

Freedom of Information request 1970/2013

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Information request

1) Could you provide copies of the results of any surveys, questionnaires, or other consultations with claimants which asks for their experiences and/or opinions on audio recording?

2) As you intend to look closely at the "ESA experience" (a) how will this be achieved (b) what are the results so far.. (c) when is the final decision expected to be made?

3) Is it obligatory for Capita to conform to your request?

DWP response

A pilot of the audio recording of face-to-face assessments for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was undertaken in Spring 2011. The pilot was conducted as a response to Professor Harrington's recommendation, in his first independent review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), to "pilot the audio recording of assessments to determine whether such an approach is helpful for claimants and improves the quality of assessments." Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act allows us to direct you to information which is already reasonably accessible to you. The link to the audio recording pilot evaluation is in the public domain and is attached - <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/wca-recording-pilot-report.pdf>.

Details of the approach and results of surveys with claimants can be found at Section 6 (page 16).

DWP have always been clear that the current provision of a limited audio recording service for ESA claimants is a temporary measure which needs to be evaluated fully before a final decision is taken on the future of the service. As part of the ongoing evaluation process, DWP and Atos Healthcare will amend written communications with claimants to provide more information about the recording facility and how to request a recorded assessment. We are working to introduce more widespread information for all claimants as soon as possible.

DWP will be extending the evaluation period until the end of the summer to allow us to gather additional data on quality and potential take-up for a subsequent robust decision on any potential future audio recording provision.

DWP had previously asked Atos Healthcare to apply a processing safeguard whereby requests for recorded assessments should be accommodated within four weeks and where this was not possible the assessment should go ahead without a recording. However, during the remainder of the evaluation period, to help ensure claimant expectations can be met, the four week safeguard will be removed. This will enable us to gather a fuller picture of demand and capacity in order to inform a full and robust evaluation.

We expect the detailed evaluation to be available in Autumn 2013. If there is evidence from this evaluation in support of a more proactive approach to audio recording DWP will review the arrangements for Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

During the tendering process audio recording was not a requirement of the PIP Assessment Service. Consequently it was not included in the Service Requirement. In their response to the Invitation to Tender, Capita stated that it could audio record consultations with claimants. DWP may accept all or part of a bidder's proposal. As Capita's proposal to audio record consultations was outside the scope of the Service Requirement, DWP chose not to progress this proposal. The decision was taken following consultation with Ministers and assessment providers.

As the Authority, DWP defines the Service Requirement for the PIP Assessment Service. Capita is obliged to conform to and deliver the Service Requirement, including the Department's request not to offer audio recording of the consultations at this stage.