

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), which replaced incapacity benefits in October 2008, offers support for ill or disabled people. Claimants must participate in a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to check eligibility and are placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) which offers support in preparing for work, or the Support Group (SG) if unable to work or complete work-related activity. Those not eligible are found Fit for Work (FFW). Since October 2013, if claimants disagree with assessment outcomes they can request a Mandatory Reconsideration (MR). If they disagree with the MR outcome they can appeal to Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunal Service (HMCTS).

Main stories

- Completed assessment volumes increased in the latest quarter to March 2017; Initial assessments from 97,000 to 120,000 and repeat assessments from 120,000 to 150,000.
- Outcomes for initial claims completed in the quarter to March 2017 were 39% SG, 18% WRAG and 42% FFW.
- ESA-WCA MRs registered in July 2017 fell by 2,200 since the previous month to 15,000.
- The majority of MRs cleared in July 2017 were not revised at 85%.
- Appeals heard on FFW decisions on initial assessments (for claims started April to June 2016) fell from 4,100 to 2,400. 39% of appeal decisions in this quarter were upheld.

Work Capability Assessment

Completed initial and repeat assessments volumes have increased

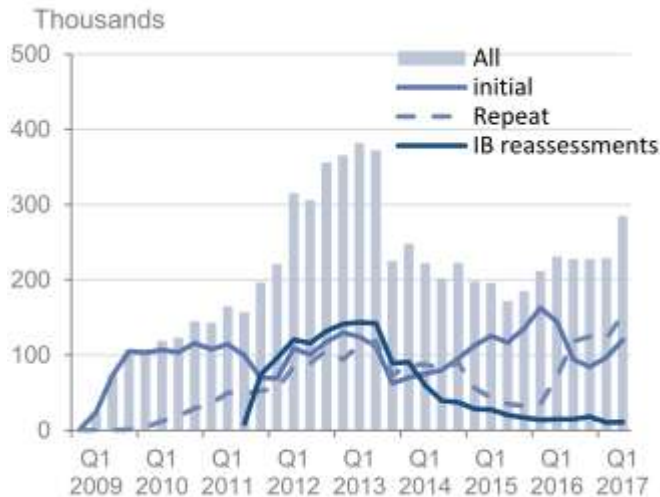
Mandatory Reconsiderations

MR registrations started to fall in latest months

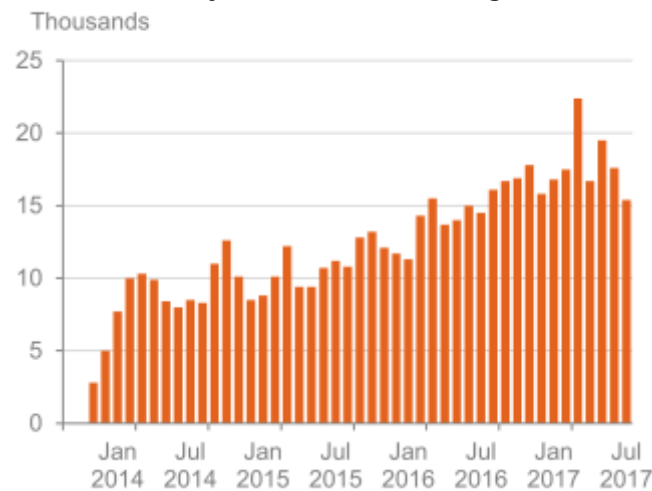
Appeals

Appeals on initial FFW outcomes have fallen slightly. 39% of decisions were upheld

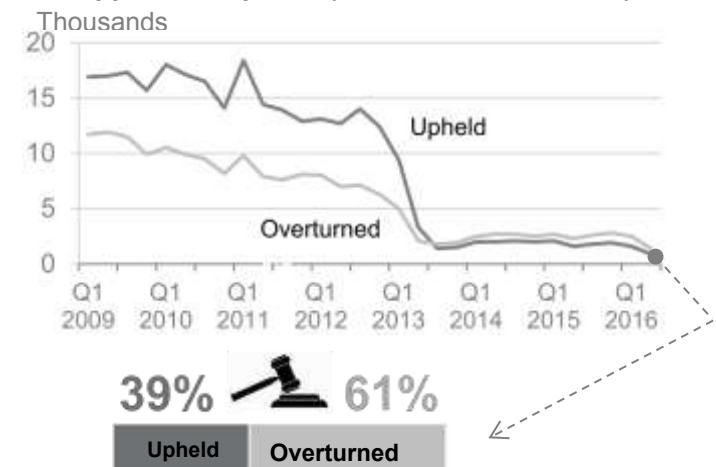
All Completed Assessments



Mandatory Reconsiderations registered



Appeals completed (for initial assessments)



At a glance

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Lead Statistician: Louise Blake

louise.blake@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

DWP Press Office: 0203 267 5144

Comments? We welcome feedback

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What you need to know

These statistics are released quarterly and cover ESA-WCA outcomes, MRs and appeals information sourced from:

- DWP's benefit administration datasets including MR data
- Healthcare provider assessment data
- HMCTS appeals data for completed appeals
- Clearance times for initial claims broken down into process stages

In addition to the ESA-WCA national statistics contained in this release, we have developed extra experimental ESA-WCA cohort figures by merging MR data with benefit, assessment and HMCTS data to allow us to track claimants through the stages of their ESA-WCA journey – see [page 3](#).

For the first time, new experimental statistics on ESA clearance times are included. They are for initial claims and give a breakdown of clearance times across various stages of the ESA claim process – see [page 11](#).

The label 'experimental' means these sections are not National Statistics until they have been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority's Office for Statistics Regulation as fully meeting the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are included here as they are undergoing evaluation and to allow a fuller analysis of the statistics. *Users should be aware of possible methodology issues and data limitations whilst using them.* See [methodology note](#) for more information.

Note: robust data for both the regular and experimental cohort information is available for claims that began at least 6 months following assessment date or, for initial assessments, nine months following the date of claim. This is due to time required to complete assessments, record and process data accurately and align with other publications. **Hence, only claims made before the end of December 2016, assessments completed up to end of March 2017, appeal outcomes for claims started up to June 2016 and clearance times for initial ESA WCAs completed up to the end of March 2017 are included in these statistics.** Throughout the release, figures are presented by assessment date, unless otherwise stated.

ESA Work Capability Assessment, Mandatory Reconsiderations and Appeals process

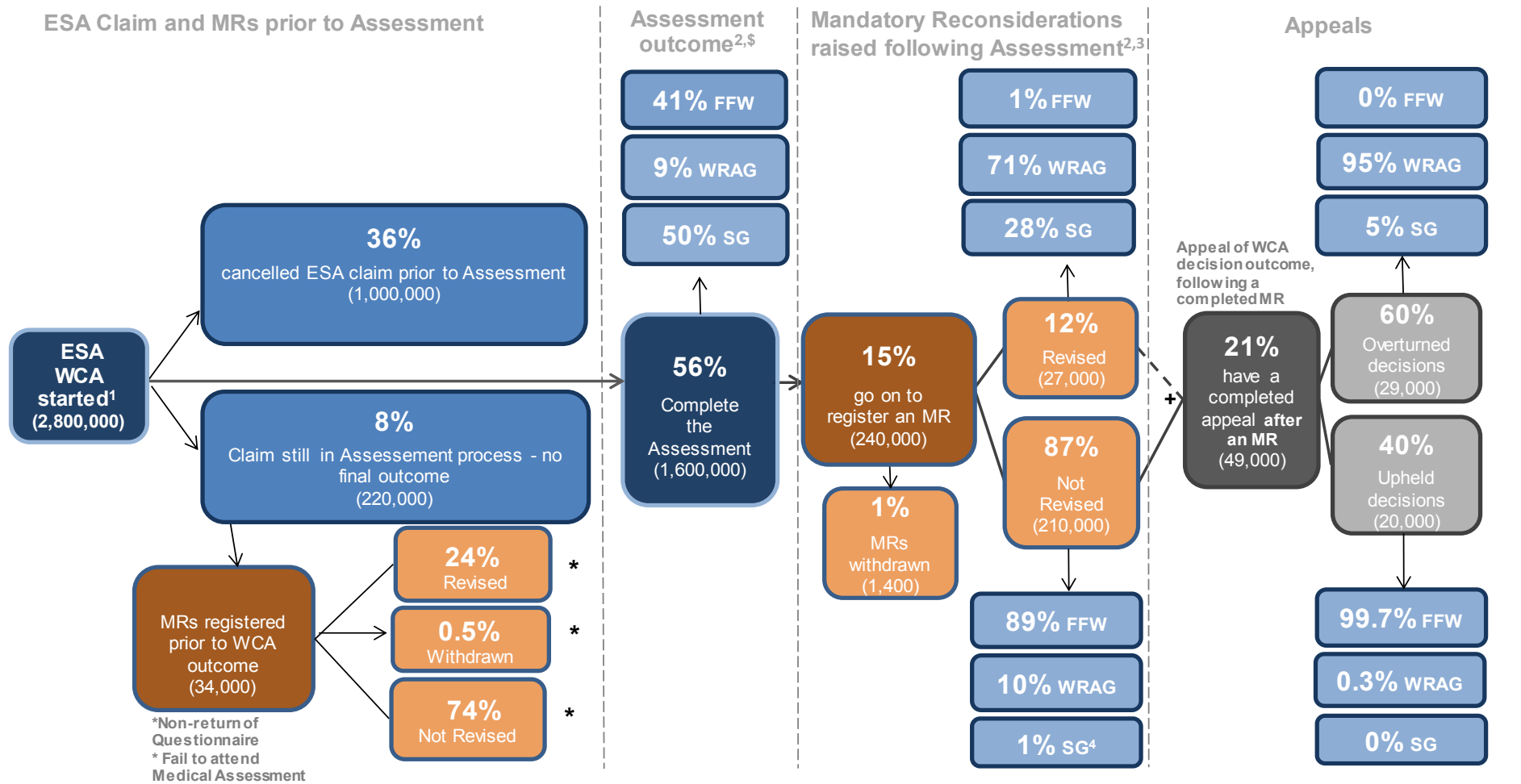
The following flow chart, containing experimental cohort data, shows the claim process to assess ESA entitlement. If claimants disagree with their assessment outcome they can ask the Department for Work and Pensions to review it by registering an MR. Following the MR outcome if the claimant still disagrees with the decision, they can appeal to HMCTS.

There are 3 types of Work Capability Assessments:

- Initial assessment – for new ESA claims
- Repeat assessment – existing claimants must undergo regular reviews; timescales depend on medical condition
- Incapacity Benefit reassessment (IBR); all IB claimants will eventually be reassessed for ESA

The figures presented in both the flow chart (page 3) and sankey diagram (page 4) cover all parts of the ESA-WCA process for claimants starting their ESA claim between October 2013 and December 2016 for **initial and repeat assessments only**.

Overview of the Work Capability Assessment, Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) and Appeals process for initial and repeat ESA WCAs starting October 2013 – December 2016 - (Experimental)



Footnotes:

1) All ESA initial and repeat WCAs between October 2013 and December 2016* (the latest period that allows sufficient time for final outcomes to have been recorded). Totals may not sum due to rounding. FFW=Fit for Work, WRAG=Work Related Activity Group, SG=Support Group.

* A small number (around 10%) of pre-assessment MR registrations may go onto appeal their MR decision. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to a small proportion of MRs still in progress. + Some claimants may still not agree with the group they have been placed in and go on to appeal the MR decision. Less than 2% of all post ESA WCA appeals come from the revised grouping.

2) Statistics show the outcome based on healthcare provider recommendation - in some cases this may not always be the final outcome as outcomes are sometimes changed due to reconsideration. Due to data source recording limitations, this is the best proxy available. A proxy is also used to determine a small proportion of revised MR outcome results - where the final result is not captured.

3) A number of FFW cases have their case outcomes revised but still fall within FFW group as they still aren't awarded enough points to move to a different group.

4) A small amount of cases are 'Not Revised' and appear in SG. We are currently unaware of the exact reasoning for this. Therefore please treat these cases with caution.

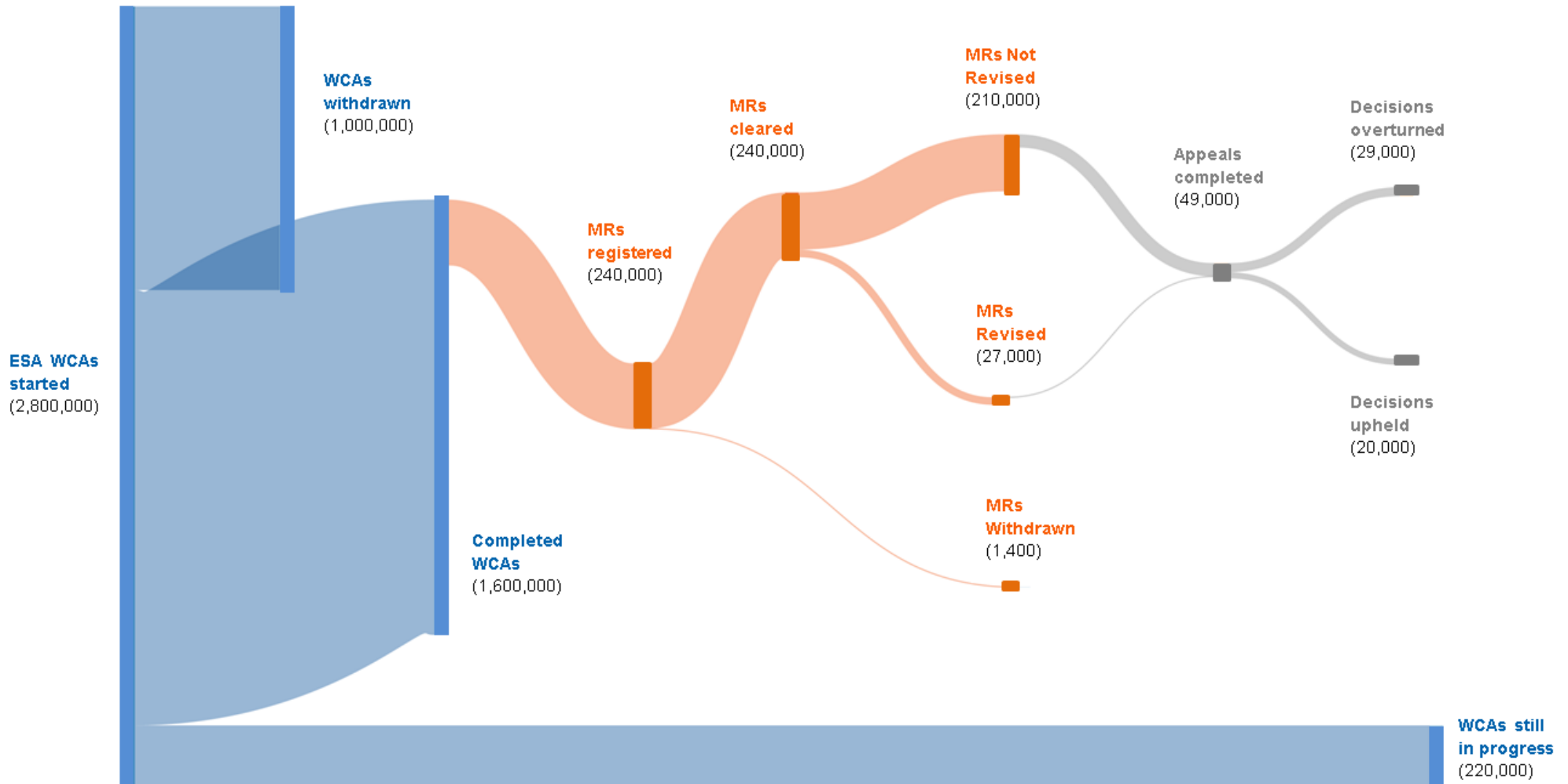
\$ Some cases may not yet have an outcome, or may have been withdrawn, cancelled, clerical cases - so WCA outcome percentages are derived using those with an actual FFW, WRAG or SG outcome. We only get information for completed appeals - so we don't know how many appeals are in progress.

5) Numbers of claimants are rounded therefore percentages may not be fully representative of figures shown.

Overview of the Work Capability Assessment, Mandatory Reconsideration and Appeals process October 2013 – December 2016 cohort - (Experimental)

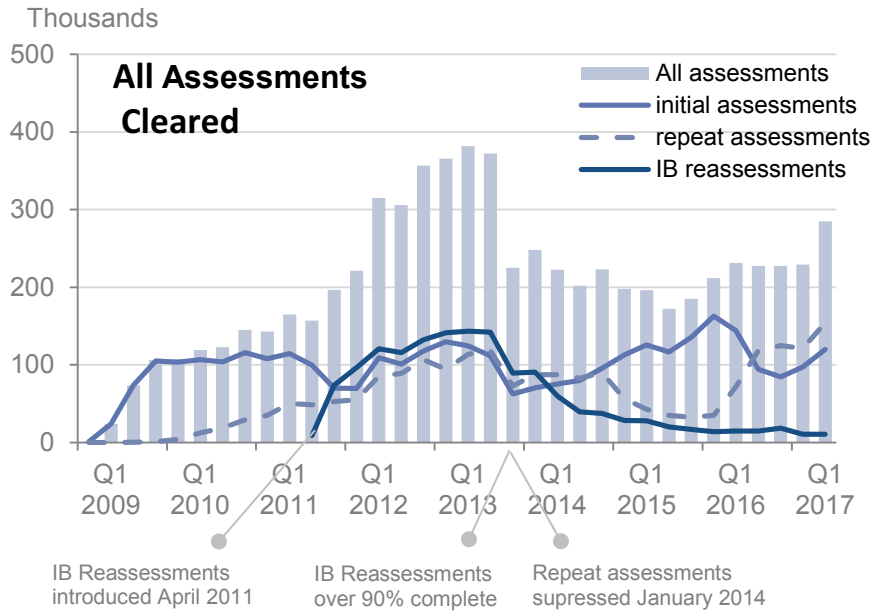
The following diagram gives a visual representation of proportions at each stage of the ESA Work Capability Assessment (WCA) process. The relative thickness of each segment represents the volume of cases flowing through each stage. For all ESA WCAs which started between October 2013 and December 2016:

- 56% have had a completed WCA (1,600,000 assessments). WCAs relating to the remaining claims are either still in progress or have been withdrawn/cancelled.
- 240,000 MRs have been registered in relation to the 1,600,000 completed WCAs.
- The diagram shows that 99% of these MRs have been cleared, with the decision maker's original decision being revised 12% of the time.
- Approximately one in five assessments with a MR, then go on to have a completed appeal. Of this group (49,000 cases), the latest case decision was upheld 40% of the time.



ESA initial and repeat assessment outcomes, IB reassessments

54% of all assessments cleared in the latest quarter were for ESA repeat assessments



Main Findings

In the latest quarter to March 2017 the majority of cleared ESA-WCA assessments were for repeat assessments.

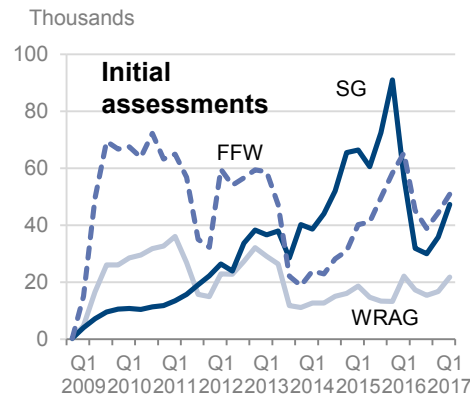
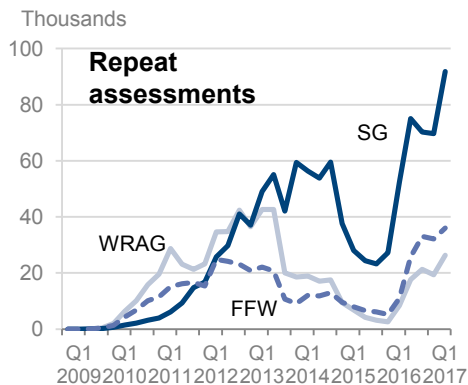
At the end of 2013, IB reassessment and repeat assessment volumes dropped significantly. The majority of IB reassessments were completed by that point and the focus was moved from assessing existing claims (including repeat assessments) to clearing new claims. IB reassessments are now 96%¹ complete.

ESA repeat assessment volumes have increased in recent quarters as processing was re-introduced in December 2015, after almost two years of focussing on initial assessments.

The effects of this can be seen in recent quarters. In the latest quarter to March 2017, 150,000 repeat assessments were cleared compared to only 72,000 for the same period a year earlier.

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

Repeat and initial assessment volumes have increased this quarter



Overall, combined numbers of initial and repeat claims assigned to SG, WRAG and FFW have increased this quarter.

In recent quarters the number of repeat assessments being undertaken increased significantly, meaning greater numbers of SG, WRAG and FFW outcomes. Decisions on repeat assessments continue on an upwards linear trend, despite a fall last quarter as a result of fluctuating referral volumes in prior months.

Overall, repeat assessments accounted for 54% of all assessments in the latest quarter.

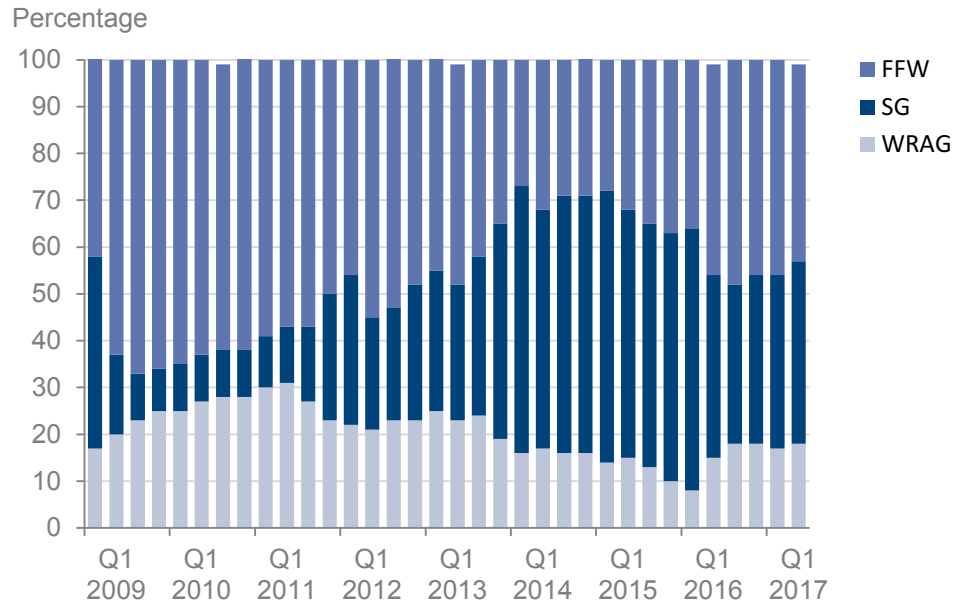
At the same time, SG, WRAG and FFW numbers have increased for initial assessments due to more initial assessments being completed this quarter.

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.


¹ The percentage shown excludes all IB cases still in progress

Assessment outcomes for ESA initial assessments

The proportion of Support Group outcomes has increased for ESA initial assessments in recent quarters



Main Findings

For the 120,000 ESA initial assessments cleared in the latest quarter to March 2017: Support Group 39%  **Up 2 percentage points** since previous quarter

Work Related Activity Group 18%  **Up 1 percentage point** since previous quarter

Fit for Work 42%  **Down 4 percentage points** since previous quarter

Outcomes of initial assessments entitled to ESA (assigned to SG or WRAG) increased by 16,000 in the latest quarter to March 2017 to stand at 69,000.

Historically, the proportion assigned to the SG for initial assessment shows a generally increasing trend up to December 2015. The proportion of SG outcomes fell over the first half of 2016, since when it has again been increasing. The latest quarter shows an increase of 2 percentage points, with the volume of initial assessments being assigned to SG increasing from 36,000 to 47,000.

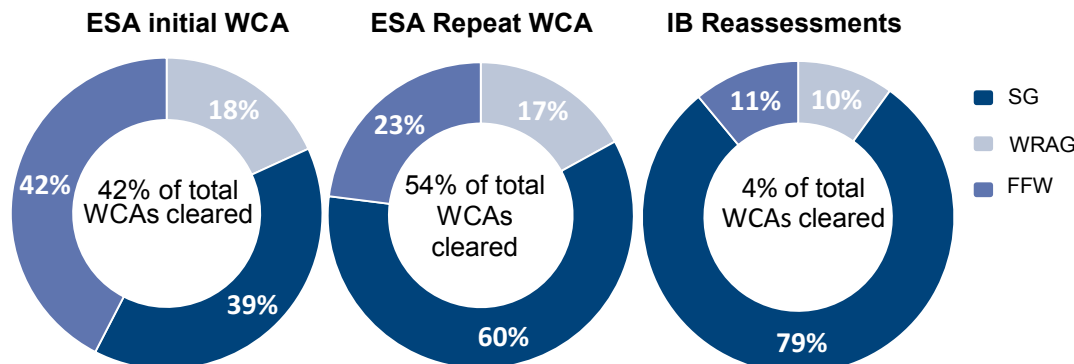
The proportion assigned to WRAG this quarter has increased very slightly, remaining broadly stable over recent quarters.

FFW outcomes increased by 6,500 to 51,000 - due to an increase in initial assessments completed, despite a fall in the initial assessment FFW rate as detailed below.

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

Note: assessment outcomes are shown by assessment date. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

ESA and IBR assessments: Cleared outcomes for the latest quarter show big differences across claim types



For assessments cleared in the latest quarter to March 2017, 42% were initial ESA claims, 54% were ESA repeat assessments and 4% were IB reassessments.

Repeat assessments account for 54% of total WCA clearances this quarter whereas the proportion in the quarter to March 2016 was only 31%. This is due to repeat assessments being re-introduced in December 2015 after almost two years of focussing on initial assessments.

The majority of IB reassessments and ESA repeat assessments have Support Group outcomes – at 79% and 60% respectively, in contrast to 39% for ESA initial assessments. This is due to IB claimants and existing ESA claimants already receiving benefit for an existing medical condition.

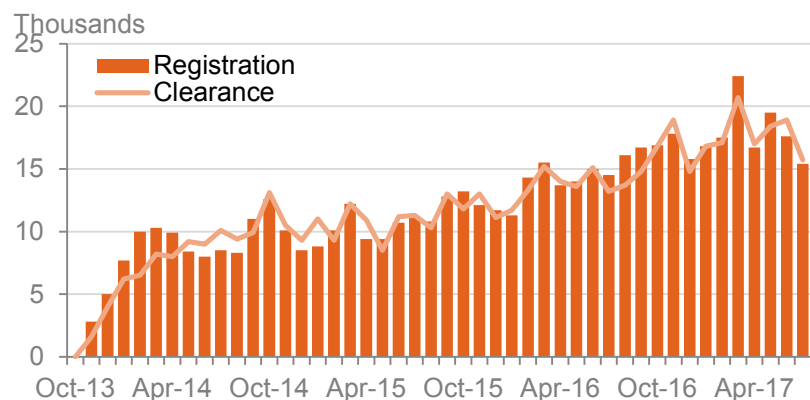
Initial ESA assessments have the highest FFW rate at 42%. This is expected as, unlike IB reassessments and repeat claims, these claimants don't have a previously known medical condition.

ESA-WCA Mandatory Reconsideration registrations, clearances and clearance times

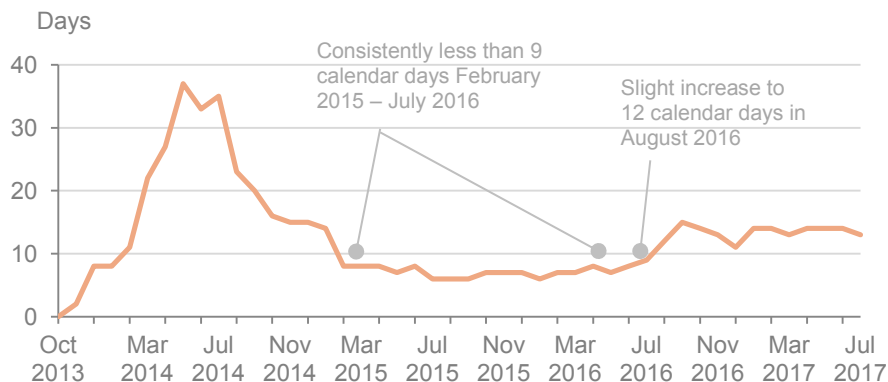
If a customer disagrees with their assessment decision they have the opportunity to raise a **Mandatory Reconsideration** and ask DWP to formally review the decision. The aim of a MR is to resolve disputes as early as possible without the need for an appeal hearing.

See [methodology](#) note for a more detailed explanation.

Mandatory Reconsideration registrations have fluctuated with a general increasing trend, dropping slightly May to July 2017



Mandatory Reconsideration median monthly clearance times have an increasing trend since July 2016, then broadly stable up to July 2017 at 13 days



Main Findings

Since the introduction of the MR process in October 2013 there has been an overall increasing trend in MR registration. Following a slight dip in December 2016, MR registration volumes have fluctuated with 15,000 registrations in July 2017, a drop of 2,200 since the previous month, continuing a decreasing trend over the latest months – this will be monitored going forward.

The chart shows rapid increases in registrations as MRs were introduced and thereafter, monthly numbers have increased gradually, fluctuating slightly each month. Since September 2015, there is an overall increasing trend in the number of MRs registered until the most recent months.

When the MR process was first introduced, clearance numbers were low in comparison to registrations. However, since May 2014, clearance volumes have improved, as the process became established.

In July 2017, the median monthly clearance time was 13 calendar days.

Initially, the median ESA-WCA MR clearance time increased steeply until May 2014, standing at 37 days, then decreased rapidly as the process became embedded. Between February 2015 and July 2016 the median clearance settled and didn't exceed 9 calendar days.

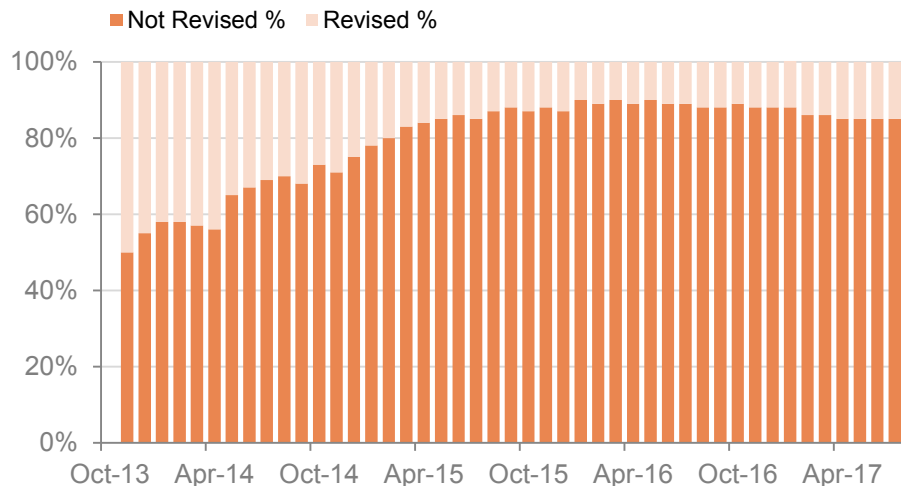
In August 2016, there was an increase in the clearance time to 12 calendar days, with a slight drop from 14 to 13 calendar days in July 2017. This could partly be due to the corresponding decrease in MR registrations over this period.

See [methodology](#) note and page 9 for how median clearance times have been derived.

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

ESA-WCA Mandatory Reconsiderations outcomes

85% of assessment outcomes were not revised at Mandatory Reconsideration in the latest month, July 2017



Note: MR figures require less retrospection than the cohort data and are therefore reported monthly to allow the most recent figures to be included. Revised % includes allowed and disallowed revisions.

Main Findings

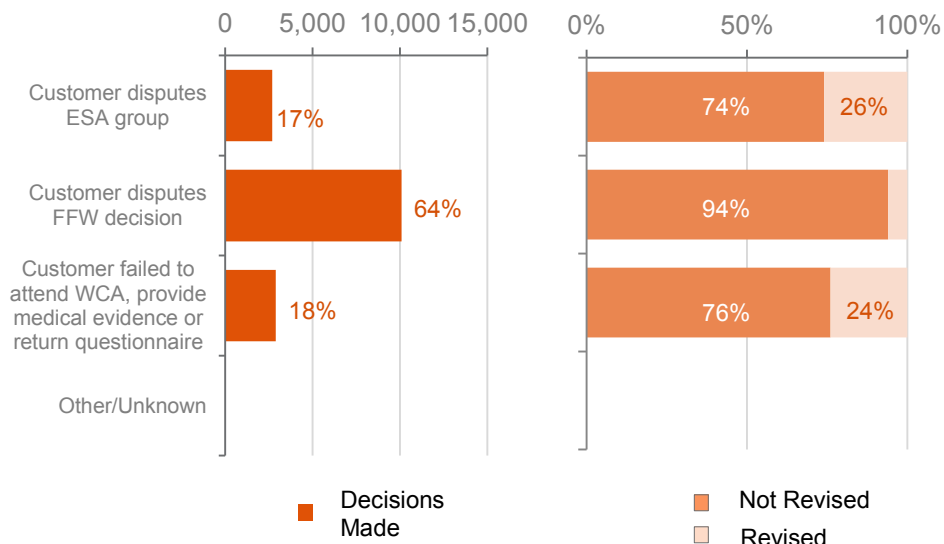
During the MR process, the DWP Decision Maker will review the evidence for the decision under dispute to either revise or not revise the decision.

Generally, since the MR process was introduced, there has been a decreasing trend in the number of decisions being revised each month. Throughout 2016, it settled between 10% and 12% and has fluctuated very slightly since. Latest figures for July 2017 show 15% were revised that month, remaining stable over recent months.

In July 2017, 85% of MRs were not revised; 13,000 decisions were not revised compared with 2,400 decisions revised.

See accompanying [tables](#) for further details

Fit for Work disputes are the main cause of ESA-WCA Mandatory Reconsideration decisions in July 2017



The vast majority of MRs raised during the ESA-WCA process in July 2017 were due to FFW decisions. These types of MRs are less likely to be revised than the other categories.

In July 2017, 10,000 MR decisions (64%) were made on disputes about Fit for Work assessment outcomes. Only 6% of FFW disputes resulted in a revision in July.

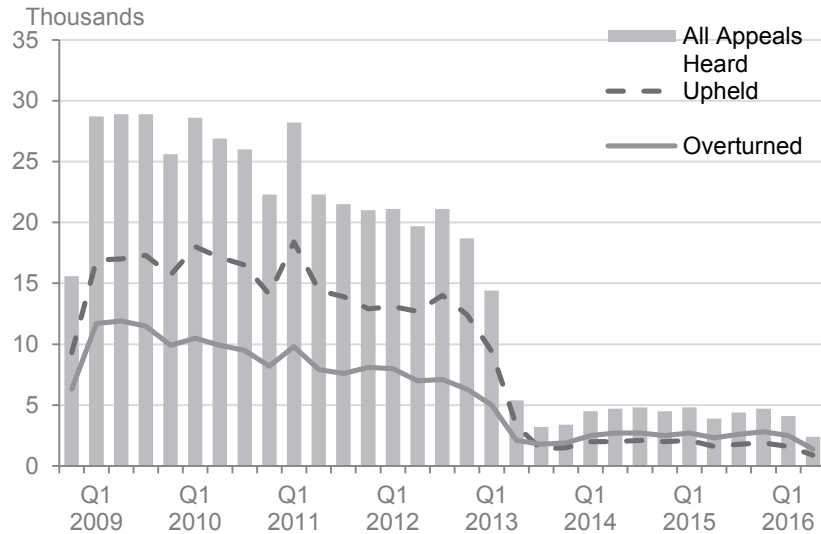
In July 2017, 18% of MR decisions were made on disputes for reasons where the claimant has not followed the claim procedures correctly. These reasons include failing to return the initial questionnaire, failing to provide medical evidence or not attending their assessment. 24% of these disputes were revised this quarter.

The breakdown of revised/not revised decisions per MR category for July 2017 is shown in the chart.

Appeals clearances and outcomes

Following an MR decision, the claimant can dispute the decision further by appealing to Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunal Service where an official appeal hearing will take place to consider the decision evidence. At appeal, the decision under dispute will either be upheld or overturned.

The number of appeals heard on initial FFW decisions has fallen



Note: appeals outcomes are shown by appeal start date.

Main Findings

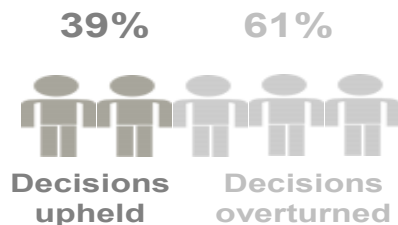
Being found FFW at assessment is the primary reason for claimants disputing a decision and therefore the main reason for appeal hearings. These figures focus on FFW appeals for initial assessments.

The total number of appeals heard on FFW decisions for initial assessments are very low over the last 3 reporting years after a steep drop of 9000 in the quarter to June 2013.

The chart shows that in the latest quarter to June 2016, the number of appeals heard on FFW decisions for initial assessments has remained low with a decrease from 4,100 to 2,400.

The low numbers of appeals over recent quarters may be due in part to the introduction of the MR process, although there could be other factors which have also contributed. The purpose of MRs is to give the customer an opportunity to present evidence against a decision for review without the need for formal appeal processes, therefore when the new system was introduced fewer appeals were expected.

Approximately two in five initial FFW decisions were upheld at appeal this quarter

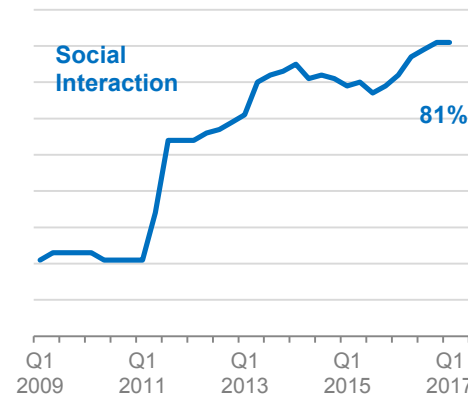
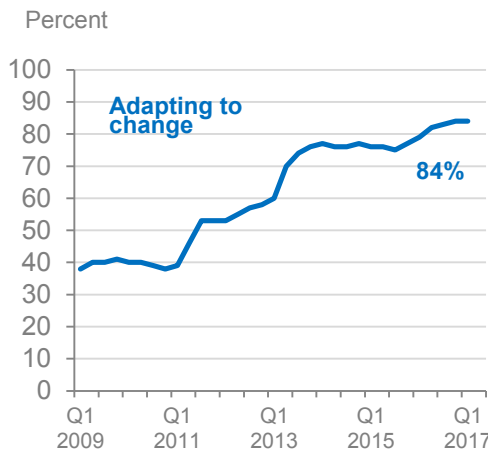
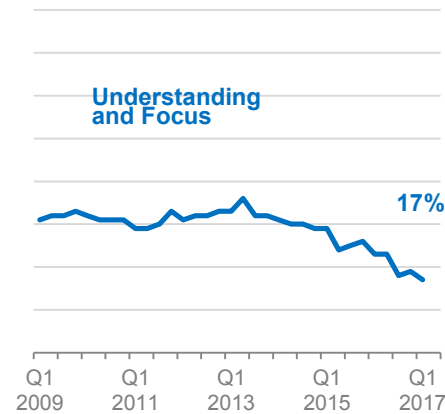
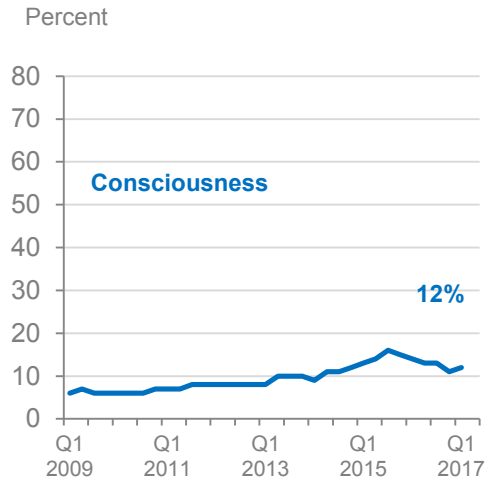


This quarter the proportion of decisions under dispute that were upheld at appeal has increased slightly from 38% to 39%. This proportion must be taken in context alongside the lower numbers of appeals heard overall in the latest quarter.

See accompanying [tables](#) for further details.

Health Conditions and ESA group allocation for initial assessments

‘Adapting to change’ and ‘Social interaction’ remain the main reasons for WRAG allocation (with 15 points or more) this quarter



Main Findings

The charts show the four main functional impairment categories in which claimants have scored points when assigned to the WRAG, scoring 15 points or more at initial assessment. Receiving 15 points or more is the main reason for assignment to the WRAG at initial assessment however; claimants can also be assigned to the WRAG at reconsideration or after appeal.

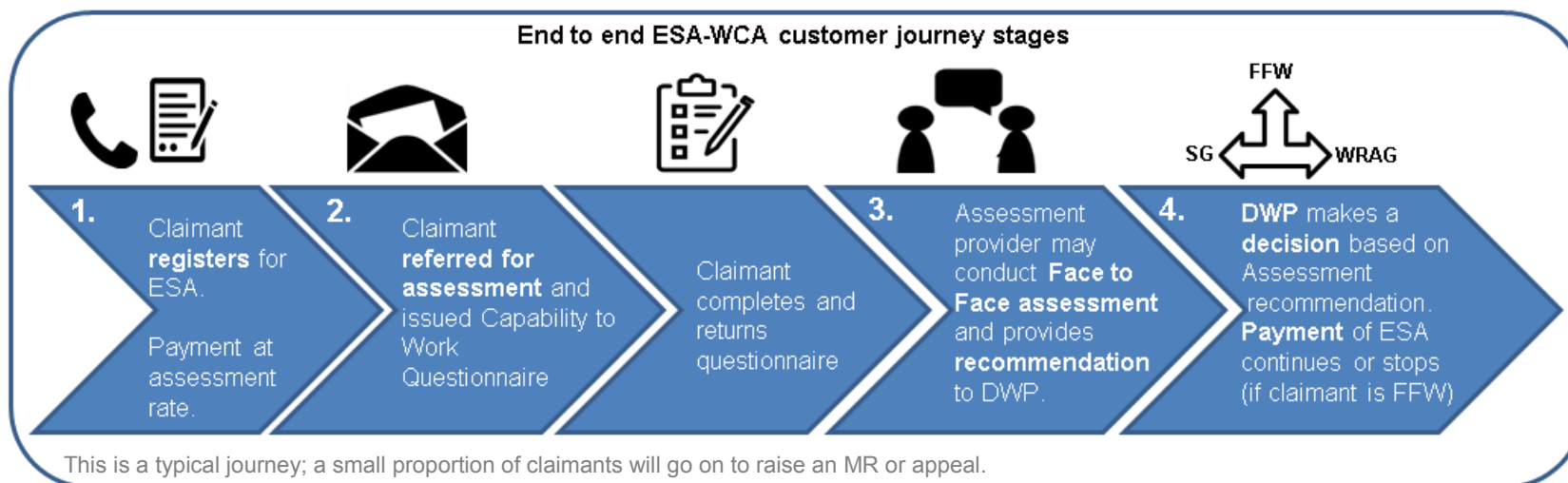
‘Adapting to change’ and ‘social interaction’ remain the most common reasons for WRAG allocations (with 15 points or more) this quarter, with 84% of claimants having an ‘adapting to change’ condition and 81% present in the ‘social interaction’ group. **Note** that claimants can have multiple functional impairments therefore appear in more than one category.

‘Understanding and focus’ affects 17% of WRAG claimants (with 15 points or more) this quarter. Other reasons for being assigned to the WRAG (with 15 points or more) which aren’t shown (Upper Limb, Sensory, Continence, and Lower Limb) are less common.

See accompanying [tables](#) for statistics on all reasons and health conditions assigned to the WRAG.

ESA-WCA customer journey clearance times for initial claims (experimental)

The following process flow shows the main stages of a typical customer journey when completing a Work Capability Assessment for ESA:



Clearance times for individual stages of the ESA WCA process

Monthly median clearance time (weeks) for completed initial claims by month of completion

Start Stage	End Stage	Clearance Type	Jan-17	Feb-17	Mar-17
1	2	Claim Registration to Referral	1	1	1
2	3	Assessment Provider (Referral to recommendation)	16	16	16
3	4	WCA recommendation to DWP decision	2	1	2
1	4	End-to-end ESA claim (Claimant registration to final decision)	22	21	21

- Individual stage medians may not summed to end to end median. Medians at each stage are calculated independently.
- Mandatory Reconsideration and Appeal clearance times will be included in the end-to-end clearance time if they have been completed by the statistics extract date.
- Weeks are for working days and rounded to the nearest week.

Main Findings

For initial WCAs completed in March 2017, the median end-to-end clearance time stands at 21 weeks, remaining stable over the quarter.

Within this, the median time spent with the Assessment Provider was 16 weeks in March 2017. This stage will usually involve an assessment and includes the waiting time for the customer to complete and return the questionnaire.

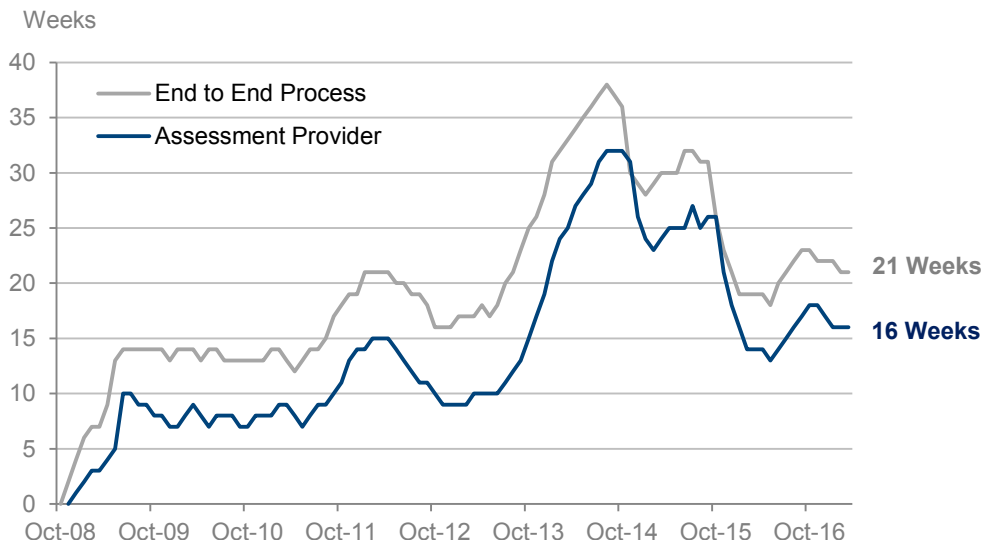
Note: The end-to-end clearance times recorded refer to time taken from claim registration to date of DWP decision. This decision will include MRs and appeals where there is a completed decision.

The accompanying [tables](#) show additional monthly breakdowns.

ESA-WCA clearance times for initial assessments (experimental)

Clearance times have fluctuated since ESA was introduced in October 2008 and are now showing a decreasing trend.

Monthly median clearance times for completed initial claims up to March 2017 (weeks)



Main Findings

The chart shows overall end-to-end median clearance times from claim registration to final DWP award decision for initial claims from October 2008 to March 2017. Included in the end-to-end process is the time taken from when the customer is referred to the health assessment provider to the provider's recommendation. The median clearance time for the assessment provider is also shown in the chart.

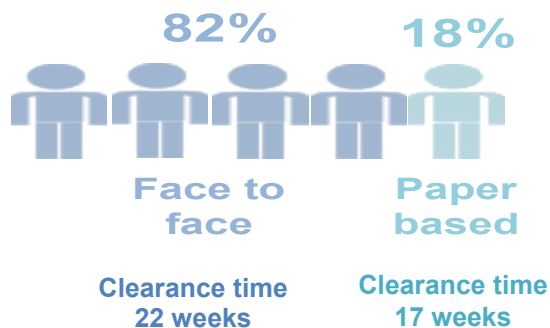
In March 2017, the average end-to-end clearance time took 21 weeks. The average clearance time for the assessment provider (referral to recommendation) took 16 weeks.

The median end-to-end clearance time has reduced by nearly half in the latest month March 2017 (21 weeks) since reaching a peak of 38 weeks in August 2014. The chart shows the assessment provider clearance times median follow a similar pattern, reaching peak in August 2014 at 32 weeks and then falling by half to stand at 16 weeks in March 2017.

There is a peak in clearance times in September 2014.

See accompanying [tables](#) for additional breakdowns.

Face-to-Face assessments accounted for 82% of initial assessments cleared in the latest month, March 2017



Assessments can be either face-to-face or paper based depending on many factors such as health condition or prognosis.

The vast majority of assessments are held face-to-face; the proportion of initial face to face assessments for cases cleared in the latest month, March 2017, was 82%.

The median clearance time for face-to-face assessments of 22 weeks was 5 weeks higher than for paper based assessments in March 2017. This is expected due to the nature of face-to-face assessments being more labour and time intensive as well as involving often complex decision making.

About these statistics

This product has recently been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority for National Statistics status and has been awarded National Statistics. National Statistics designation is awarded to the subset of official statistics that are judged to be of good quality, value and trustworthiness. This badge does not currently apply to the experimental cohort figures or ESA clearance times.

Key uses of the statistics include:

- Providing the evidence base for assessing the potential effect of changes, monitoring and evaluation of DWP policy
- Answering Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests and Forecasting benefit expenditure (in conjunction with expenditure statistics)
- Policy development and evaluation by local authorities and other welfare to work and pensions stakeholders and providers.

Terminology:

- **Registration** - Claimant registers an application for a WCA, MR or appeal
- **Clearance** - DWP decision maker has determined whether the claimant should or should not be entitled to claim ESA.
- **Mandatory reconsideration** - Claimant wishes to dispute a decision made on their claim and requests DWP to reconsider the decision.
- **MR clearance time** - The clearance time begins from the point the MR is raised on the DWP administrative system by the Benefit Centre as a valid MR, having considered whether they can initially change the decision in the light of any new information. The total clearance time therefore includes the time taken to transfer the case to the Dispute Resolution Team and the time taken for the decision maker to make a decision.
- **Repeat assessment** - An existing claim that has been reassessed for ESA, as opposed to a new claim. A repeat assessment is the second or subsequent WCA undertaken on an existing, continuous ESA claim, usually between 3 and 24 months after the previous assessment. These claimants will have already been assessed as having a limited capability for work at their initial WCA and the repeat assessment will assess if their capability for work has changed.

Experimental cohort statistics:

MR statistics have been added to the regular cohort data to build on the story of the end to end customer journey. The cohort MR statistics are less timely than the stand alone MR statistics due to time lags in the benefits data and assessment data they are linked to in the cohort process. Time lags are present to allow stages within the process sufficient time to complete. These statistics give a feel for the volumes flowing through each stage of the ESA WCA process. For robust figures on individual stages, please use the stand-alone figures within the published tables (not table 17).

ESA Clearance Times (experimental):

- This release includes ESA clearance times for the first time. The statistics are labelled as experimental as there is scope to develop them further.
- Clearance times for initial claims only are included in these statistics.
- Clearance times are calculated as median weeks where a week is derived from the number of working days then rounded to the nearest week.
- These figures are derived for cases where a final award decision has been recorded.
- MR and appeal decision dates are included in the final DWP decision date where available.

See [methodology note](#) for more detailed information on these statistics.