Dear Frank,

Thank you for your letter dated 9th May regarding PIP and ESA Assessments. In your letter you raised concerns that the volume based payment model for these contracts could lead to assessments being rushed. You also asked how the Department ensures that assessment providers do not impose time limits on their assessors. Please find my responses to your questions as set out below.

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

DWP's health assessment contracts require providers to deliver quality assessments and excellent customer service, as well as the volume of assessments that we require. The quality of assessments is robustly measured by our independent auditors each month. All assessment providers are subject to contractual financial remedies, should service levels for quality or service be missed. This is a strong disincentive against prioritising high volume over quality.

Work Capability Assessments require Healthcare Professionals to thoroughly consider the effect that a claimant’s condition has on their ability to work and undertake everyday activities. The assessment for PIP looks at an individual's ability to carry out a series of key everyday activities such as washing, dressing, reading or preparing and cooking a meal.

In order to provide a high quality, accurate assessment report, a Healthcare Professional must undertake extensive questioning and allow the claimant sufficient time to provide their relevant medical history and explain how their disability or health condition affects them. Depending on the claimant’s condition, the Healthcare Professional may be required to conduct an overview of their physical or sensory
function. This is a comprehensive disability assessment analysis and durations will vary based on the individual circumstances of each claimant.

**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?**

The Department has not set any time limits regarding the duration of assessments. All assessment providers advise claimants through their written communications that assessments are likely to take an hour, but the length of the assessment will be determined by the claimant and their condition. Irrespective of the time taken, quality remains a key measure of success.

The Department meets regularly with providers on a monthly basis to review performance, including data relating to average duration times. Healthcare Professionals may be given additional coaching and support if their average duration is consistently higher or lower than the national average, for example, short assessments may suggest a Healthcare Professional is not gathering enough information, whilst long assessments may mean the Healthcare Professional needs support to improve their questioning techniques.

All assessment providers recently provided evidence to your Committee which showed that the average duration of assessments was in line with the Department’s expectations.

I am aware that you have contacted all the assessment providers in relation to the issue of incentives following sight of a letter sent by Independent Assessment Services (IAS). In high volume driven contracts there will always be occasions where resources need to be maximised in order to meet periods of high demand. Health Professionals who are willing to extend their day to complete an additional quality assessment may be incentivised to do so. Any incentives offered by the assessment providers at any time are dependent on quality which is closely monitored.

The Department has set standards for the quality of assessments and our independent auditors continuously monitor assessments against these standards.

We are continually working with the assessment providers to further improve the quality of assessments through clinical coaching, feedback and support available to each assessor and increased observation of assessments.

Thank you for raising this matter with me and I hope that you find this reply helpful.

\[Signature\]

Sarah Newton MP  
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work