

# Face-to-face health assessments for benefits suspended amid coronavirus outbreak

Face-to-face assessments for all sickness and disability benefits will be suspended for the next 3 months, the government announced today (16 March 2020).

The temporary move, effective on Tuesday 17 March 2020, is being taken as a precautionary measure to protect vulnerable people from unnecessary risk of exposure to coronavirus as the country's response ramps up in the 'delay' phase. We will ensure those who are entitled to a benefit continue to receive support, and that new claimants are able to access the safety net.

It affects claimants of Personal Independence Payment (PIP), those on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and some on Universal Credit, and recipients of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.

The suspension of face-to-face assessments also covers new claims to those benefits.

Work and Pensions Secretary Thérèse Coffey said:

As we move into the next phase of our response to coronavirus, it is right we take steps to protect those with health problems.

Temporarily suspending face-to-face assessments for sickness and disability benefits will allow us to ensure we continue to provide a safety net for those in need, while removing unnecessary risk of exposure to this disease.

Anyone who has a face-to-face assessment appointment scheduled from Tuesday 17 March onwards does not need to attend and will be contacted to discuss next steps and alternative arrangements, which could involve either telephone or paper-based assessments. We expect this measure will be in effect for the next 3 months but we will be regularly reviewing the position in line with Public Health advice.

No further action is required by any claimant as a result of this change. They will be contacted with advice on next steps.

DWP continues to accept new claims for all benefits. Anyone already receiving PIP, ESA, Universal Credit or Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, will continue to receive their current payments as normal while alternative arrangements are put in place to review or reassess their claim.

Suspending face-to-face health assessments is a precautionary measure which

reflects the Prime Minister's decision to trigger the 'delay' phase. It is important to note that this change does not affect or change any existing public health advice.

Read the current [NHS guidelines on coronavirus, including advice on those who should stay at home](#).

The department will continue to work with its providers through this period and pay them in accordance with its contracts.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5144

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## **[Lord Risby reappointed as Board Member of the Horserace Betting Levy Board.](#)**

Before entering Parliament Lord Risby worked in the City, becoming a vice-president at Merrill Lynch. Standing down after eight years as a Conservative MP, for Bury St Edmunds and then West Suffolk, Lord Risby entered the House of Lords in 2010. He had also been Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Party from 2005-2010. He is currently the British Trade Envoy to Algeria and to Lebanon, and is Chairman of the British Ukrainian Society. He is President of the Association for Decentralised Energy and Deputy Chairman of the Small Business Bureau Ltd.

This role is remunerated at £19,665. This reappointment has been made in accordance with the [Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments](#), the process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Government's Governance Code requires that any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years is declared. This is defined as holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation or candidature for election. Lord Risby has declared that he has undertaken political activity for the Conservative Party.

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## **[Update on complying with a restriction](#)**

[English] – [[Cymraeg](#)]

In [March 2019](#), we told you that to comply with restrictions we would only accept consents that state 'consent is given to registration of the

disposition' from April 2020. We said consents that 'consent to the disposition only' would not be accepted from that date. [Section 3.1.1 of our practice guide 19](#) was updated, and we issued several reminders about this change.

Following feedback about the full implications of our decision from some customers and stakeholders, we have looked at this again.

We still think the right form of consent is to registration. In addition, the best form of consent will:

- be addressed to the registrar
- specifically identify the dispositions
- identify the restriction

We have decided we will not send a request for information (requisition) from April if consents are to the disposition. In these situations we will interpret consents to registrable dispositions as including consent to their registration. We will keep this under review.

We are aware some customers have already taken steps to introduce the right form of wording as a result of our advice. We thank those customers and encourage all customers to do the same.

We want to align our process and requirements more closely with yours, to make it easier and more consistent for both of us. To help achieve this we are considering how our processes might provide a standard approach to providing consents.

We will share more information about this as soon as we can.

[[English](#)] – [Cymraeg]

Ni fyddwn yn anfon cais am wybodaeth (ymholiad) o Ebrill os yw cydsyniadau i'r gwarediad yn unig.

Ym [Mawrth 2019](#), dywedwyd wrthy ch mai dim ond cydsyniadau sy'n datgan y 'rhoddir cydsyniad i gofrestru'r gwarediad' y byddem yn eu derbyn o Ebrill 2020 er mwyn cydymffurfio â chyfyngiadau. Dywedwyd na fyddai cydsyniadau sy'n 'cydsynio i'r gwarediad yn unig' yn cael eu derbyn o'r dyddiad hwnnw. Diweddarwyd [adran 3.1.1 o'n cyfarwyddyd ymarfer 19](#), a chyhoeddwyd sawl nodyn atgoffa am y newid hwn.

Yn dilyn adborth am oblygiadau llawn ein penderfyniad gan rai cwsmeriaid a budd-ddeiliaid, rydym wedi edrych ar hyn eto.

Rydym yn dal i feddwl mai'r math cywir o gydsynio yw i gofrestriad. Yn ogystal, bydd y math gorau o gydsynio:

- yn cael ei gyfeirio at y cofrestrydd
- yn nodi'r gwarediadau'n benodol
- yn nodi'r cyfyngiad

Rydym wedi penderfynu na fyddwn yn anfon cais am wybodaeth (ymholiad) o Ebrill os yw cydsyniadau i'r gwarediad. Yn y sefyllfaoedd hyn, byddwn yn dehongli cydsyniadau i warediadau cofrestredig fel rhai sy'n cynnwys cydsynio i'w cofrestru. Byddwn yn adolygu hyn.

Rydym yn ymwybodol bod rhai cwsmeriaid eisoes wedi cymryd camau i gyflwyno'r ffurf gywir o eiriad o ganlyniad i'n cyngor. Rydym yn diolch i'r cwsmeriaid hynny ac yn annog pob cwsmer i wneud yr un peth.

Rydym am wneud ein proses a'n gofynion yn gydnaws â'ch rhai chi, i'w gwneud yn haws ac yn fwy cyson i'r ddau ohonom. Er mwyn helpu i gyflawni hyn, rydym yn ystyried sut y gallai ein prosesau ddarparu dull safonol o roi cydsyniad.

Byddwn yn rhannu rhagor o wybodaeth am hyn cyn gynted ag y gallwn.

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## **VMD switchboard service unavailable: Update – now working**

[unable to retrieve full-text content]The VMD switchboard is now up and running.

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## **HMRC to stop automatically sending paper Self Assessment returns**

Self Assessment customers will no longer receive automatic paper returns, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has today announced, as part of efforts to encourage customers to take advantage of the online service and cut unnecessary use of paper.

Increasing numbers of people expect to engage with HMRC digitally. Last year alone, 94% of HMRC's customers filed their return online and HMRC recently saw a 110% increase in customers registering to communicate digitally. Last year HMRC automatically sent out more than 500,000 returns.

Now, taxpayers will still be able to file a paper return if they choose but HMRC will encourage those who are able to file online to do so. The environmentally-friendly measure means that from April, instead of automatically receiving a paper return, taxpayers who have filed on paper in the past will now receive a short notice to file. If they still wish to file on paper they can download a blank version of the return or call HMRC to

request one.

The notice to file will tell taxpayers we intend to communicate with them digitally and provide them with information about managing their tax affairs through their Personal Tax Accounts.

As customers visit their Personal Tax Account online we will request their agreement to communicate digitally by default and, if they consent, subsequent communication, including statutory notices, will be provided digitally.

Where HMRC can identify taxpayers whose personal circumstances mean they cannot file online, they will continue to receive a blank paper return.

Angela MacDonald, HMRC's Director General for Customer Services said:

Most customers manage their tax affairs online. It's easy, secure and available 24 hours a day. Customers can also sign up for email alerts and online messaging. It doesn't even have to be done all in one go – they can stop, save what they've done, and pick up where they left off later.

We are working hard to stop the use of unnecessary resources which have an environmental impact; that's why we're reducing the use of paper as much as possible.

Digitisation remains an HMRC priority but we're still committed to giving taxpayers the ability to choose what's best for them, so those who want to file a paper return can still do so.

These efforts are part of a larger HMRC initiative to reduce unnecessary paper with Annual Tax Summaries now also moving to taxpayers' Personal Tax Accounts. The summaries of what PAYE taxpayers have paid were posted to 22 million people last year.

Paper will also be reduced when HMRC stops providing more than three million blank P45s and 11 million P60s in April. The vast majority of employers already use their existing HMRC, free or commercial software to produce P45s and P60s for their employees.

- This change does not prevent the tax payer filing a paper return if they choose to do so.
- There will be a small number of tax payers (between 1% and 3%) for whom the nature of their return or their personal circumstances means that filing digitally will not be an option in 2020 to 2021. Where we can identify them in advance, we will provide them with a paper return in April 2020.