Northern Ireland Assembly

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Parliamentary questions – comparative information

This information is provided to Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in support of their duties, and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as professional legal advice, or as a substitute for it.

1 Introduction

This briefing paper has been prepared following a request from the Committee on Procedures. The committee asked for comparative information on the following:

- Time taken to answer written questions and potential to create mechanisms/sanctions to compel Ministers to answer on time
- The number of listed oral questions answered by each Minister during Question Time
- The number of listed oral questions answered and how this is affected by the number of supplementary questions taken
- The balance between listed questions and topical questions
- The frequency of attendance by each Minister

The research examined procedures in the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament, Senedd and Dáil Éireann. It also references international examples where useful.

Some data was provided directly from officials in the relevant legislatures, along with publicly available information.

The research has sought to address the issues within the limitations of the information that was publicly available and that which was received in correspondence from officials in other legislatures.

2 Overview

Parliamentary questions provide a key scrutiny tool allowing backbenchers to hold government ministers to account.

All Westminster-type legislatures allow variations on parliamentary questions. These include some or all of the following: questions to the Prime Minister/First Minister, oral questions to ministers, topical questions and urgent questions. These are taken in plenary and answered on the day. There is also a facility for

written questions, whereby members may request more detailed information and receive a written answer.

Parliamentary questions are governed by the relevant standing orders and accompanying guidance. Each legislature has particular rules on the submission of questions, including timings and admissibility of questions.

The research incorporates information and statistics from other legislatures, but direct comparisons should be approached with caution, particularly given differences in the size of the legislatures and the resources available to them.

Part 1 – written questions

3 Overview of written questions mechanisms

Table 1 provides an overview of the procedures for written questions in the relevant legislatures.

Table 1: procedures for written questions

	Type of written question	Limit per member	Time limit for response	Facility to compel Ministers/Departments to answer
House of Commons	'Ordinary' and 'Named Day' – Named Day are deemed priority	No limit for Ordinary Maximum of five Named Day per day	Five days for Ordinary Named Day - third sitting day after they are tabled	No, although performance of departments is monitored
Scottish Parliament		Members are expected to exercise responsibility in relation to the quantity of their questions	Within 10 counting days, i.e. days on which the Parliament is open for business and excluding public holidays	No

Senedd		No limit	Welsh Government aims to provide an answer within eight working days, but is not bound to do so	No
Dáil Éireann	Unless a Member indicates otherwise, a question is assumed to require a written answer.	No limit		Recourse under Standing Order 55 if a member is dissatisfied with answer. Minister must respond to challenge.

4 Time taken to answer written questions and potential to create mechanisms/sanctions to compel Ministers to answer on time

4.1 House of Commons

The House of Commons has two types of written questions:

> 'Ordinary' written questions. Departments usually respond between five and 10 working days after the question has been tabled. There is no limit on the number of ordinary written questions you can table.
>
> 'Named day' written questions. Departments deal with named day questions as a priority. They should be answered on the third sitting day after they are tabled. A sitting day is a day when the House is meeting. You can table a maximum of five named day questions each day. This allows you to prioritise some questions.[1]

4.1.1 Report of the Procedure Committee – September 2026

In September 2026 the Procedure Committee of the House of Commons published its report *Written Parliamentary Questions*. The report examined the submission, processing and responses to written questions. A summary of its key findings includes:

- A very much larger number of WPQs has been asked in this Parliament than has been the norm in recent years. In every month of 2025, the number of WPQs was greater than in the same month in 2024. The present Parliament is exceptional in terms of the number of WPQs asked, and that those numbers are continuing to increase over time.
- In 2018 there were over 40,000 written questions submitted. This had risen to over 80,000 in 2025.

[1] House of Commons, MPs Guide to Procedure: Written Questions: https://guidetoprocedure.parliament.uk/collections/PzOsIRFq/written-questions

- The committee noted that fluctuations in the number of written questions were to be expected, especially with the high turnover of members at the beginning of the current Parliament. However, the increase in questions asked means a trade-off in the quality of answers.
- It also noted that the Government spent £17.7m answering 80,810 written questions in 2025.

The committee's report looked at the performance of government departments in answering questions. Successive Procedure Committees since 2010 have undertaken the task of monitoring departmental performance in relation to written questions. The report noted:

> We have found this work to have a positive impact, and our targeted interventions have ensured that departments that slip below our 85% thresholds for answering each type of question on time are given the opportunity to improve their internal processes swiftly to improve performance. Our predecessors have also worked with successive governments to ensure that the Guide to Parliamentary Work, produced by the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons, is kept up to date and revised in line with the committee's recommendations for improving scrutiny.

4.1.2 Previous monitoring statistics

Table 2 presents information from the 2023-24 session in relation to departmental performance, ranked by the number of questions submitted.

Table 2: Written questions submitted to UK Government Departments, ranked by number submitted, 2023-24 session

Ordinary written			
	Questions tabled for answer	**Number (%) answered substantively within 5 working days**	
Health and Social Care	2653	2268	85%
Defence	2,329	1997	86%
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	1675	1302	78%
Home	1342	1226	91%
Education	1187	990	83%
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	1166	704	60%
Transport	1063	1049	99%
Work and Pensions	1040	1027	99%
Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	1020	971	95%
Treasury	790	787	100%
Energy Security and Net Zero	720	715	99%
Justice	703	604	86%
Business and Trade	672	626	93%
Culture, Media and Sport	504	475	94%

Cabinet Office	364	337	93%
Science, Innovation and Technology	316	313	99%
Government Equalities Office	111	108	97%
Northern Ireland Office	58	55	95%
Attorney General's Office	52	50	96%
Scotland Office	25	25	100%
Wales Office	21	21	100%
Leader of the House of Commons	10	8	80%
Prime Minister's Office	4	4	100%

4.1.3 Requirement for Ministers to answer written questions

There is no formal mechanism, either in Standing Orders or the general procedures of the House, that can compel Ministers to answer written parliamentary questions within a set timeframe.

The work of the Procedure Committee in highlighting both positive and poor performances of individual departments may play a role in motivating departments to meet the 85% target. As part of its work in this area, the committee hears from ministers and their officials on how processes could be improved.

On the government side, the Ministerial Code states that:

> Ministers should, where possible, provide full and timely responses to written parliamentary questions, ministerial correspondence and select committee reports.[2]

Beyond this, the *Guide to Parliamentary Work*, produced by the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons, in conjunction with colleagues, provides detailed advice to Ministers and civil servants when dealing with Parliament. It provides the following advice on responding to written parliamentary questions:

- Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs) for ordinary written answer should be answered within five working days of the question being tabled. Ordinary WPQs answered beyond 10 working days are considered to be late.
- Departments should act promptly in transferring questions, ideally on the day it is received. Departments should not refuse to accept a transfer if it rightly lies within their responsibilities, even if the delay in transfer leads to the answer being late.
- Whilst there is no limit to the number of ordinary WPQs a Member may put down, the House has resolved to limit the number of questions tabled via Memberhub, the e-tabling system, to 20 per sitting day per Member. Members can table a maximum of five named day questions each sitting day.

The guide makes no reference to sanctions or any mechanism to compel answers to written questions.

4.2 Scottish Parliament

Guidance on Parliamentary Questions, published by the Scottish Parliament, sets out the arrangements for the submission of and answer to written questions. Relevant extracts are reproduced below:

11. Written Questions

[2] UK Government, Ministerial Code: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministerial-code/ministerial-code#chapter-7-ministers-and-their-departments

Members are expected to exercise responsibility in relation to the quantity of their questions.

11.1 Answers to Questions

The Scottish Government should provide answers to written questions within 10 counting days, i.e. days on which the Parliament is open for business and excluding public holidays.

In the case of a question lodged during the 10 counting days before a recess of more than four days or during such a recess, an answer should be given within 20 counting days. The Scottish Government will send the answer to the member in whose name the question is lodged and to the Chamber Desk.

11.2 Holding Answers

In certain cases, the Scottish Government may issue holding answers, such as "I will reply to the member as soon as possible". These are not printed in the daily written answers report but the numbers of the questions that have received a holding answer appear at the end of the report. Chamber Desk clerks are not responsible for following up late answers.

11.3 Questions Initiated by the Scottish Government (Inspired Questions)

Written questions initiated by the Scottish Government (although asked by individual MSPs) in order to provide information to the Parliament are identified as such in the Business Bulletin. The answers to inspired questions will be posted on the Parliament's website as soon as possible.

Inspired questions are subject to the same admissibility and editing criteria as other written questions to the Scottish Government.[3]

[3] Scottish Parliament, Guidance on Parliamentary Questions: https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/chamber-office/guidance-on-parliamentary-questions.pdf

4.2.1 Performance

Unlike the House of Commons, there is no systematic monitoring of departmental performance in answering written parliamentary questions.

In 2022 the Finance and Public Administration Committee received correspondence from the Scottish Government that revealed that 83% of written questions in 2021 were answered on time, although that had risen to 90% in the first quarter of 2022.[4]

[4] Civil Service World, Perm Sec admits room for improvement over Scottish Government correspondence delays, May 2022: https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/scottish-government-perm-sec-acknowledges-room-for-improvement-after-ministerial-correspondence-delays

The Scottish Parliament provided the following data for the period January to March 2026.

Table 3: Data on Scottish Parliament written questions, January-March 2026

Portfolio	Questions Answered Substantively (On Time)	Questions Answered Substantively (After Due Date)	Number Currently with Substantive Answer	Number Currently with No Substantive Answer	Total	% Answered on Time
Climate Action and Energy	252	0	252	0	252	100%
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture	30	0	30	0	30	100%
Education and Skills	52	5	57	0	57	91%
Finance and Local Government	45	0	45	0	45	100%

Health and Social Care	165	1	166	0	166	99%
Housing	83	0	83	0	83	100%
Justice and Home Affairs	73	0	73	0	73	100%
Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands	58	0	58	0	58	100%
Social Justice	53	0	53	0	53	100%
Transport	133	3	136	0	136	98%
Economy and Gaelic	44	0	44	0	44	100%
First Minister	2	0	2	0	2	100%
Lord Advocate	4	4	8	0	8	50%

4.2.2 Requirement to answer written questions

The Scottish Ministerial Code 2025 states:

> It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to the Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead the Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the First Minister;
>
> Ministerial office requires candour and openness. Ministers should demand and welcome candid advice. Ministers should be as open as possible with the Parliament and the public, reflecting the aspirations set out in the Report of the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament. They should refuse to provide information only in accordance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and other relevant statutes…[5]

Scottish Government internal guidance from 2017 sets out in detail how officials should address parliamentary questions. It is the latest available published guidance.

On the issue of responding to questions, the guidance states:

> It is a civil servant's responsibility to help Ministers to fulfil their obligations but ultimately it is the Minister's right and responsibility to decide how to do so. Care should be taken to avoid replies which are literally true but are likely to give rise to misleading inferences…
>
> Where information is withheld and the PQ cannot be answered fully, this should be made clear in the reply. Information should not be omitted simply because disclosure could lead to political embarrassment or administrative inconvenience.

[5] Scottish Government Ministerial Code: https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-ministerial-code-2025-edition/pages/2/#page-top

> Where there is a particularly fine balance between the aim of openness and the need for non-disclosure and where the draft answer gives precedence to the latter - this should be explicitly drawn to the Minister's attention. Similarly, when the draft answer provides information of a sort which is not normally disclosed, this should be drawn to the Minister's attention.[6]

4.3 Senedd

Standing Order 14 of the Senedd sets out the process for tabling written questions.

Questions must be tabled at least five working days before they are to be answered and are accepted at the discretion of the Presiding Officer, who must have regard to any published guidance.

There is no limit on the number of written questions Members may table when the Senedd is sitting.

Members may make minor typographical amendments to questions tabled for written or oral answer up to one day before the question is due to be answered. Significant amendments that would alter the subject matter or [7]nature of the question will not be accepted.

Performance is not routinely monitored. A recent Freedom of Information request to the Welsh Government sought information on Senedd written questions.

On the issue of timescales, the FOI response stated:

[6] Scottish Government FOI response: https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/foi-eir-release/2019/02-a/foi-19-00390/documents/foi-19-00390-information-requested-2/foi-19-00390-information-requested-2/govscot%3Adocument/Parliamentary%2BGuidance%2BNotes%2B-%2BGuidance%2Bfor%2BSG%2BOfficials%2Bon%2BPQs%2B-%2B5%2BSeptember%2B2017.pdf

[7] Guidance on the proper conduct of Senedd Business, April 2026: https://senedd.wales/media/ncvphjui/collation_of_guidance_eng.pdf

> … there is no time frame in which a Written Question (WQ) must be answered.
>
> Internally, the Welsh Government currently aims to provide an answer to a WQ within 8-working days (but is not bound to do so). An 'answer' is either a full answer to a question or a 'holding response' in which the Welsh Government informs a Senedd Member that more time is needed to answer their question and that a Minister will provide a full answer in correspondence as soon as possible.
>
> Although the Welsh Government aims for a substantive letter to follow within 10 further working days, the exact timeframe will depend on the nature and detail of the question. It should be noted that the issuing of substantive letters is not administered as part of the WQ process, but by individual policy teams. Once issued, the letter is published on the Senedd's Record of Proceedings alongside the holding reply.

The response also revealed that 15,520 written questions were tabled to the Welsh Government during the sixth Senedd. It declined to answer the following queries:

- the number answered outside that expected timeframe
- the number, if any, for which no answer was published
- the percentage answered within the expected timeframe

on the basis that it would cost more than the appropriate limit under FOI Regulations to extract the information.[8]

4.4 Dáil Éireann

4.4.1 Performance

Officials from Dáil Éireann provided the following information:

> Generally, the answers are received on time.

[8] Welsh Government FOI response: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2026-06/atisn27006_0.pdf

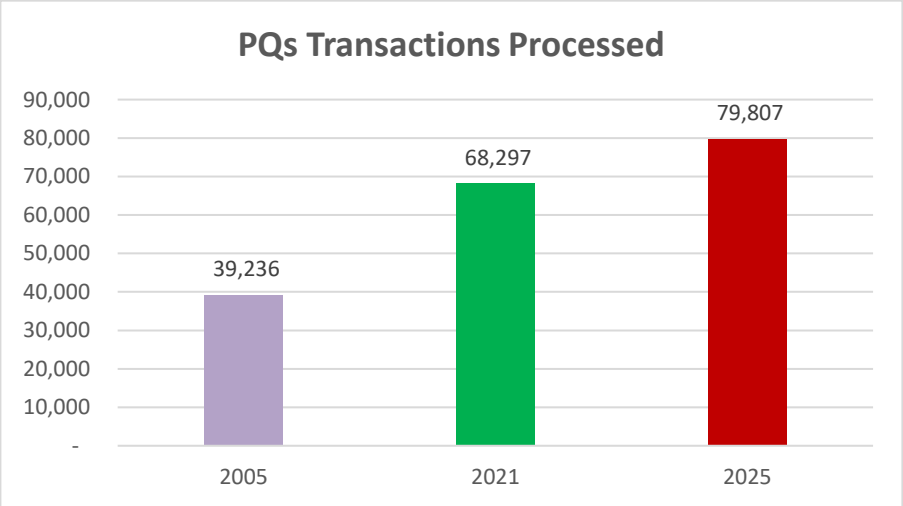
There has been a 30% increase in the volume of questions since last year, and so a small proportion of replies are not provided within the deadlines. We cannot supply specific details.

The notice period for written questions is 3 days. There are two exceptions to this, set out in Standing Order 52:

i) Deferred replies. Where Departments need more time to compile a response. The substantive response has a deadline of up to 10 days.

ii) Referred replies. When questions are referred to an agency for a response. The substantive response has a deadline of up to 10 days.

The total number of PQs processed has increased by 143% between 2005 and 2025 and by 78% between 2016 and 2025. Projections for 2026 based on mid-year data and historic patterns suggest that the number of PQs processed could exceed 100,000 by the end of 2026.



4.4.2 Requirement to provide responses to questions

Standing Order 55 contains a requirement for Ministers to answer requests for information:

> (1) A member of the Government shall, in replying to a Question asked on notice (whether for written or oral reply) or to a topical issue, address each and every request for information contained therein.

It also provides mechanisms for members to challenge Ministers in circumstances where they feel that a reply is inadequate. Members can raise concerns there and then or at a later date.

Standing Orders set out what is then required of the Government:

> (5) A member of the Government who has been advised in writing that the Ceann Comhairle is of opinion that there has been a failure to comply with the provisions of paragraph (1) shall, not later than 12.30 p.m. on the day following the communication of such opinion, furnish to the Ceann Comhairle a response in writing to each of the requests for information in relation to which there has been, in the opinion of the Ceann Comhairle, a failure to comply with paragraph (1).

There is further recourse for members who feel that any Government response is inadequate:

> (8) A member who is of the opinion that a response furnished by a member of the Government in accordance with paragraph (5) has failed to comply with paragraph (1) may communicate such opinion in writing to the Ceann Comhairle not later than four days after the response has been furnished to the Ceann Comhairle, not reckoning a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday, identifying the specific request or requests for information not addressed in the response and requesting that the matter be selected for consideration as a topical issue.

4.4.3 Example of Standing Order 55 in action

Below is an extract from documentation relating to a challenge raised under Standing Order 55 in response to a parliamentary question:

> **Ceann Comhairle**

On 23rd May 2025, Deputy Pa Daly submitted to me that, in his opinion the reply to Question 23759/25 to the Minister for Health for written answer failed to address the specific request for information.

I have reviewed the Question and the reply given and I agree with the Deputy that the reply does not comply with the provisions of the Standing Order.

In this regard, the Ceann Comhairle wrote to the Minister for Health on 11th June 2025. Having received a response from the Minister for Health on 12th June, the Ceann Comhairle is required under paragraph (6) of Standing Order 55, to lay the response before the Dáil. The response will also be associated with the Official Report of the debates for 13th May 2025 and a copy of the response has been forwarded to Deputy Daly.[9]

4.5 International comparisons

The research looked beyond the legislatures in the UK and Ireland to provide additional context to the issue of written questions.

Dr. Ruxandra Serban, a Lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London, submitted a paper to the Procedure Committee in the House of Commons to inform its recent report on written questions. The research examined written question procedures across a number of legislatures. The data presented in the paper is reproduced in figure 1[10]:

[9] Report of an application under Dáil standing order 55 : adequacy of replies to questions and topical issues: https://opac.oireachtas.ie/s?q=ceann%20comhairle%20standing%20order%2055&criteria=creator%3Dceann%20comhairle&type=16&v=G

[10] Written evidence to the Procedure Committee, House of Commons: https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/160988/pdf/

Figure 1: Extract from written evidence to the House of Commons Procedure Committee on its inquiry into written questions

	Country/Parliament	Limits on questions an individual MP can ask	Deadline for the government to respond	Type of response period
1	UK (House of Commons)	No limit on ordinary WPQs[5] Up to 5 Named Day questions per day	Usually within a working week[6] To be answered on the named day	Brief Brief
2	Canada (House of Commons)	A member may have a maximum of 4 written questions on the Order Paper at any one time	45 calendar days	Extended
3	Australia (House of Representatives)	No limit	No formal deadline mentioned	No formal deadline
4	New Zealand (House of Representatives)	No limit	6 working days[7]	Brief
5	Ireland (Dáil Éireann)	No limit	3 working days when the Dáil is sitting	Brief
6	Spain (Congreso de los Diputados)	No limit	Within 20 days (may be extended by a further 20 days)	Moderate
7	Portugal (Assembleia da Republica)	No limit	Within 30 days	Moderate
8	France (Assemblée Nationale)	52 per session	Two months / 10 days for 'signalled' questions	Extended / Moderate for 'signalled' questions
9	Germany (Bundestag)	Up to 4 per month	Within one week of receipt	Brief
10	Belgium (Chambre des représentants / Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers)	No limit	20 working days	Moderate
11	Italy (Camera dei deputati)	No limit	20 days	Moderate
12	Norway (Storting)	Two questions per calendar week	6 working days	Brief
13	Denmark (Folketing)	No limit	6 working days	Brief
14	Sweden (Riksdag)	No limit	5 working days; the Speaker may allow up to 14 days in total	Brief
15	Finland (Eduskunta)	No limit, but standing orders specify that the Eduskunta may decide to implement a cap	21 days	Moderate
16	Netherlands (Tweede Kamer)	No limit	Three weeks	Moderate
17	Scotland (Scottish Parliament)	No limit	10 counting days (20 counting days if lodged near recess)[8]	Moderate
18	Wales (Senedd)	No limit	5 working days	Brief
19	Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Assembly)	Up to 5 questions each day, one of which may be for priority answer	Ordinary questions: 10 working days Priority questions: 2-5 working days	Moderate Brief

The research went on to say:

> Nine out of the 19 parliaments analysed here (including the UK) have a brief time limit (up to a week) for government departments to answer a WPQ. Eight parliaments operate moderate response times of up to a month. The Northern Ireland Assembly is counted in each of these

categories, as it operates both a brief limit for priority questions and a moderate limit for ordinary questions. Three parliaments operate extended deadlines (Canada and France) or have no formal time limit (Australia). Some parliaments note the target response time in their rules of procedure, while others operate this as a convention, including the UK House of Commons and the Irish Dáil. In the case of the Dáil, parliamentarians must submit their questions at least three working days before the sitting when an answer is sought, although it is not clear whether this quick turnaround time is always met by departments. This variation suggests that legislatures balance responsiveness to WPQs and administrative capacity in different ways, and do not converge on a particular 'best practice' model.[11]

4.6 Monitoring of departmental performance in France

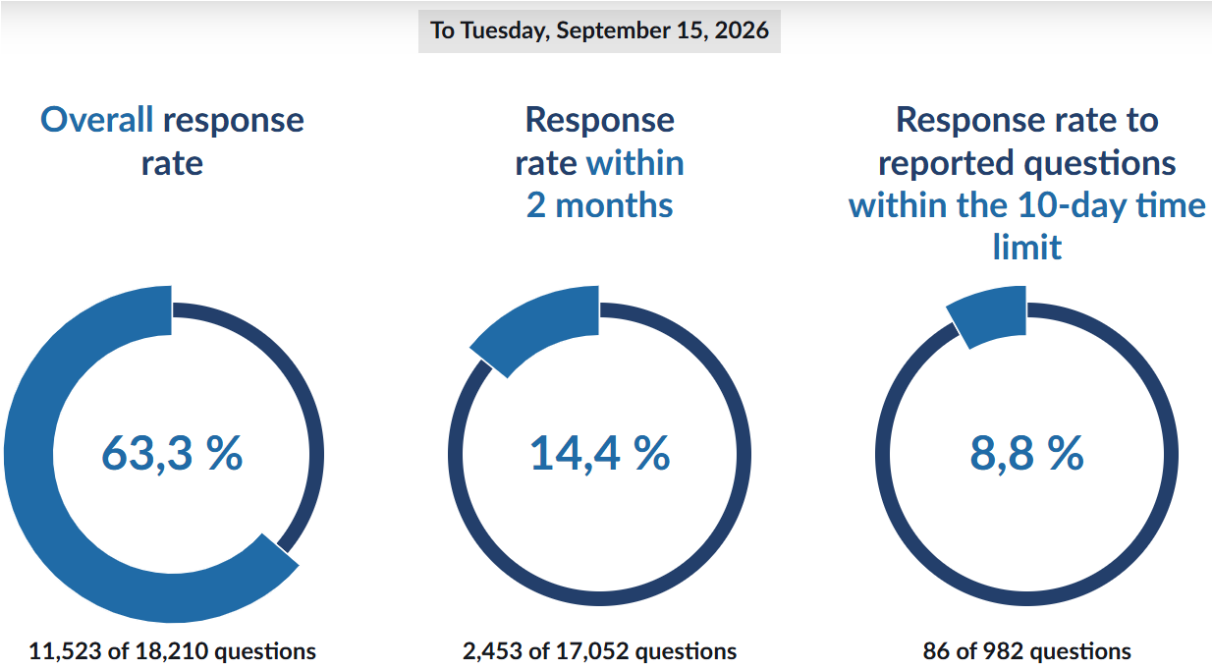
The National Assembly of France tracks the performance of departmental responses to questions, with updated information produced on a weekly basis. The House of Commons Procedure Committee considered this approach and noted that it "had a positive impact on government performance, and also that it has led to some public interest in monitoring departmental response rates."[12]

Figure 2 shows how this information is displayed on the Assembly's website.

[11] Written evidence to the House of Commons Procedure Committee: https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/160988/pdf/

[12] House of Commons Procedure Committee, Written Parliamentary Questions, First Report of Session 2026–27 https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/54991/standard/pdf/

Figure 2: statistics on departmental performance, France



Statistics are also available for each individual department.[13]

[13] French National Assembly, information on questions: https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/questions

Part 2 – oral questions

5 Overview of oral questions mechanisms

The following tables provide an overview of the mechanisms for oral questions in the relevant legislatures.

Table 4: oral questions procedures in the House of Commons

House of Commons	
Submission of questions to Prime/First Ministers	Deadline for tabling an oral question to the Prime Minister is usually 12.30 pm on the preceding sitting Thursday. The Prime Minister will not know what questions will be asked of them. However, the Prime Minister will be extensively briefed by government departments in anticipation of likely subjects they could be asked about. Speaker may call any member to ask a supplementary question.
Questions to departments	Deadline for submitting oral questions is 12.30pm three to five sitting days before the Question Time takes place. MPs who are called by the Speaker to ask their question do not read it out, but simply call out its number. When the government minister has replied, the MP can ask one

	further question, known as a supplementary. Other MPs may also be called to ask supplementary questions at the discretion of the Speaker. The Minister must reply to each in turn. Supplementary questions must be on the same subject as the original question.
Topical questions	Topical questions, which are in a standard form (asking for a statement on the minister's responsibilities) and which provide an opportunity to ask a spontaneous question on any aspect of the department's responsibilities. Topical questions usually take place during the last 15 minutes of a Question Time.
Urgent questions	Backbenchers (MPs who are not ministers) and shadow ministers can apply to the Speaker to ask an urgent question to a minister. To be judged as 'urgent', a question should relate to a very recent or imminent event or development on which a minister may reasonably be expected to provide an answer that day. The matter raised in the question must be important in terms of public policy, and must have more than a local or temporary significance. Matters of current debate in the media don't automatically pass these tests.

Table 5: oral questions procedures in the Scottish Parliament

Scottish Parliament	
Submission of questions to Prime/First Ministers	First Minister's Question Time (FMQT) is usually the most high-profile item in the Parliamentary week. It normally takes place each Tuesday and Thursday and lasts for up to 30 minutes each time. It is almost always scheduled for 2 pm. The Tuesday session of FMQT is normally reserved for backbench questions – that is, questions asked by members who are neither opposition party leaders (or leaders of any group of smaller-party or independent MSPs) nor ministers. The Thursday session is normally reserved for questions by opposition party leaders. None of the questions for either session needs to be lodged in advance, although backbenchers are encouraged to submit an indication of the questions they wish to ask to the Presiding Officer. As a result, the First Minister has no advance notice of the questions asked at either session.
Questions to departments	The business programme must include, each week, opportunities for MSPs to ask Portfolio Questions (normally on Wednesday, for up to 60 minutes) and General Questions (normally on Tuesday, for up to 25 minutes, and on Thursday, for up to 30 minutes).

	Purpose of Portfolio Question Time is to structure oral questions according to the remits of the various Cabinet Secretaries, using a rota to ensure that every portfolio is open to scrutiny on a regular basis. Two portfolios are covered each week. The purpose of General Question Time is to ensure there is still an opportunity, each week, to ask questions on topics not related to that week's portfolios. Members wishing to ask questions at Portfolio or General Question Time must first submit their names by noon on Monday of the previous week. Members should only submit their names if confident they can attend the relevant Question Time. Names are randomly selected by the clerks: normally ten names for each portfolio and 18 for General Question Time. Members may enter their names for more than one portfolio and also for General Questions, but once a name is selected, it must be disregarded in any subsequent selection that week. Selected names are published in the Bulletin on the Tuesday and questions should be lodged by noon on the Wednesday. During that interim period, members whose names have been selected may swap their places with members selected to ask a question in another list. Members whose names are selected but who don't lodge a question by the deadline are expected to provide an explanation to the Presiding Officer.
Topical questions	N/A

Urgent questions	Any member may request that an oral question to the Scottish Government, lodged by 10 am on a day when there is a meeting of the Parliament, be answered on that day. It is for the Presiding Officer to decide whether the question is sufficiently urgent – and, if so, to make any adjustments to the daily business list. Around 10 minutes is normally allowed for each urgent question.

Table 6: oral questions procedures in the Senedd

Senedd	
Submission of questions to Prime/First Ministers	First Minister answers questions each week. The Presiding Officer conducts a ballot to determine the names of Members who may table questions for a designated Question Time. Each Member may enter their name into the ballot once for the First Minister and other Ministers. Group Leaders cannot enter the ballot for questions to the First Minister as there is a dedicated time set aside for Group Leaders to ask questions without notice to the First Minister, normally after the second tabled question has been asked. The Member selected must then table their oral question at least five working days before the question is due to be answered for Welsh Ministers, the Counsel General and Senedd Commission. A shorter deadline of three working days applies for questions to the First Minister.

Questions to departments	Welsh Ministers and the Counsel General answer questions on a four-week rotation.
Topical questions	Time is allocated by the Business Committee for Members to ask Topical Questions without notice to Welsh Ministers each week. Topical Questions must relate to a matter of national, regional or local significance where an expedited Ministerial response is desirable. The question must also have arisen since the deadline for tabling Topical Questions the previous week: Topical Questions must be tabled with the Table Office between 09:00 on Monday and 10:00 on Wednesday.
Urgent questions	N/A

Table 7: oral questions procedures in Dáil Éireann

Dáil Éireann	
Submission of questions to Prime/First Ministers	The Taoiseach answers questions on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and does not take priority questions. However, the Taoiseach does answer private notice questions. There is a notice period of four days for submitting questions.
Questions to departments	Apart from the Taoiseach, Ministers answer on the basis of a daily rota, each of them answering questions on one day in approximately every five weeks. Each Member may put down a maximum of two questions for oral answer on any one day; questions to the Taoiseach are not included in this limit. Party or group spokespersons may put down five. The order in which oral questions, to a line Minister, appear on the Order Paper is determined by means of an electronic lottery. The original question and its reply may lead to a short debate on the floor of the House, through supplementary questions which may be asked by any Member present. Supplementary questions are permitted at the discretion of the Ceann Comhairle and must be relevant to the original question.
Topical questions	

Urgent questions	A private notice question must relate to a matter which, in the opinion of the Ceann Comhairle, is of urgent public importance and has arisen so suddenly as to prevent Members from tabling ordinary oral or written questions within the normal deadlines. Because they relate to urgent matters, the deadline for receipt of private notice questions in the Questions Office is 2.30 p.m. on the day that they are due to be answered. Private notice questions may be asked of the Taoiseach on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and of other members of the Government on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Private notice questions are taken immediately after the Topical Issues debate.

6 Number of listed oral questions answered by each Minister during Question Time

6.1 Scottish Parliament

First Minister's Questions

The Presiding Officer may select, from all admissible First Minister's Questions lodged, up to 8 questions for answer at First Minister's Question Time.

3. In addition to questions selected in advance under paragraph 2, the Presiding Officer may call any of the following members to ask a question at First Minister's Question Time -

(a) a leader of a political party represented by 5 or more members of the Parliament, or a representative of that leader;

(b) a representative of any group formed in accordance with Rule 5.2.2.

4. The Presiding Officer may also, at First Minister's Questions, call any member to ask a question, so long as that question is not one which has been selected in advance.

Portfolio and General Questions

A member shall submit that member's name for selection during the period commencing with the completion of the General Question Time or Portfolio Question Time (whichever is the later) in the second week before the week in which the member wishes to ask a question and ending at 12:00 on the Monday of the week before that week (or such time and day as may, exceptionally, be specified by the Parliament on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau).

The Clerk shall select, from the names submitted, such number of members to put questions for answer at General Question Time and for each portfolio

at Portfolio Question Time as, in each case, shall be determined by the Presiding Officer. Each selection of names shall be carried out on a random basis and the selections shall be carried out in the order in which the proceedings to which they relate are to take place. A member's name, once selected, shall be disregarded in any subsequent selection of names for the same week.

6.1.1 Statistics

In the parliamentary year 2024-25 **223** questions were selected for answer at First Minister's questions. This includes questions which may not be answered in the Chamber.

The total number of general questions selected during the year was **253**. Again, this includes questions which may not have been answered in the Chamber.

The total number of portfolio questions answered during the parliamentary year was **788**.

The total number of topical questions selected during the parliamentary year was **72**.

The total number of urgent questions selected during the parliamentary year was **nine**.

The total number of questions to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body answered during the parliamentary year was **26**.

6.2 Senedd

Standing Orders set out the process for the tabling and answering of oral questions.

Standing Order 12.64 specifies how the order in which oral questions are answered is determined. In practice, the Table Office will ask Members to submit their names in advance of each of the ballots to be held under Standing Order 12.61.

The Table Office will conduct the ballot(s) and contact, by e-mail, those Members who have been drawn as the top 16 names in each ballot inviting them to submit a question by the deadline set by the Business Committee. The Table Office will then conduct a further shuffle after the deadline to determine the final order of the questions.
Only the first 12 questions selected in the final shuffle will go forward for answer and the remaining four questions will fall. The final order of questions is published on the Senedd's website and Members are notified by email of their question's position on the order paper, or if the question was not selected. If fewer than 12 questions are tabled to a particular Minister before the deadline, then any questions received after the published deadline, and up until five working days before they are due to be answered, will be added to the list of questions and taken in the order they are received.
Procedure for oral questions in Plenary The Presiding Officer starts question time by calling the name of the Member whose question is first on the list. The Member reads the question, which should not differ from the tabled version. The Presiding Officer then invites the First Minister, Minister, Counsel General or member of the Commission, as appropriate, to provide an answer.
Following an answer, the Presiding Officer invites the Member who asked the original question to ask a follow-up question (a supplementary question) that relates to the original question. When the first supplementary question has been answered the Presiding Officer may call other Members to ask related supplementary questions. Decisions on who is called to ask supplementary questions are entirely at the discretion of the Presiding Officer and cannot be challenged.
Any oral questions that are not answered during the period allocated for oral questions will receive a written answer on the same day. If all questions are

answered before the allocated time is complete, the Presiding Officer will call for the next item on the agenda.

The following information was provided by Senedd officials:

In the previous Senedd (2021-26), the Presiding Officer had a policy of reaching at least question 8 of 12 (66%) on the order paper during oral question sessions. Sessions were sometimes extended until this number of questions had been asked.

On some occasions additional questions were also reached during the time allocated (60 minutes for First Minister's Questions, 45 minutes for other Ministerial oral questions), though this was relatively uncommon. A number of questions without notice from leaders or spokespeople are also called within this allocated time.

In the current Senedd, since May 2026, practice has been more variable under a new Presiding Officer and with an expanded membership of the Senedd leading to an increased number of requests for supplementary questions. There has also been an increase in the number of spokespeople questions as a result of there being three opposition groups as opposed to two.

The number of questions reached has varied between 6 (50%) and 12 (100%) between sessions, though there are recent indications that it is settling back around 8 (66%).[14]

6.3 House of Commons

This section presents information from the House of Commons for the current session (up to mid-September), which was approximately 10 sitting weeks, with questions answered on 39 days.

[14] Information from Senedd officials, September 2026

For PMQs, 15 MPs' names are drawn in the shuffle (random draw for questions). On average the PM answered 13.9 MPs whose questions were listed. The Prime Minister answered the engagements question once each session (there have been ten) and then answered supplementaries from an average of 13.9 MPs who were successful in the ballot. He will also have answered six questions from the Leader of the Opposition, two from the Liberal Democrat leader and one from a small party (one of them is called each week by the Speaker).

For departments that have the full hour of questions – 25 substantive questions and 10 topical questions are listed on the order paper (occasionally there are fewer questions if an MP withdraws the question after the shuffle). The first 45 minutes are allowed for substantive questions and the last 15 for topical questions, although in practice, the Speaker allows question time to overrun most days. There have been 25 out of the 39 days when a main government department has answered for the whole hour.

So far over the session, in the question times to these departments (aggregated) an average of 15.32 MPs with substantive questions have been called and eight MPs with topical questions have been called.

Note if the same question is tabled by more than one MP, questions are grouped and the first MP with the question asks the substantive question and a supplementary, the remaining MPs who asked that question are just called to ask a supplementary.

From 19 May to 14 September, 916 tabled questions have been answered. This comprises 540 substantive questions to departments and backbench MPs that answer questions; 237 topical questions and 139 PMQs.[15]

6.4 Dáil Éireann

[15] Information provided by House of Commons officials

Officials from Dáil Éireann provided the following information:

> Deputies are entitled to submit 2 oral questions each per session, and spokespersons are allowed to submit a further 3 oral questions per session, and then there are 6 priority questions at the start. Therefore, the number of oral questions listed will typically be in excess of 120.
>
> Generally, the Minister will answer the priority questions, and a small number of the oral questions.
>
> The Minister on average, will answer around 15 oral questions, approx. 10% of all questions. Some questions could be grouped, so in practice; it could be more than 15 oral + written questions answered in one session.[16]

7 Frequency of attendance by each Minister

7.1 Scottish Parliament

Information on the website of the Scottish Parliament states:

> **First Minister's Questions**
>
> The First Minister usually answers questions from MSPs in the Debating Chamber twice a week.
>
> On Tuesday there are 30 minutes of FMQs for backbenchers and on Thursday there are 30 minutes for party leaders.
>
> The number of MSPs a party has determines whether a party leader is entitled to ask questions on a Thursday.
>
> No questions are published in advance. The First Minister doesn't know which questions will be asked.
>
> **SPCB Questions**

[16] Information provided by Dáil Éireann officials

SPCB Questions take place three or four times a year.[17]

Portfolio Questions

The Portfolio Questions sessions usually take place back-to-back on a Wednesday and run from 14:00-15:00 (each run for 30 minutes, and 10 questions are asked on each portfolio).

Figure 3 sets out the rota for Portfolio Questions from 26 October to 14 December 2026.

Figure 3: rota for Portfolio Questions, Scottish Parliament

26 October 2026	Justice	Health and Care
2 November 2026	Climate Action and Rural Affairs	Education, Culture and Gaelic
9 November 2026	Social Justice and Housing	Economy, Tourism and Transport
16 November 2026	Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Finance and Local Government, Parliamentary Business and Veterans	Public Service Reform, Europe, External Affairs and Energy
23 November 2026	Justice	Health and Care
30 November 2026	Climate Action and Rural Affairs	Education, Culture and Gaelic

[17] Scottish Parliament, information on questions: https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/about-questions-and-answers

7 December 2026	Social Justice and Housing	Economy, Tourism and Transport
14 December 2026	Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Finance and Local Government, Parliamentary Business and Veterans	Public Service Reform, Europe, External Affairs and Energy

7.2 Senedd

The following is the schedule for answer to oral questions in the Senedd:

Figure 4: rota for oral questions, Senedd

First Minister	Every Tuesday between 13.30 – 14.15 for a maximum of 45 minutes during Senedd sitting weeks.
Welsh Ministers	Every Wednesday 13.30 – 15.00 for a maximum of 45 minutes each on a rotational basis during Senedd sitting weeks. This includes the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution.
Senedd Commission	Once every four sitting weeks on Wednesdays for a maximum of 30 minutes.

7.3 House of Commons

According to the House of Commons website:

> Question Time takes place for an hour, Monday to Thursday, after preliminary proceedings and private business. Each government department answers questions according to a rota called the Order of Oral Questions.

The rota for October 2026 is set out at figure 5[18]:

Figure 5: rota for oral questions, House of Commons

	Monday 12 October	**Tuesday 13 October**	**Wednesday 14 October**	**Thursday 15 October**
Question Time	Work and Pensions	Energy Security and Net Zero	Attorney General's Office Prime Minister	Business, Innovation, Science and Trade
	Monday 19 October	**Tuesday 20 October**	**Wednesday 21 October**	**Thursday 22 October**
Question Time	Defence	Health and Social Care	Northern Ireland Prime Minister	Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Church Commissioners and House of Commons Commission and Public Accounts Commission and Restoration and Renewal Client Board and Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission

[18] https://commonsbusiness.parliament.uk/Document/107144/Pdf?subType=Standard

	Monday 26 October	Tuesday 27 October	Wednesday 28 October	Thursday 29 October
Question Time	Home Office	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development	Scotland Prime Minister	Transport

7.4 Dáil Éireann

Apart from the Taoiseach, Ministers answer on the basis of a daily rota, each of them answering questions on one day in approximately every five weeks. Figure 6 sets out the rota for September 2026.

Figure 6: rota for oral questions, Dáil Éireann

	Wednesday 16 September	Thursday 17 September	Tuesday 22 September	Wednesday 23 September
Questions	Leaders questions Other members questions Questions on Cabinet Committees	Priority questions to the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment Other questions to the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment Priority questions to the Minister for Children,	Leaders questions Priority questions to the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment Other questions to the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment	Leaders questions Other members questions Questions on Policy or Legislation

		Disability and Equality Other questions to the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality Leaders questions Other members questions Questions on Policy or Legislation		
	Thursday 24 September			
Questions	Priority questions to the Minister for Social Protection Other questions to the Minister for Social Protection Priority questions to the Minister for Transport Other questions to the Minister for Transport			

	Leaders questions Other members questions Questions on policy or legislation			

8 Refining and improving the process and emerging issues

Legislatures often seek to refine and improve procedure for parliamentary questions. This may be in response to concerns raised by elected representatives or in response to changing business needs.

This section provides examples where changes have been made to procedures, including an example of real-time monitoring of departmental performance.

8.1 Innovations in the Scottish Parliament

On 21 May 2026 a series of measures designed to make the Parliament "more efficient, topical and effective" were announced as part of the Presiding Officer's vision of renewal and re-engagement.[19] The changes, which impacted on question time, are set out below:

> There will now be two First Minister's Questions a week, with 30 minutes on a Tuesday for backbenchers and 30 minutes on a Thursday from Party Leaders.
>
> MSPs were informed of the changes by the Presiding Officer during a meeting of the Parliament this afternoon.

[19] Renewal and re-engagement – a Parliament for all of Scotland, May 2026: https://www.parliament.scot/about/news/news-listing/2026/may/renewal-and-re-engagement

The Presiding Officer also informed Members that:

- Time taken for interventions will be added, to protect the time of speakers who most engage
- Labour and Reform will alternate each week in leading off on questions in First Minister's Questions, debates and statements
- Chamber Business will run from 2pm to 5.30pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to provide more time for scrutiny in the Chamber
- Chamber Business will run from 1.30pm to 5pm on Thursdays to accommodate more time for committee business in the morning
- Questions to the First Minister will no longer be published in advance
- There will be 18 general questions a week, 10 more than previously
- Members will have to identify relevant procedure when making points of order
- Events and cross-party groups will be permitted during Members' debates to prevent delays to visitors

Informing MSPs of the changes, the Presiding Officer, Kenneth Gibson MSP, said:

"Parliament needs renewal and re-engagement - with independent, innovative and open-minded leadership. That's of critical importance and exactly what I'll provide.

"We need to de-clutter and simplify how we work, make Parliament more efficient, topical and effective for those we represent.

"The collegiate working anticipated in the 90s, prior to Devolution, has not fully transpired. The status quo is not an option - and I'm keen to push at the boundaries of what's possible within my remit."[20]

8.2 Australian Parliament

[20] https://www.parliament.scot/about/news/news-listing/2026/may/renewal-and-re-engagement

In May 2021 the Committee on Procedure published a detailed report on the practices and procedures relating to question time. The report contained 11 recommendations on how question time could be improved. A selection is listed below:

- The Committee recommends that House adopt a standing order that permits one non-government Member to ask a supplementary question during Question Time each day. The Committee recommends that the time limit for the question be 30 seconds and the time limit for the following answer be 90 seconds.
- The Committee recommends that the House adopt a standing order that ensures Question Time consist of a minimum of:
    - at least 10 questions from opposition members
    - five questions from government Members, on a rostered basis
    - five constituency questions from government Members, on a rostered basis
    - one question from a non-aligned Member.
- The Committee recommends that standing orders be amended to reduce the time limit for all questions to 30 seconds.
- The Committee recommends that standing orders be amended to reduce the time limit for answers to two minutes.

For each recommendation, the Government responded:

> The Government does not support the recommendation, considering the current arrangements for question time are working well.[21]

[21] Australian Government response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure report: A window on the House: practices and procedures relating to Question Time, March 2022: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Procedure/-/media/8E9E877607284AA29058ED63B9FA52E8.ashx

8.3 Increasing use of AI in the House of Commons and Dáil Éireann

8.3.1 House of Commons

In its September 2026 report the House of Commons Procedure Committee touched on the suggestion that Artificial Intelligence (AI) was being employed in both the drafting and response to written questions.

It reflected evidence (to a separate inquiry from the Committee) from Josh MacAlister OBE MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education, who stated that his department would be willing to use AI, where appropriate:

> The principle would be that where automation can speed up processes that humans would take longer to do, we will use it with human judgment and sign-off baked into it.[22]

He added that there would be a public expectation that new technologies should be used to make processes more efficient:

> My view is that, in time, the public would look increasingly dimly on Government Departments and agencies not making full use of technology where it can create more efficient processes that save them tax money—these processes are all expensive—and deliver more efficient, quick and transparent public services.[23]

The committee also heard concerns that AI was being used in the drafting of questions, and referenced a Sky News report that the use of this technology had contributed to the increase in numbers of written questions. However, the committee also received evidence that an AI prompt would likely take longer to write than an actual question.

It also recognised the use of a tool in the Table Office to identify questions with high degrees of similarity. It concluded that:

[22] Procedure Committee, Written Parliamentary Questions, First Report of Session 2026–27

[23] As above

> We consider that the use of AI to speed up the processing of WPQs—whether in the Table Office or in government—is to be welcomed as an initiative to give Members a smoother experience of the WPQs system and promote the efficient use of public resources. To prevent the adoption of emerging technologies to streamline processes and ultimately speed up a system focused on transparency and accountability would be nonsensical.[24]

8.3.2 Dáil Éireann

In July 2026 thejournal.ie reported that TDs "will have to use a new system to submit parliamentary questions (PQs) to ministers in an effort to ease pressure caused by AI use."[25]

The report went on to say:

> Rather than impose a limit on the number of PQs each TD can ask, the Oireachtas Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform agreed to implement a new system for submitting PQs to improve the flow and management of queries.
>
> From September, when the Dáil returns after the summer recess, TDs will submit PQs via the internal Oireachtas Áis-Linn system (which is already used for submitting things like speaker lists and topical issues) rather than via email.
>
> A spokesperson for the Oireachtas told The Journal that the new system "supports the full lifecycle of Parliamentary Questions – from submission to processing, tracking and replies – within a single secure and user-friendly system".

[24] Procedure Committee, Written Parliamentary Questions, First Report of Session 2026–27

[25] The Journal.ie, Oireachtas officials had to overhaul the system for TDs to ask questions to clamp down on AI use, July 2026: https://www.thejournal.ie/ai-parliamentary-questions-7116453-Jul2026/?utm_source=twitter_short

"It has been designed to simplify and improve the overall management of Parliamentary Questions," they said.[26]

9 Conclusion

Parliamentary questions are a key mechanism in the legislatures examined for this research. However, the procedures governing written and oral questions vary significantly. The number of questions, methods of submission, timings for response and appearance by ministers to answer questions are governed by standing orders, guidance and convention.

There are few formal mechanisms to compel ministers to answer questions, either written or oral. The House of Commons Procedure Committee regularly monitors departmental performance and legislatures usually set targets within which departments are expected to respond to written questions.

The Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann do contain a mechanism whereby a member can challenge a reply that they deem inadequate. Although the relevant minister is required to respond to any challenge, their reply could simply say that the original response was, in their opinion, adequate.

The procedures for oral questions attempt to strike a balance between the parliamentary time available and the number of requests for information. Officials will advise on the form and structure of questions but the Speaker/Presiding Officer maintains wide discretion in the operation of the process, for example in calling supplementary questions.

Procedures relating to parliamentary questions continue to evolve in response to business needs and, more recently, to changes in technology, particularly the use of AI. The use of AI can be a double-edged sword; it can speed up and enhance the administration of parliamentary questions, but it also has the potential to overwhelm the number of questions officials can reasonably be expected to process. Legislatures will have to adapt to these emerging

[26] The Journal.ie, Oireachtas officials had to overhaul the system for TDs to ask questions to clamp down on AI use, July 2026: https://www.thejournal.ie/ai-parliamentary-questions-7116453-Jul2026/?utm_source=twitter_short

technologies as their use becomes more widespread in many aspects of parliamentary business, not least written and oral questions.