



Department for
Business, Innovation,
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Regulatory Innovation Office
Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade
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Dame Chi Onwurah MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

27 August 2026

Dear Dame Chi

Follow up to oral evidence, 14 July 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence on the work of the Regulatory Innovation Office. I am grateful for the Committee's continued focus on regulatory innovation, and its work to highlight both the opportunities of innovation and the importance of supporting responsible adoption.

I promised the Committee two things, and I have set both out below. I also want to say something more considered about impact than I managed in the time available.

Measuring impact (Q107)

The end goal for RIO is straightforward. We want an innovative firm with a good idea to reach the market faster than it otherwise would, and to reach it safely.

We do this in collaboration with regulators. The decisive steps needed, whether this involves changing guidance or shortening an approval route, or lifting a restriction, is theirs to take. We also hope our work encourages them to go beyond the specific interventions we shape directly.

We track three different ways of assessing whether what RIO has done, in collaboration with regulators, is making a difference.

- The first is whether the barrier itself has moved: e.g whether guidance now exists where it did not, whether an approval route has been shortened, whether a restriction has been lifted or clarified.
- The second is whether firms are behaving differently as a result, which is where the novel foods work with the Food Standards Agency has been instructive. Halving approval times matters, but the more telling signal was the near doubling of businesses applying once the direction of travel became clear. Regulatory certainty changes behaviour before the regulation itself changes.

- The third is whether the change holds and spreads, which is where RIO's approach is least mature. This takes longer to assess, because you need data at scale, for example from companies applying to the regulators for approvals and passing through the regulatory process, before you can see growth and change with any confidence. We would expect to return to it around a year on from a change taking effect.

I offered to send you examples of how, in drones and other areas, we have set ourselves particular benchmarks for performance. Following the Committee's questioning on this, we have done more work on metrics of performance, and our delivery milestones and impact metrics for drones and engineering biology will shortly be published on gov.uk. I attach an advance draft of our drones metrics. This gives a fair sense of how we are approaching these questions in practice, and of the level at which we think it is reasonable for us to measure.

AI models and drug safety (Q129 to 130)

The AI sandbox referred to by Lord Vallance has not yet commenced. An open call for Expressions of Interest will be used to select participants, and no AI models have yet been submitted or assessed. The sandbox will provide a structured regulatory environment to explore the development, validation and potential regulatory acceptability of AI-based tools that may support drug development and medicines safety assessment.

A key objective will be to improve understanding of the data used to develop these tools, including data provenance, training data characteristics, representativeness and potential sources of bias, and ensuring any personal health information is used in accordance with relevant legal, ethical and regulatory requirements, including appropriate anonymisation.

I hope this is helpful and would be happy to provide further detail if it would assist the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Willetts

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