



Department of Health & Social Care

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
By email to: pubaccom@parliament.uk

*From James Frith MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
for Health Innovation*

*39 Victoria Street
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08 September 2026

Dear Sir Geoffrey,

I am pleased to write to you in my new role as Minister for Health Innovation with responsibility for dentistry. I look forward to working closely with the Committee on our shared ambition to improve access to NHS dentistry and quality of care for patients.

I am writing to draw your attention to the publication of the annual dentistry statistics, alongside NHS England's Dental Recruitment Incentive (Golden Hello) Scheme data and workforce survey. Links to the publications are provided at the end of this letter.

Over the last two years, the Government has been rebuilding the broken NHS dental system, and I am delighted that today's statistics show progress is being made, with NHS dentistry in a stronger position today than when this Government came into office. In 2025/26 dentists delivered 37.6m NHS courses of treatment. This is nearly 3m additional courses of NHS dental treatment compared to the year leading up to the General Election. This is a significant improvement, ensuring that millions of people across the country have access to the dental care they need to maintain or return to good oral health.

Around half of these additional treatments were delivered to children, and the statistics show that access rates for children have now recovered to above pre-pandemic levels with 7.2m children seen in the 12 months to end June 2026. Regular visits to the dentist are vital for children because they help to build good oral health habits, prevent decay and identify problems early.

It is also particularly encouraging to see NHS dental activity increasing in the most deprived areas, where oral health needs are often greatest. This is an important step towards reducing oral health inequalities and improving access to care to those who need it most.

However, I am not complacent, and I know there is much more to do to improve access to NHS dentistry. The reforms we launched earlier this year are a first step along this path, addressing some of the pressing issues that dentists and dental teams have been experiencing. The reforms underpin the delivery of more urgent appointments every year, better support for patients with complex treatment needs, and incentivise the delivery of more preventative care.

Improving access to urgent dental care has been a key priority for this Government. Last year we asked ICBs to commission additional urgent care dental appointments and these statistics show that 4m urgent care courses of treatment were delivered last year - an increase of 8.4% compared to the year before and more than has been delivered in any other year before. There is now an urgent care safety net available across the country, ensuring that people in pain and discomfort can access a dentist when they need one. This

progress reflects the steps we have taken to make the best use of NHS capacity, including broadening the scope of the previous urgent care commitment to include all patients. In April 2026, we introduced a requirement for NHS dental practices to deliver a set proportion of their contract as urgent care, supported by increased payments for delivering this treatment, helping patients get rapid support through the NHS.

Alongside the annual statistics, NHSE have also published data on its dental recruitment incentive scheme (the Golden Hello scheme) which incentivises dentists to work in areas which have faced long-term recruitment challenges. I am pleased to announce that this, and other local variations of the scheme, has resulted in the recruitment of 185 dentists to these under-served areas, of which 162 have commenced in post.

The dental workforce survey data also shows that general dentists providing NHS care spent 70% of their full-time equivalent working time on NHS care, unchanged from the previous year. The NHS vacancy rate for general dentists fell from 19% in December 2024 to 10% in December 2025.

Strengthening the workforce is key to our ambitions to rebuild NHS dentistry. As announced in the 10-Year Health Plan, the government will make it a requirement for newly qualified dentists to practice in the NHS for a minimum period of at least 3 years. That will mean more NHS dentists, more NHS appointments and better oral health. We are increasing dental school places in England from 809 to 859, supported with around £11 million per year once the expansion is fully implemented; and we are increasing the availability of examinations for overseas-qualified dentists to enable them to join the UK dental register and contribute to the dental workforce. This will allow over 2,000 additional overseas-trained dentists, many of whom are already in the country, to practise each year from 2028/29.

While I recognise there is more to do, these reforms are placing NHS dentistry on a more secure footing, as reflected in these positive statistics. I look forward to working with you and the Committee as we continue to shape and develop our plans to further improve NHS dentistry.

Data links:

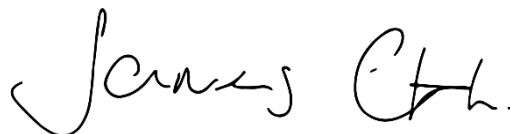
Annual dentistry statistics: <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202526>

Dental workforce survey: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mi-nhse-dental-workforce/december-2025>

Golden Hello data: [NHS England » Dental recruitment data](#)

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Frith'.

JAMES FRITH MP

**PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR HEALTH INNOVATION**