

To P V Sutton  
C/o request-127983-ac39b45c@whatdotheyknow.com

DWP Business Management Team

Our Ref: VTR 3763-3396

DATE 23 November 2012

Dear P Sutton

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request that was received by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Freedom of Information Requests on 3 September 2012 and forwarded on 7 September for response by DWP Business Management Team Freedom of Information Officer, who apologises for the delay in providing you with a response.

In your email you asked to be provided with information answering the following questions:- *I notice from your pdf file "MAC Info" that several of the medical assessment centres are part of DWP buildings. I also know that the ATOS website says,*

*"Not all the assessment centre locations that we use are accessible for customers who have difficulty or are unable to manage stairs. The majority of the centres are government owned, often co-located with Job centres.*

*"If an assessment centre is not on the ground floor and you cannot use the stairs in the event of an emergency, we will look at an alternative venue."*  
([http://www.atoshealthcare.com/claimants/faq\\_view/12](http://www.atoshealthcare.com/claimants/faq_view/12))

*By my calculation about half the MACs listed as not accessible to those in wheelchairs are in DWP buildings.*

*I think that ATOS have said elsewhere that this restriction is due, in part, to a re-assessment by the DWP of Health and Safety regulations.*

- 1. Does this access restriction apply only to those reliant on wheelchairs, or to anyone who would have substantial difficulty managing stairs - perhaps due to arthritis or COPD - who might be a serious obstruction to others in the case of emergency evacuation?*
- 2. Does this restriction apply only to medical assessment centres, but to all DWP buildings?*
- 3. Does this restriction apply only to visitors, or does it apply to staff as well?*
- 4. Is this change in regulations part of a DWP initiative, or is it the result of a change in public policy? If so is the restriction likely to apply to buildings of other government departments?*

In answer to **Q 1** the Health and Safety guidance given to the Department by its facility provider Telereal Trillium regarding access to public areas of the Department is not confined to wheelchair users and applies to any claimant who may have mobility difficulties.

In reply to **Qs 2, 3 & 4** DWP Policy states: - "The Site Manager must ensure that the needs of all other building users e.g. peripatetic staff/visitors/contractors and members of the public are taken into account in the site evacuation plans, and that all such individuals (or those responsible for their safe evacuation) are made aware of these plans on arrival at the building. Emergency evacuation notices will be posted at building entrances. The evacuation needs of people with disabilities or mobility –impaired persons not normally employed on the site will be included in the Telereal Trillium Generic Master Risk Assessment 'Emergency Evacuation of Disabled/Mobility Impaired Persons', which will be retained with other site risk assessments."

All building users with disabilities or mobility issues which would prevent their safe evacuation or obstruct other user's safe evacuation from an upper floor of a DWP building would not be allowed to access the upper floors. However, staff with disabilities or mobility issues will have a Personal Evacuation Plan in place allowing them to be safely evacuated from an upper floor.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a number of duties on DWP, TT and ATOS in relation to the arrangements for action to be taken in the event of an emergency, for the safe evacuation of staff and visitors. The Fire Safety Order applies to all government departments.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Business Management Team

e-mail: [freedom-of-information-xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx](mailto:freedom-of-information-xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx)

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**Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act**

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing [freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.gov.uk](mailto:freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.gov.uk) or by writing to DWP, Central Fol Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)