From the Chair

9 May 2018

Sarah Newton MP
Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House, Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Dear Minister,

**PIP and ESA Assessments**

As you will be aware, the Committee has an ongoing interest in the quality of PIP and ESA assessments.

On 22 March, I tabled a written question to the Department, asking about the adequacy of the length of time contracted provider assessors have to carry out assessments. Your response explained that assessors are “encouraged to take as much time as they need during an assessment to fully understand the impact of a claimant’s condition on their everyday life”.\(^1\) It concluded that “there are no time limits set on the duration” of assessments.

I agree that it is crucially important for assessors not to be rushed to conduct assessments. All three contractors are, however, paid according to the volume of assessments they carry out and have contractually agreed service levels that they must meet.\(^2\) I am concerned that this approach to paying contractors could encourage them to set targets which, in effect, impose time limits. Might you please:

1. Outline the steps taken to ensure volume-based payment does not incentivise rushed assessments by contractors?

2. Explain how the Department ensures contractors do not impose time limits on assessors? Do you forbid it? Or do you monitor contractors to ensure they are not used?

Thank you for your help and I look forward to hearing from you,

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\(^1\) Written Question 133847, 22 March 2018

\(^2\) The National Audit Office’s 2016 report on contracted out health and disability assessments reported that DWP expects providers to return assessment reports within six weeks.
Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair