5th November 2025

Dear Baroness Smith,

Over the next 10 years, the government's Life Sciences Sector Plan will invest over £2 billion with the aim of making the UK Europe's leading life sciences hub by 2030 and third globally by 2035[1]. Achieving this requires a strong pipeline of skilled professionals, especially medical statisticians who are vital to pre-clinical research, clinical trials and health data interpretation. Protecting Level 7 apprenticeship funding for those over 21 would improve workforce shortages, ensure accessible routes into the field remain open and increase investor confidence. We therefore urge the government to protect access to career entry qualifications, ensure inclusive funding and protect the future of UK life sciences.

The UK's life sciences sector is a key economic driver generating £108 billion in turnover and supporting ~300,000 jobs, with 19 of the top 20 global pharmaceutical companies present in the 'Golden Triangle' area of London, Cambridge and Oxford[2]. In July 2025, the government committed over £2 billion to R&D, genomics, health data, and advanced manufacturing to build on the success demonstrated with the COVID vaccine program[3]. The UK government are currently working to implement the Lord O'Shaughnessy reforms, whose report emphasised the urgent need to expand clinical trial capacity[4], however expansion isn't possible without the skilled workforce to support it.

Medical statisticians are essential across pharmaceuticals, healthcare, biotech, regulatory agencies and academia. Their work drives excellence in the design, analysis and interpretation of experiments and clinical trials, ensuring that research findings are valid, reliable, robust and trustworthy[5]. The proposed funding changes risk damaging not only the pharmaceutical industry but also public health charities, the NHS and clinical trials units. Academic research will also suffer, as fewer MSc students means a smaller pool progressing to PhDs, ultimately leading to reduced research output and innovation.

The Level 7 Medical Statistics Apprenticeship was created to remove barriers to postgraduate education in a field where a Master's degree is the minimum requirement for entry-level roles, with some roles requiring a PhD[6,7]. With limited funding, and

postgraduate student finance not covering tuition fees let alone living costs[8], for many aspiring statisticians, personal loans are the only option. The apprenticeship provides a crucial alternative: paid, hands-on training with a fully funded MSc via the levy. Since 2021, 14 companies including AstraZeneca, Roche, and UCB have embraced this model, yet under the proposed age cap of 21, 89% of current apprentices would have been excluded from this vital program.

As an MSc-level apprenticeship, entry requirements include a BSc, making a 21 and under age cap unworkable. It excludes students on longer courses, those undertaking a placement year, mature students, career changers, and those who paused studies due to illness or family duties. It disproportionately affects individuals from disadvantaged and lower economic backgrounds, where unequal access to education and financial constraints are two of the leading factors preventing entry into higher education[9].

If enacted, this change would constitute discrimination against age, a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010[10].Employers could not lawfully advertise age-restricted roles, and small clinical trials units reliant on grants would struggle to cover higher fees, risking legal action from both candidates (if the offer was rescinded) and funders (if grants were used for alternative purposes).

Pharmaceutical, biotechnology, clinical research organisations and academic employers currently contribute to the apprenticeship levy, however, with the proposed changes they will be unable to access the funding needed to address critical gaps in their workforce. In a global market, this risks making the UK less competitive, as employers may turn to readily available MSc-qualified statisticians from Europe, the US, and Asia Pacific. Statisticians are already listed on the UK's skills shortage list[11], and restricting this pathway only worsens the problem.

We recognise these changes would impact other Level 7 apprenticeships, including those for doctors, nurses, psychologists, engineers, and solicitors, all professions which are already in high demand[11]. While we welcome new pathways for school leavers, cutting funding for other entry routes would jeopardise the entire future pipeline of jobs in sectors essential to the UK economy and public services. After leading employer workshops, we've developed several proposals that preserve both objectives, and we'd welcome the opportunity to discuss these further with you.

As Minister of State and Minister for Women and Equalities, we urge you to draw a distinction between career entry and career progression apprenticeships and protect Level 7 apprenticeship funding for entry level roles. If the UK is to lead globally in life sciences, we must safeguard the future of Medical Statistics and uphold fair, inclusive access to education. Lifting this planned restriction is critical to securing the talent and innovation our ambitions demand.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Willgoss, Data Science UK Site Head at Roche

David Wright, Head of Statistical Innovation at AstraZeneca

Jim Saul, Director and Head, Global Statistics - Early Development at Labcorp

Rachael Lawrance, Senior Director & Functional Lead Statistics at Adelphi Values

Kim Cocks, Senior Director and Global Lead Statistics and Programming at Adelphi Values

Professor Emma Hall, Director of the Clinical Trials and Statistics Unit at The Institute of Cancer Research, London

Tom Seymour, Chief People Officer at Veramed

Susan Lovick, Head of Statistics at Plus-Project Ltd

Naomi Givens, Chair of Statisticians in the Pharmaceutical Industry (PSI)

Valerie Millar, Chair of the Medical Statistician Apprenticeship Trailblazer Group

Jennifer Gilbride, PSI Contracts and Finance Director (employed at Bayer PLC)

Christine Fletcher, VP of Biostatistics for Respiratory, Immunology & Inflammation (signed in a personal capacity)

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