

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

Letter by email to: FAC@parliament.uk

31 March 2021

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

Thank you for your letter of 18th March regarding the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into the Xinjiang detention camps.

As you say in your letter, international research collaboration is of great benefit to our knowledge economy. I would go further and say that it is an intrinsic part of the pursuit of excellence in science in general, and of the mission of the Royal Society "to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity". At the same time, I absolutely recognise that, as you highlight, international research collaboration can also come with risks; and the Society therefore has a duty to ensure that it does all that it can to mitigate against those risks.

In that context, the Society works with Chinese scientists at an institutional level and through the provision of grants to researchers. We have Memorandums of Understanding with the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), the Chinese Association for Science and Technology (CAST), Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). And we currently have just over 200 active grant projects in or with China.

The Society's programme of international work as a whole passes through a system of committees, including expert peer review committees, and through the Society's Board and Council, where it is assessed, scrutinized, and advised on drawing on a wide range of expertise. That is also the case for China work specifically, and that is an ongoing process which we recognise the need to keep attention on. It is through this system that risk is identified, recorded, and where mitigating actions are agreed.

As regards grant support, the Society expects all award holders to observe the highest standards of ethics and integrity in undertaking their research. Award holders have responsibilities with respect to research misuse as detailed under clause 3.16.1 (e) of the [UK Research Integrity Office Code of Practice for Research \(PDF\)](#). The Society, through its Conditions of Award, requires that UK-based Host Organisations undertake appropriate due diligence to assess the systems and controls of any non-UK partners and to put in place appropriate collaboration agreements to articulate the standards and frameworks that will need to be met by all parties. This is further supported by the expectation that "*The Host Organisation and the Award Holder must ensure that, before the research commences and during the full Award Period, all the necessary ethical, legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met*".



President Sir Adrian Smith
Executive Director Dr Julie Maxton CBE

Founded in 1660, the Royal Society is the independent scientific academy of the UK, dedicated to promoting excellence in science.

Registered Charity No 207043

The Society considers it the responsibility of the Host Organisation to investigate and report all allegations of research misconduct and/or poor behaviour and accepts that such investigations must be aligned to its internal human resources policies and disciplinary procedures. In addition, the Society is ensuring that all researchers we fund are aware of the advice of the Centre for the Protection of the National Infrastructure (CPNI) on [Trusted Research](#) when entering new collaborations.

In the case of Xinjiang specifically, the Society can confirm that with regards to non-grant activity, no resources are going into the Xinjiang region; and in terms of our grant funding, no funds are going into the Xinjiang region either through funding projects based in the region or through research partners based there. For completeness, I should flag that we are supporting one grant operating between the Botanical Gardens at Kew and the Beijing Ministry of Ecology and Environment which is focused on the protection of Xinjiang plant life with a view to making recommendations to the Ministry on flora loss in Xinjiang.

We recognise the challenge in the issues that you raise and the fact that we cannot have knowledge of, or expertise in, every question that might arise. We are therefore continuing to work with CPNI to see if there is more we might do in terms of ensuring that our community has access to the best advice available, and that it is being actively encouraged to use that advice ahead of entering in to any new collaboration. We will also keep close to the FCDO and would welcome any more specific advice that they could give about institutions, individuals, programmes etc where they see risk in our engaging.

As I am sure you will recognise, research integrity is fundamental to the mission of the Society. It is therefore something that we are always going to be keen to protect; and it is also something that we are keen to promote as an independent institution.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Smith', written in a cursive style.

Sir Adrian Smith
President



Foreign Affairs Committee

House of Commons · London · SW1A 0AA
+44 20 7219 6106 · fac@parliament.uk
www.parliament.uk · [@CommonsForeign](https://twitter.com/CommonsForeign)

From the Chair
Tom Tugendhat MP

Sir Adrian Smith PRS
President
Royal Society

Letter by email: press@royalsociety.org

18 March 2021

Dear Sir Adrian,

I am contacting you as part of the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into the Xinjiang detention camps. I have heard reports that various UK universities are engaged in research partnerships or collaboration with Chinese organisations that are complicit with the identity-based persecution of the Uyghurs and other minority groups in Xinjiang.

While international research collaboration is of great benefit to our knowledge economy, we also have a responsibility to ensure that it does not directly or indirectly lead to the UK and its scientists being complicit in atrocities.

I am concerned that the Royal Society may not have an adequate policy in place to safeguard against the potential harmful appropriation of research by malign actors. While the Royal Society is a member of the UK Academies Human Rights Committee, this group concerns only the protection of the human rights of its researchers, and not the potential human rights violations arising from the misuse of its research.

With this in mind, I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions:

- What ethical screening processes does the Royal Society use when assessing its international work to ensure no involved parties are implicated in human rights abuses?
- How does the Royal Society assess the risk of any resultant research having applications that could be used for persecution?
- What due diligence work has the Royal Society done in the case of Xinjiang specifically?
- What support could the UK Government offer to bodies like the Royal Society in assessing and scrutinising its international work?

It would be helpful to have a response by 1 April. I intend to place your response in the public domain.

Best wishes,

TOM TUGENDHAT