

To: Keith Woods
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DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

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Our Ref: FOI 3154

18 July 2013

Dear Mr Woods,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request dated 3 July 2013.

You asked:

I am interested in what criteria are used to determine the validity of claims for ESA by ATOS.

Specifically, those who have reported their condition as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Post viral fatigue syndrome, myalgic encephalomyelitis, myalgic encephalitis, myalgic encephalopathy.

The answer would include any written criteria or training materials on how to assess and score applicants who are attempting to claim this benefit.

Specifically, I would like to know if there is a current update to the document 'Training & Development ESA Handbook' (MED-ESAHB~001, Version: 4 Final, 28 July 2009)

Atos Healthcare provide the relevant reports for Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Decision Makers (DMs) but play no part in the actual decision making process.

The role of the Healthcare Professional (HCP) is to provide an independent, impartial assessment of the claimant's ability to perform activities within each of the functional areas by choosing the descriptors that they consider appropriate on the medical report they complete. This opinion is based on interview with the claimant, observations and an appropriate clinical examination.

Benefit entitlement is determined by DWP DMs not HCPs. In order to make a decision on benefit entitlement the DM considers all the available evidence not just the reports received from Atos Healthcare. Other evidence may include the claimant's Limited Capability for Work questionnaire, reports from GPs, hospital doctors and other medical clinicians/HCPs.

Please find attached to this email the guides 'Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) – Guidelines for the Disability Analyst and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Version 1 the information you requested which has been issued by me in the role of DWP's Business Management Team Freedom of Information Officer.

These requested documents have been produced as part of a programme for HCPs to carry out medical assessments as approved HCPs. All HCPs undertaking these medical assessments must be registered medical or nursing practitioners who in addition, have undergone training in disability assessment medicine and more specific training. The training includes theory training in a classroom setting, supervised practical training, and a demonstration of understanding as assessed by quality audit. These documents must be read with the understanding that, as experienced medical or nursing practitioners, the HCPs will have detailed knowledge of the principles and practice of diagnostic techniques, and therefore such information is not contained in these documents. In addition, these are not stand-alone documents, and form only a part of the training and written documentation that a HCP receives. As disability assessment is a practical occupation, much of the guidance also involves verbal information and coaching. Thus, although the documents may be of interest to non-medical readers, it must be remembered that some of the information may not be readily understood without background medical knowledge and an awareness of the other training and guidance given to HCPs.

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This weblink <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/specialist-guides/#other> provides you with access to the current Work Capability Assessment (WCA) Handbook which is issued to all Healthcare Professionals (HCP) who are approved to undertake WCAs. This PDF includes links to the PowerPoint forms.

If you have any queries about this letter please use the email address provided below quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely

Business Management Team
Health & Disability Assessments (Operations)
dwp.medicalservicescorrespondence@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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@dwg.gsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central FoI Team, Caxton House, 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 www.ico.gov.uk