



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Baroness Merron
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State*

*39 Victoria Street
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By email

26 September 2024

Dear Lord Patel,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Committee on the prevention and consequences of preterm birth in England earlier this month. I welcome the Committee's focus on this important area and look forward to your report.

This Government are committed to reducing avoidable preterm births and poor outcomes for mothers and babies. We are determined to learn lessons from investigations and reports on maternity and neonatal services to make sure all women and their babies receive safe, personalised, equitable, and compassionate care.

The Committee has asked about the enhanced developmental support and surveillance of children born preterm as recommended in NICE guideline NG72, applicable up to age two and, for certain children, up to age four. NHSE England are also writing to you to provide additional information on this point.

For babies born preterm, assessment at two years of age as well as follow-ups in the first year are the responsibility of NHS neonatal services, as stated in the NICE guideline NG72^[1]. The number of babies being assessed continues to improve, from 68.4% in 2020 to 74.4% in 2022 as evidenced in the National Neonatal Audit Programme (NNAP) report which is commissioned by NHS England. Performance against the metric can be viewed on their dashboard.^[2]

For the assessment at four years of age for babies born before 28 weeks' gestation, the NICE guideline states it is the responsibility of community paediatric services. This is the reason that only 6.7% of neonatal units are conducting the follow ups, as neonatal services do not have responsibility for providing them.

Community paediatric services are commissioned by Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). Four-year checks at this enhanced level of surveillance are not routinely undertaken, as community paediatric services are not commissioned locally to undertake them, despite it being part of NICE Guidance. Therefore, unfortunately further data is not available on the four-year follow-up by community services.

I recognise the value of these checks and will give careful consideration to any recommendations you may make in this area.

In terms of additional checks in place, the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework (EYFS) sets the standards and requirements that all early years providers must follow to ensure every child has the best start in life and is prepared for school. The EYFS aims to ensure that all children have the skills and knowledge needed to thrive. Evidence tells us that high-quality early childhood education and care has a positive impact on outcomes in both the short and long term, particularly for the most disadvantaged children. At the end of the academic year in which children turn 5, this is usually reception year, each child's level of development must be assessed against the 17 early learning goals set out in the EYFS.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Committee again for your attention in this important area. I look forward to reviewing your report.

All good wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Gillian', with a stylized flourish underneath.

BARONESS MERRON

^[1] [Overview | Developmental follow-up of children and young people born preterm | Guidance | NICE](#)

^[2] [National Neonatal Audit Programme - Data dashboard | RCPCH](#)