

Bill introduced to create high risk, high reward research agency ARIA

- New Bill introduced to set up UK's Advanced Research and Invention Agency, an independent research body which will fund high-risk, high-reward scientific research
- legislation will provide ARIA with the powers to have an innovative and flexible approach to programme funding, as well as giving ARIA the ability to pursue ground-breaking discoveries
- the Bill equips ARIA with unique powers and freedoms to invest in ambitious research at unprecedented speeds

A new Bill to create the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA), an independent UK scientific research agency that will fund cutting-edge science and technology, was introduced to Parliament today (Tuesday 2 March 2021).

The Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill sets out the legislative framework and governance for the new agency, which was announced by the Business Secretary last month. The agency will empower some of the world's most exceptional scientists and researchers to identify and fund transformational areas of research to turn incredible ideas into new technologies, discoveries, products and services – helping to maintain the UK's position as a global science superpower.

The design of the agency allows this work to take place at greater speed, with flexibility and minimised bureaucracy.

The Bill equips ARIA with unique powers and freedoms that it needs to succeed, explicitly allowing the agency a much higher tolerance for failure than other UK funding agencies. This flexibility is necessary to enable the agency to develop technologies at speed that could create profound positive change for the UK and the rest of the world, recognising that failure is an essential part of scientific discovery.

As part of this, the Bill provides the agency with the powers to have an innovative and flexible approach to programme funding, including seed grants and prize incentives, as well as being able to start and stop projects according to their success. This innovative approach to funding will give its leadership the tools and autonomy to push boundaries in search of new discoveries.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

This Bill marks a momentous step forward for UK R&D – creating a bold, new scientific agency with invention at its core, putting the UK in a formidable position to respond to the most pressing global challenges of our time.

The success of our Vaccine Taskforce has shown the value of putting power in the hands of our best scientists to make swift, high-risk funding decisions – free from unnecessary bureaucracy. With this Bill, I am determined to ensure ARIA upholds this winning formula.

ARIA will be equipped with all the tools and freedoms it needs to succeed – placing our world leading scientists at the heart of decision making, stripping back red tape and giving our best minds license to invest in the most transformative research at speeds like never before.

ARIA will be based on models that have proved successful in other countries, in particular the influential US Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) model. This was instrumental in creating transformational technologies such as the internet and GPS, changing the way people live and work, while increasing productivity and growth. More recently, ARPA's successor, DARPA, was a vital pre-pandemic funder of mRNA vaccines and antibody therapies, leading to critical COVID therapies.

In the US, DARPA benefits from autonomy and flexibility outside the standard government contracting and granting standards. The ARIA Bill will provide the agency with exemption from the existing Public Contract Regulations, enabling ARIA to procure vital services and equipment with maximum flexibility so that it can carry out ground-breaking research at speeds rivalling a private investment firm.

The Bill will also purposefully streamline the agency's operating structure and minimise bureaucratic processes so it can focus all its efforts and resources on transformational research.

The government's intention, therefore, is for ARIA not to be subject to the Freedom of Information Act to reduce the administrative time required to process FOI requests and protect Britain's competitive advantage, while allowing the agency to run an extremely lean and agile operating mode – which is essential to its design and ultimate success.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

Today is another milestone moment for the UK's world class R&D community, as we introduce to Parliament the legislation needed to create ARIA.

By facilitating fast and flexible funding, removing bureaucracy and accepting failure as an essential part of scientific discovery, this new agency will empower our scientists and innovators to go where they haven't been before – accelerating the development of future products and technologies that could change all our lives for the better.

While the Bill will prioritise the formation of an agile research agency by

stripping back red tape, it will also ensure this is balanced with necessary accountability and oversight.

Administrative exemptions will sit alongside legal obligations for ARIA to proactively share information about its activities. The agency will be subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office, as is usual for a public body, and will be required to submit an annual report of its functions and statement of accounts, which will be laid before Parliament for scrutiny.

The Business Secretary will also have robust powers to intervene in the interests of national security if required, for example, directing the agency to cease collaboration with certain hostile actors or closing specific programmes.

Recognising that pursuing ambitious, high risk research requires patience, the government's intention is to provide ARIA with the necessary long-term security: the Bill sets a 10-year grace period before any potential dissolution of the agency can be triggered.

The Bill's introduction to Parliament today follows the Business Secretary's [announcement of the new agency](#) on Friday 19 February 2021. The aim is for the agency to be fully operational by 2022.

A recruitment campaign will begin over the coming weeks to identify a world class interim Chief Executive and Chair to shape the vision, direction and research priorities for the agency.

ARIA will be backed by £800 million of government funding over the course of this Parliament, as set out by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak in the March 2020 Budget.