Quality of evaluation of work disability

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Appendix: Evaluation of work disability in the Netherlands (2009)

Normally the applications for a work disability benefit are treated as follows:

**Legal conditions:**
To qualify for a disability benefit, a salaried worker has, due to disease or handicap, to be unable to earn more than 35 percent of what a comparable healthy person earns in customary work. In this definition it is the loss of earning capacity that is insured, not the health problem itself.

A salaried worker can file a claim after a period of sick leave from his or her former function of two years. The claim has to be filed at the UWV, the Institute for Employees Benefit Schemes. UWV has the work disability evaluated by a social insurance physician (SIP) and a labour expert.

**Procedure:**
The SIP performs a medical examination and estimates the claimant’s current ability to function. The SIP then drafts a general medical report. The SIP may consider the claimant fully and permanently disabled for work and report so. Otherwise, the SIP completes a functional capacity report (FML), which contains 56 items in six categories:

- Personal Functioning: focus of attention, remembering, speed of action, etc.
- Social Functioning: seeing, hearing, dealing with emotions of others, conflicts, etc.
- Adaptation to Physical Environment: heat, cold, draught, allergies, etc.
- Dynamic Activities: the use of hand and fingers, walking, squatting, climbing stairs, etc.
- Static Positions: sitting, standing, ability to work above the head, etc.
- Working Hours per day or per week.

The SIP selects the relevant categories and ticks the relevant items as capable, partly capable, or incapable. The labour expert uses this information to identify existing jobs that the claimant can theoretically work in. The FML is designed so that it can be used as input in a computer-based matching programme. In this programme some 7500 jobs nationwide are described, with their requirements and earnings. This information is updated on a regular basis by job analysts employed by UWV. The programme provides examples of jobs that the claimant can theoretically do, based on the functional capacities as identified by the SIP. The labour expert then selects those jobs that seem feasible in the case of the claimant. If this selection leaves sufficient jobs that the claimant can theoretically do, the average earnings of these are calculated and compared to the claimant’s earlier earnings. This may show a percentage of loss of earning capacity that is the basis for a benefit if the loss is over 35 percent. The benefit is proportional to the loss of earning capacity.
Benefit:
Benefits are time limited and claimants are reassessed regularly for continuation of the benefit. If the SIP considers the claimant fully and permanently disabled for work, the claimant is granted a full benefit. If the labour expert finds a percentage of loss of earning capacity over 35 percent, that is the basis for a partial benefit. The benefit is proportional to the loss of earning capacity. The claimant is expected to look for work that fits his or her capacities and he or she is periodically reassessed.

Quality control:
The evaluation of work disability is subject to several measures to control quality:
1. The SIPs and labour experts receive training within UWV and in official post-graduate education (SIP) and high school (labour expert). They are expected to continue their professional education throughout their professional lives.
2. SIPs and labour experts are expected to participate in peer tutoring sessions where they discuss professional aspects of their daily work and functioning.
3. Guidelines have been drafted for the work of SIP and labour expert. These are to support their professional decision making. These guidelines can be found at www.cba.uwv.nl.
4. Reports of SIPs and labour experts are sampled by UWV staff for review of the case handling. SIPs and labour experts receive feedback on the result of this.
5. Polls among clients of UWV in which their opinion of the service delivery of UWV is asked.