

Duration of the Assessment Phase for Employment and Support Allowance claimants

November 2011

Introduction

This statistical release presents the average and median time spent in the assessment phase of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and the proportion completed within different timescales. The figures are derived from administrative data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare. This covers all initial Work Capability Assessments (WCA) completed between October 2008 and May 2011.

Background

The Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) assessment phase is the time between a claim commencing and a decision on whether a claimant has limited capability for work related activity, or is fit for work. During the course of the assessment phase, ESA claimants are paid at the assessment phase rate and undertake the WCA process.

The Department's decision maker assesses the claimant's continued eligibility for ESA on the basis of the WCA. If a claimant is assessed as fit for work at the WCA their ESA will end. They may be eligible for other benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support, if the conditions of entitlement are satisfied.

The main phase starts once the assessment phase is complete. If the WCA shows that your illness or disability does limit your ability to work, an additional amount (called a component) is paid on top of the basic rate. This is normally paid from the 92nd day of the claim. If the WCA is delayed beyond 91 days (13 weeks) for whatever reason, the component will be backdated to the 92nd day of your claim.

There are two groups within the main phase:

Work-Related Activity Group

If you are placed in the Work-Related Activity Group, because you have limited capability for work, you will be expected to take part in Work-Focused Interviews with your Personal Adviser. You will get support to help you prepare for a return to work. In return, you will receive a work-related activity component in addition to your basic rate.

Support Group

If your illness or disability has a severe effect on your ability to work, because you have a limited capability for work related activity, you won't be expected to engage with a Personal Advisor, but you can do so on a voluntary basis if you want to. You will receive a support component in addition to your basic rate.

The assessment phase may be extended for a number of reasons including failure to comply with the assessment process. Claimants who, for example, fail to return the ESA50 application form or fail to attend a WCA appointment will normally have their entitlement to ESA withdrawn. However if they can demonstrate good cause for their lack of compliance, the claim will continue in the assessment phase until the WCA process is complete.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 below present the mean and median durations in the assessment phase for initial ESA claims assessed between October 2008 and May 2011, the latest data available. The information is broken down for all claims and also by the outcome of the initial WCA. Timings are presented in both calendar days and weeks.

This analysis excludes any time spent in the assessment phase after the WCA decision is made – as is the case for appeals. Claimants appealing the WCA decision remain on ESA in the assessment phase until their appeal is resolved. Claims that are closed before the WCA is completed, and those awaiting a WCA decision, are also excluded.

Median times are presented to negate the effect of claims recorded with very long assessment period durations. These excessively long durations are probably the result of repeated compliance failures with good cause or claims that have closed and payment ceased, but remain “live” due to data issues.

Table 1. Average assessment phase duration in calendar days. All initial assessments Oct-08 to May-11.				
	Support Group	WRAG	Fit for Work	All
Calendar Days	117	133	128	128
Weeks	17	19	18	18

Table 2. Median assessment phase duration in calendar days. All initial assessments Oct-08 to May-11.				
	Support Group	WRAG	Fit for Work	All
Calendar Days	91	106	108	106
Weeks	13	15	15	15

Table 3 below shows the proportions of assessments that were completed within the timescales shown. Claims that have not have a final decision from the WCA have been excluded.

Table 3. Proportion of assessments completed in the timings shown						
	13 weeks or less	13 weeks to 6 months	6 months to 1 year	Over 1 year	Unknown	Total
Support Group	50%	35%	12%	3%	0%	100%
WRAG	38%	44%	14%	4%	0%	100%
Fit for Work	34%	51%	13%	2%	1%	100%
All	37%	47%	13%	3%	0%	100%

This information is taken from administrative data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and assessment data from Atos Healthcare. Percentages have been

rounded to the nearest percentage point and durations have been rounded to the nearest calendar day or week as shown.

“Unknown” represents claims where administrative data is incomplete or inconsistent.

Further information on Employment and Support Allowance can be found at:
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/employment-and-support/>

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