



Unis join hunt for spies

Foreign interference on campus to be addressed

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UNIVERSITIES need to work with Australia's national security agencies to ensure threats of foreign interference and espionage are identified and addressed, urges federal Education Minister Jason Clare.

It follows the release earlier this week of the government's response to the report into national security risks at higher education, including from Beijing's soft-power-focused Confucius Institutes.

Mr Clare said attempts by Chinese authorities to monitor their students and academics abroad had not been raised with him, as has been reported in some other countries, but warned that Australian agencies would be keeping a "close eye" on their actions.

"I'll just make the point that we're keeping a close eye on it, and for that reason, we're also making it clear we don't want to see any more (Confucius Institutes) established," he said.

The Albanese government backed the report's recommendation to undertake a "campaign of active transparency" in relation to national security risks, as well as having universities employ a person responsible for managing foreign interference risks.

The education and training sector made up 7 per cent of the cyber security incidents reported in Australian in 2021-22, according to the Australian Cyber Security Centre's most recent threat report.

Mr Clare said he had been

engaging with universities about foreign interference and was taking the issue seriously.

"There is good co-operation between the unis and the national security agencies. And that's critical," he said.

"If we're going to make sure that we identify (foreign interference) and address it, it requires that unis to work closely with the national security agencies.

"The seriousness of our response indicates that the work universities and national security agencies do together is important and needs to be ongoing."

He said he had been impressed with the work and co-operation from universities so far.

Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong on Tuesday said the government remained concerned about foreign interference and "potential risks to academic freedom through some foreign arrangements at

universities". Opposition countering foreign influence spokesman Senator James Paterson said he noted the minister had not used her powers to end any of the existing arrangements.



Jason Clare