

Gateway ref: 13847

To:
PCT Chief Executives
PCT Medical Directors
Postgraduate Deans
Trust Chief Executives
Trust Medical Directors
SHA Chief Executives
SHA Medical Directors
SHA Revalidation Leads
SHA Workforce Directors

Room 542
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NL

5 March 2010

Dear Colleague,

I wrote to PCTs and Trusts in February to alert them to action that we were taking to ensure the security of the information that doctors use in their appraisals, relating specifically to the NHS Appraisal Toolkit developed by a company called SCHIN.

At that time, the toolkit had been tested and found to have security problems. With the support of the BMA and RCGP, Ministers immediately instructed that the website be taken offline until the supplier SCHIN could address the potential vulnerabilities.

We took this precautionary step to protect the confidentiality of patients and doctors information.

During the past three weeks, the Department has coordinated the work to remove the security vulnerabilities with SCHIN, who have delivered all the changes required within the planned period.

Further testing has been undertaken and an expert panel including members nominated by the BMA and the RCGP advised Ministers that they were satisfied that the toolkit could safely be restored online.

I am pleased to confirm that the appraisal toolkit was reinstated online at 2pm on Thursday 4 March and doctors can now access their information pertaining to their appraisals.

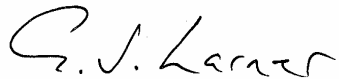
I am grateful for the flexibility you have shown in extending the completion date for appraisals where appropriate, and for not penalising doctors because they were unable to complete them due to the temporary unavailability of the toolkit.

As with all IT systems, the DH service management arrangements of the toolkit will include regular security assessments, the first within three months and then at suitable periods thereafter, to take account of developments in the nature and level of security threats.

The attached press statement, Annexe A, issued to the medical press yesterday afternoon, sets out the position. This statement is also available via the DH and the Revalidation Support Team (RST) website at <http://www.revalidationsupport.nhs.uk/about.asp>.

If you require further information, please send an email to professionalstandardsprogramme@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. J. Larner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

Gavin Larner
Director
Professional Standards



Press information: Released at 1400 Thursday 4th March 2010

NHS Appraisal Toolkit website restored after security checks satisfied

The Department of Health suspended the online NHS Appraisal Toolkit on the 9 February after routine security checks identified that the system established over nine years ago was not sufficiently robust to withstand modern day hacking.

The Department is aware that this is a busy period for doctors undertaking appraisal activity and during the last three weeks it has been working closely with the provider to ensure that all potential vulnerabilities have been addressed with the intention of restoring the toolkit as soon as possible.

Further security checks have been undertaken and we have shared our findings with an expert panel including members nominated by the BMA and the RCGP. Ministers, advised by the expert panel, are now satisfied that the toolkit can safely be restored online.

The system will continue to be reviewed in line with the Government's Data Handling Review to ensure its robustness, and to preserve the confidentiality of staff and patient data.

[ENDS]