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Weekly Political Update

Week ending 24 February 2012

Westminster

Health/NHS issues

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
PQ on outcomes for NHS patients	Iain Stewart MP (Con, Milton Keynes South) asked the Government what progress he has made in improving outcomes for NHS patients.
NICE Quality Standard publication	The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published a new quality standard and guidance on patient experience in NHS services.

Disability issues – employment and welfare

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Welfare Reform Bill – consideration of amendments	Lords amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill were debated in the House of Commons. The Government accepted amendments which would allow a future Government to increase the one year time limit on contributory Employment and Support Allowance, if an appropriate funding source was identified.
PQ on work capability assessments	Stephen Hepburn MP (Lab, Jarrow) asked for information on the number of people in the UK who have attended a work capability assessment and have been deemed either fit and unfit for work in the last 12 months.
PQ on work capability assessment waiting times	Tom Greatrex MP (Lab/Co-op, Rutherglen and Hamilton West) asked how many people waited longer than 13 weeks to undergo a work capability assessment.
PQ on ESA claimants	Tom Greatrex MP (Lab/Co-op, Rutherglen and Hamilton West) asked what the average time was for an employment and support allowance (ESA) applicant between completing the ESA 50 questionnaire and undergoing the work capability assessment.

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PQ on work capability assessment appeals	<p>Tom Greatrex MP (Lab/Co-op, Rutherglen and Hamilton West) asked whether the Government has considered imposing financial penalties on Atos Healthcare to reflect the number of work capability assessments which are overturned on appeal.</p>
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Disability issues – social care
Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
PQ on investment in social care	<p>Annette Brooke MP (Lib Dem, Mid Dorset and North Poole) asked the Government what it was doing to cater for those with lower-level needs through preventive measures and early intervention.</p>
PQ on social care reform	<p>Tracey Crouch MP (Con, Chatham and Aylesford) asked the Government what representations it has received on the role of the welfare system in reform of social care.</p>
Written Ministerial Statement – Report publication	<p>The Department of Health published a report titled ‘Performance and capability review of the Care Quality Commission’.</p>

Disability issues – other
Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
PQ on representation of people with disabilities	<p>Sheila Gilmore MP (Lab, Edinburgh East) highlighted claims in a recent report by the Work and Pensions Select Committee that some statements made by the Government have encouraged a negative view of people with disabilities. She asked what the Government was doing to address this.</p>

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Consultations

Title: Personal Independence Payment: assessment thresholds and consultation

Source: Department for Work and Pensions

Deadline: 30 April 2012

[PQ on outcomes for NHS patients](#)

Iain Stewart: What progress he has made in improving outcomes for NHS patients.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): Last December, we published data against 30 indicators in the new NHS outcomes framework, which has been supported enthusiastically by patients, by professionals and internationally. The data show that for 25 of the new measures, the NHS improved or maintained performance, including MRSA infections being down by half and C. difficile infections being down by 40% since 2008-09. I expect continuing improvement over the coming years, as the focus on outcomes drives change and improvement.

[Welfare Reform Bill – consideration of amendments](#)

Lords amendments to the Bill to introduce a universal credit were debated in the Commons.

During the day's debate on the Welfare Reform Bill, Lords amendments 3B and 26B were rejected following a division. The Government accepted Lords amendments 17B to 17D, 19B and 73BA.

Divisions and debates

Lords amendment 3B and Lords amendment 26B

Moving that the Commons disagreed with Lords amendment 3B and Lords amendment 26B, Employment Minister Chris Grayling began by detailing that the Government accepted amendments 17B to 17D and 19B on employment and support allowance time-limiting and 73BA on child maintenance.

Mr Grayling stated that although amendments 17B to 17D and 19B did not change the Government's existing policy and the time limit would remain at 365 days for those in the work-related activity group and take effect from April 2012, the amendments meant that a future government could increase the length of the time limit by order rather than primary legislation.

Amendment 73BA clarified some of the powers introduced by the previous Government under the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008 and gave examples of the provisions that could be made under regulations, Mr Grayling stated. He stressed that it did not imply any change to the Government's proposed policies on charging.

On Lords amendments 3B and 26B, the Minister said that the Government believed that that it was neither good value for the taxpayer, or right that those in social housing had spare rooms paid for. He stated that the Lords amendments would cost £100 million and the Government did not have a "blank cheque" that would cover the cost of them, as expenditure on housing benefit would reach £26 billion by 2014-15 if left unchecked.

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The Government's aspiration was to protect the most vulnerable in society while also dealing with the broader challenge of under-occupation, Mr Grayling concluded.

Shadow Employment Minister Stephen Timms hoped that Government Members thought "long and hard" before voting down Lords amendments 3B and 26B, detailing that the Lords amendments would exempt people in receipt of disability living allowance. He felt that legal challenges to the Government's policy seemed inevitable because it penalised people for a situation that it was impossible for them to change.

Mr Timms detailed that the proposal in the amendments would safeguard those who were too ill to be expected to return to work in the near future, adults and children in receipt of disability living allowance or the personal independence payment, war widows and foster carers.

He detailed that the National Housing Federation stated that 180,000 social tenants in England were under-occupying two-bedroom homes, but only 68,000 one-bedroom social homes became available to let in the year 2009-10, and in many places there would simply not be a one-bedroom home to go to.

Lords amendments 3B and 26B were rejected by 316 votes to 263.

Lords amendments agreed to

Lords amendments 17B to 17D

Lords amendment 19B

Lords amendment 73BA

[PQ on work capability assessments](#)

Stephen Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in (a) Jarrow constituency, (b) South Tyneside, (c) the North East and (d) the UK who have attended a work capability assessment have been deemed (i) fit and (ii) unfit for work in the last 12 months.

Chris Grayling: The following table shows completed employment and support allowance (ESA) work capability assessments (WCA) taking place between September 2010 to August 2011 (this is the latest 12 month period for which these figures are available). The table also shows the number of fit for work decisions made following these assessments. Information is unavailable for the Jarrow constituency and data for Great Britain are given in place of data for the United Kingdom as data for Northern Ireland is not available. The numbers provided have been rounded to the nearest hundred (as a result, figures may not sum to the totals shown).

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Table one: Completed assessments and fit for work decisions—CA outcomes by date of assessment for September 2010 to August 2011

Geographical area	Entitled to employment and support allowance:			Fit for work	Any outcome
	Work related activity group	Support group	Either group		
Great Britain	118,800	58,500	177,300	237,300	414,600
North East	5,400	3,500	8,900	18,000	26,900
South Tyneside LA	400	200	600	1,200	1,800

1. The data presented above comes from benefit claims data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and functional assessment data from Atos Healthcare. 2. These figures do not include incapacity benefit reassessment claims. 3. A small number of clerical assessments, where the result cannot be determined from DWP benefits data, are excluded from these figures.

The Department regularly publishes data on ESA and the WCA, which can be found on the departmental website here:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca

This information is taken from administrative data held by the Department, assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare and appeals data from Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.

PQ on work capability assessment waiting times (2)

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people waited longer than 13 weeks to undergo the work capability assessment in (a) 2009, (b) 2010 and (c) 2011.[95578]

Chris Grayling: The number of employment and support allowance (ESA) claims where the time between the claim start and the work capability assessment (WCA) decision was longer than 13 weeks, was:(a) 147,600 for assessments completed from January to December 2009;(b) 236,600 for assessments completed from January to December 2010; and(c) 146,800 for assessments completed from January to August 2011 (the latest data available).There are a number of reasons why the time between the claim start date and the WCA decision may take longer than 13 weeks.

These include the claimant delaying return of the ESA50 form, not being able to attend a face to face WCA with good cause, and awaiting a face to face WCA or DWP decision. Employment and support allowance is normally put into payment at an “assessment rate” pending the WCA decision.

Where the assessment phase continues longer than 13 weeks because a WCA has not taken place payment continues.

For those assessed to be on ESA in the Work Related Activity Group or Support Group following the decision, the components are backdated to week 14 of the claim. Notes:1. For approximately 17% of all new claims, the duration cannot be determined due to data not being available, so have been excluded from the analysis above.

These are mainly claims with the one or other of the dates is missing so the time from the claim start to the notification of the WCA decision cannot be calculated.2.

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The data presented above comes from benefit claims data held by the Department for Work and Pensions.

It related to ESA claims; incapacity benefit claims are not included. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.3. As the Official Statistics on ESA and the WCA do not focus on benefit durations, the underlying data used to provide the information has not been quality assured to the same level, and should be treated with caution

[PQ on work capability assessment waiting times \(1\)](#)

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

(1) how many people have undergone the work capability assessment since April 2011, by week; [95577]

(2) how many people have undergone the work capability assessment since April 2011. [95555]

Chris Grayling: The Department regularly publishes official statistics on employment and support allowance (ESA) and the work capability assessment (WCA).

The latest report on monthly assessments was published in January 2012 and can be found on the internet at the following

link:http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wcaInformation on a weekly basis is not available. Tables 2a and 2b accompanying the bulletin show that between April 2011 and August 2011, the latest information available, 239,200 ESA claims went through the WCA process. Figures for the number of existing incapacity benefit (IB) recipients undergoing reassessment for ESA via the WCA are not yet available. The Department plans to publish official statistics on outcomes of the WCA for claimants going through the IB reassessment process and will be announcing publication on the statistics publication hub in due course.

[PQ on ESA claimants](#)

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time was for an employment and support allowance (ESA) applicant between completing the ESA 50 questionnaire and undergoing the work capability assessment in

(a) 2009,

(b) 2010 and

(c) 2011. [95576]

Chris Grayling: In April 2011 incapacity benefit reassessment (IBR) began, significantly increasing the volume of people requiring a work capability assessment (WCA), and in July 2011 a number of changes were introduced to both the IBR and the ESA process. The changes introduced on the recommendation of Professor Harrington, although improving the overall process, had the impact of increasing the time taken to complete face to face medical assessments. Considerable time and effort has gone into training Atos Healthcare professionals to deliver the changes introduced and the time taken to conduct medical assessments has decreased over time.

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At any given time there are large volumes of cases going through the medical assessment journey. DWP and Atos Healthcare are working very closely to reduce the length of the WCA process by improving capacity and productivity.

Average time for WCA customer journey:

2009 was 39.3 days

2010 was 36.05 days

2011 was 44.00 days

Notes:

1. The data supplied are derived from unpublished management information which was collated for internal departmental use only. The data supplied have not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics standard and are subject to change. They should therefore be treated with caution.
2. The average time has been calculated using the Atos Healthcare management information relating to the average time to undertake a work capability assessment as reported against their average actual clearance target of 35 days.
3. The average time is calculated using the number of working days between a claimant completing the ESA questionnaire and their work capability assessment and measured at a regional level rather than nationally.
4. The information has been collated from regional data from 11 Government regions from 2009 to June 2011 when the Government offices by region reorganised and reduced to seven regions.
5. The measurement of the time undertaken to complete the customer journey through to the assessment is heavily reliant on the date which the claimant returns their questionnaire. A significant number of claimants return their questionnaires after 25 days.

[PQ on work capability assessment appeals](#)

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 11 January 2012, *Official Report*, column 164, on work capability assessment, whether he has considered imposing financial penalties on Atos to reflect the number of work capability assessments which are overturned on appeal. [94582]

Chris Grayling: The Appeal Tribunals consider all the available evidence afresh, as well as any additional evidence that has since been submitted by the customer which may not have been available to either the Examining Healthcare Professional or originally to the Department for Work and Pensions Decision Maker. Consequently, when a Tribunal overturns a decision it is not necessarily due to a lack in the validity or accuracy of the examination report used in the decision making process. Therefore it would not be appropriate to impose financial penalties on Atos to reflect the number of work capability assessments which are overturned on appeal.

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[PQ on investment in social care](#)

Annette Brooke: I appreciate that the Government have allocated additional funding for social care, but what more will and can they do in the short term not only to address the current crisis in funding and ensure that funding is used creatively and efficiently locally, but to cater for those with lower-level needs through preventive measures and early intervention?

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Paul Burstow): My hon. Friend is right about the need to invest in early intervention and prevention. In addition to the £7.2 billion that we will invest this Parliament, this January we announced an extra £120 million for the remainder of the year to support care services. Furthermore, we are funding, jointly with the Local Government Association, work to support councils in delivering improved productivity and sharing best practice to ensure that they deliver improvements to services, and not just cuts.

[PQ on social care reform](#)

Tracey Crouch: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received on the role of the welfare system in reform of social care; and if he will make a statement.

Maria Miller: DWP Ministers have met with their counterparts in the Department of Health to discuss the important role that the social security system plays, and will continue to play in the care and support system for disabled adults and older people, a system which includes social care services provided by local authorities.

[Written Ministerial Statement – Report publication](#)

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): I wish to inform the House that the Department is today publishing the report of its performance and capability review of the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The review is intended to provide robust assurance to the public, the Department and Parliament that CQC is improving its performance and that action will be taken to build and sustain its capability for the future.

The review ran from October 2011 to February 2012, and was led by a panel of senior departmental officials and external reviewers, chaired by the Permanent Secretary. The review gathered evidence from a range of external stakeholders and CQC staff. It also considered findings of the recent reports from the Health Select Committee and the National Audit Office.

The review sets out recommendations to challenge CQC and support its continuing improvement by providing clearer strategic direction, strengthening the CQC board and developing and delivering the underlying regulatory model. These recommendations will be important to ensure that CQC builds and sustains its capability for the future. The review also recognises that the Department has more to do as a sponsor and work is underway to strengthen accountability arrangements across all the Department's arms length bodies.

I have today placed in the Library copies of a letters exchanged between the Permanent Secretary of the Department and the Chair and Chief Executive of the CQC, together with a copy of *Performance and Capability Review: Care Quality Commission*. Copies are available to hon. Members from the Vote office and to noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office.

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[PQ on representation of people with disabilities](#)

Sheila Gilmore: The Minister will be aware that the recent report from the Work and Pensions Select Committee on the transition from disability living allowance to personal independence payment has made it clear yet again that some statements made by the Department have themselves encouraged a negative view of people with disabilities. What steps is she taking to ensure that anything coming out from the Department cannot be misinterpreted in that way?

Maria Miller: I agree with the hon. Lady. Anything that fuels hostility or harassment is absolutely unacceptable. I believe that for too long the benefits system itself has trapped people in a life of welfare dependency, and that if we are to tackle this issue effectively, it must be subjected to a radical overhaul. Perhaps it is those who are reluctant to accept such a change in the benefits system, which has trapped 5 million people on out-of-work benefits, who are standing in the way of what is needed.

Parliamentary terms

Early Day Motion (EDM)

Early Day Motions are formal motions for debate submitted by MPs in the House of Commons. There is usually no time available to actually debate an EDM, but they are useful for drawing attention to specific events or campaigns and demonstrating the extent of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view. MPs register their support by signing individual motions.

Parliamentary Question (PQ)

Parliamentary questions are oral or written questions to Ministers in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. They are used to seek information, and Ministers are obliged to explain and defend the work, policy, decisions and actions of their departments. Parliamentary questions are a vital tool in holding the Government to account. The Prime Minister answers to the House of Commons every Wednesday at midday.

Debates

Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords hold debates in which Members discuss government policy, proposed new laws and current issues. All debates are recorded in a publication called 'Hansard' which is available online or in print.

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal groups composed of politicians from all political parties. They provide an opportunity for cross-party discussion and co-operation on particular issues. All-party groups sometimes act as useful pressure groups for specific causes helping to keep the Government, the opposition and MPs informed of parliamentary and outside opinion.

Select Committees

House of Commons Select Committees exist to scrutinise the work of government departments. Most committees have about 11 members and reflect the relative size of each party in the Commons. They conduct enquiries on a specific issue, and gather evidence from expert witnesses. Findings are reported to the Commons, printed, and published on the Parliament website. The Government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee's recommendations.

Select Committees in the House of Lords concentrate on four main areas: Europe, science, economics, and the UK constitution.

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Written ministerial statements

Government ministers can make written statements to announce:

- The publication of reports by government agencies
- Findings of reviews and inquiries and the government's response
- Financial and statistical information
- Procedure and policy initiatives of government departments

Private Members' Bills

Private Members' Bills allow backbench MPs or Peers to introduce their own legislation. There are three types of Private Members' Bills:

- **Ballot Bills:** A ballot is held at the beginning of each parliamentary year the 20 MPs whose names come out top are allowed to introduce legislation on a subject of their choice.
- **Ten Minute Rule Bills:** The sponsoring MP is given a slot in which they may make a speech lasting up to 10 minutes in support of his or her bill
- **Presentation Bill:** a Member is not able to speak in support of it and it stands almost no chance of becoming law