

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

ADVANCED RESEARCH AND INVENTION AGENCY BILL

Third Sitting

Tuesday 20 April 2021

(Morning)

CONTENTS

CLAUSE 1 agreed to.

SCHEDULE 1 under consideration when the Committee adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Saturday 24 April 2021

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2021

This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/.

The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: JUDITH CUMMINS, MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE, †ESTHER McVEY, DEREK TWIGG

- | | |
|---|---|
| † Baker, Duncan (<i>North Norfolk</i>) (Con) | † Onwurah, Chi (<i>Newcastle upon Tyne Central</i>) (Lab) |
| † Bell, Aaron (<i>Newcastle-under-Lyme</i>) (Con) | Owen, Sarah (<i>Luton North</i>) (Lab) |
| † Blackman, Kirsty (<i>Aberdeen North</i>) (SNP) | Richardson, Angela (<i>Guildford</i>) (Con) |
| † Butler, Dawn (<i>Brent Central</i>) (Lab) | † Solloway, Amanda (<i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy</i>) |
| † Crosbie, Virginia (<i>Ynys Môn</i>) (Con) | † Tomlinson, Michael (<i>Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury</i>) |
| † Fletcher, Mark (<i>Bolsover</i>) (Con) | † Zeichner, Daniel (<i>Cambridge</i>) (Lab) |
| † Flynn, Stephen (<i>Aberdeen South</i>) (SNP) | |
| † Furniss, Gill (<i>Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough</i>) (Lab) | |
| † Hunt, Jane (<i>Loughborough</i>) (Con) | Sarah Ioannou, Seb Newman, <i>Committee Clerks</i> |
| † Mayhew, Jerome (<i>Broadland</i>) (Con) | |
| † Metcalfe, Stephen (<i>South Basildon and East Thurrock</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |

Public Bill Committee

Tuesday 20 April 2021

(Morning)

[ESTHER McVEY in the Chair]

Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill

9.25 am

The Chair: We are now sitting in public and the proceedings are being broadcast. Before we begin, I have a few preliminary announcements. Members will understand the need to respect social distancing guidance. In line with the Commission's decisions, face coverings should be worn in Committee unless Members are speaking or medically exempt. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to hansardnotes@parliament.uk. Please switch electronic devices to silent; teas and coffees are not allowed during sittings.

We now begin line-by-line consideration of the Bill. The selection list for today's sitting is available in the room and shows how the selected amendments have been grouped together for debate. Amendments grouped together are generally on the same or similar issues. Please note that decisions on amendments do not take place in the order in which they are debated but in the order that they appear on the amendment paper. The selection list shows the order of debates. Decisions on each amendment are taken when we come to the clause to which the amendment relates. A Member who has put their name to the leading amendment in a group is called first; other Members are then free to catch my eye to speak to all or any of the amendments within that group. A Member may speak more than once in a single debate.

At the end of the debate on a group of amendments, or new clauses and schedules, I shall again call the Member who moved the leading amendment or new clause. Before they sit down, they will need to indicate whether they wish to withdraw the amendment or new clause, or seek a decision. If any Member wishes to press to a vote any other amendment in a group, including grouped new clauses and schedules, they need to let me know. I shall use my discretion to decide whether to allow a separate stand part debate on individual clauses and schedules following the debate on the relevant amendments.

Clause 1

ESTABLISHMENT OF ARIA

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I beg to move amendment 2, in clause 1, page 1, line 3, leave out "Advanced Research and Invention Agency" and insert "Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency".

This amendment would modify the name of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency to the Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 3, in clause 1, page 1, line 5, leave out "ARIA" and insert "AREPA".

This amendment would reflect a modification to the name of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency to the Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency.

Amendment 4, in clause 1, page 1, line 6, leave out "ARIA" and insert "AREPA".

This amendment would reflect a modification to the name of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency to the Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency.

Amendment 26, in clause 15, page 5, line 35, leave out "Advanced Research and Invention Agency"

and insert

"Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency".

This amendment will modify the ARIA short title.

Amendment 1, title, line 1, leave out

"Advanced Research and Invention Agency"

and insert

"Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency".

This amendment would modify the long title of the Bill to reflect a change to the name of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency to the Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency.

Daniel Zeichner: It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms McVey. I look forward to a fascinating discussion about a very important set of issues. Let me start by apologising on behalf of the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central, who is delayed this morning but will be joining us in an hour or so. I have the pleasure of opening this morning's sitting. I thank those who set up last week's evidence sessions. I have sat on a number of Bill Committees in my short time in Parliament, and I have to say that I think it was the most informative evidence session that I have come across. I hope we all learned something from it—I certainly did.

The evidence session led directly to the first set of amendments. David Clevely suggested this idea, in fact, and I remind the Committee of what he said in his observations:

"All the examples given of contributions that make a difference have all been, it strikes me, about engineering, so I suggest that we rename this the 'Advanced Research and Engineering Agency'. To be honest, 'invention' strikes me a bit like something in the 1950s, with somebody emerging from a shed with a gadget that has just blown their hair off"—

a bit like my hair this morning. He continued:

"Peter Highnam pointed out 'projects', so we might actually consider it to be the 'Advanced Research and Engineering Projects Agency'."—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 74, Q76.]

That is a really important point. I suspect that much of the discussion today and in successive sittings will really be about the finer points of setting up an organisation, and will be relatively dry. Amendment 2 goes to the heart of what the agency is actually about and its whole purpose.

I very much hope that we will get wide engagement from all members of the Committee. I know that Government Whips are sometimes inclined to suggest that Government Members should hold their fire, but we have lots of expertise here today, and I think we are all trying to get the best outcome, so I hope people will feel that they can contribute.

One thing that struck me about the evidence session was just how many witnesses highlighted the need for greater clarity about the purpose of the agency. Professor Wilsdon put it very well when he said:

“I think that trying to bring more clarity, or at least a sense of how this issue will be addressed through the governance of this new thing, is really important.”

He warned:

“Otherwise, you or your successors, and we or our successors, will be back here in a few years’ time, asking ourselves why it did not work.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 23, Q19.]

Commentary and observations from the outside world say the same thing. The Government may have a view, and I hope the Minister will take the opportunity to clarify it. Our concern is that the Bill lacks clarity.

I found the evidence session very helpful, particularly because I started with a bit of prejudice: I thought I would struggle with anything that had been promoted by Dominic Cummings. I am not a grudgey sort of person—I do not bear a grudge. Actually, I do bear more than 65 million grudges on behalf of every man, woman and child in the country who was outraged by his behaviour this time last year, without going into what happened before that. It was disappointing that he did not choose to make himself available for our evidence session, because this is clearly a project associated with and driven by him. Perhaps that was for the best, though, because it makes it less about him and more about the future of research and development in our country.

The proposed name change came out of the evidence that he gave to the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which I watched. As one often does late in the evening, I was scrolling through the TV channels and suddenly I found hon. Members interviewing Dominic Cummings on the TV. Usually, I would move on to the football, but there was something extraordinarily engaging about that hour-long session. It seemed meandering and self-indulgent, and it revealed his loathing and hatred for everything in the world, particularly bureaucracy: whether it be Brussels bureaucracy, the blob or the way in which research and development work in this country, everything is designed to stop the process of invention emerging.

We all want it to be easier to do things. None of us wants bureaucracy, but most of us understand why it is there—there is a reason for it. Of course, we have to fight against it, but particularly in the last week or two it has become strikingly obvious why we need it: to make sure we do not leave ourselves open to cronyism and the abuse of public money. Over the years, all politicians have felt just how frustrating democracy can sometimes be. Would it not be so much better if just a few of us—a few blokes, probably—could just get together with Dominic and run the country? Would that not be so much better? We have seen examples of that through history and in other places. Without going back to clichés, there is a reason why we stick with democracy: it is better than all the other difficult systems.

I was struck by Mr Cummings’s constant invocation of the way things have been discovered in the past. He has talked frequently of the Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, which is very dear to me. For those who come to Cambridge on the train from London, although there are many striking buildings outside Cambridge, it is particularly iconic building. It

is not just a building, though; hugely important work goes on in it. Scientists from across the world, particularly Europe, are doing fantastic work. They have won a disproportionate number of Nobel prizes over the years.

Mr Cummings’s view was to hark back to the starting point, when there were some fantastic breakthroughs in a shed on the site of the old Addenbrooke’s Hospital. He almost seemed to think that they needed to be in the shed to get the breakthroughs. He was harking back to a very different world—perhaps the world that he wants us to be, back in the 1950s. That is not the world we are in now. That is the crunch with the name change.

What is in a name? In this case, a great deal. The word “invention” in the current title is useful to create a cheery acronym—I will come back to that—but actually it points to completely the wrong approach. As David said, it is bit like something from the 1950s, when someone emerges from a shed with a gadget that has blown their hair off. It is a sepia-tinged view of innovation: “The great breakthroughs were achieved against the odds, largely by blokes in sheds.” Well, perhaps they were, but that was then and this is now, and all the other witnesses painted a very different picture of how innovation happens.

Tabitha Goldstaub was particularly clear. She told us:

“I worry also about the lone genius model. We are well beyond individual success being seen like that. This is all about community. One of the things I have heard time and again is that people do not want to be funded as individuals but as groups of people. It is a community that would come together around a programme manager that is really important.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 54, Q52.]

That was the real force of the evidence from those who know best—those who have been doing this in America. The session with the people from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency was particularly powerful. DARPA does not have invention in its title and there is a good reason for that: it is not what it does.

Dr Highnam was particularly clear:

“DARPA: defence and national security. Clear mission; clear scope in which to work. Of the ARPA-like entities around that I am aware of, the only one that very closely follows the DARPA model would be the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity in the US intelligence community. When you change what I would regard as the key elements—ephemeral or temporary people, project based, and no fixed assets—that have made DARPA nimble and forward leaning for 63 years now, you get something else.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 43, Q37.]

Note that he said “project based”—it is about projects, which is why that is in our amendment. It is a much more accurate description of what the agency should be about.

Dr Highnam said more, and this is probably more significant:

“The p in DARPA stands for ‘projects’, which is critical for a place like DARPA. We are not doing technology area x or y just because, and we do not do it for the long term. We have projects that are well defined at the beginning. A case has to be made. They are monitored, they have metrics and all manner of independent evaluation associated with them before we go out to find the best teams we can to participate and to be funded to work on that research. Then that project ends.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 40, Q34.]

He could not have been clearer—that is what makes it work.

[Daniel Zeichner]

If we contrast that clarity with the Bill, we see that the evidence sessions clearly revealed the muddle in Government thinking, as a succession of witnesses tried to get their heads around what this agency is for. It is certainly not clear in the Bill. As it stands, without amendment 2 the muddle over what the agency does remains unresolved, which inevitably means a muddle over money and resources, because while managing projects does not necessarily require a big spend, invention is quite another matter. The name change links to that vexed question of whether it is new money.

When Dame Ottoline Leyser of UK Research and Innovation—she is a constituent of mine—was asked what she would do with an extra £800 million if she had it to spend, her reply was skilful in the extreme. It was tactful, but it was a laugh-out-loud moment, because it was quite clear that this is not what she would choose to spend it on. Professor McDonald made a similar point, as did a succession of other witnesses. All of them were absolutely clear that it has to be new.

We in the Opposition certainly want new. Our aspiration is to go beyond 2.4%—we want 3%. We are happy to support new money, but I suspect that if it were a Labour proposal, the first question would be, “Where is the money coming from?” Perhaps the Minister can tell us that, because I do not think we have any clues. We welcome it, none the less.

In reality, despite the creative attempts at amendments from us and from the Scottish National party, we know that future money cannot be guaranteed. That is why the purpose of the agency is so important and why the “Projects” element matters so much.

The amendment also seeks to add “Engineering”, partly as that was suggested by David Cleevly in his witness statement. As he rightly pointed out, many of the examples are engineering examples. I have to say “partly” because the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central, is a chartered engineer. Perhaps that is not actually so significant. If we took out “Engineering”, our amendment would result in the name being ARPA—the Advanced Research and Projects Agency—which is a straight copy. We are seeking to emulate largely what ARPA has achieved, which I am not sure is such a bad thing.

I have to say that on Second Reading I had a slightly tetchy exchange with the Secretary of State about whether the proposed agency was modelled or based on whatever. It is clearly learning from experiences. We have some other not dissimilar examples: we have the small business research initiative, which is the SBRI. I have spent many years trying to promote and support it, and it is based on the American model, the SBIR—small business innovation research—so we have some examples of borrowing from the Americans and switching the letters round. Given the number of different American ARPAs, we could end up with ARPA UK, or it could be ARPA GB or ARPA England—it depends how the world goes in the years ahead—but, frankly, we are not precious about it. However, the shift from “Projects” to “Invention” really does matter, so if the Government chose to make that change, or whether it was an accident, I would like the Minister to explain why and what the Government think is significant about the word “Invention” in the title of the agency.

Dr Highnam of DARPA said that if one does not do it in the way that he described, one gets something else. It is therefore only reasonable to ask the Minister what it is that she wants to do differently. What is it that she wants the agency to be? If the agency is going to cost an initial £800 million, what makes her confident that it will work? We heard from a number of witnesses, including Felicity Burch, who talked about previous efforts to move our research system closer to the “edge of the edge”, as it has been described. I am thinking of the Technology Strategy Board and the industrial strategy challenge fund. Felicity Burch said in her evidence that setting the agency up on a statutory basis makes a difference, and I think it does, but only if it is done in the right way.

Let me conclude by returning just briefly to the operative theme that I have encouraged throughout the debate so far. I have been through Puccini and Purcell, but to finish where I began with Dominic Cummings, could we annoy him a little bit more by suggesting that the song might be the “Ode to Joy”? It is not quite an aria, more a collective chorale, but I think one of the projects we could turn to is to create more joy. In general, let us have clarity by making the purpose of the agency clear in its title. Let us recognise that it really is about projects, and do so by adopting the series of amendments under consideration. That would give the new agency a genuinely clear purpose, with the challenge framed by the Government. In our view, that has a much better chance of success, and as such is worth supporting with enthusiasm.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Amanda Solloway): What a pleasure it is to be under your chairmanship, Ms McVey, and to listen to the hon. Member for Cambridge. He talked about a wide range of issues, most which I am sure will be addressed in further debate. In this instance, I will concentrate on amendment 2 and those grouped with it.

The creation of ARIA represents an exciting opportunity to add to our already excellent research and development funding landscape. That came out very strongly on Second Reading, and I hope that today’s debate and last week’s evidence sessions demonstrate the importance of the legislation. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Opposition parties for the constructive way in which they have approached the Bill thus far, and I look forward to discussing the amendments that they have tabled.

Amendment 2 and associated amendments would change the name of the agency to the advanced research and engineering projects agency, or AREPA. I must say that when the hon. Gentleman raised this option last Wednesday, I did not realise that it was a serious suggestion. As I am sure he can imagine, a certain amount of thought and discussion has gone into choosing the name of the agency, and I do prefer the musical reference to naming the agency after a flatbread.

On a serious note, I recognise how central engineering successes have been to the historic breakthroughs of ARPA and DARPA in the United States. I found the evidence of Sir Jim McDonald of the Royal Academy of Engineering and others hugely interesting. I share the hon. Gentleman’s concern that those contributions should not be overlooked. I very much hope that ARIA

builds on the history of engineering excellence that we have right across the UK, and supports the next generation of transformational breakthroughs. The powers of the body are key. I assure the Committee that just as UK Research and Innovation is able to provide funding for engineering research through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, ARIA's powers extend to conducting engineering projects in exactly the same way as projects in any other area of science. That important discipline has not been forgotten. Our ambitions can be achieved without renaming ARIA, and I cannot accept the amendment.

9.45 am

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to the Minister. I admit that there is a sense of gentle joshing in the name change. It is not the engineering issue that is important to us, but the invention issue. I listened closely to for an explanation from the Minister of why “invention” has been chosen, but did not hear one; I would be grateful if she intervened to explain. I outlined clearly why the projects element is so important. We heard a consistent view from witnesses throughout the evidence sessions, so I see no reason why the amendment should not be seriously considered.

Looking at the numbers around me, I do not expect to secure an overwhelming victory in a vote, but this amendment will go on for further discussion elsewhere. I hope that it will be thought about carefully, because it simply cannot be denied that, both in the evidence sessions and outside this place, there is concern about clarity of purpose. We all want the agency to succeed, and the amendment is a constructive suggestion. Personally, I would go for “ARPA”, to make it absolutely clear that we are trying to do what the Americans have achieved in the past. Neither the Minister nor anyone else has given me a sense of clarity about what are actually trying to achieve—to say, “That is what we need to achieve, and that is what is missing.” That is why I wish to divide the Committee on the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3, Noes 9.

Division No. 1]

AYES

Butler, Dawn
Furniss, Gill

Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Baker, Duncan
Bell, Aaron
Crosbie, Virginia
Fletcher, Mark
Hunt, Jane

Mayhew, Jerome
Metcalf, Stephen
Solloway, Amanda
Tomlinson, Michael

Question accordingly negatived.

The Chair: As the remaining amendments to clause 1 are consequential to amendment 2, to which the Committee has just disagreed, I will not call amendments 3 or 4, as it would be inconsistent with the decision that the Committee has just reached.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Amanda Solloway: The establishment of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency as a statutory corporation means that the body has its own legal personality that is distinct from the that of the Crown or its individual members, as set out in paragraph 1 of schedule 1. That allows ARIA to enter into legal relations such as contracts, and to hold property in its own right.

A statutory corporation also allows the specific terms of the relationship between Government and ARIA to be set out in law—the composition of the board and the appointments process, for example. In setting that out, we have sought to balance the freedom required for ARIA to deliver transformational scientific and technological advances, but with appropriate ministerial oversight. I hope that hon. Members agree that that is the right vehicle for the creation of the agency.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1

THE ADVANCED RESEARCH AND INVENTION AGENCY

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I beg to move amendment 5, in schedule 1, page 6, line 10 at end insert—

“Memorandum of understanding

2 (1) ARIA and UK Research and Innovation must prepare a memorandum of understanding.

(2) The memorandum must set out how ARIA and UK Research and Innovation intend to co-operate with each other and avoid overlap between the exercise by ARIA of its functions and the exercise by UK Research and Invention of its functions.

(3) The memorandum shall be reviewed on an annual basis and revised as necessary by agreement between ARIA and UK Research & Innovation.”

This amendment would require ARIA and UKRI to prepare a memorandum of understanding setting out how they will collaborate and avoid overlap.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 6, in schedule 1, page 6, line 2, at end insert—

‘(c) the Chief Executive Officer of UK Research and Innovation; and’.

This amendment would make the CEO of UKRI a non-executive member of ARIA in order to achieve greater collaboration and communication between the two bodies.

Dawn Butler: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey. I do not think anyone will vote against the amendment, because all it seeks to do is ensure that there is a memorandum of understanding between ARIA and UK Research and Innovation about how they will work together. The two organisations will be working on the same themes, though doing things slightly differently, and they need to communicate. I am happy to give way to anyone who thinks it is not a good idea that UKRI and ARIA communicate. The amendment is practical and sensible and seeks only to clarify how they would work together.

Our evidence session was informative. Dame Ottoline Leyser from UKRI said:

“The people employed at ARIA will absolutely need to understand deeply what UKRI is doing and what the opportunities are across that research base in order to deliver their vision. I would expect a very close working relationship with ARIA to allow that to happen.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee, 14 April 2021; c. 6, Q3.*]

[Dawn Butler]

When she said that, I thought that the relationship must have been written in the legislation and I had missed something, because she said it as though it was going to happen. I went back to the Bill to have a look, but nothing in it says that UKRI and ARIA have to work together or at least know what each other is doing. I thought that quite strange. When I asked her how she expected that to happen, she said “naturally”. We in Parliament make laws and legislation; we do not leave things to happen naturally if we can we put them on the statute book. The amendment seeks only to have a memorandum of understanding between the already established UKRI and the newly established ARIA.

If the Committee votes against the amendment, people outside will not understand. They will ask, “Why don’t you want a memorandum of understanding?” Everything cannot be done just on trust. We have trust and transparency, but right now ARIA has neither, and it will not be subject to freedom of information rules. It is the wrong approach to say to people outside, “We are going to give £800 million to an organisation that will have no oversight, no FOI and no link to UKRI.” How would that be sensible, especially when—I say this gently—the Government are caught up in sleaze at the moment? That would not help at all. People will say, “You want £800 million to go to whom and to do what?”

Ultimately, we know that men of a certain age get these opportunities, and these men tend to fail upwards. Without the amendment, we are saying that we will allow people to fail upwards and we will not know what they are doing because failure will be part of what ARIA is. We accept that failure can be a part of ARIA, but there needs to be some oversight and connection to the already established UKRI.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for her service on the Science and Technology Committee with me, where we have been discussing this issue and the covid crisis over the last year. She made a point about men of a certain age. Last year, it was two women of a certain age—Dido Harding and Kate Bingham—who helped to respond to coronavirus. At the time, the Opposition made various allegations of cronyism, particularly about Kate Bingham, which ought to be withdrawn now that we have seen the success of what can happen when we take away some of the administrative burdens, focus clear-mindedly on a key goal and get it delivered. Making these allegations of sexism when we have had two women leading our response to coronavirus is not appropriate.

Dawn Butler: I thank the hon. Member for his service on the Science and Technology Committee, where we often agree and very often disagree. Of course we praise what goes well, but let us not forget that £14 million was spent on a test and trace system that was scrapped, or that Northern Ireland spent £1 million on a test and trace system that works perfectly well. Let us not forget those facts. Now, we are talking about £800 million.

Professor Pierre Azoulay said,

“It is important not to put those two agencies in competition; they both have a role to play.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill (Second sitting)*, 14 April 2021; c. 46] Both agencies have a role to play; let them work together. Let us work on the premise that it will be a success.

Amanda Solloway: As a female Science Minister, I fully understand the sentiment behind the proposed amendment. I agree that it is important that ARIA and UKRI co-operate for ARIA to be a coherent addition to the UK R&D funding landscape.

I thought that Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, the CEO of UKRI, really spoke eloquently on this point last week when she said:

“The kinds of relationship that one wants to have with key players across the system are not things for which you necessarily legislate. They are about maintaining open lines of communication and building high-quality personal relationships with different actors in the system.” [*Official Report Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill (First sitting)*, 14 April 2021, c. 15.]

I agree. It is important that we do not over-engineer ARIA’s governance arrangements and obligations in the Bill such that we risk binding the body and creating a bureaucratic process. I am concerned that the need for ARIA and UKRI to agree and annually review an MOU creates just such an administrative burden.

I also agree with Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser when she says that this happens organically. After all, it will be in ARIA’s interests to maintain a dialogue with UKRI to understand the work opportunities and key research opportunities in the UK R&D landscape. The framework document which will be agreed between BEIS and ARIA will set out the broad principles according to which ARIA must interact with other public R&D funders, which will, of course, include UKRI. For this reason I cannot accept the amendment, and I hope that the hon. Member for Brent Central will withdraw it.

Daniel Zeichner: I want to question the Minister on the difference between an MOU and the document that she has just referred to. It seems to me that we are not far apart on that. Could we not have an MOU?

Amanda Solloway: The framework document will be drawn up by the leadership of ARIA, and it is really important that that is how it will be devised. It will not be a Government-led document; it will be drawn up by the leadership and with ARIA.

Dawn Butler: I think the Minister has just described an MOU. A framework document that is agreed by UKRI and ARIA, not by the Government, is an MOU, I believe.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): In earlier comments, the hon. Lady referred to the evidence obtained offline. When she asked, “How would this occur?” Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser replied, “Naturally.” The Lady’s response is to ask, “Why would we rely on that, if we can put something on the statute?” I suggest that it should be the other way around. In this country, we legislate only where we have to, not where we can.

Dawn Butler: The Government are creating a new agency and spending £800 million. They are saying that this new agency should not be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. They are saying that it will fail, a lot, and we need to accept that failure happens in science. That is fine—I used to be a computer programmer, and I know that sometimes you try things and they do not work—but this is very new. We should not put it in a

silo by itself, with no proper link to UKRI. I do not believe the hon. Member believes that there will be no link, because the Minister has just described this document as a memorandum of understanding by another name. I do not think there are actually any disagreements about having the memorandum of understanding.

10 am

It is important to say right from the outset that we want communication between UKRI and ARIA, so that ARIA will be a success. Otherwise, we are limiting the success of ARIA. We took evidence from Tabitha of CognitionX, who is the chair of the AI Council. I would love her to run ARIA; her evidence was so enlightening, and I would love somebody like that to run it. She also talked about the link to UKRI and other industries. I do not think there is any difference between us. The Minister described a memorandum of understanding. To be fair, we should just continue in the way we have done—constructively—and make the amendment.

Daniel Zeichner: I have learned something this morning. I too was a computer programmer. I hope my hon. Friend was a better programmer than I was—I worry about the code that I left for others.

On whether it is better to have it in the legislation, which is the point raised by the hon. Member for Broadland, does it strike my hon. Friend as odd, particularly at a time when the Government are under such scrutiny for relaxed arrangements involving texts, WhatsApp and all the rest of it? Is that not exactly the reason it should be put in legislation—so that it is clear for everybody?

Dawn Butler: My hon. Friend makes a very valid and powerful point. There are ongoing investigations—Greensill, PestFix and VIP lanes. Let us avoid such accusations by agreeing a memorandum of understanding between ARIA and UKRI. Let people not question the role of ARIA: we are expecting the public to accept failure as an essential part of ARIA, and they are going to accept failure. Let the public understand that there will be some link to UKRI, which is an established agency.

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): I wish to refer to some of the things that were said during the evidence sessions. In the very helpful session with Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, she talked about the “edge of the edge”, to which we have already referred, but she also said directly after that that leaving them the freedom of decision making may attract the special people we need in that role. She was talking about the chief exec and the role of the people who will be looking after ARIA. That is very important. What we do not need to do is create restrictions around this. This is £800 million that is separate from UKRI. Professor Leyser was very happy about that; in fact, she wanted it to be quite separate, so that it was free and allowed to develop ideas and inventions.

The Opposition referred to a muddle when they talked about clarification, but I think what they mean is they want to meddle. They want to put restrictions in place—any kind of restriction that would show that we are in charge. Well, we are not. We are not great inventors. The people who will be in ARIA will be great inventors, and they will create good things.

The hon. Lady mentioned that she was happy to accept failure, but she also beat us around the face and neck about the £14 million that was spent on test and trace, which failed. Come on—we have to allow them to fail.

Dawn Butler: I was almost with the hon. Lady up until the £14 million. At the end of the day, Northern Ireland spent £1 million on a test and trace system that worked. I could have programmed a test and trace system—it might have taken me a few years, but I could have done it—for a lot less. It is unacceptable to spend £14 million on a test and trace system that failed and had to be scrapped. It is shocking for the hon. Lady to stand up and even consider that to be a defence.

A memorandum of understanding does not restrict anybody. A memorandum of understanding is exactly that: a memorandum of understanding. The hon. Lady talked about the CEO of UKRI. Amendment 6 talks about making

“the CEO of UKRI a non-executive member of ARIA in order to achieve greater collaboration and communication between the two bodies.”

What is wrong with having greater collaboration between UKRI and ARIA? I do not understand. Nobody has yet stood up to tell me why there is a problem with having collaboration between UKRI and ARIA. None of the Members that have spoken has given a reason why there should not be collaboration between the two. ARIA can still go off and do its thing, and fail away, but it needs to know what UKRI is doing. What is the problem?

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 9.

Division No. 2]

AYES

Blackman, Kirsty	Furniss, Gill
Butler, Dawn	
Flynn, Stephen	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Baker, Duncan	Mayhew, Jerome
Bell, Aaron	Metcalfe, Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia	Solloway, Amanda
Fletcher, Mark	Tomlinson, Michael
Hunt, Jane	

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: 6, in schedule 1, page 6, line 21, at end insert—

“(c) the Chief Executive Officer of UK Research and Innovation; and”—(*Dawn Butler.*)

This amendment would make the CEO of UKRI a non-executive member of ARIA in order to achieve greater collaboration and communication between the two bodies.

Question put and negatived.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I beg to move amendment 28, in schedule 1, page 6, line 22, at end insert—

“(4) The Secretary of State must ensure that—

- (a) at least 50% of the other members appointed under (3)(c) are women; and

[Kirsty Blackman]

- (b) where the number of members under (a) would be an odd number, the calculation of 50% of other members should be made as if the board had one fewer non-executive member.”

This amendment is intended to ensure that the Secretary of State appoints a significant percentage of women as other non-executive members.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 9, in schedule 1, page 6, line 24, at end insert—

“(5) The Secretary of State must, in appointing the members of ARIA, have regard to the diversity of the members including the representation of those with protected characteristics.

(6) In this section, ‘protected characteristics’ has the meaning given by Part 2, Chapter 1 of the Equalities Act 2010.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to have regard to the diversity of ARIA’s board when using their powers of appointment.

Kirsty Blackman: It is a pleasure to be able to take part in this Bill Committee. Unfortunately, I had to come to London to do so, but it is nice to see some of the faces that I have not seen for a while, other than on little screens. I will start with a bit of fluff: I thank the Clerks for their huge amount of hard work in assisting us with the amendments that we tabled to the Bill. It was really helpful. I am sure they provided the same level of help to everybody else, but we very much appreciate it.

I will speak to amendment 28 and the Opposition’s amendment 9. Our amendment 28 relates to the number of women to be appointed to the board in non-executive positions. There is some lack of flexibility around the positions because two are taken by named individuals. There are also positions that are not appointed by the Secretary of State because they are executive positions. In relation to the non-executive members, it is incredibly important that a significant percentage of women is included among them.

The hon. Member for Broadland said that we should legislate only where we have to. I think in this case it is incredibly important to legislate. We know that only 12% of all engineers are women, and that 25% of 16 to 18-year-old girls would consider becoming an engineer as opposed to 51.9% of boys in that age group. There is an incredibly hard glass ceiling, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and in the kind of roles that will benefit from the funding that ARIA will receive.

We know that young women, and young men, are more likely to take up and aspire to positions if they can see people who look like them in those positions, see people who have succeeded, and know that there is an opportunity to climb the ladder rather than hit the glass ceiling, as people so often do in engineering. This would be a real opportunity for the Government to make it clear that it is incredibly important to have women in these roles. Maths is not just for boys; it is a subject for everybody. When I was doing my advanced higher maths, I was the only girl in the class. Not one other girl had chosen to take advanced higher maths. It was not a small class, it was a class of about 20, and it was because people felt that it was a boys’ subject and girls should not be taking it.

It is important that the Government agree to such an amendment. If the Minister is unwilling to, it would be helpful to hear how the Government plan to increase the gender balance on the board and ensure that women are appointed to these roles. For example, they have said to FTSE companies that they need to have a percentage of women on those boards, but they are not putting that into the legislation in this instance and it is important that they do so.

The Opposition’s amendment 9 in relation to diversity is an incredibly good amendment. In fact, I am quite upset I did not think of it. We have a similar problem with diversity in engineering. Mainly white men are in these positions, and people in school do not look at these positions and think, “I’m going to aspire to do this,” because they do not see people like them in those roles.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South and I represent Aberdeen constituencies, where Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen University do a lot around engineering, oil and gas. We have thankfully seen a significant amount of immigration to our city because of the oil and gas. Outside London, the highest percentage of non-UK-born citizens is in Aberdeen. That means a significant number of people from ethnic minority groups are in the engineering profession, but again we have the same issue. It is very unusual to go into a room full of oil and gas executives and for any of them not to be white, and it is fairly unusual for any of them to be women, although we are seeing an increase in those numbers. These amendments would make clear the Government’s intentions and say to organisations such as the FTSE companies that are being asked to have gender balance on their boards, “We are doing this too; we are leading by example”.

Aaron Bell: It is really nice to see the hon. Member back in London. I know it is a burden for SNP Members to come all the way down to the United Kingdom Parliament, but it is lovely to see her in person.

I do not think the Government are doing so badly on diversity, particularly on women. I reassure the hon. Member and the Opposition that, in relation to their amendments, the panel will be selected by Sir Patrick Vallance and other independent advisers. The job that they have done during covid demonstrates how many women we have in positions of scientific importance. We have the women we mentioned earlier: Dame Jenny Harries, Dame Ottoline Leyser, who gave evidence to us, and the Science Minister herself. From the diversity perspective, I think the absolute hero of the press conferences has been Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, who has been a wonderful communicator to the whole country, so I gently say to the hon. Member that I do not think it is as bad as all that and that the amendments are therefore unnecessary.

Kirsty Blackman: I was hoping that I was not being too critical of the Government. I did not intend to say the UK Government are terrible in this regard. I think they have done some good things around gender balance on boards, for example. I would have gone further, but they were a good start. I am not hugely critical of where things are, but I think a kind of stamp on this Bill, to say, “This is the direction we would like to go to”, would be helpful.

This can be done. We have done it in Scotland with the Scottish National Investment Bank. Our amendment is very similar to the proposal in relation to the investment bank—we are doing a huge amount for our public bodies. The investment bank intends to have a significant number of women on it, and it is the same for gender representation on public boards in Scotland more generally. I would very much appreciate it if the Minister let us know whether the Government will take the actions that we have proposed in our amendment. If not, what do they intend to do to ensure that people from diverse backgrounds are included?

10.15 am

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms McVey. I apologise to the Bill Committee for not being here at the start. That was due to a medical appointment that I could not avoid. I am sorry to have missed the opening speeches.

Labour welcomes this debate and the interest and proposed investment in advanced research and innovation through this agency. We have concerns about the Bill as it stands, which will I will go through in some detail, amendment by amendment. We champion our world-leading scientists, and we recognise the importance of giving science and engineering in this country the opportunity to enable us to build back better and create a fairer and more progressive world.

Amendment 9, which stands in my name and those of my hon. Friends, follows on nicely from the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North. I am sorry to have missed part of her remarks, but I caught most of them. We echo her desire to see diversity on the board of ARIA. I was very drawn to her comments about the oil industry in Aberdeen North. I worked as an engineer for 20 years before coming to Parliament, and I spent some of that time in Nigeria working not in the industry but with oil engineers, so I know about the lack of diversity that she is referring to and how challenging it can be to be the only person of one's gender, ethnicity or class in the room.

Our amendment seeks to ensure that, in appointing members of ARIA,

“The Secretary of State must...have regard to the diversity of the members including the representation of those with protected characteristics.”

“Protected characteristics” has the meaning given by part 2, chapter 1 of the Equality Act 2010. That would require the Secretary of State to have regard to the diversity of the board when using their powers of appointment.

Labour wants to ensure that agencies such as ARIA are of benefit to the entire nation—indeed, to all nations in the United Kingdom—and every region and citizen. It is clear that, at the moment, diversity is not the strong point of our science establishment. Only 7% of managers, directors and senior officials in academic and non-academic higher education positions are black, Asian or minority ethnic, and only 24% of the UK STEM workforce are women. That has to change if we are to create a welcoming and inclusive culture in United Kingdom research and development. The Government's R&D roadmap states:

“Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is a critical aspect of research culture...UKRI will develop and launch bold initiatives to increase the participation, retention and promotion of a diversity of talent into R&D.”

I know that the Minister takes these issues seriously, so why is there no reference to diversity in this new agency? This Bill is a real opportunity for action. If the Government are serious about a forward-looking diversity programme, they must ensure that ARIA has diversity at its heart.

We want ARIA to be world leading and to make breakthroughs of which the whole United Kingdom can be proud. We cannot allow the research breakthroughs of tomorrow to be held back and hamstrung by old attitudes of the past. We are never going to unlock the full potential of our research sector if we do not use the talents of everyone. There are real issues with diversity in the UK science sector, with black and minority ethnic men 28% less likely to work in STEM than white men, and women representing 9% of people in non-medical STEM careers. Yet we face a shortfall of 173,000 STEM workers, which is estimated to cost the sector £1.5 billion a year.

The reason I am so determined that ARIA should reflect the importance of diversity is because when I graduated from Imperial in 1987—a long, long time ago—around 13% of engineering students were women. In my year at Imperial it was 12%. If we fast forward some 30 years—more than a quarter of a century—the figures have increased by 2 percentage points. In a quarter of a century, that is the amount of progress we have made in this critical area. We must not show any complacency or think that this will happen over time. As we have seen, it does not happen over time; it requires action.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Chi Onwurah: I am happy to give way to an hon. Member who is a great champion of diversity in science.

Stephen Metcalfe: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. Does she recognise that the Government have taken steps in this direction, particularly during the year of engineering in 2018 and in the subsequent creation of an engineering envoy to try to continue to promote engineering to everyone, regardless of background, gender or ethnicity? The Government are alive to the issues and take them seriously, so mandating it in this amendment is not the right way forward. We need to do exactly what the hon. Lady said, which is to set up projects that let people decide that engineering is the career for them.

Chi Onwurah: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his intervention. I recognise the sterling work that he did as Chair of the Science and Technology Committee and as the Government's envoy during the year of engineering, and that he now does as chairperson of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. He is not talking about this issue now simply because it has become more fashionable; he has a long history in this area.

I did not mean to imply that the Government have not taken any action. It is important for the Government to promote engineering, but in this, as in everything, it is the outcomes that matter, not the words. At the heart of this Bill is the creation of an institution. There are many challenges facing our research environment, including the lack of private investment in research and the lack of venture capital investment in early start-ups.

[Chi Onwurah]

The Government have chosen to respond with an institution, and therefore it should reflect the Government's priorities when it comes to diversity. If part of the answer to the challenges facing the scientific community is a new institution, at the heart of it must be the diversity that we want to see in the science establishment.

Obviously, I am not the only person to raise this issue; we heard earlier from the hon. Member for Aberdeen North, and it was clear from witness evidence that there was significant support for ARIA acting as an agent of change in this important matter. Professor Leyser, the chief executive officer of UKRI, said:

"I have to think about all parts of the system. I have to think about the people—do we have the right kinds of people in the system, the right mix, the right diversity, the right set of skills, and the right career trajectories and pathways through the system?"

If the person who is in charge of the greatest portion of the UK R&D budget has to think about that, why not ARIA? We also heard from Tris Dyson of Nesta Challenges, who said specifically of the proposed agency that

"we think that there is an opportunity to explore new avenues and do things slightly differently. Some of the opportunities that that presents, both through ARIA and more generally, is around boosting the diversity of people involved in frontier technology and innovation and improving geographical reach."—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 5-7, Q3.]

I hope that the Minister will explain how that will be realised if not through an amendment such as amendment 9.

We also heard really important evidence from Dr Dugan of Wellcome, who is a past director of DARPA. She said:

"What I can tell you about diversity from my own experience, both in Silicon Valley and at DARPA, is that for decades we have known that specificity of goal and outcome is a good way to get more equality and diversity in assessment of ideas and in people conducting or pursuing those ideas."—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 39, Q33.]

We will come on to consider this in further debate, but currently ARIA has no mission, no specificity of outcomes, and no diversity requirements.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Does the hon. Lady recognise that the Secretary of State will follow the code governing public appointments, which includes the principle that public appointments should reflect the diversity of our society?

Chi Onwurah: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point and it raises two issues. First, how the CEO will be recruited and which rules for public appointment that process will follow is not clear in the Bill, so perhaps the Minister will provide that information. If the Secretary of State has to follow those rules, surely the amendment simply makes it clear what he—he in this case—has to do, and ensures focus on and recognition of the requirements. I do not feel that those two considerations are incompatible.

Daniel Zeichner: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a fundamental issue. There is a real problem particularly around design, as Caroline Criado Perez identified in her book "Invisible Women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men"—some of us attended the

book launch here a couple of years ago. Extraordinarily, she pointed out that a swathe of design was done without women in mind at all, so crash tests and so on do not work because they are tested on the wrong people. That reflects the danger of having a board without a wide range of people. I read somewhere the other day that the armed forces in some country had only just discovered that women require different underwear from men. There is a blinds pot here, and it goes back to blokes in sheds I am afraid.

Chi Onwurah: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree wholeheartedly. The fact that most technology and science has been designed and developed by a narrow demographic minority has great implications for our society. Sometimes I lie awake at night thinking of the wonderful inventions and technologies that we might have in the world had women and minorities been able to play a full part in our scientific development. My hon. Friend gave the example of how, as Caroline Criado Perez said in her book, so much of our world has not reflected the needs or interests of women, which is really important. I say to the Minister: the agency, which we will come back to a number of times, will fail. It is designed to fail. When it fails—not in general, but particularly—it needs to have the support of the public to understand the reason why it failed. To lock women out of the board, which is what it will effectively do, and not reflect the importance of diversity, will be a factor in public trust.

10.30 am

This is entirely irrelevant to the amendment, but I noticed in the policy intent document published by the Secretary of State—I thought this was hilarious—the worked example for a programme director had women in it. The Minister knows that that worked example was not reflective of the proportion of principal investigators in our academic scientific and research establishment or indeed the mindset of the principal architect of the agency, Dominic Cummings, who, when asked at the Select Committee to suggest potential CEOs, found it very difficult to name a single woman.

The Government seem to be divided on this. They are paying lip service when it comes to talking the talk, but not reflecting the reality of the imperative that science reflect both the talents and the needs of women and the nation as a whole, which is what the amendment is designed to do.

I have a couple more quotes before I close. Professor Leyser of UK Research and Innovation told the Science and Technology Committee that

"we are interested in whether the organisations we fund are genuinely committed to, and engaged in, driving up equality, diversity and inclusion in their systems, by whatever mechanism, right across the range of protected, and indeed, unprotected characteristics....we are collecting these figures, so that we can track that the interventions we are making, which are substantial, are indeed driving up diversity....The way I view it is that high-quality research and innovation need diversity. You have to have people with different ideas and different backgrounds coming together to create the kind of environment where extraordinary things happen."

That is what we want for this agency. I hope we all believe that diversity is not a "nice to have"; it is an economic imperative that we need for the agency. The Minister must know that people tend to recruit people like them. That is how recruitment works, unfortunately.

People respect and admire the skills of those who look or talk like them, or went to the same school. We cannot allow this agency to be subject to that, because innovation, at its heart, needs diversity, and this agency is about innovation.

Finally, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy told the Select Committee:

“One thing I learnt in my brief time as Secretary of State, talking to people like Steven Chu, Nobel prize-winning laureates, and really amazing and brilliant researchers, is that we need to have diversity. All the best researchers and the most innovative thinkers in this space will say that you have to have a diversity”, but not, apparently, on the board of ARIA.

With regard to the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge, another example was the design of spacesuits for the NASA programme. When they had finally got round to having female astronauts, they realised that they had to delay a mission—I forget which one it was—because the spacesuits were designed for men. Do we really want to invest £800 million in an agency that addresses some great challenge but then forgets the importance of half of our population in meeting that challenge? I hope that the Minister will accept our amendment.

Amanda Solloway: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place.

This amendment concerns the appointment of ARIA's non-executive members by the Secretary of State. I have been lucky enough to speak to many outstanding women during my time as science Minister: scientists; researchers; and those with other important perspectives who would bring great expertise and value to the ARIA board.

This is an issue that I am committed to more broadly, as the hon. Lady will know, through developing a people and culture strategy that will look to ensure that the UK has the people we need at all levels, working in a culture that gets the best out of everyone and which delivers the best outcomes for the country. That means looking to remove barriers and dismantle any inequalities in the system that limit the ambitions, inclusion and participation of people from any background. I recognise the objective of the amendment and its importance, but I also highlight the inadvertent dangers of placing legislative constraints on the recruitment and appointment of ARIA's members.

However, I will emphasise for the hon. Lady the provision of the Equality Act 2010, as set out in schedule 3 of the Bill, which I am sure we will come on to discuss. ARIA will be subject to the public sector equality duty. This duty will also apply to appointments made to ARIA by the Secretary of State. That means seeking to advance equality of duty between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

As the hon. Lady will be aware, protected characteristics include sex and gender reassignment, and I believe that this duty should place—as it was designed to do—important issues of gender equality on the appropriate legislative footing. Therefore, I hope that she recognises that there is no need to make any provision in the Bill, and will withdraw the amendment.

Amendment 9 also concerns the appointment of ARIA's non-executive members by the Secretary of State. In considering it, I will return to the Equality Act 2010, to which ARIA will be subject, and the public sector equality duty. As I have said, I believe that this duty should place, as it is been designed to do, the important

issue of inclusion and equality on an appropriate legislative footing. Appointments made by the Secretary of State will follow the governance code for public appointments. The code includes the following principle:

“Public appointments should reflect the diversity of the society in which we live and appointments should be made taking account of the need to appoint boards which include a balance of skills and backgrounds.”

I therefore hope that the hon. Lady recognises that there is no need to make any further provision in the Bill and will withdraw her amendment.

Kirsty Blackman: This has been quite an interesting debate and I particularly enjoyed the speech by the shadow Minister; I thought it was very good. However, I did not expect to be discussing women's underwear during the course of this Bill Committee.

It is the case in relation to things being designed for men that such things happen. We see that if we consider the fact that endometriosis treatments, for example, are few and far between, because researchers and organisations do not put money into researching things that are “women-only problems”, because for some reason we matter less. It is therefore incredibly important that the Government take positive steps in this regard.

Engineering and innovation will be the future for us. I have already said that I represent Aberdeen. We are looking at having a just transition; we are looking at moving Aberdeen away from its focus on oil and gas to a focus on renewable energy and the energies of the future. We will not have those energies of the future or the design and innovation that we will need unless we have diversity in the research environment and unless we have a significant number of people from different backgrounds, all with different life experiences, considering how best to solve problems. For young people considering coming into these organisations, having women and people with other protected characteristics on boards such as that of ARIA would mean that they are more likely to be able to aspire to those roles.

Stephen Metcalfe: I agree that we need to hold people up as examples to encourage people from far more diverse backgrounds to come into engineering and all STEM subjects. However, the amendment would mandate the percentage of women sitting on the board of ARIA. The UKRI board, with 13 members, has six women, without that being mandated and using the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act is delivering our aims. Let us talk about how we get more people from diverse backgrounds into engineering. In my view, this is not the way to do it.

Kirsty Blackman: I thank the hon. Member for his input. I was not trying to criticise the actions of the UK Government in this area—in lots of other areas, but not in this one. Positive steps have been made. In Scotland, we have a duty of gender diversity on boards and it has worked. We have proved that it has worked across public sector boards. It has made a positive difference. People can say that we might not need to legislate for it, but it is a safeguard. It ensures that we have that percentage of women on the board and that we have diversity in all appointments in relation to ARIA.

Dawn Butler: I thank the hon. Member for her informative contribution, which I have found fascinating. It is great that UKRI has that diversity on its board

[Dawn Butler]

without it being mandated—I would suggest that that is another reason why ARIA and UKRI need to have a memorandum of understanding. Is it not important that there is some communication if that diversity is going to be taken into consideration? As the hon. Member says, if it is not mandated, we are just relying on good faith.

Kirsty Blackman: I absolutely agree. This measure should be included in the Bill as a safeguard or a fallback—a failsafe. I appreciate the public sector equality duty exists, but that is not strong enough to give me comfort.

When women do engineering degrees, they get better degrees than men. They get a better class of degree—the statistics prove it. If we want the highest possible quality of people, from diverse backgrounds, pushing innovation forward and trying to, for example, make the renewable energy technologies of the future, we need to ensure diversity on the board and more widely in the staff of ARIA.

Chi Onwurah: I echo the disappointment of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North in the Minister’s response, who takes this issue very seriously. The architect of ARIA and the debate around it have focused very much on great individual minds of science, generally men, and how they should be left on their own to go off and discover new and exciting things. These amendments would send a really important message to the science community that ARIA is an inclusive agency and that, regardless of what some may have said or envisaged, this is about the whole of the United Kingdom. I would emphasise that we still have far, far to go to reflect diversity in the science community.

10.45 am

Question put, that the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 9.

Division No. 3]

AYES

Blackman, Kirsty
Butler, Dawn
Flynn, Stephen

Furniss, Gill
Onwurah, Chi
Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Baker, Duncan
Bell, Aaron
Crosbie, Virginia
Fletcher, Mark
Hunt, Jane

Mayhew, Jerome
Metcalf, Stephen
Solloway, Amanda
Tomlinson, Michael

Question accordingly negatived.

Stephen Flynn: I beg to move amendment 31 in schedule 1, page 6, line 22, at end, insert—

“(3A) The Secretary of State may not appoint a person as chair unless the appointment of that person has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

(3B) ARIA may not exercise any functions under this or any other Act, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA under section 4 of this Act, until its first chair has been appointed.”

This amendment requires both Houses of Parliament, under the affirmative resolution procedure, to approve the name of the proposed Chair. ARIA may not exercise any functions, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA until its first chair has been appointed.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 10 in schedule 1, page 6, line 26, at end insert

“with the consent of the Science and Technology Select Committee of the House of Commons.”

This amendment would require that the Secretary of State seeks and obtains the consent of the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons for the appointment of ARIA’s first Chief Executive Officer.

Amendment 33 in schedule 1, page 6, line 26, at end insert

“(1A) The Secretary of State may not appoint a person as Chief Executive Officer unless the appointment of the person has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

(1B) ARIA may not exercise any functions under this or any other Act, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA under section 4 of this Act, until its first Chief Executive Officer has been appointed.”

This amendment requires both Houses of Parliament, under the affirmative resolution procedure, to approve the name of the proposed Chief Executive Officer. ARIA may not exercise any functions, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA until its first Chief Executive Officer has been appointed.

Amendment 32, in clause 4, page 2, line 21, at beginning insert

“Subject to paragraph 2(3B) of Schedule 1,”.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 31.

Amendment 34, in clause 4, page 2, line 21, at beginning insert

“Subject to paragraph 3(1B) of Schedule 1,”.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 33.

Stephen Flynn: I would like to echo, first and briefly, the sentiments of my colleague in thanking the Clerks for their diligent work in the run-up to this Bill Committee and also to thank all of the witnesses who came to the evidence session last week. I found it incredibly informative and the hon. Member for Cambridge was right to highlight that at the start of today’s proceedings.

Amendment 31 and those related to it are quite simple. To coin a phrase that is oft used by Conservative Members, it is a way for this place to take back control. It is not a phrase that I would use willingly too often, for fear of sounding like them, but in this regard, it is a good way of summarising what is in front of us. It comes back to a key theme that runs through everything to do with ARIA and this entire concept. The hon. Member for Cambridge touched on it in respect of clarity. What is the Bill seeking to achieve? What is going to be the mission and the focus?

We heard during the evidence session that much of that determination of what the Bill seeks to achieve and the direction it takes is going to default to the chair, the CEO and those who are involved. They are going to fill the vacuum that the Government are leaving. That is fine, I assume, from the Government’s perspective, but it is incumbent on us as Members of this place, who are presiding over a significant amount of public money, to have a keen interest in what ARIA is seeking to achieve. The best and a very simple way we can do that is to ensure we have a chair and a CEO in place who we feel are pointing in the right direction. That is an important point to make, because—I am loath to mention him—

Dominic Cummings in his evidence session and in the public domain has ties with people whose views are questionable, to say the least. I say “ties”, but he referenced scientists who promote the likes of eugenics and we need to be mindful of these things and that there are people out there who have views that are abhorrent. We do not know who the chair is going to be. We do not know who the CEO is going to be. We can trust the judgment of the Secretary of State or we can all play a part in deciding that. It is incumbent on all of us when we are talking about such a significant amount of public money to do our duty: to take back control and make sure ARIA has the direction that it requires.

Chi Onwurah: Amendment 10, which stands in my name and that of my hon. Friends, reflects many of the concerns articulated by the SNP spokesperson—the hon. Member for Aberdeen South—and would require the Secretary of State to seek and obtain the consent of the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons to the appointment of ARIA’s first chief executive officer. Some members of the Bill Committee serve on the Select Committee and know how well able the Science and Technology Committee is to hold to account the potential—future—CEO of ARIA.

I feel that this amendment is particularly important because, in a response to a parliamentary question that I received just yesterday, the Minister made it clear that the recruitment of the first CEO was under way and that no interim CEO would be appointed. We therefore need to ensure that we get the first CEO right.

The driving factor behind the amendment is the need for greater oversight and responsibility. We are in the midst of a crisis of confidence; a scandal of sleaze is overwhelming this House and many of its institutions. I will start with a quote:

“The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-advisers for hire, helping big business find the right way to get its way.”

That is how former Prime Minister David Cameron described back in 2010 the next big scandal to hit British politics. I want all members of this Bill Committee to think long and hard about the way the Bill is currently drafted. It leaves £800 million of taxpayers’ money, and our scientific future, open to just that level of sleaze.

We see in the current cronyism scandal the consequences of placing power and responsibility in the hands of those who are not accountable and do not have the moral judgment to hold that power wisely in the public interest. This Bill places huge power and responsibility in the hands of the CEO of ARIA, with little ongoing accountability, a significant budget and none of the checks provided by the usual public procurement and freedom of information rules. It is critical that there be parliamentary oversight of the choice of CEO if we are to avoid both sleaze and, equally important, the appearance of sleaze. This CEO needs the confidence of the UK’s scientific community: they will have a huge challenge. But they will receive that confidence only if they are appointed on merit. The Bill was drafted before the current sleaze scandal and reflects far too much the “Ask no questions—that’s too much bureaucracy” approach. We see where that has got us.

Labour’s Opposition day debate on 14 April, just last week, highlighted the fact that the Greensill scandal is just the tip of the iceberg of the cronyism rife in the

Conservative party during the pandemic and long before. It is laced through the billions of pounds-worth of contracts paid for by taxpayers and of a slew of troubling senior appointments.

Bill Committee testimony from Government witnesses such as Professor Philip Bond, and Dominic Cummings’ evidence earlier to the Science and Technology Committee contained multiple references to trusting the leaders of ARIA with £800 million of taxpayers’ money with no purpose or mission, none of the usual safeguards and complete freedom for the Secretary of State as to whom they appoint. We are concerned that this is a recipe for sleaze in science. There is no detail in the Bill—

Stephen Metcalfe: I am listening very closely to what the hon. Lady is saying, but I cannot imagine for one moment—I am sure that she cannot, either—that a chair or chief executive of ARIA would refuse an invitation from the Select Committee on Science and Technology to attend and answer questions. In the 11 years that I have been here, I have not been aware of a single incident of someone from the science community refusing to attend the Committee. To suggest that this could be science sleaze in the waiting is stretching the point way beyond reality.

Chi Onwurah: I am always grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s interventions, as he makes interesting—if inaccurate, in this case—points. Let me emphasise how it looks from the outside right now: we have all these friends getting contracts because they have the WhatsApp contact of the Secretary of State, and people appointed to be in charge of procurement also work for big producers. I am afraid that the Bill does not contain the necessary safeguards, and it is incumbent on the Committee to ensure that that kind of sleaze does not taint science.

Aaron Bell: One of the reasons why things look that way from the outside is the accusations made by the Opposition. I have an example. The hon. Lady was not here earlier—I completely accept that she had a reason for that—when I referred to Kate Bingham’s appointment, and the £670,000 spent last year on a crucial campaign to get hard-to-reach groups not only to take part in vaccine trials but to take the vaccine. At the time, the Leader of the Opposition said:

“You cannot justify that sort of money being spent”,

and the deputy leader of the Labour party said, “This cronyism stinks.” After what we saw last year, I think it a little rich of the Opposition to go round suggesting that this is the problem, when, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock said, the Science and Technology Committee, and all the science community, are very engaged. The idea that there would be scientific sleaze is frankly risible.

Dawn Butler *rose*—

Chi Onwurah: Before I give way to my hon. Friend or address the latest intervention, I will finish addressing one of the points made by the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock. He said that he could not imagine that any chair or CEO of ARIA would not agree to give evidence to the Science and Technology Committee. I remind him that Dominic Cummings,

[Chi Onwurah]

who was not the chair of ARIA but was certainly its chief architect, refused to give evidence to this Committee on the basis that he had already given evidence to another Committee, and once was enough in terms of accountability.

Jane Hunt: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Chi Onwurah: Let me deal with the previous interventions, to which I am currently trying to respond. The hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock says that he cannot imagine such a circumstance, but I want undeniable accountability written through the Bill. I am concerned about the level of accountability in the Bill, and in some of the evidence, and in other discussion on the Bill, it has been suggested that accountability is a good thing, because that bureaucracy prevents people getting their own way. Perhaps the CEO might feel that they have better things to do than be accountable. In addition, this is about making the appointment of the CEO subject to the scrutiny of the Science and Technology Committee. What could be wrong with that?

As for the intervention from the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme, it is the first time that I have heard *The Telegraph* called the Opposition. The charges of sleaze are far broader than those coming from the Labour party. Indeed, it really cannot be said that we have led the charge when it comes to concerns about multiple examples of sleaze. I was really interested in the vaccine taskforce example that the hon. Gentleman gave. I congratulate the vaccine taskforce, and indeed the NHS. It is interesting that it is never called the “NHS vaccine roll-out” but we do talk about NHS Test and Trace, when the NHS is rolling out the vaccine much more than it is testing and tracing.

I asked about that £650,000 funding at parliamentary questions, and it did not go towards finding hard-to-reach groups—I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the response. It may have gone to good purposes, but to argue that it was for hard-to-reach groups is to take accountability away from that expenditure. That is worthy of criticism.

11 am

Dawn Butler: The Government are going to extraordinary lengths to avoid scrutiny. We have seen that time and again, from the closing down of Parliament to awarding themselves Henry VIII powers. The Science and Technology Committee, on which I and the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme sit, is a good Committee that comes up with good results. We are, in the main, collegiate and work together in the name of science and its progress. It is not unusual for appointments to flow through the Science and Technology Committee—that is how Parliament works—so the amendment is not asking for something extraordinary. It is saying, “Let’s continue what we do in Parliament on scrutiny and oversight.” I fail to understand why the Government are so opposed to any form of scrutiny on ARIA.

The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme says that people outside may be thinking about sleaze because of what the Opposition are doing. I disagree. They are understanding sleaze because of what the Government are doing, what the Good Law Project is doing in taking

the Government to court and what *Byline Times* and other investigative journalists are doing in highlighting the cronyism and corruption. If the Bill is to go through, we need to ensure that those allegations are not levelled at it, because we do not want sleaze in science. That is the last thing we need.

Jane Hunt: I have two points. First, UKRI is not broken. It is a great service that offers, through a process of application, grants and so on, a means to research and development. What ARIA does is create an opportunity for exceptional brains to make exceptional decisions and, with some money behind them, to try to develop things. It is not underhand or any of the things being said; it is just an opening and an opportunity. Someone said the other day that the coders in their bedrooms, who do not have the resources to make bids or applications, nor the language behind them to be successful, can get into that system. UKRI is not broken; ARIA is something separate.

With absolutely the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central, who was not here at the beginning, for good reasons, a number of Opposition Members have referred to Dominic Cummings. I am sorry, but I am not happy about that; we have before us a highly respected female Minister putting forward the Bill. We should respect her and her position and stop referring to somebody unelected who is not even in the room.

Chi Onwurah: There were a number of important interventions. Let me first respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central. She was right and did well to remind us of the normalcy of the Science and Technology Committee looking at important science appointments and how eminently qualified the Committee is to do that. I referred somewhat light-heartedly to *The Telegraph* not being the Opposition. She did well to remind us that important elements of the sleaze scandals—plural—that are circulating were discovered by investigative journalism of the highest quality, sometimes outside the mainstream press, which is not often appropriately and adequately supported on access.

On the hon. Member for Loughborough’s intervention, first, it is not the Opposition who are saying that UKRI is broken. She does not like my mentioning Dominic Cummings, but I must say that he and others have criticised UKRI and the existing science establishment. Let us remind ourselves that UKRI is only three years old, but they have criticised it as inadequate and argued for the creation of something that is not subject to huge bureaucracy. She claims that this will not be a barrier to the great coder in their garage who has some fantastic idea.

We are trying to prevent ARIA from being used simply by those in the know who have connections. That great coder in their garage is unlikely to know who to apply to for an ARIA grant or prize and will not have the connections to get to the front of the queue. I am sure that the Minister has considered that sometimes bureaucracy is about ensuring equality of access and opportunity. ARIA wants to move fast, and we recognise that, but it needs to ensure that the right accountability and confidence are in place. As other hon. Members have emphasised, we cannot allow the kind of sleaze we have seen elsewhere, particularly with regard to procurement

during the pandemic. We cannot allow that in science. I will not allow it to stain our great scientific heritage and hope for the future.

I have mentioned the Minister's interest a number of times. I hold her in the greatest respect, but she is very misplaced in her argument that I am somehow discriminating against her by referring to the self-vaunted architect of ARIA—he made that much clear during his Select Committee evidence, and he implied that it was one of the conditions for his becoming the Prime Minister's chief adviser—and to the antecedents of the agency that this Bill is about. That does her credibility no favours.

Let me continue. I am happy to take interventions, although I imagine that the Whips would like us to make progress. With none of the usual safeguards, and with complete freedom for the Secretary of State appointed by the Government, we are concerned that this is a recipe for sleaze in science. There is no detail in the Bill—perhaps the Minister could think about how to approve this—about who, if anyone, will play a role in making or scrutinising the appointments of chair, non-executive members and the first chief executive officer. There must be a concern about cronyism and protecting ARIA's independence.

Let me consider a point made earlier. We do not know whether the roles of the chair and chief executive of ARIA will be added to the schedule of the Public Appointments Order in Council so that they can be independently regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. If the answer is yes, I would appreciate clarity. Will the significant appointments to the roles of chair and chief executive of ARIA require a senior independent panel member, approved by the commissioner, to sit on the advisory assessment process? If not, how will the Secretary of State ensure a fair and open-minded recruitment process for those positions?

The public are frankly tired of backroom deals between mates who go to the same pub. I want the CEO to have a transformative impact on British society. It is right that at least their appointment should be subject to public scrutiny. There has been much criticism of the revolving door between the public and private sector. We want ARIA to be above such criticism. Let us not allow it to become mired in grubby deals before it has even begun.

Some might say that the Government are taking a rather Stalinist approach to scientific research, where a small group of really smart men, as it always was, are left to decide how best to pursue socioeconomic projects. That is a model that basically entrusts resources to a small group of experts, without democratic oversight. I thought the other side were not over-enamoured with experts. If a Labour Government had done that, one suspects they would have had to face comparison to some of the USSR's leaders.

I emphasise that I do not believe that the Minister is subject to groupthink, and I am sure, or at least I hope, that the Secretary of State would never compromise himself in the way that the Conservative ex-Prime Minister David Cameron has, by giving jobs to buddies, but the fact is that people recruit people like themselves. Surely we need broader input. Dominic Cummings said in his evidence to the Science and Technology Committee that

the agency should have “extreme freedom”. The very least we should expect is that Parliament should be able to scrutinise the appointment.

To emphasise that our concerns are credible and legitimate, I point the Committee to supporting points made in evidence. Dame Ottoline Leyser from UKRI said:

“The whole ability of this organisation to operate in this edge-of-the-edge really visionary way that we are all very excited about is critically dependent on those people; and they are in very short supply.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 8, Q4.]

She added that

“it is crucial for the success of ARIA—it is everything. We need to go into the search process with absolute resolve to wait until we find the right people, and not appoint people just because there is a vacancy.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 16, Q13.]

On the mission, Professor James Wilsdon said that “in relying on appointing the leadership as the route to answering the question, all you do is move the source of the problem.”

That is why the amendment is so important. The Government are not taking responsibility for the mission, so the mission is with the chief executive officer. Surely the CEO must have some accountability. As Professor Wilsdon went on to say:

“If the Government have not been able to resolve the question of what it is for, how do we identify who the right leaders are?...I don't see how you can find the right people. If you do find people, how do you avoid it simply becoming a tool, a plaything, of their prior interests and priorities?”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 19, Q16.]

The Science and Technology Committee could investigate prior interests and priorities.

We heard from Professor Philip Bond that he is

“a big believer in giving the chair and the director enormous amounts of autonomy. You pick people you are willing to bet on and then hand them a lot of trust.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 25, Q20.]

We are agreed that the Bill hands a lot of trust to the CEO, without making them accountable to Parliament or the public.

Finally, I want to quote from ARIA's statement of policy intent:

“In shaping the research, culture, and setup of ARIA, the first CEO will have a significant effect on the technological and strategic capabilities of the UK over the course of generations. They will establish the philosophies, working styles, and cultural norms that make ARIA effective and distinct. They will recruit the first cohort of Programme Managers...enable them to launch the first programmes, sign the first research partnerships, and help define the strategic advantages the programmes aim for. They will position ARIA as a distinctive part of the UK's research funding landscape that complements and expands the UK's funding capability.”

Given the importance of the role, as clearly set out in that statement, to the science and technology landscape of this country, how can the Minister refuse to allow the Science and Technology Committee to have a role in that appointment?

11.15 am

Amanda Solloway: Amendment 10 would require the Secretary of State to seek the consent of the Science and Technology Committee before appointing ARIA's

[Amanda Solloway]

first CEO. Amendments 31 to 34 would require the proposed chair and CEO of ARIA to be approved by both Houses through secondary legislation.

These amendments reflect the welcome interest across Parliament in ARIA and the recognition that the agency's success is dependent on the right leadership, as has been mentioned. In regard to the amendments, there is no equivalent precedent, such as in the case of UK Research and Innovation. As such, we will soon launch a robust recruitment process and have designed it such that only the very best candidates will be appointed as ARIA's first CEO and chair. An experienced and expert panel will be responsible for sifting and interviewing candidates. It will feature the Government's chief scientific adviser Sir Patrick Vallance and Jo Shanmugalingam, who is director general for science, innovation and growth at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. They will be accompanied by two highly esteemed panellists from the international R&D community, whose names will be announced in due course. The final appointments will be made by the Secretary of State, who will continue to have responsibility for appointing non-executives, including future chairs.

The chair, in consultation with other non-executive members, will appoint future executives, including CEOs. Last week, Philip Bond told us that

"if you want to define the ARPA model at some level, it is this: it is a different model of trust."—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 25, Q20]

We trust the chair to make, in consultation with other non-executive members, appointments to the executive board. Placing additional limitations on that would, therefore, be contrary to the important principle of ARIA's operation. Of course, the Select Committee will be able to call on ARIA's leadership, to take evidence and understand their vision for the role. That point was made by the Secretary of State when he appeared before the Committee on 17 March. I therefore think that the process is open, fair and robust. It is completely sufficient for finding the right people.

Daniel Zeichner: Surely there is a fundamental point here about the relationship between Government and Parliament, and exactly the same point could be made about every single kind of appointment. This is a power grab by Government. The Science and Technology Committee would behave perfectly properly in making any kind of assessment. Why are the Government attacking Parliament in this way?

Amanda Solloway: As I previously explained, there is no precedent in the system. We will be recruiting in the same way as we do for UKRI, and it does not go into legislation. I am very confident that we will have a full and robust process for appointing the chief executive. I therefore think that this is an open, fair and robust process. It is completely sufficient for finding the right people to be the chair and chief exec of ARIA and to make it a success. As such, I hope that the amendment will be withdrawn.

Stephen Flynn: I want briefly to reflect on a couple of the Minister's remarks. She has twice referred to the fact that there is, of course, no precedent to what has been

suggested and used UKRI as an example. However, it is possible to make freedom of information requests of UKRI, and the organisation is subject to public contract auditors, so the comparison is not fair or just. I respectfully suggest to the Minister that it is apples and oranges, and I think she needs to reflect on that

The Minister also said that she does not want to infringe on the principle of ARIA. What about the principle of scrutiny? What about the principle of Parliament playing its role in that process? Does that mean nothing to the Government? The hon. Member for Cambridge hit the nail firmly on the head with his final comments. The relationship between Government and Parliament is an important one, and I find it utterly bizarre, as I said earlier, that a group of MPs who were all elected on a platform of taking back control are so happy to give it away to a single individual. Surely they can all see how utterly bizarre that is, and how the public will reflect on that with complete and utter dismay.

I will reflect briefly on the debate. I am sure that many of the points will be raised again later, particularly in relation to FOI, public contracts and the sleaze in which the Government are obviously enveloped. I have to admire the courage of the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme, who has tried incredibly hard to defend the Government. I would suggest that perhaps he is trying to defend the indefensible. I am sure the Government Whip is incredibly impressed at the hon. Gentleman's hard work in that regard, but he needs to be mindful about how tone deaf he perhaps sounds.

The very notion from the hon. Member for Loughborough that we cannot mention Dominic Cummings, even though he is the architect of the Bill, is utterly absurd. Did she not watch his evidence?

Jane Hunt: My point was that Dominic Cummings has been mentioned very frequently, but when debating the previous amendment we talked about wanting to promote women and their status in society and in science. We have here a Science Minister, but we are not referring to her with respect; we are referring to somebody else. That is what I was talking about.

Stephen Flynn: I am glad that the hon. Lady has managed to make her point, but with all due respect, I do not think I, or indeed anyone, has impugned the Minister's capabilities in any way, shape or form. All we have done is reflect on why the Bill is here in the way it is. It was set up by an individual who only got the role of chief adviser to the Prime Minister on the basis that this would become a thing. She needs to be very mindful of that.

To go back to my initial point about why we have tabled these amendments, it is about the role of this Parliament. It will be of no surprise to anyone in this room that I do not hold this Parliament in much regard. I would be quite happy for the people of Scotland to not have MPs in this Parliament, but while the public in Scotland are contributing money to this Parliament, it should have a role in providing scrutiny.

Dawn Butler: As a member of the Science and Technology Committee, I can say with almost absolute certainty that its Chair would be in favour of having a say in who becomes the CEO of ARIA.

Stephen Flynn: The hon. Lady has certainly made her point very well. I will sum up, because I am conscious of time and the fact that everyone else is, too. We heard during the evidence sessions that we want someone who is cross-cutting and who is not the usual suspect. We want someone who is a divergent figure. Let us play a role in making sure that we get that person.

Question put. That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 9.

Division No. 4]

AYES

Blackman, Kirsty
Butler, Dawn
Flynn, Stephen

Furniss, Gill
Onwurah, Chi
Zeichner, Daniel

Baker, Duncan
Bell, Aaron
Crosbie, Virginia
Fletcher, Mark
Hunt, Jane

NOES

Mayhew, Jerome
Metcalf, Stephen
Solloway, Amanda
Tomlinson, Michael

Question accordingly negated.

The Chair: We are drawing to a close. I am mindful of the time—we have literally two minutes left—so we might as well end slightly early.

11.23 am

Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

