



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the Constitution

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Lord Callanan
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Horse Guards Road
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31 October 2021

Dear Lord Callanan,

Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill

I write on behalf of the Constitution Committee in relation to the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill.

We note your intention that the ARIA will be independent of government and “will be led by scientists with the freedom to identify and fund transformational science and technology at speed.” However, there does not appear to be any guarantee that members of ARIA will be appointed by way of normal civil service procedures; nor is it clear that its members will operate independently of government. There is also no commitment to the independence of ARIA on the face of the Bill. As the Secretary of State’s appointment powers are considerable, the independence of ARIA could therefore be called into question.

We also note the intention for ARIA to operate outside the main UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) framework, so it will not be bound by the ‘Haldane principle’. The Committee is not opposed to such an arms-length approach, in principle, but we believe it is still important to maintain an appropriate level of accountability to Parliament, beyond the requirement to lay an annual report and accounts and provide evidence to select committees. As Parliament enjoys a degree of oversight of the UKRI framework, we would welcome greater clarity about the parameters within which ARIA will operate and the principles which will guide it.

We also find it difficult to understand the rationale for excluding ARIA from the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Public Contract Regulations 2015, particularly as ARIA’s commercial interests are already protected by the Bill. However, we note that the Bill allows for regulations to be made to define ARIA as a public authority for the purposes of FOIA 2000. We would be grateful if you could provide further justification for this approach.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Taylor of Bolton
Chair of the Constitution Committee