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A New Research Funding Agency

Dear Greg,

Many thanks for your letter of 25 September about the Government's proposals for a new science and technology funding agency. I am delighted to contribute further to your Committee's inquiry.

As you know, the Government committed through the Manifesto and Queen's Speech to establishing this agency to support a new approach to funding high-risk, high-payoff research in emerging fields of research and technology.

The Government consulted leading individuals and organisations within the science and technology community on its proposals from an early stage and will continue to seek expert external input as they are developed further. This has included engagement with UKRI, the National Academies, the Prime Minister's Council of Science and Technology, business representative organisations, sector bodies and individual scientists. We have also consulted with equivalent funding agencies in the US and Europe.

A new funding agency in the UK context

- Initial stakeholder engagement focussed on strategic questions around how to translate a body focussed on high-risk high-payoff research to the UK, beginning with a roundtable in September 2019 chaired by the former Secretary of State and Science Minister. This brought together senior representatives from the National Academies, Government R&D organisations, research charities, the CBI, academics and innovators, and R&D intensive businesses to review the potential benefits of this model within the UK R&D landscape.
- In January, a roundtable was held with Policy Exchange and senior BEIS officials following publication of their report 'Visions of ARPA', which included contributions from two former Science Ministers. Further engagement with contributors to that work, including Dame Nancy Rothwell, took place between January and March at Ministerial and official level.
- Engagement in that period was also conducted with ISCF Challenge Directors, Research Councils, the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering, as well as individual experts such as Professors Andy Hopper and Philip Bond.

- The Prime Minister's Council of Science and Technology gave their views on the Government's approach to the new agency on 4 March with both the Prime Minister and the Science Minister.
- There has also been ongoing engagement on the proposals since March to gather a broad range of views from stakeholders across the UK science and technology community, including ongoing Ministerial discussions with UKRI leadership.
- A roundtable event took place in March with the Office for Life Science's Research, Innovation and Data group.
- Informal discussions, informed in some cases by evidence submitted to this inquiry, have also taken place with the CBI, AIRTO and other National Academies and Learned Societies.
- Government has also gathered a short survey of views from six Public Sector Research Establishments, facilitated by the National Physical Laboratory.
- The Government's approach has also been informed by wider consultation on the innovation landscape, including through innovation roundtables attended by research organisations and charities, researchers and innovators.

International engagement and comparison

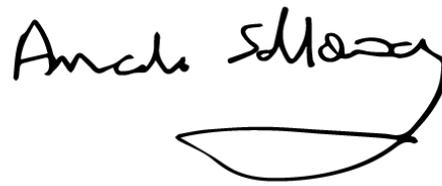
- Discussions on equivalent organisations in other countries were conducted from May – August on core features of the model.
- This included Directors, project managers and researchers with previous and current involvement with ARPA, DARPA, IARPA and Sprin-D.
- These were run alongside conversations with UK organisations including the Faraday Institution, Fraunhofer UK and the Defence and Security Accelerator.

Further consultation

The preliminary engagement described above has underpinned policy development and decision making. Following an announcement on the delivery mechanism for the new funding agency, we intend to progress a further round of Ministerial and official engagement to inform the Government's approach during the next stage of work. This will connect with wider ongoing activity around the R&D Roadmap, and will leverage new sources of advice such as Government's Innovation Expert Group, in addition to the existing stakeholders described above. An important strand of this will be engaging the Devolved Administrations on the Government's approach.

For this new UK funding agency to be successful it must have independence, over both operational and strategic matters. The Government will not stifle the organisation by prescribing the detail of its operation. It will be led by exceptional scientists, researchers and innovators, who must be free to set their own priorities. To deliver this manifesto commitment the Government will therefore create a structure that enables the organisation to operate, and recruit and empower the right people to run it. The Government will appoint an exceptional leader for the organisation in due course, who will themselves be responsible for engaging the scientific community and developing the organisation's vision.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Solloway". The signature is written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a simple, hand-drawn oval shape, likely representing a smile or a flourish.

AMANDA SOLLOWAY MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State – Minister for Science, Research & Innovation