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29th January 2021.

Tom Tugendhat MP,
Foreign Affairs Committee,
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA.

By email only to: fac@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

I am writing in response to your letter dated 14th January 2021 regarding the research partnership between the Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Manchester and the China Electronics Technology Corporation (CETC).

In July 2018 The University of Manchester entered into an agreement with the “38th Research Institution of China Electronics Technology Group Co. Ltd (CETC38)” to create an “International Joint Research Laboratory for Radio Astronomy Advanced Instrumentation Research (RAAIR)”. This framework agreement set out the parameters of the research collaboration and included the financial and in-kind contributions of both parties. The overarching objective of the RAAIR collaboration was to “significantly advance the field of radio astronomy”. The intention was to achieve this by undertaking three research projects under the terms of the agreement.

The projects worked towards an objective of disseminating research results in the public domain through publication in academic journals and as is standard in collaborative research projects, results of the work undertaken were shared between the parties in accordance with the terms of the agreement. All collaborative projects undertaken under the framework agreement with CETC38 were sent to the Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU) for assessment and export control approval.

The first project, undertaken in 2019, was assessed by the Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU) and did not require a licence. This project is now complete. A licence application was submitted to ECJU for a second project under the framework agreement and was refused on 6 January 2021. A third application that was under assessment at the ECJU has now been withdrawn by the University.

I confirm that as I am aware no members of staff at the University have raised concerns about the collaboration with CETC38, and no desires have been expressed or steps taken by the University or CETC38 to develop collaboration between these two organisations in the areas of artificial intelligence, big data or advanced materials. It should be noted that academic colleagues in the Department of Physics and Astronomy are also involved in the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), a major international, inter-governmental project on radio astronomy, with headquarters based at Jodrell Bank, with CETC is an international partner linked to observatories in South Africa and Australia.

I also confirm that, as far as I am aware, the University had no prior knowledge of any credible reports stated in your letter, or from any other source, linking CETC’s technology with the persecution of Uyghur Muslims. Your letter is the first to do so.

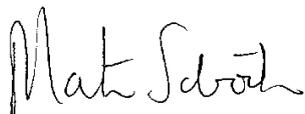
Following the recent rejection by EJCUC of an export controls licence application for the second project on 6th January 2021, the University has been reviewing its collaboration with CECT38 to understand the reasoning behind EJCUC's decision. Prior to this notification from the ECJU and the receipt of your letter, the University was neither aware nor had been informed of these links, or of the EJCUC's concerns regarding CETC38. As a result of receipt of this information, the University has now taken steps to terminate the current agreement with CETC38 whilst it continues its assessment.

The remit of the University's ethical review processes is currently to consider research involving human participants (including personal data) or animals and consequently approval for this collaboration was not and would not have been sought by an academic ethics board. However, the agreement did pass through the University's internal approvals processes in place at the time, and included within the agreement, amongst other terms, are clauses to ensure that export control approval was acquired before any project work commenced.

The University has recently undertaken a further programme of work addressing the potentially complex risks and issues that arise in the context of developing international research partnerships. This remit of this work includes the wider ethical and security issues that have been discussed in recent UK publications such as the CPNI Trusted Research guidance and Universities UK's 'Managing Risks in Internationalisation: Security Related Issues' report. One output of the University's work in this area is towards the establishment of a new body, which will provide a strengthened degree of assurance about the alignment of potential new research partners with the University's guiding principles, values, missions and goals.

I trust that this response answers fully the important points raised in your letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.



Foreign Affairs Committee

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From the Chair
Tom Tugendhat MP

Professor Martin Schröder
Vice-President of The University of Manchester
Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering
Letter by email: m.schroder@manchester.ac.uk

14 January 2021

Dear Professor Schröder

I am writing to you regarding The University of Manchester School of Physics and Astronomy's research partnership with the China Electronics Technology Corporation (CETC).

According to credible reports from both Human Rights Watch and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, CETC is one of the main architects of the Chinese government's surveillance state in Xinjiang, China, providing both technology and infrastructure that is being used for the identity-based persecution of more than one million people, predominantly Uyghur Muslims.

As part of our inquiry into the Xinjiang detention camps, the Foreign Affairs Committee is attempting to determine the extent of British involvement with organisations who are implicated in the crisis in Xinjiang. In this context, we would be grateful for responses to the following questions:

- What is the nature of Manchester University's agreement with CETC? Is the University expected to share research findings and developments in exchange for funding?
- Have any members of staff at the University raised concerns about the partnership?
- At the time of the agreement, CETC President Liehong Liu expressed a desire to broaden research cooperation into areas including artificial intelligence, big data and advanced materials. Have steps been taken to develop cooperation in these areas?
- Were you aware of the extent of the atrocities being committed in Xinjiang – and CETC's involvement with them – when this collaboration was agreed?
- Prior to its agreement, was this collaboration subjected to scrutiny by an academic ethics board or other body?

It would be helpful to have a response to this letter by 30 January. I intend to place your response in the public domain.

Best wishes,

TOM TUGENDHAT