



Department of Health & Social Care

Edward Argar MP
Minister of State for Health

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Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP
Chair, Procedure Committee
House of Commons
London
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24th March 2020

Dear Karen,

As mentioned last month, I am writing again to provide an update to you and the Committee on the Department of Health and Social Care's response to Written Parliamentary Questions, based on the completed February data.

Recovering PQ performance remains a departmental priority and we are committed to returning to the high standards expected of us as quickly as possible.

This letter provides an update on the progress of our efforts to recover PQ performance, including our work to clear the backlog of overdue PQs and increase the number of PQs that are answered on time.

PQs received

PQ volumes remain high. In February we received 1180 PQs. This is an increase of over 60% compared to the same month last year.

Response rate

At the end of February, our on-time response rate increased to 31.7% which represents our fifth successive month of performance improvement and our strongest performance since March 2020. While an increase in performance, I do note that the trajectory has flowed, recently, in part from the very significant number of written questions relating to vaccines, at the time that the team was also focused on the roll out. I am confident that when I respond to you in March, we will see an increase in the improvement trajectory.

Overdue PQs

We are continuing to make progress on the backlog although this has proved challenging while incoming volumes remain high. At the end of February our backlog stood at 908, a slight improvement from 913 at the end of January. While welcome, this is clearly only a marginal increase in the January performance figures and was driven by extremely high volumes in just one policy area. Having tracked March data on a weekly basis and addressed performance in this area, again we are confident of a bigger step-change in performance during this month. I have also implemented a number of targets across the Department which seek to expedite PQs that were due for answer in 2020 and the start of 2021 and I look forward to sharing our further progress in my next written update.

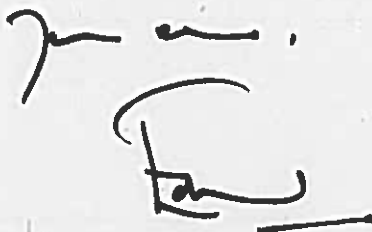
PQ progress through the Department

We are also focused on reducing the average length of time that PQs are taking to get through the Department. To gauge the performance in the last calendar month, we have

taken a snapshot of the time taken to answer PQs that were received in that month that had been answered by the end of that month. In February the average time taken for PQs to be answered was 8.5 days. To note, there will be some fluctuation in the previous month averages since the last report, as more overdue PQs have been answered. However, the trend line demonstrates our steady progress on this metric since the introduction of the PQ Recovery Plan in September.

Please do ask your Clerk to let me know if there is any further specific information you would like on performance beyond the above, and I will endeavour to provide it. More broadly, with your permission, I will write to you and the Committee again next month when we have the verified March data to provide to you.

I am copying this letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', written in a cursive style.

EDWARD ARGAR MP

Annex A

Monthly Volume of PQs Due and Percentage Answered on Time in the Last Year

