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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP  
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10 July 2020

Dear Sir George

Thank you for your email of 28 May to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about the Mind campaign concerning face-to-face health and disability assessments. I am replying as the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work and I apologise for the delay that has occurred.

We recognise that attending a face-to-face assessment can be a stressful experience, which is why we do not carry out them out where there is enough existing evidence available to determine benefit entitlement. However, it is important to carry out reassessments at appropriate intervals to ensure that:

- claimants keep in touch with the Department;
- the benefit entitlement is correct, as people's health conditions and disabilities, the way they manage them, and their impact on their functional ability can change; and
- claimants continue to receive the support appropriate to their current circumstances.

Nevertheless, the temporary suspension of face-to-face assessments, initially brought in for three-months to protect people from unnecessary risk of coronavirus at the outset of the pandemic, will remain in place following a consideration of the latest public health guidance. We will announce any changes to this in due course. As measures are taken across the country to ease restrictions, the Department will also gradually resume some review and reassessment activity which had been put on

hold because of the coronavirus outbreak. We will shortly be re-starting review and renewal activity in Personal Independence Payment and Disability Living Allowance, starting with those claims which were already underway when this activity was suspended.

Anyone who makes a new claim or is due an assessment will be contacted, if necessary, to discuss next steps, which could involve either telephone or paper-based assessments. We will shortly be writing out to some Personal Independence Payment and Disability Living Allowance claimants asking them to complete paperwork to resume their reviews, reassessments and renewals. For Personal Independence Payment cases where paperwork has already been returned, claimants may be contacted by one of our assessment providers.

Review and reassessment activity in other benefits will remain suspended but this will be kept under regular review and any changes will be announced in due course. This includes:

- reassessments in Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit;
- reviews in Attendance Allowance; and
- all Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit activity.

People are encouraged not to delay making a claim if they believe they need support, nor hesitate to update the Department on a change of their circumstances. All services remain open and some forms can be returned online.

A number of safeguards were built into the assessment processes from the outset, and we have introduced further improvements to ensure the assessment processes deal with people with mental health conditions fairly and accurately.

Our assessment providers also have Healthcare Professionals in place who specialise in mental health conditions to spread best practice in mental health, learning difficulties and cognitive impairment, and support the Healthcare Professionals carrying out the assessments. Furthermore, the Healthcare Professionals are given specific training in assessing individuals with mental health conditions and receive continuing professional education in order to remain up to speed with developments in the field of mental health.

It is possible for an appointee and/or companion to attend a face-to-face and telephone assessments with a claimant, where appropriate, in order

to give them support during the assessment. Where people have difficulty travelling to an assessment, they can ask for a home assessment. They must, however, provide evidence from their GP to support this request.

We remain fully committed to making continuous improvements to the support we provide to people with health conditions and disabilities, and will evaluate and learn from the assessments measures that have been introduced to inform future changes and any reform to assessments in the future. We are also considering opportunities to build on the changes that have been introduced during the COVID19 outbreak.

You may like to know that Senior Departmental Officials recently met with representatives from Mind to discuss their concerns, ensuring that they are taken into account when considering any changes to our processes.

I hope your constituents will find this reply helpful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Justin" with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Justin Tomlinson MP**  
Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work