



University of  
**Strathclyde**  
From the Principal's Office

12 April 2021

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP  
Foreign Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London, SW1A 0AA  
[fac@parliament.uk](mailto:fac@parliament.uk)

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

Re: Your letter of 30 March 2021

Thank you for your letter regarding the work of our Space Mechatronic Systems Technology (SMeSTech) Laboratory. Please find below answers to each of your questions.

- **What is the nature of the University of Strathclyde's agreement with CALT? Is the University expected to share research findings and developments that would not otherwise be made public in exchange for funding?**

The University of Strathclyde and the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT) entered into collaboration agreements in 2009 and then in 2012 for 5 years, focussing on mechatronics research to establish a UK-China Space Mechatronic Systems Technology Laboratory (SMeSTechLab) within Strathclyde. Laboratory equipment, PhD scholarships and a research assistant were supported as part of this collaboration. The University and CALT were subsequently partners in UK funded projects supported by the Science and Technology Funding Council and the UK Space Agency.

In particular, the relationship contributed positively to the UK-China Flagship Challenge program. The SmartFarm project aimed to develop more efficient and sustainable approaches to farming and food production. It used AgriRover – a device for testing soil quality inspired by (based on) technology previously developed for use in exploration on Mars – as a key prototype. A demonstration of AgriRover was made in a farm in Beijing as part of the UK-China SmartFarm 1.0 and an export control license was secured from the UK Government Export Control Joint Unit before the demonstration.

The University is allowed to publish outputs arising from these collaboration arrangements provided that none of CALT's confidential information is included without their prior written consent. This is a standard contractual provision in this type of arrangement.

## The place of useful learning

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- **Have any members of staff or students at the University raised concerns about the partnership?**

We are not aware of any concerns being raised by staff or students about the partnership.

- **Were you aware of the extent of the atrocities being committed in Xinjiang – and CALT's reported involvement with them – when this collaboration was agreed?**

The University's formal collaboration with CALT started in 2009 and concluded in Feb 2017, so predates the deployment of drones mentioned in your letter. We were not aware of the reported role of CASC.

- **Prior to its agreement, was this collaboration subjected to scrutiny by an academic ethics board or other oversight body?**

In accordance with the relevant policies and procedures in effect at the time, the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Strathclyde approved the initial collaboration. The formalisation of the arrangements and the associated contracting process was managed in conjunction with the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Services Directorate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James McDonald", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Professor Sir Jim McDonald  
Principal & Vice-Chancellor  
University of Strathclyde



## Foreign Affairs Committee

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**From the Chair**  
Tom Tugendhat MP

Professor Sir Jim McDonald  
University of Strathclyde  
Principal & Vice-Chancellor  
Letter by email: [mary.bennett@strath.ac.uk](mailto:mary.bennett@strath.ac.uk)

30 March 2021

Dear Professor Sir Jim,

I am writing regarding the University of Strathclyde's partnership with the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT) for its Space Mechatronic Systems Technology (SMeSTech) Laboratory.

According to credible reports from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, CALT's parent company, the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), is considered very high risk for its research, development and production of military technologies for the People's Liberation Army of China. Furthermore, reports indicate that drones developed by CASC were deployed in the autonomous region of Xinjiang following unrest in 2014. As you will be aware, Xinjiang is the location of 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 may be implicated in facilitating the persecution of Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang. In this context, we would be grateful for responses to the following questions:

- What is the nature of the University of Strathclyde's agreement with CALT? Is the University expected to share research findings and developments that would not otherwise be made public in exchange for funding?
- Have any members of staff or students at the University raised concerns about the partnership?
- Were you aware of the extent of the atrocities being committed in Xinjiang – and CALT's reported 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 oversight body?

It would be helpful to have a response to this letter by 13 April. I intend to place your response in the public domain.

Best wishes,

**TOM TUGENDHAT**