



Tom Tugendhat MP, Chair
Foreign Affairs Committee
Letter by email - FAC@parliament.uk

11 May 2021

Response to Foreign Affairs Committee

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

Thank you for your letter regarding the Xinjiang detention camps and UK universities engaging in research partnerships or collaboration with Chinese organisations.

Please be assured that UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) takes its responsibilities as an ethical partner seriously, based on the principle that everyone has a right to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect. We are committed to promoting safe research and innovation environments free from exploitation, abuse and harm. UKRI recognises that as a major public funder of research and innovation, we can play an important leadership role in addressing exploitation, abuse and harm within the sector and are committed to working with individuals, organisations and other funders to promote the development of the highest standards in organisational culture, systems and practice.

With respect to your specific questions, I have answered these below.

What ethical screening processes does UKRI use when assessing research proposals to ensure no involved parties are implicated in human rights abuses? How does UKRI assess the risk of any resultant research having applications that could be used for persecution?

All researchers and research organisations in receipt of funding are required to comply with the relevant mandatory UKRI grant terms and conditions and to abide by our policies. UKRI has developed a preventing harm (safeguarding) in research and innovation policy¹ to support individuals and organisations to enhance their approach to preventing and addressing actual or potential harms in their research and innovation activities.

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-050920-PreventingHarmSafeguardingInResearchAndInnovationPolicy.pdf>



This policy applies to all UKRI funded activities irrespective of whether they take place in the UK or overseas, and to all individuals and organisations receiving UKRI funding either directly, or indirectly through a partner organisation.

Alongside individual research council policies on research ethics, the UKRI Good Research Resource Hub² (GRRH) has a set of clear statements about the roles and responsibilities of Researchers, Research Organisations and Research Ethics Committees. UKRI also sets out Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct on our website³.

To contribute to wider efforts across the international development sector, UK funders of ODA research worked with UKCDR to develop a set of principles and best practice guidance on safeguarding to anticipate, mitigate and address potential and actual harms in the funding, design, delivery and dissemination of research to ensure the highest safeguarding standards in the context of international development research.

However, there is no known robust mechanism for ensuring that “no involved parties”, broadly defined, “are implicated in human rights abuses”.

What due diligence work has UKRI done in the case of Xinjiang specifically?

UKRI has not undertaken any due diligence work in the case of Xinjiang specifically. We have and will continue to follow government guidance⁴ on this issue. We currently have no grant funding going directly to China so have not had cause to undertake due diligence. However, UKRI does actively review due diligence processes for UK research organisations and provide guidance on making their due diligence processes more robust. Guidance provided includes the checking of sanctions lists and other government guidance to ensure risks are identified and appropriate steps put in place to mitigate any risk, or to terminate or avoid the relationship where deemed necessary.

What support could the UK Government offer to bodies like UKRI in assessing and scrutinising grant proposals?

Where there is a need to scrutinise grant proposals in the context of human rights issues, UKRI works closely across government with BEIS, FCDO and MoD to assess these. We will continue to work in this way on these important issues.

² <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/roles-and-responsibilities/>

³ <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/research-integrity/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/business-and-industry/embargoes-and-sanctions>



**UK Research
and Innovation**

Thank you again for contacting me and please don't hesitate to get in touch if I can help further.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Ottoline Leyser', enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser

Chief Executive, UK Research and Innovation



Foreign Affairs Committee

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From the Chair
Tom Tugendhat MP

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser DBE FRS
Chief Executive
UK Research and Innovation

Letter by email: press@ukri.org

18 March 2021

Dear Professor Leyser,

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 UK universities being complicit in atrocities. I am concerned that UKRI's policy on preventing harm in research and innovation does not account for the potential harmful appropriation of research by malign actors.

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

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

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