

Employment and Support Allowance: Leavers from the Support and Work Related Activity Groups

12 September 2012

Introduction

This statistical release presents the number of claimants leaving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) being in either the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) or Support Group (SG) at the time of leaving the benefit. The figures are broken down by those that have been claiming ESA for up to one year and those that have been claiming for longer than one year. The figures are derived from administrative data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare. This analysis presents information on new claims for ESA only. It does not contain incapacity benefits reassessments to determine eligibility for ESA.

Background

A key part of the ESA regime is the WCA process, which is used to assess capability for work and eligibility for benefit. Within this the service contractor, Atos Healthcare, carries out any face to face assessment. They then make a recommendation for each claimant to a DWP decision maker who makes a decision on the claim. There are three possible outcomes:

Claimants can be found fit for work. In this case their claim:

- closes and the claimant can move to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA); or
- remains open following receipt of a challenge against the decision (either a reconsideration by DWP, or an appeal to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS)). If redress is sought, the pre-assessment rates remain until closure;

Claimants can be found to have limited capability for work. In this instance they are allowed the benefit and placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). Those in this group are not expected to work, but are provided with help and support to prepare for work where possible. They receive a higher payment than those on JSA. Claimants can also appeal the decision to be put in the WRAG instead of the Support Group (SG); and

Claimants can be found to have limited capability for work and in addition, limited capability for work related activity. In this situation, claimants are allowed the benefit and placed in the SG. Claimants in this group have the most severe functional impairments and so are provided with unconditional support and receive a higher premium than those in the WRAG.

Both WRAG and SG claims run until the initial or latest 'prognosis period' ends, which is usually, but not always, a standard length of time such as 3, 6, 12, 18 or 24 months based on the individual claimant's health and then have a repeat assessment.

There are a number of reasons why people might leave ESA. The vast majority leave because they are found fit for work at their initial assessment or a repeat assessment and either do not appeal or are not successful with their appeal. Either way, they no longer qualify for ESA. Those that leave from the WRAG and SG can do so for many reasons, including moving into employment, moving into education or training, reaching state pension age, or claiming other benefits more suitable for their circumstances.¹

Results

The table below shows the numbers of people that left ESA after having been placed in the WRAG or SG at their most recent WCA. The figures relate to assessments which took place between October 2008 and February 2012, including actions on these claims up to May 2012. Please note that the group shown in the table may differ to the group that the claimant was in at their initial assessment. For example, a claimant that is shown as a WRAG leaver may have initially been placed in the SG and moved to the WRAG after a repeat assessment. The ESA leavers figure from each group has been split into those that have been on ESA for up to one year and those that have been on ESA for more than a year. The vast majority of ESA leavers are those found Fit for Work, since they are not eligible for the benefit, with 572,500 leaving during the period covered by the table below. Claimants in the WRAG are not expected to work, but are provided with help and support to prepare for work where possible. Those in the SG are provided with unconditional support due to the nature of their illness, which can include degenerative conditions, terminal illness and severe disability.

Table: Number of people leaving ESA from the Support Group or the Work Related Activity Group by claim duration, October 2008 to February 2012

Duration	Work Related Activity Group	Support Group
Up to 1 year	29,200	23,900
Longer than 1 year	20,900	12,400
All leavers	50,100	36,300

Source: The figures are derived from administrative data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare.

Notes:

(1) The table covers all ESA leavers between October 2008 and February 2012 and shows the outcome of their most recent WCA. This analysis presents information on new claims for ESA only. It does not contain incapacity benefits reassessments to determine eligibility for ESA.

(2) All numbers are rounded to the nearest 100.

¹ For more information on destinations of benefit leavers see: Adams, L. et al. (2011): Destinations of Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and Employment and Support Allowance Leavers 2011, DWP Research Report 791. <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2011-2012/rrep791.pdf>

Annex

The analysis was produced in relation to the following Parliamentary Question (PQ):

- **PQ/12/110695 - Stephen Timms (East Ham):** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many of those who have entered the employment and support allowance work related activity group have left it within a year.

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12 September 2012