

Ad-hoc analysis of incapacity benefits face- to-face assessments

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Background

People claiming incapacity benefits undergo regular assessments of their functional impairment. For old style incapacity benefits, most claimants undergo a Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) to determine eligibility to their benefit, although under certain circumstances some claimants can be deemed exempt from the PCA.

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) replaced Incapacity Benefit for new claims from October 2008. Claimants on ESA undertake a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to determine eligibility to the benefit. The WCA is usually a face-to-face assessment but in certain circumstances it can be carried out as a paper scrutiny.

This ad-hoc analysis looks at the numbers and proportions of claimants who do not receive a face-to-face assessment for old-style incapacity benefits on ESA. The analysis uses information from the following sources:

- DWP 5% administrative data for Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), May 2010;
- DWP Management Information on medical assessments completed;
- Benefit claims data held by the DWP covering new ESA claims that started between October 2008 and February 2010; and
- Functional assessment data sourced from Atos Healthcare covering assessments completed up to June 2010.

Results

Incapacity Benefit / Severe Disablement Allowance

Table 1 shows that as at May 2010, 39% of Incapacity Benefit recipients (including those receiving Income Support on the grounds of incapacity) and SDA recipients were classed as ‘PCA exempt’ – that is they do not need to have a Personal Capability Assessment (face to face or scrutiny) to determine their continued eligibility to IB/SDA.

Table 1: Incapacity Benefit / Severe Disablement Allowance recipients who are ‘PCA exempt’

	PCA-exempt	Non PCA-exempt	Total Caseload
Incapacity Benefit	39%	61%	100%
Incapacity Benefit / SDA	43%	57%	100%

Source: DWP 5% administrative data for Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), May 2010

Those who are not PCA-exempt undergo a Personal Capability Assessment periodically to determine their continued eligibility to benefit. The PCA can either be a paper-based assessment or a face to face assessment; both paper-based and face-to-face assessments are undertaken by Atos Healthcare. Table 2 shows that of all Personal Capability Assessments held between October 2007 and September 2008, 53% were face-to-face and 47% were paper based assessment.

Table 2: PCA assessments by type of assessment

	Paper-based assessment	Face to face assessment	Total assessments
PCA completed Oct-07 to Sep-08	47%	53%	100%

Source: DWP Management Information on medical assessments completed, October 2007 and September 2008

Employment and Support Allowance

All those on ESA undergo a Work Capability Assessment to determine their continued eligibility to the benefit. Unlike old style incapacity benefits, there is no 'exempt' category. Table 3 shows that currently about 7% of new ESA claims that have been assessed are awarded benefit without a face to face WCA (i.e. the assessment was carried out using paper based evidence). These would be people with the most severe and/or life threatening health conditions so we may not expect them to attend a face-to-face WCA in the future.

Table 3: WCA assessments by type of assessment

	Paper-based assessment	Face to face assessment	Total assessments
New ESA claims Oct-08 to Feb-10 that have been assessed	7%	93%	100%

Source: Benefit claims data held by the DWP covering new ESA claims that started between October 2008 and February 2010, and functional assessment data sourced from Atos Healthcare covering assessments completed up to June 2010.

Notes

The figures in the tables above are not directly comparable as the IB/SDA figures are based on caseloads and the ESA figures are based on new claims. The ESA figures are likely to change over time as the numbers on ESA increase.