



# Science and Technology Committee

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From Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Chair

Amanda Solloway MP  
Minister for Science, Research and Innovation  
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy  
(By e-mail)

29 September 2020

Dear Amanda,

## **Research and development investment**

As you will be aware on Wednesday 9 September my Committee held a one-off evidence session on university research funding.<sup>1</sup> I would encourage you and your officials to read the full transcript of our exchanges to hear the issues and potential issues facing university research, including funding, at present and in the months ahead. As a number of these issues fall within your responsibility, I would be grateful if you could provide some information on them to the Committee.

### Research funding

Witnesses welcomed the steps taken by your department and the Department for Education to address the challenges the university sector has faced as a result of COVID-19, the awarding of A-Levels (and equivalent qualifications) in summer 2020, the removal of student number controls and the possible decrease in international students attending universities in the UK. However, it was clear from witnesses that further detail was needed, for example on the terms of support for higher education institutions announced by the Government. Witnesses also stated that the full impact of COVID-19 on universities, in particular the extent of a possible reduction in overseas students, was unknown and would not be known for a number of weeks. I encourage you and the Universities Minister to continue working with the sector to work through these issues.

In our evidence session we also heard how COVID-19 had opened up a “Pandora’s box” on university research funding, highlighting the long-standing issue that university research is not funded at a level covering its true costs but is instead cross-subsidised by international fees, residencies, commercial activities and activities.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I would be grateful if you could outline the Government’s plans to address this issue in the long-term to ensure that university research funding is sustainable.

Finally, Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli described the R&D roadmap published by the Government in July as a “very high-level document” that needed to be “turned into a definitive plan very quickly”, with clarity given on the Government’s exact plans for investment. I would therefore be grateful if you could set out for the Committee when further details will be released on this roadmap.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/839/pdf/>

<sup>2</sup> [Q17](#)

## Impact of COVID-19 on non-COVID research

In our session we further heard how COVID-19 has significantly impacted the operation of non-COVID research and clinical trials in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Separate to the evidence session, I have been made aware how the UK is currently lagging behind international competitors in re-starting clinical trial activity which was put on hold by the pandemic (in August, new patients entering study-sites in the UK was down 40% on the first 11 months of 2019—see enclosure).<sup>4</sup> I would be grateful if you could set out:

- why the UK is behind many other countries in re-starting its clinical trial activity (e.g. new patients entering study-sites);
- why there is a delay to non-COVID clinical trials re-starting;
- the assessment the Government has made of the impact this will have on UK research in the short and medium-term;
- the steps the Government and its agencies are undertaking to get such clinical trials restarted; and
- the assessment the Government has made of the impact of a second wave of COVID-19 on non-COVID clinical trial activity.

## Horizon Europe

The UK's participation in Horizon Europe remains uncertain as does the detail on the nature and scope of an alternative domestic scheme. I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with the following information:

- What work the Government and its agencies have undertaken to date to set up an alternative funding scheme following the findings of the Smith-Reid Review last year;
- When the Government will inform universities and other research institutions of the functional details of such an alternative funding scheme;
- How the Government will ensure that there is no substantial gap in research funding available to UK researchers in the event that the UK does not associate with Horizon Europe; and
- How the Government would seek to address non-financial losses, such as networking and training, that the UK could lose if it does not participate in Horizon Europe?

I would be grateful if you could provide a response to this letter by Thursday 8 October at the latest. I am copying this letter to the Minister of State for Universities, Michelle Donelan MP.

I will publish this letter and your response on the Committee's website in due course.

With best wishes,



**Rt Hon Greg Clark MP**  
*Chair*

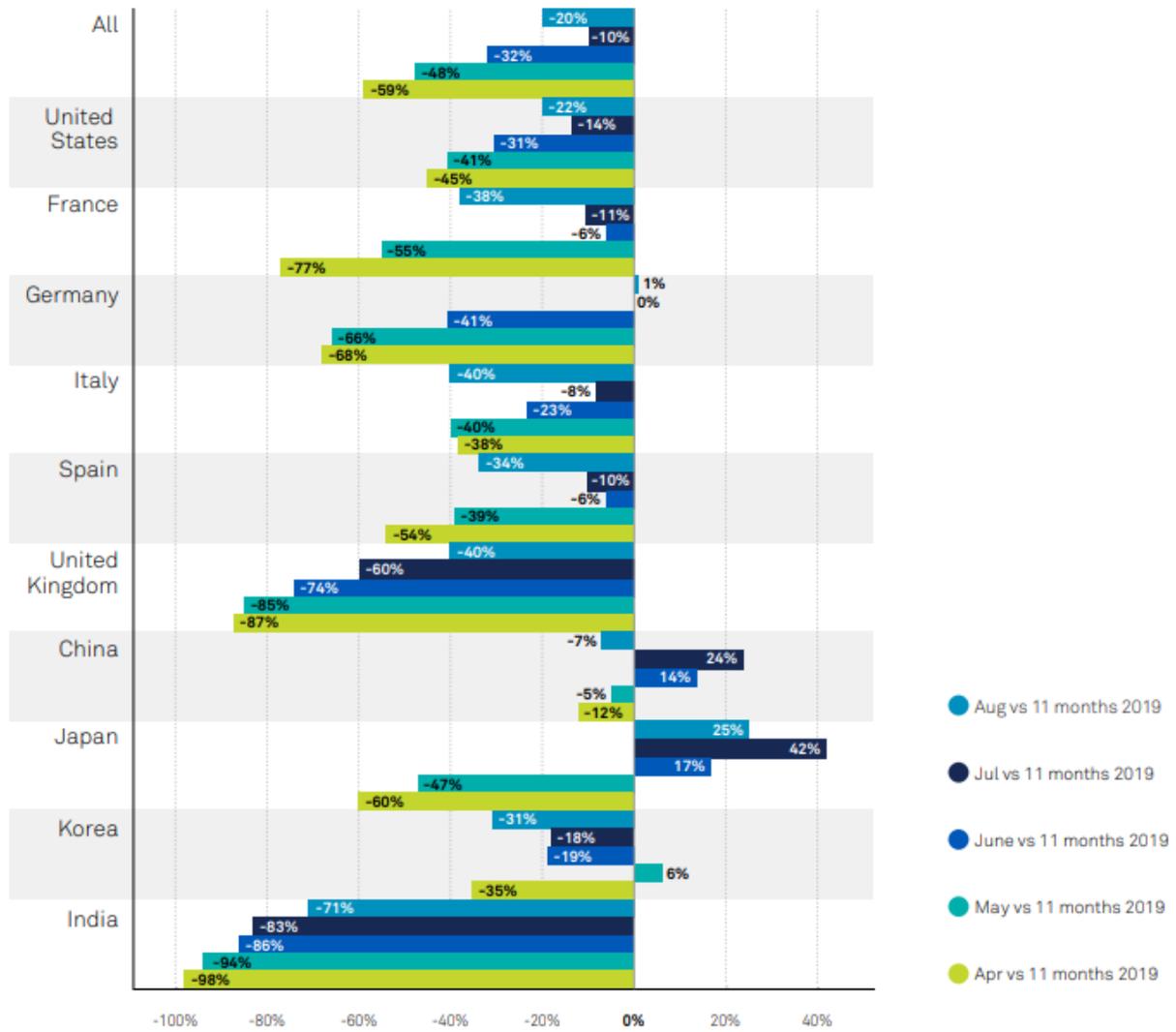
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<sup>3</sup> See [Q15](#).

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.medidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COVID19-Response9.0\\_Clinical-Trials\\_2020921\\_v2.pdf](https://www.medidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COVID19-Response9.0_Clinical-Trials_2020921_v2.pdf)

Enclosure: Change in new patients entering study-sites by region

Figure 1: Change in new patients entering study-sites by region



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Source: [COVID-19 and Clinical Trials: The Medidata Perspective, Release 9.0](#)