



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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[DWP Website](https://www.dwp.gov.uk)

Our Ref: FOI2021/14089

8 March 2021

Dear Frank Zola,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FoI) request received on 18 February. You wrote:

"Further to your Touchbase update <https://news.dwp.gov.uk/dwplz/lz.aspx?p1=MI9DU1MzY5M1M5NzI0OkU1OTkzQTMxMDQ4OTdGRUZDRDgzQzI3RTA2MjYzNjYy-&CC=&p=0> reported at <https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/welfare-rights/news/item/dwp-confirms-that-it-has-increased-the-range-of-outcomes-that-can-be-provided-following-a-telephone-work-capability-assessment> can you provide information on:

[1] "a limited range of outcomes"

[2] "increasing the range and volume of outcomes that can be provided for claimants"

in relation to:

'We [DWP] ... introduced telephone assessments at scale for WCAs from June 2020 which follow the same structure as face to face assessments. Initially, these resulted in a limited range of outcomes. We have continued to focus on developing our assessment processes and increasing our capacity and capability to assess people by telephone; increasing the range and volume of outcomes that can be provided for claimants ... This approach enables us to ensure claimants receive their correct benefit entitlement as quickly as possible and reduce the time that claimants who may be entitled to a higher award have to wait for their assessment.'

<https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/welfare-rights/news/item/dwp-confirms-that-it-has-increased-the-range-of-outcomes-that-can-be-provided-following-a-telephone-work-capability-assessment>

Specifically what exactly had been the "limited range of outcomes" [1] and what exactly are the newer increased range [2]?

Can you also provide information held of what the legislative basis is for making WCA "telephone assessments" and the range of outcomes for claimants entitlements?

On a final note can you provide information concerning Touchbase no longer being published on gov.uk and it not being possible to view past editions you send via email,

which include a link to view online but not past copies/an archive? You started publishing Touchbase on gov.uk 14 September 2015 and the last update was 9 March 2020”

DWP Response

We can confirm that the department holds some of this information.

To answer your first question, initially, only Limited Capability for Work and Work-related Activity outcomes resulted from telephone Work Capability Assessments (WCAs). Having increased our capacity and capability to assess people by telephone we have, over a period of time, expanded this so that healthcare professionals can make recommendations on all outcomes

To support the implementation of these changes, telephone assessments are subject to additional quality assurance measures supplementing the rigorous assurance processes that are already in place. Healthcare professionals undertaking the assessments are also being provided with additional training and ongoing support. As stated in the Touchbase article you refer to, this approach enables us to ensure claimants receive their correct benefit entitlement as quickly as possible and reduce the time that claimants who may be entitled to a higher award have to wait for their assessment.

To answer your second question, we are currently exploring different ways of undertaking health assessments in addition to providing them on a face to face basis. We have introduced telephone assessments as part of the department's response to the Covid -19 pandemic and, in addition, we are a trailing video assessments. Once completed the trial will be evaluated and a decision made on the feasibility of wider roll out. The department remains committed to moving towards a wider range of channels for undertaking assessments.

To answer your final question about the publication of Touchbase. In March 2020 at the start of the coronavirus outbreak, Touchbase was issued weekly by email with information about the government's response to the pandemic. Guidance was changing rapidly and the information in Touchbase was quickly becoming out of date. DWP felt there was a risk that people could be misled by out of date information as older editions of Touchbase were available on GOV.UK. To avoid this, DWP decided not to publish emails containing guidance, and instead, ensured that GOV.UK guidance was kept up to date with the latest information. This can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>. Guidance is continuing to change quickly and frequently and therefore we have no plans to recommence publishing Touchbase emails on GOV.UK.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team
Department for Work and Pensions

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-information-request@dwp.gov.uk or by writing to: DWP Central FoI Team, Caxton House, 6-12 Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA.

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.
Website: [ICO Contact Information](#) or telephone 0303 123 1113.