

To J Newman  
C/o request-100654-6dcfb838@whatdotheyknow.com

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

e-mail: [freedom-of-information-xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xx](mailto:freedom-of-information-xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xx)

Our Ref: VTR 2789-183

DATE 13 February 2012

Dear J Newman,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request that was received by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Adelphi on 16 January 2012 and forwarded on 17 January for response by DWP Medical Services Contracts Correspondence Team (MSCCT) Freedom of Information Officer. I apologise for the delay in responding to your request.

In your email you asked to be provided with information answering the following questions:-

*Dear Department for Work and Pensions,*

*Atos uses HCPs with widely varying levels of clinical expertise, but they all receive more or less the same level training in disability assessment. Atos insists that regardless of clinical experience, all of its HCPs are equally qualified to undertake any WCA, regardless of the claimant's condition or history. The fact remains that some conditions are considerably more complicated than others.*

*Does Atos make any attempt whatsoever to match claimant's condition with HCP expertise? In view of the above, the answer should be no and that WCAs are assigned to HCPs randomly, but I would like you to confirm that this is the case.*

In answer to your questions, the role of the HCP is to carry out an assessment of the functional effects of the customer's disabling condition, and to utilise the information gathered to provide the DWP Decision Maker with an impartial and independent assessment. Therefore, unlike the more widely known type of examination, the assessment is not concerned with diagnosis or decisions about treatment so specialist diagnostic qualifications are unnecessary. However a customer may submit evidence from their doctor or specialist if appropriate.

All HCPs are fully trained in Disability Assessment Medicine, prior to commencing to conduct Work Capability Assessments. Expertise in this field qualifies the HCP to give an impartial, independent assessment on the way in which a customer's illness or disability affects them in carrying out of a range of everyday work-related activities. Training includes the assessment of the effects of specific conditions, for example mental health, or where a condition may fluctuate. Emphasis is always placed on the differing circumstances of each individual customer. They also receive training in customer rights, equal opportunities and professional standards.

The assessment carried out is different to the more usual type of medical examination in which the GP or Specialists aim is to make a diagnosis and decide on appropriate treatment. A GP or Specialist is not usually trained in disability assessment medicine and therefore will often not have specific experience in assessing the disabling effects of medical conditions and the way in which a customer's illness or disability affects them in carrying out of a range of everyday work-related activities. As well as this difference in emphasis within the assessment process, the HCP will, when giving an opinion, be aware of the law relating to benefit entitlement. A Specialist on the other hand is less likely to be familiar with Social Security Legislation.

Each Medical Assessment Centre (MAC) has a pool of HCPs who are trained to carry out medical assessments.

When a claimant arrives at the MAC, their file is placed in a queue. The HCP assesses claimants in the order of their appointment time and the time at which they arrive at the MAC.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol Team

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### **Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act**

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing [freedom-of-xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx](mailto:freedom-of-xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx) or by writing to DWP, Central Fol Team, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor The Adelphi, 1-11, John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)