

Written Ministerial Statement

Thursday 30 October 2014

THE DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment and Support Allowance

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith MP): The previous Government appointed Atos the sole provider for carrying out Work Capability Assessments in 2008.

On 27 March, the former Minister for Disabled People announced that following negotiations with Atos, the Government had reached a mutual agreement for Atos to exit the contract to deliver health related assessments including Work Capability Assessments before it is due to end in August 2015.

Following a rigorous procurement exercise, I am pleased to announce today that MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd has been awarded the contract to deliver health related assessments including the Work Capability Assessments for DWP. The contract is to provide a national service for three years, with the option to extend twice by a further year. Operational service will commence on 1 March 2015.

The Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations will apply and most of the Atos employees currently employed on this contract will transfer to MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd; who will also use the existing Atos infrastructure and IT. The new provider will therefore be able to step into the contract without disrupting the service.

My absolute priority for MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd will be to transition the service smoothly from the current provider and stabilise the operation to deliver the best service possible for claimants, increase the volume of assessments carried out and reduce waiting times without compromising quality.

MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd runs healthcare programmes in Australia, Canada and the United States and is one of the largest occupational health providers in the UK. They employ large numbers of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals and bring years of experience conducting independent health assessments. MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd is already a key Work Programme provider and was recently awarded a contract to run the Department's new Fit for Work service.

MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd will bring both clinical expertise and a fresh approach that, over time, will significantly reduce waiting times and provide a better experience for claimants. A key focus of their plan is on recruiting and retaining the high quality healthcare professionals the service needs. MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd staff will spend more time engaging with and helping claimants earlier in the process, so that claimants know what to expect and can better prepare for the assessments. This should help reduce the number of people who currently do not attend assessments.

I am confident MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd will bring about the changes required to improve claimants' experience of the assessment process.

We already have in place an agreement with Atos covering the remaining term of their contract. This agreement is more robust, with an agreed performance regime that gives us confidence delivery goals will be achieved. My Department, Atos and MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Ltd will work together during the transition period to ensure a smooth handover.

Atos will continue to deliver health related assessments including Work Capability Assessments in Northern Ireland under a separate contract.