

Response to Questions

ESD Advisory Committee meeting 11/12/14

The following questions were posed at the November 12, 2014 Employment Security Advisory Committee meeting:

Question 1: Today, how many FTEs total in the claims centers? How many in adjudication? How many in intake?

Answer: Unemployment in Washington State is seasonal due largely to declining employment in agriculture and construction, so claims volumes increase in fall and winter, and typically exceed staff capacity to meet demand. In October 2014, the claims centers completed a reduction in force as a result of shrinking funding. Workload related to initial claims declined 10% in 2013 and 7% in 2014, and intake staffing levels were reduced 40% in 2013 and another 19% in 2014.

The claims centers employ some part-time workers to provide flexibility in meeting workload demands during peak and non-peak periods. From November through mid-February, part-time employees work full-time, and March through October, they work fewer hours.

	FTE Levels		
	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014
Administration*	52.0	35.3	29.3
Adjudication Supervisors	15.0	12.0	9.0
Adjudication Leads	15.0	12.0	9.0
Adjudicators	154.8	132.8	107.0
Intake Supervisors	13.8	10.0	7.0
Intake Leads	13.5	10.0	7.0
Intake Agents	163.9	101.2	83.8
Emergency Unemployment Compensation	17.0	11.0	0
Special Wage and Benefits Unit	7.0	6.0	6.0
Training Benefits	14.0	7.5	7.5
Shared Work	17.8	11.8	16.8
Special Programs	6.0	0.0	0
Job Search Review Center	10.0	9.0	8.5
Training, Technology and Planning	6.8	6.8	3.8
	506.5	365.3	294.7

*Administration consists of: Management, Resource Coordinators, Coaches, Administrative Assistants, Process Improvement Leaders, Project Managers, and Office Assistants

Question 2: What are the call wait times currently? What is our best guess of the number of customers who get the high volume or otherwise can't get through?

Answer: For the week ending November 18, 2014 the average call wait time was 17 minutes and 16 seconds.

For every 100 agents taking calls, our phone system allows another 80 to wait on hold. Once the maximum number of calls is reached, the next caller receives a high volume message: *“Due to high call volumes, we cannot answer your call at this time. Please call back later or access unemployment information and services on our website at www.esd.wa.gov Thank you for your patience.”*

Telephone Statistics: Weekly Average	November 2012	November 2013	November 2014
High volume messages	20,150	36,303	22,475
Calls Entered	22,341	14,016	11,583
Calls Answered	18,079	10,314	9,242
Average Wait time for those on hold	13:15	24:09	19:55

Customers may use many of our phone features without the assistance of a claims center agent. These same features (and more) are also available on our web-site:

- Initial claim application is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week on the website (no agent assistance needed).
- Questions can also be asked on the website at any time, and we will respond within 2-3 days.
- Reopen a claim via the phone or website 24 hours per day, Sunday (12:01 a.m.) through Friday at 3:00 p.m. (no agent assistance needed).
- File a continued weekly claim via phone or web 24 hours per day, Sunday at 12:01 a.m. through Friday at 5:00 p.m. (no agent assistance needed).

Because our telephone system has reached “end of life,” is expensive to maintain, and is subject to frequent outages, we are designing a replacement system scheduled for implementation in 2015. This system is expected to help us improve customer service and increase efficiency.

Question 3: What do we project will happen from now through May 2015?

Answer: We anticipate that our demand will exceed our resources through at least January 2015. We expect claims volumes to decline after that time, but we do not know if demand will still exceed resources.

In response to these difficulties, ESD has implemented a number of solutions, including:

- Dedicating claims center staff to answering incoming from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The remainder of the day, agents respond to claimants who have been waiting to speak to them—including those who have requested calls back, have contacted us via email or are waiting on hold.
- Hiring additional non-permanent staff to assist;
- Authorizing overtime to assist with workload; and
- Redirecting adjudicators to help answer phones.