

Senedd Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig
Ymchwil a Datblygu
RD08
Ymateb gan: Moderna Biotech UK Limited

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Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Research and Development
RD08
Evidence from: Moderna Biotech UK Limited





**Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Research and Development Consultation Response**

3. Do the research interests of universities and industry differ and, if so, what actions can be taken and by who to ensure the interests of both sectors are catered for?

Response: In certain sectors, the research interests of industry and universities will differ. However, in Moderna's area of expertise - life sciences - interests between the sector and academia often align. In order to advance the joint interests of industry and Welsh academia, action must be taken to resolve the ongoing issues with clinical trials and UK-wide regulators.

Participation in clinical trials across the UK, including in Wales, is lagging, driven in part by consistently slow and uncertain set-up timelines. A report from The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) in October 2022 found that the number of industry clinical trials in the UK fell by 41% between 2017 and 2021 ([link](#)). This pushed the UK down the global rankings for late-stage clinical research, from second in the world to sixth in Phase II trials, and from fourth to tenth in Phase III trials.

Another report from Cancer Research Wales has found that the pandemic had a significant effect on cancer clinical trials, with new cancer clinical trials 'virtually stopp[ing]', and patient recruitment for ongoing trials being 'severely affected' ([link](#)). While cancer clinical trials have now reopened, patient recruitment continues to remain slow, with the numbers of patients enrolling still falling behind pre-pandemic levels. There is a role here for the Welsh Government to use its influence on UK-wide bodies such as the MHRA to drive forward developments in clinical trials to help realise the goals set out in the Welsh innovation strategy, '*Wales Innovates*,' as well as delivering innovative treatments for the population of Wales.

There is a huge opportunity to make Wales one of the best countries in the world to conduct clinical trials, but in order to take advantage of this, the UK Government alongside its devolved counterparts must rapidly address the range of issues in the existing landscape. Lord O'Shaughnessy's landmark review on clinical trial reform is a positive step in the right direction, and we must ensure his proposals are given serious consideration.

In order to cement Wales and the UK's positions as a science superpower and realise the potential to be a world-leader on clinical trials, our view is that the UK Government should implement measures that will: speed up and simplify the approval process, and create sustainable additional capacity in the UK's clinical trials landscape.

In order to address the declining rate of clinical trials in Wales and across the UK, the Welsh Government and Welsh public health officials should, through networks such as the MHRA Cross-UK group and its membership of the JCVI's various sub-committees:

1. Ensure that additional MHRA funding is directed to scale up the regulator's technical capabilities, increasing staffing in priority areas and speeding up approvals.
2. Embed a prioritisation framework throughout the regulatory process, with an industry voice represented in setting priorities.
3. Introduce a procurement panel to the JCVI.
4. Standardise application processes and timelines throughout the NHS.

4. How can universities and businesses better interact and collaborate with each other?

Response: The *Wales Innovates* Delivery Plan sets out a range of positive actions which would foster improved research and development in Wales through enhanced collaboration between Welsh universities and businesses - including industry sponsored research programmes, industry placements for university students and joint working groups. The *Wales Innovates* Delivery Plan also contains a number of proactive measures to address the increasing demand for education and skills in life sciences, for example within the Education mission and by using forums such as the *Wales Innovation Network*, which will help to increase partnerships between higher education institutions and industry, whether it is through educational outreach, placements, or research collaborations, by develop the life sciences workforce.

The *Collaborative Innovation Plan for Wales* is another positive development which will enable Welsh universities and businesses from across the UK to interact and collaborate. Its core actions of connecting support and making accessing innovation funding streams easier, amplifying communication channels, and sharing data will all help develop closer links between industry and higher education institutions. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) will also be essential here, however to be effective, the proposed funding of £1.4m per year contained in the delivery plan should be provided.

To support the Welsh Government's innovation strategy, Moderna is seeking to partner with academic institutions in all four nations of the UK as part of our commitment to foster innovation in Wales and support Moderna's work and the development of its mRNA technology. The Welsh life sciences sector, as well as Welsh universities have a key role to play here, and we have already committed to the sponsorship of doctorates and PhDs in a number of universities across the UK, including University College London (UCL), Imperial College London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle, and Dundee.

We will also shortly be launching a STEM outreach programme with ring fenced Scottish funding to support the development of the life sciences workforce of tomorrow and Scotland's innovation goals. While this is not directly relevant to Wales, Moderna is looking to increase its educational engagement and outreach programmes in all three devolved nations, including Wales, and would welcome further opportunities to interact and collaborate with Welsh universities, as well as the Welsh Government.

5. How effective is the Welsh Government's Innovation Strategy likely to be in supporting research, development and innovation in Wales?

Response: The *Wales Innovates* strategy contains many positive goals and, if fully implemented, the strategy is likely to be effective in supporting research, development and innovation in Wales. Moderna welcomes the ambitions set out in the strategy, in particular the underpinning principle to focus on

'translational research and commercial opportunities'. Identifying opportunities for university spinouts, industry scaleups and collaborative working between government, industry and academia will be essential and have been rightly highlighted as an area for action in the strategy. Of particular interest is the action contained in the Delivery Plan to 'attract, develop, or consider Public Sector Research Establishments' (PSREs). While deviation from some UK-wide PSREs, such as the MHRA, may cause further regulatory delays to life sciences innovation in Wales, not to mention additional cost and lack of expertise, additional PSREs can be valuable tools to drive innovation and could be a valuable tool for the Welsh Government in achieving its goal of developing commercial opportunities for life sciences and health technology innovation.

As mentioned above, in the field of health innovation, removing barriers to clinical trial research will also be essential for the success of the innovation strategy in terms of health technology and life sciences. Implementing the recommendations of Lord O'Shaughnessy's review into clinical trials will be crucial. The Review provides a framework for devolved solutions to issues surrounding clinical trials and the Welsh Government should seek to shape and implement suitable policy to align both with reforms to the UK-wide clinical trials regulatory landscape and the *Wales Innovates* strategy. The Welsh Government should also look to make full use of its membership of the UK Clinical Research Recovery, Resilience and Growth (RRG) programme, as well as in its interactions with the Health Research Authority (HRA), to drive forward this change, as highlighted by Lord O'Shaughnessy.

An additional challenge for the strategy is workforce pressures, which will need to be addressed in order to meet the strategy's goals. A recent report from the CIPD shows that skills shortage vacancies have more than doubled in Wales over the last six years while the Welsh Government has also now admitted it will not reach its target of creating 125,000 all-age apprenticeships within this Senedd term ([link](#), [link](#)). Recent budget cuts, including a £17.5 million cut to apprenticeship programmes, threaten to undercut the positive goals set out in the innovation strategy and should be addressed to ensure the next generation of STEM workers are receiving the training and career opportunities required to deliver the strategy. Other cuts, such as the £74.7m cut to the education budget, the largest in the recent financial statement, will further affect crucial skills development that is essential to the long term success of Wales innovation goals.