



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Secretary of State
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA

0207 340 4000

www.gov.uk

ministers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons

Our ref: POS(1)10077/509

9 October 2017

Dear George

Thank you for your email of 4 October on behalf of your constituents who contacted you regarding Personal Independence Payment.

I can assure your constituents that we have designed Personal Independence Payment to reflect a modern understanding of disability, treating all conditions fairly. It is only right that support is targeted at those disabled people who require the most assistance to lead independent lives and Personal Independence Payment is achieving that.

It is the case that Personal Independence Payment is a different benefit from Disability Living Allowance, with different eligibility criteria and, in some cases, individuals may find a change in the amount of support they are entitled to following reassessment. However, 40 per cent of those previously in receipt of Disability Living Allowance are now receiving a higher rate of benefit in Personal Independence Payment. Of the 1.5 million claimants now receiving Personal Independence Payment, 29 per cent are getting it at the highest level (£141.10 a week) compared to 15 per cent of the working-age Disability Living Allowance claimants prior to its introduction. This demonstrates that the assessment criteria do successfully identify those most in need of support.

The assessment criteria were developed in collaboration with a group of independent specialists in health, social care and disability and, following extensive consultation, have been chosen to consider the impact of a more comprehensive range of impairment types than the Disability Living Allowance criteria. The criteria ensures that the greatest level of support goes to those least able to carry out the activities and contributes towards the increased costs that they are likely to incur.

The claiming process was co-produced with the assistance of disabled people, carers and organisations supporting them. In particular, the PIP2 questionnaire was designed to allow claimants to tell us, in their own words, how their health condition or disability impacts them on a day-to-day basis. The questionnaire has a mixture of tick boxes and free text boxes allowing claimants to add as much or as little detail as they wish. I do appreciate that for some people the length of the questionnaire may seem intimidating. That is why we provide guidance notes to help complete it and, following earlier concerns about time limits, we introduced rules and procedures which allow claimants additional time to complete the form where it is reasonably required.

Recent research carried out by Ipsos MORI indicates that 85 per cent of claimants were able to complete all sections of the questionnaire and only 4 per cent were

unable to do so. The research also shows that 63 per cent of claimants found completing the questionnaire as 'easy' or 'easier than expected'. This research is available on the Government website at:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-independence-payment-evaluation-wave-1-claimant-survey-findings.

I would like to reassure your constituents that we will continue to explore opportunities to improve the questionnaire making use of customer testing and engagement with disability groups.

In relation to the award lengths and reviews, once someone has been awarded Personal Independence Payment, which can be paid at one of eight rates, their award will be reviewed at an appropriate date. Reviews are a key part of the benefit and ensure that not only do awards remain correct where needs may change, but that we also maintain contact with the claimant, both features missing from Disability Living Allowance.

Importantly, the length of an award is based on an individual's circumstances and can vary from nine months to an ongoing award, with a light touch review at the ten year point. Personal Independence Payment already recognises that for the most severely disabled claimants, the award review process could seem unnecessarily intrusive. That is why we introduced changes so that those with the most severe, lifetime disabilities, whose functional ability has remained the same, are more likely to have their evidence reviewed by a Departmental decision maker and will not need to have a face-to-face assessment with a healthcare professional. We will continue to closely monitor developments across the health and disability landscape and engage with stakeholders, including the Disability Benefits Consortium, to improve the service we provide to all claimants.

In terms of guidance and training for the assessment providers, Independent Assessment Services and Capita, the Department requires all healthcare professionals carrying out assessments to have a broad training in disability analysis, as well as training in specific conditions, including multiple and complex conditions. Assessments are, therefore, carried out by healthcare professionals from a range of different backgrounds. This includes doctors and nurses and also professionals such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists. Healthcare professionals must go through a comprehensive training programme and pass an assessment of competence before they can carry out medical assessments. As well as their qualified profession, any healthcare professional undertaking assessments must have at least two years' experience following registration.

The Department has reviewed the assessment providers' training materials and is content with them. In doing so, it has judged the material against whether they will equip trainee healthcare professionals with the competence, knowledge and skills necessary to assess claimants against the assessment criteria.

Both assessment providers have to conform to a rigorous set of quality standards regarding staff recruitment and training to demonstrate that their healthcare professionals meet all of our requirements before they are approved to carry out assessments on our behalf. Furthermore, all healthcare professionals are subject to ongoing quality audit checks to ensure they continue to deliver high quality assessments. Where healthcare professionals fall below the required standards and do not improve, processes are in place to revoke their approval to carry out assessments.

If the provider fails to deliver against these measures, agreed financial remedies will be applied and, ultimately, the Department has the right to terminate the contract if there is sustained underperformance in a range of areas.

In addition to having access to their own training material, healthcare professionals also have access to the Personal Independence Payment Assessment Guide. The guide is regularly updated to reflect legislative changes and policy amendments and it is available on the Government website at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-independence-payment-assessment-guide-for-assessment-providers#history.

With regards to decision making, we have ongoing plans to ensure decisions are right first time. In the vast majority of cases that already happens – of the 2.64 million decisions made to date (June 2017), only 8 per cent of all decisions have been appealed and only 4 per cent of all decisions successfully appealed, often as a result of new evidence presented to the Tribunal. Departmental decision makers also receive comprehensive training and are supported by a range of regularly updated guides, such as the Advice for Decision Makers Guide and the Personal Independence Payment Assessment Guide. They also receive disability-specific training and have the support of quality assurance managers.

Following the first Independent Review of the Personal Independence Payment assessment process, carried out by Paul Gray and published in December 2014, to support the Department's staff and the assessment providers to come to the correct decisions first time, we:

- introduced initiatives to ensure better working relationships between our Departmental decision makers and healthcare professionals;
- revised the Personal Independence Payment Assessment Guide to highlight the importance for further evidence and ensure this is embedded in operational guidance for decision makers;
- updated guidance and training to re-emphasise the need for decision makers to ensure 'reliability' criteria is applied against each activity within daily living and mobility components;
- held training events with Departmental decision makers to ensure consistent application of criteria and policy intent; and
- strengthened feedback mechanisms with assessment providers.

The Department is currently considering the second Independent Review report, published on 30 March, and will be responding in due course.



Rt Hon David Gauke MP