



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

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Darren Jones MP
Chair, BEIS Select Committee
House of Commons,
London, SW1AA

18 February 2021

Dear Darren,

Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)

As you know, this Government is committed to continuing our proud history of scientific excellence. As we build back better from the impacts of coronavirus and begin our future outside the EU we must continue safeguard the UK's status as a science superpower – at the forefront of the cutting-edge research that will fix the problems of tomorrow as well as today.

That is why our manifesto committed to a **new funding agency focused on high-ambition, high-reward research**, and we are very pleased to announce our plans to fulfil this commitment.

This Government will be creating a new **Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)** and we plan to bring forward primary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

ARIA's sole focus will be to fund ground-breaking research; research that sparks transformational societal change through the creation of new technologies and new industries.

With £800 million committed to ARIA up to 2024/25, this new agency will support our efforts to build towards 2.4% of GDP into research and development (R&D) by 2027. ARIA will also form a central part of delivering on our R&D Roadmap, published in July 2020, designed to ensure the UK is the best place for scientists, researchers, and entrepreneurs to live and work, while helping to power up the UK's economic and social recovery.

Since the manifesto, we have spent the last year drawing on the experiences of our international partners. We have listened to the views of the scientific community to understand how similar models across the world can be adapted to maximise the opportunities such an agency will bring to the UK. As Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, Amanda Solloway has also engaged closely with the Science and Technology Committee (Commons) during their inquiry into a high-risk, high-reward



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research funding agency, and we will be responding to their valuable report in due course.

UKRI has a broad remit as the principal R&D funder in the UK, and as part of this, has funded important high-risk, blue skies research. It is therefore crucial that ARIA complements existing funders, and makes a distinct contribution to UK R&D. ARIA will do this by working in partnership with UKRI and across the wider landscape, and its key features will be:

- **A singular focus on high-risk, high reward research.** ARIA will provide support for transformational, long-term science and technology. ARIA will not be restricted in whether it funds pure science, applied science, or technological development – in fact, it may do aspects of each within a single programme.
- **A high tolerance for risk and failure.** Failure is part of the scientific process and particularly central to finding technological breakthroughs. ARIA will not shy away from high risk, in the pursuit of high rewards.
- **Minimal bureaucracy.** The recent approach to COVID rapid response funds and the Vaccine Taskforce has led to a cultural shift around funding and decision-making - towards a more lean and agile system, and ARIA will continue this trend. It will have an innovative approach to funding, with the ability to use mechanisms such as seed grants and prizes to ensure the best support for the best ideas. ARIA's programme managers will be able to pull in scientists on projects within in a matter of weeks. ARIA will need unique, but proportionate, freedoms to reduce administrative burdens on such a small and agile agency.
- **To empower exceptional talent.** There is a role for R&D funding focused on the strategic priorities of Government – such as through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund – but there is also appetite in the scientific community to empower *scientists* to make these decisions. This is why the Government will not prescribe a research focus for the agency. We will attract and retain world-class talent to identify projects, start and stop them quickly and redirect funding efficiently.

Next Steps

- The Commons Science and Technology Committee's report rightly notes that it is important to strike a balance to ensure best practice whilst reducing bureaucracy for ARIA. Therefore, we will be introducing a range of legislative and non-legislative mechanisms for aspects such as scrutiny, autonomy, funding, and ARIA's relationship with UKRI, to enable ARIA to succeed. As the report also noted, some of these will be different to what we are used to.



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- The ARIA Bill will establish the agency as a statutory body. It will afford it with specific functions, powers and governance arrangements to provide it with long-term security, which is crucial to this type of research.
- During the passage of the Bill, we will recruit a visionary CEO and experienced Chair. They will build ARIA by setting the agenda, shaping the culture, and building an exceptional team for the agency. They will be supported by a board, which will include the Government Chief Scientific Advisor, to ensure strategic oversight and good governance across ARIA's activities.
- We will also soon publish a Policy Statement, which will set out the vision for ARIA, and explore its model in more detail. This will further open up the conversation with the research community as we determine the specific mechanisms of ARIA's operations.
- It is only right, with the autonomy that ARIA will have, to finalise these decisions with a CEO and Chair in post. We will therefore publish a Framework Document on ARIA's relationship with my Department accordingly, taking into account the insights that we will have gathered from the sector by that stage.
- We expect ARIA to be fully operational in 2022.

We really value the experience of the Committee and am committed to keeping you updated as we progress these exciting plans. We welcome any thoughts from you following this update and look forward to further engagement.

We hope you will share our view that ARIA offers us an opportunity to create new global standards for innovation. By funding research and brilliant ideas across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, this exceptional new agency will ensure the most ground-breaking science can happen in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

RT HON KWASI KWARTENG MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy &
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AMANDA SOLLOWAY MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of
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