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## Deals with unis in China, Russia ‘putting staff at risk of blackmail, bribery’

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Australian universities are exposing academics and students to espionage, blackmail and bribery risks through thousands of research and teaching collaborations with universities in China, Iran and Russia, a report reveals.

Stricter security checks for foreign students – especially those wanting to study a masters degree or PhD in Australian universities – are flagged in the academic study,

titled *Are we Training Potential Adversaries?*

More than 3300 collaborations with universities in autocratic regimes are analysed in the paper by University of Queensland academics including cyber criminology lecturer David Mount, who is a former commandant of Australia’s Defence Intelligence Training Centre, and his colleague Brendan Walker-Munro, a senior research fellow with UQ’s Law and the Future of War research group.

The report warns that staff and students on exchange programs with Chinese universities could be “potential targets for foreign interference, espionage, bribery or blackmail”.

Researchers from China, it says, “may commence projects at Australian universities which are not being properly assessed for their national security risks”.

The academics also sound the alarm over The Australian’s revelation that universities could unwittingly be training enemies to hack into critical infrastructure, through cyber security courses for

students in China. Australian universities have signed three times more research and teaching collaboration projects with Chinese universities than with institutions in the Quad nations of the US, Japan and India, the report reveals. It red-flags 607 agreements with Chinese universities rated with a high or very high risk level by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

The report warns of “cyber-security concerns” with 10 Chinese universities that have links to Chinese military signals intelligence units, or alleged involvement in cyber attacks against Western infrastructure.

It identifies nine Australian universities that have executed agreements with Russian or Iranian research institutions that pose “security or reputational risks”.

The report found that 19 universities have executed 155 agreements with 14 Chinese universities that have been sanctioned by the US or Japan in the past five years.

It singled out Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Tsinghua University, Northwest-

ern Polytechnical University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

“(They) pose highly specific risks to the teaching of offensive cyber because of identified associations with hacker recruitment programs, Chinese military or intelligence units, or infrastructure associated with cyber-attacks on Western states,” the report says.

The security experts called on the federal government to consider restrictions on foreign students from “authoritarian or

autocratic countries” who want to study a masters degree or PhD in

Australia for study or research that touches upon “critical technologies in the national interest”.

“This might include stricter security assessments for visas for international students from autocratic or authoritarian regimes seeking to pursue research into critical technologies,” their report states. “Students arriving from an autocratic or authoritarian regime may be arriving with an agenda to obtain sensitive information or exert influence in the community, such as over expatriate students of the same country.”