
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Andrew Dilnot CBE

Sheila Gilmore MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

29 May 2013

Dear Ms Gilmore

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter dated 9 April 2013, regarding the reporting of official statistics relating to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). I apologise for the delay in my response but I wanted to check this matter carefully before responding.

As you noted in your letter, an article published in the Sunday Telegraph on 30 March 2013 reported that according to government figures, "nearly 900,000 people who were on incapacity benefit dropped their claim to the payments, rather than undergo a tough medical test."¹ The article quoted Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps MP, in his capacity as Conservative Party Chairman, as saying "This is a new figure, nearly a million people have come off incapacity benefit...before going for the test. They take themselves off."

The National Statistician's Office has passed on to me the text of a press release apparently issued by the Conservative Party at around the time the article was prepared (Annex 1). We note that the press release appears no longer to be easily available in a published format.

Having reviewed the article and the relevant figures, we have concluded that these statements appear to conflate official statistics relating to new claimants of the ESA² with official statistics on recipients of the incapacity benefit (IB) who are being migrated across to the ESA³.

According to official statistics published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in January 2013, a total of 603,600 recipients of IB were referred for reassessment as part of the migration across to ESA between March 2011 and May 2012. Of these, 19,700 claims were closed prior to a work capability assessment in the period to May 2012.

The figure of "nearly 900,000" referenced in the article appears to refer to the cumulative total of 878,300 new claims for the ESA (i.e. not pre-existing IB recipients) which were closed before undergoing assessment in the period from October 2008 to May 2012. Annex 2 presents data published by DWP on new ESA claims and IB reassessments.

¹ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9963012/900000-choose-to-come-off-sickness-benefit-ahead-of-tests.html

² http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/index.php?page=esa_wca_arc (January 2013)

³ http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_ibr_arc (January 2013)

In your letter, you also expressed concern about the apparent implication in the Sunday Telegraph article that claims for ESA had been dropped because the individuals were never really ill in the first place. The statistical release does not address the issue of *why* cases were closed in great depth, but it does point to research undertaken by DWP which suggests that “an important reason why ESA claims in this sample were withdrawn or closed before they were fully assessed was because the person recovered and either returned to work, or claimed a benefit more appropriate to their situation”.⁴

I am copying this to Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps MP; to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Rt. Hon. Iain Duncan Smith MP; to the Chair of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, Bernard Jenkin MP, and the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, Dame Anne Begg MP; and to the National Statistician, Jil Matheson.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Andrew Dilnot CBE

⁴ Barnes, H. et al (2011), 'Unsuccessful Employment and Support Allowance claims – qualitative research'
<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2011-2012/rrep762.pdf>

Annex 1: Conservative Party Press Release

Nearly 1 million people drop incapacity benefit claim before medical test

878,300 people claiming incapacity benefit - more than a third of the total - have chosen to drop their benefit claim entirely rather than face a medical assessment, new figures have revealed. <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_jan2013_tables.xls>
Figures for the two years to November 2010, show that in Glasgow City, an enormous 50 per cent of incapacity benefit claimants chose to lose their benefit rather than undergo a medical test (Hansard, DEP2011-1633, 18 October 2011, link<http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2011-1633/DEP2011-1633.xls>).

To date, a total of 1.44 million Incapacity Benefit reassessments were carried out by doctors. Of those, the majority, 837,000 (55 per cent), were found fit to work immediately, with a further 367,300 (23.9 per cent) able to do some level of work. Only 232,800 people (15.1 per cent) were classified by doctors to be too ill to do any work at all (DWP, Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, 22 January 2013, linkhttp://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca).

Whilst the figures show that not a single person with a terminal illness has been classified as able to work, injuries such as 'sprains and strains', 'repetitive strain injury', 'allergic reactions', 'blisters' and 'acne' have seen big reductions in the numbers of people claiming benefit (DWP, Analysis of WCA outcomes, 12 September 2012, link <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/adhoc_analysis/2012/ESA_WCA_Detailed_medical_condition_breakdown_after_appeals.xls>).

Conservative Party Chairman Grant Shapps said:

"Welfare makes up a third of this country's spending - so it's our job to make sure it's getting to the people who really need it.

"Our reforms are about freeing people from a system of dependency that's trapped them and their families for decades - and people are getting back into work as a result.

"These figures demonstrate how the welfare system was broken under labour and why our reforms are so important."

ENDS

Notes to editors

Blisters

- 100 per cent of all incapacity benefit claimants suffering from blisters have either withdrawn their claim or been found fit to work.

Repetitive Strain Injury

- 87 per cent of all incapacity benefit claimants suffering from RSI have had their benefit stopped. 37 per cent withdrew their claim voluntarily. Of those who attended a medical assessment, 79 per cent were found fit to work immediately.

Sprains/Strains

- Less than 0.5 per cent of claimants with 'sprains/strains' have been found too ill to do any work. 69 per cent of claimants chose to give up their benefit rather than face a medical assessment.

Acne

- None of the 60 people who have been claiming incapacity benefit for 'acne' have been found to be so ill that they cannot do any work. 83 per cent have been found to be either fit for work immediately, or voluntarily withdrew their claim.

Alcohol

- Of the 46,120 people who claim incapacity benefit because of 'behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol', more than 13,000 chose to end their benefit altogether rather than be medically tested. 66 per cent of all claimants have been found to be fit for work immediately, or withdrew their claim.

Drugs

- Of the 29,130 people who claim incapacity benefit because of 'behavioural disorders due to multiple drug use', 69 per cent have been found to be fit for work immediately, or voluntarily withdrew their claim.

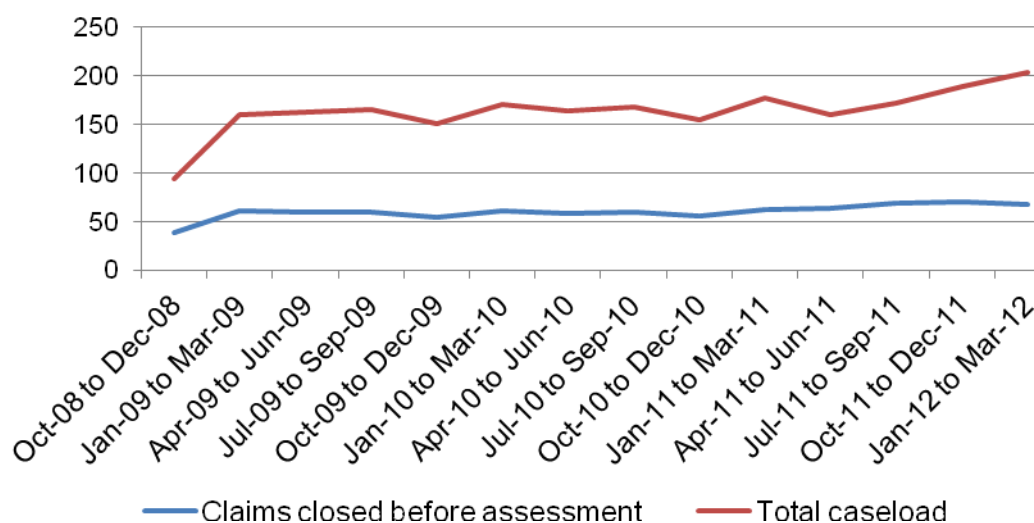
Annex 2: Department for Work and Pensions statistics on new Employment Support Allowance claims and Incapacity Benefit reassessments

New Claims for Employment Support Allowance by month of claim start (thousands)

Quarter	Claims Closed before assessment (thousands)	Total caseload (thousands)
Oct-08 to Dec-08	38.3	94.4
Jan-09 to Mar-09	61.0	159.6
Apr-09 to Jun-09	59.1	162.4
Jul-09 to Sep-09	59.4	164.6
Oct-09 to Dec-09	54.1	150.1
Jan-10 to Mar-10	60.5	170.8
Apr-10 to Jun-10	57.9	163.2
Jul-10 to Sep-10	59.6	167.5
Oct-10 to Dec-10	56.0	154.3
Jan-11 to Mar-11	62.6	176.8
Apr-11 to Jun-11	63.6	159.6
Jul-11 to Sep-11	69.0	172.1
Oct-11 to Dec-11	70.3	189.3
Jan-12 to Mar-12	67.9	203.2

Source: Department for Work and Pensions, Employment and Support Allowance: Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, Great Britain – new claims (January 2013 – Table 1a)

New Claims for Employment Support Allowance by month of claim start (thousands)



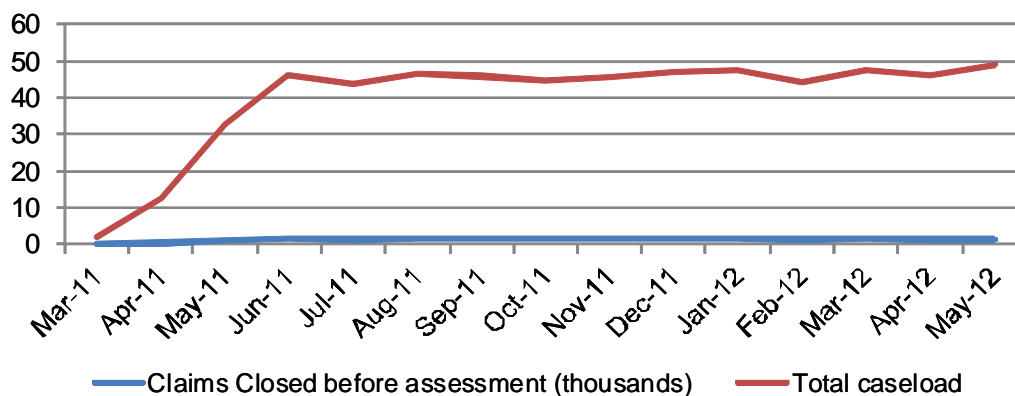
Source: Department for Work and Pensions, Employment and Support Allowance: Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, Great Britain – new claims (January 2013 – Table 1a)

**Incapacity Benefits Reassessments
by month of referral for reassessment (thousands)**

Month	Claims Closed before assessment (thousands)	Total caseload (thousands)
Mar-11	0.1	2.0
Apr-11	0.4	12.6
May-11	1.1	32.9
Jun-11	1.6	46.3
Jul-11	1.4	44.0
Aug-11	1.6	46.7
Sep-11	1.7	45.9
Oct-11	1.6	44.6
Nov-11	1.5	45.6
Dec-11	1.6	47.1
Jan-12	1.6	47.4
Feb-12	1.4	44.2
Mar-12	1.5	47.4
Apr-12	1.4	46.0
May-12	1.4	49.2

Source: Department for Work and Pensions, Employment and Support Allowance – Incapacity Benefits Reassessments: Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, Great Britain (January 2013 – Table 1)

**Incapacity Benefits Reassessments by month of referral
(thousands)**



Source: Department for Work and Pensions, Employment and Support Allowance – Incapacity Benefits Reassessments: Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, Great Britain (January 2013 – Table 1)