Dear Richard,

Microbiome research and applications
You may be aware that the Science and Technology Committee ran its “My Science Inquiry” initiative in January. This was an open opportunity for the science community, and the wider public, to suggest science and technology areas for scrutiny. We received 86 submissions of which 10 were shortlisted and invited to pitch their idea to us, in person, in Westminster.

One of the people we heard from was Dr Chris Brown at the Society for Applied Microbiology. You can view his full pitch to us at Q23–30 of the transcript (goo.gl/ioSjEe). In his pitch, he highlighted a number of issues relating to microbiomes, including:

- Research in some areas on the application of microbiomes being more developed than others;
- Products developed for use in healthcare and agriculture facing regulations meant for the chemical and pharmaceutical industries;
- Consumer regulation—‘at home’ test kits available for anyone to test their gut microbiome despite the link between microbiomes and certain diseases in some cases being unclear; and
- Some countries (such as the US) being ahead of the UK in this area—in 2016 the US government invested $120m into the launch of a National Microbiome Initiative. At the same time, more than 100 external organisations announced over $400 million in financial and in-kind contributions in support of the overarching goals of the US government’s initiative. The US government also created a working group to devise a cross-government strategic plan for microbiome research, which was published in April 2018.

I would be grateful if you could set out in response to this letter the action that the Government is taking in response to each of the issues listed above. It would also be helpful to know:
- whether the Government is considering introducing a specific national microbiome roadmap;
the Government's views on whether such a roadmap could help to identify the key opportunities for growth and ways to coordinate funding, accelerate innovation and stimulate the early adoption of technology; and
• if the Government has investigated microbiome research as a route to help deliver the goals stated in its Strategic Vision for the UK Bioeconomy in 2030

I would be grateful if you could discuss these issues, with colleagues across Government, especially Ministers in the Department for Health and Social Care and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and incorporate their views into your response. If possible, I would be grateful if you could reply by Friday 15 March.

Yours,

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair