

# Agreement on the Independence of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)

Between

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The Scottish Government

The Welsh Government

The Northern Ireland Executive

## **Introduction**

1. This Agreement is between the following parties (the "Parties"):
  - i. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
  - ii. The Scottish Government
  - iii. The Welsh Government
  - iv. The Northern Ireland Executive
2. The Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) Act establishes a new statutory corporation to fund scientific research. This will be a UK-wide independent research agency to deliver high-risk, high-reward funding for transformational scientific research.
3. This Agreement operates in accordance with the principles and provisions outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements on Devolution between the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, and is consistent and complemented by other guidance on common working arrangements.
4. This Agreement sets out the principles underpinning the design of ARIA and the terms of the Parties' engagement with it. It does not prejudice the legislative framework underpinning ARIA or research, and innovation policy across the UK, including powers that are reserved, devolved, and those that are shared or exercisable concurrently in the Science and Technology Act 1965.
5. The Parties agree to use best endeavours to comply with the terms and the spirit of the Agreement. The Agreement provides a statement of political intent, but is not intended to create new, or override, existing legal relations obligations, or to be justiciable.

### **ARIA's design and benefits**

6. The views of the research and innovation community throughout the UK have been reflected in ARIA's design. It is essential that ARIA complements, rather than duplicates, the UK's existing funding infrastructure. The community has sent strong, clear messages about how this should be done, based around the need for independence and risk appetite. The parties recognise the guiding principles of ARIA's design to be:
  - I. Strategic autonomy: ARIA will not be subject to ministerial direction of its funding choices. Instead, funding will be allocated by an independent leadership and Programme Managers with technical expertise.
  - II. Operational autonomy: ARIA will be a small organisation with the independent leadership able to recruit in line with their own priorities, set its own procedures and create the institutional culture that best suits its objectives.
  - III. Minimal bureaucracy: ARIA will not be subject to the layers of approval and review that might exist elsewhere in the funding system or in government. It will be agile, efficient and empowered to experiment with its structures, methods and processes.
  
7. The Parties agree that upholding these principles in all interactions with ARIA - with the overarching requirement that the involvement of all four administrations of the UK be minimised - will equip it to succeed, add most value to the funding landscape and bring the greatest benefit to the UK.

### **· Maximum autonomy**

8. The Parties recognise the importance of, and commit to protecting, the principles in Paragraph 6.
  
9. These principles are reflected in the ARIA Act. Unlike comparable bodies such as UK Research and Innovation, for ARIA there is no power of direction for government, and information rights are strictly limited. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's role is constrained to essential functions required in the establishment and delivery of ARIA, including national security, necessary appointments, and the provision of funding allocated by the UK Parliament.
  
10. As the Secretary of State alone is empowered by the ARIA Act to make grants to ARIA, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is the sponsoring department for ARIA.

11. This funding of ARIA requires a minimal level of accountability for the spending of public money that runs through the UK Government, with basic public body governance requirements including a Framework Agreement between ARIA and BEIS. This will balance the need for accountability to the public with the agency's need for autonomy in line with the principles in paragraph 6.
12. The Parties will not seek to direct ARIA's funding through legislation or other means, or to confer functions on ARIA such that its operations would be constrained by administrative processes or bureaucratic review.
13. The Parties will facilitate ARIA's seamless operation throughout the UK, and will not seek to create differing obligations and responsibilities across the four Administrations.
14. The Parties will not seek to take a greater role in determining ARIA's purpose, functions or priorities - through legislation or other means - without the approval of all the other Parties.

## **Engagement**

15. While ARIA will have the greatest possible freedom to pursue its chosen avenues of research, it will complement and build on the science and innovation ecosystem that exists across the whole of the UK.
16. ARIA will share its completed annual report with the Parties in parallel each year for their information, enabling them to be shared with the respective legislatures if the Parties wish (the Secretary of State is required to lay the report before the UK Parliament).
17. The UK Government Chief Scientific Advisor holds a non-executive position on the ARIA Board, as an independent science advisor. They will consult with their counterparts in the Scottish and Welsh Governments and with an equivalent representative on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive on input into ARIA.
18. This input will be provided through a new CSA forum of the GCSA and devolved administration CSAs that will meet twice annually. This formal addition to the existing CSA network will ensure the policy priorities of all four UK administrations are translated into scientific challenges and jointly communicated directly to ARIA's executive leadership. In keeping with the principles in paragraph 6, there is no obligation for ARIA to respond to these government priorities, as funding decisions will be taken by its independent executive leadership.

## Disputes

19. The current Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements on Devolution sets out a dispute procedure which will be followed should a dispute be unresolved through normal administrative channels.

## Signatures

*David Mundell*

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy



On behalf of the Scottish Government

*Vaughan Gething*

On behalf of the Welsh Government



On behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive