

Freedom of Information request 2015-3703

Date received 02 September 2015

Date of response 03 February 2016

Information request

My request is about the prognoses given by HCPs during the Work Capability Assessment for Employment and Support Allowance. When I refer to 'assessments', I am referring to both in-person medical assessments and opinions rendered by HCPs on 'scrutiny' of available evidence without a face-to-face assessment.

I wish to know:

1) The number of people in the Work-Related Activity Group who were reassessed and kept in the WRAG, and of these

- a) The number of people whose prognosis was increased**
- b) The number of people whose prognosis was decreased**
- c) The number of people whose prognosis did not change**

2) The number of people in the Work-Related Activity Group who were reassessed and were moved into the Support Group and, of these

- a) The number of people whose prognosis was increased**
- b) The number of people whose prognosis was decreased**
- c) The number of people whose prognosis did not change**

3) The number of people in the Support Group who were reassessed and kept in the Support Group, and of these

- a) The number of people whose prognosis was increased**
- b) The number of people whose prognosis was decreased**
- c) The number of people whose prognosis did not change**

4) The number of people in the Support Group who were reassessed and were moved to the WRAG, and of these

- a) The number of people whose prognosis was increased**
- b) The number of people whose prognosis was decreased**
- c) The number of people whose prognosis did not change**

5) The number of people who were reassessed while in the Support Group and found fit for work

6) The number of people who were reassessed while in the WRAG and found fit for work.

DWP response

Entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is based on the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The WCA is a functional assessment of what activities an individual can do. In practice, individuals are assessed by qualified healthcare professionals against a set of qualifying descriptors.

Once a claimant has been found to be eligible for ESA they will usually be allocated a prognosis or re-referral date where their entitlement to benefit will be reconsidered to see whether they are receiving the correct rate of benefit and where appropriate help to take steps to move closer to the labour market.

As such whilst it is unlikely that individuals with certain degenerative illnesses will recover from their condition, the assessment will take into account their functional abilities at the time of the assessment and where the individual is capable of working or of undertaking some work related activity they could be found fit for work or placed in the work related activity group (WRAG).

If an individual's condition deteriorates or they present another illness they can have their eligibility reassessed, either via a new WCA or based on paper evidence; and on this basis they may then be moved into the WRAG or support group (SG).

In response to your query, the following tables include the requested information for those with an initial ESA WCA outcome of WRAG or Support Group and the result of the first reassessment by change in length of prognosis from October 2008 to June 2015.

Please note that the figures supplied are derived from unpublished information and have not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard. They should therefore be treated with caution.

Table 1: Number of people with an initial ESA assessment outcome of WRAG by first reassessment outcome and change in prognosis length: October 2008 – June 2015

	Outcome of reassessment		
	Remained in WRAG	Placed into Support Group	Found Fit for Work
Total	165,300	58,300	91,700
No change in prognosis	56,500	12,100	..
Prognosis increased	78,200	37,300	..
Prognosis decreased	24,400	6,100	..
Prognosis changed to terminally ill	-	600	..
Prognosis remained terminally ill	-	-	..
Prognosis Unknown	6,200	2,300	..

Table 2: Number of people with an initial ESA assessment outcome of Support Group by first reassessment outcome and change in prognosis length: October 2008 – June 2015

	Outcome of reassessment		
	Remained in Support Group	Placed into the WRAG	Found Fit for Work
Total	161,600	20,900	23,400
No change in prognosis	47,700	6,400	..
Prognosis increased	90,400	8,600	..
Prognosis decreased	13,900	4,800	..
Prognosis changed to terminally ill	2,600	-	..
Prognosis remained terminally ill	1,100	-	..
Prognosis Unknown	5,900	1,000	..

Source: Data in the above tables is derived from administrative data held by the DWP and assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare and the Centre for Health and Disability Assessments.

Notes:

1. Please note that the figures supplied are derived from unpublished information and have not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard. They should therefore be treated with caution.
2. For all tables, data is rounded to nearest 100. Totals may not sum due to rounding method used. "-" denotes nil or negligible. ".." denotes not applicable.

3. An increase is counted where the length of prognosis increases, e.g. the prognosis is 3 months at the initial assessment and is 6 months at the reassessment.
4. The assessment outcomes include face-to-face assessments and scrutiny cases.
5. 'Prognosis Unknown' covers instances where either the prognosis at initial assessment and/or the prognosis at the first reassessment was 'Unknown'.
6. Figures include outcomes of initial functional assessments that were completed by month of assessment up to 30 June 2015 for initial assessments for ESA new claims and exclude clerical cases and Incapacity Benefits Reassessment cases.
7. The assessment outcomes relate to the claimant's first assessment before appeal and may include cases that will have been revised following reconsideration.
8. Prognosis data derives from the healthcare professional's recommendation. The quality of the prognosis data will be affected where the healthcare professional makes a recommendation consistent with being fit for work but the claimant is awarded the benefit as a result of a DWP Decision Maker's decision or the outcome of an appeal. In these cases the prognosis may be recorded as very short term or missing. The outcome of reassessment recorded is the final DWP Decision Maker's decision or the recommendation made by the healthcare professional where the Decision Maker's decision is not yet available.
9. There is a reporting lag owing to the time needed to process data e.g. March 2015 data is reported in September 2015.
10. Note that routine referrals from DWP to the assessment provider for repeat assessments were suspended between January 2014 and December 2015 to focus on processing new claims. Claimants were able to request repeat assessments during this period.