



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Work Capability Assessment Support Group Outcomes and Disability Benefit History of Employment and Support Allowance claimants by Age

October 2008 – March 2014

Statistics to accompany the Government response to the
5th Independent Review of the WCA

February 2015

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Introduction

This statistical release supports the Government's Response to the year five independent review of the Work Capability Assessment, published on 27 February 2015.

The Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is a part of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) regime. It assesses how a person's sickness or disability affects their capability for work.

The Welfare Reform Act 2007, which legislated for the introduction of the WCA, states that:

"The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions shall lay before Parliament an independent report on the operation of the assessment annually for the first five years after those sections come into force."

This release accompanies the Government's response to the fifth such independent report on the WCA.

The statistics contain information on the Support Group outcomes and disability benefit history of ESA claims by age. Also included are statistics on WCA decisions by the claimant's main disabling condition. A full list of tables can be found below.

Contact Details

Queries about the content of this document

Please direct any queries to: Sophie Tomlinson

Department for Work and Pensions

Tothill Street

London

SW1H 9NA

Email: Sophie.tomlinson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Background

Overview of the Work Capability Assessment

A key part of determining entitlement to ESA is the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which assesses an individual's capability for work. ESA claimants undergo an assessment conducted by a Healthcare Professional (HCP) and, following the assessment, the HCP's advice is passed on to DWP. A DWP Decision Maker then considers the advice, alongside any other available evidence and makes a decision on the claimant's entitlement to ESA.

The outcome will be one of the following:

- The claimant is found fit for work and is not eligible for ESA.
- The claimant is found to have limited capability for work and placed in the Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG). Those in this group are not expected to work, but are expected to undertake work-related activity with a view to preparing to enter, or return to, work in the short to medium term.
- The claimant is found to have both limited capability for work and limited capability for work-related activity. In this situation, claimants are placed in the Support Group and are not expected to undertake work-related activity, although voluntary support is available.

A claimant may challenge a decision, first by requesting a mandatory reconsideration by DWP, and subsequently by lodging an appeal with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS).

Changes were made to the WCA descriptors in March 2011 and January 2013. These descriptors set out a range of actions against which a claimant's capability for work is assessed by the Healthcare Professional. The March 2011 changes to these descriptors included expanding the Support Group to cover more people with certain communication issues and severe disability due to mental health conditions. The January 2013 changes expanded the categories of cancer treatments under which a claimant could be placed in the Support Group.

Source of Data

Figures used in this data release come from DWP's benefit administration datasets on ESA WCA Outcomes from 27 October 2008 to 31 July 2014 and historic benefit claims

List of tables

- Table 1: Proportion of total new claimants entering the Support Group by mental health or other health condition
- Table 2: Proportion of initial assessments that resulted in a Support Group decision by age
- Table 3: Proportion of current Employment and Support Allowance caseload where claimant had previously claimed Disability Living Allowance by age at start of Employment and Support Allowance claim
- Table 4: Proportion of claims assessed that were placed in the Support Group, Work-Related Activity Group or found Fit for Work, split by whether cancer is the main disabling condition

Key points

- Table 1: This table shows the proportion of new claimants who were placed in the Support Group that had a mental health condition and the proportion that had another (non-mental health) condition. This is given for each group of claims that started in every month since October 2008 until March 2014. There has been an increase in the proportion of those entering the Support Group at an initial WCA who had a mental health condition. In January 2009, 30% of those entering the Support Group had a mental health condition. This figure had risen to 39% by February 2011, the month prior to changes to the Support Group descriptors relating to mental health. In March 2014, 46% of those entering the Support Group had a mental health condition.
(See p11 of Government Response to the 5th Independent Review of the WCA for explanation)
- Table 2: This table shows what proportion of new claims assessed in a year were placed in the Support Group for claimants of a given age. The proportion of 16-20 year olds placed in the Support Group is considerably higher than the equivalent proportion of 21-24 year olds. The proportion of Support Group decisions for this latter group are on average higher than for those aged 25 and over but this difference is much lower than that between 16-20 year olds and the over 25s group.
(See p14 of Government Response to the 5th Independent Review of the WCA for explanation)
- Table 3: This table looks at the ESA caseload in May 2014 and breaks down the number of claimants in this group by their age when they started their ESA claim. It then gives the total of each of these subgroups who had made a

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claim at some point prior to claiming ESA¹. The final column shows what proportion (rather than volume) of the total number of claimants starting their ESA claim at a given age had made a DLA claim prior to claiming ESA.

Younger ESA claimants are more likely to have previously claimed DLA prior to making an ESA claim. 78% of those aged 16 at the start of their ESA had previously claimed DLA in comparison to 20% of those aged 25 and over.

- Table 4: This table shows the proportion of claims assessed that were placed in the Support Group, Work-Related Activity Group or that were found Fit for Work. This is given for both claimants whose main disabling condition was cancer and for those whose main disabling condition was any health condition other than cancer. The proportions are given by quarter, where the relevant date being used is that on which the assessment took place. The proportion of claimants with a form of cancer as their primary condition who were placed in the Support Group at an initial WCA increased substantially in the quarter February- April 2013. This followed changes to the definition of chemotherapy in the WCA descriptors in January 2013.

¹ Note that this DLA claim may have ended by the time they started claiming ESA, so the number does not represent the number of claimants who were claiming both ESA and DLA at the time of making their ESA claim.