



Procedure Committee

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From Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Chair

Edward Argar MP
Department of Health and Social Care

8 June 2021

Dear Ed

Thank you for your latest letter regarding the Department's efforts to improve its performance in answering written parliamentary questions.

The Committee reviewed WPQ performance at its meeting on 24 May, and noted the Department's improvement since the beginning of 2021. The Committee acknowledges the extent to which you have been assiduous in your role as Ministerial lead for PQ recovery but regrets that the Department's performance is still a long way from where it needs to be for this aspect of ministerial accountability at DHSC to be a reality rather than an aspiration.

Table: DHSC WPQ performance in Session 2019-21

Period	Named Day answered on time	Ordinary answered <5 days
19 Dec 2019 – 25 Mar 2020	621/846 (73%)	930/1160 (80%)
20 Apr 2020 – 17 Jul 2020	101/1375 (7%)	301/1825 (16%)
20 Jul 2020 – 30 Dec 2020	170/2056 (8%)	549/2694 (20%)
6 Jan 2021 – 29 Apr 2021	436/1585 (28%)	1051/2171 (48%)
Session 2019-21	1328/5862 (23%)	2831/7850 (36%)

Source: Q&A system

While it is true to say that WPQ volumes are significantly higher at DHSC and that the associated growth was at the root of the decline in performance, continuing high volumes should be assumed and the Department's plans for improved performance must not be predicated on decreasing levels of parliamentary interest in the Department's work. We would urge caution in using the second half of 2019 as a baseline for levels of parliamentary activity, given the unusual circumstances and reduced number of days on which the House sat.

The Committee expects to see continuing improvements in performance which will place the Department in a position to regain its pre-pandemic PQ performance

by the end of this Session, and subsequently meet or exceed the 85% on-time target for both named-day and ordinary WPQs. Once that has been achieved, we hope that the challenge of regaining acceptable WPQ performance will not then be forgotten, as is too often the case in Departments which lose and regain (at significant cost) their performance.

I have asked the Committee's clerks to arrange for you to return to the Committee before the summer recess and very much hope that we will have better figures to review when we meet.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP

cc. Mr Speaker
Leader of the House