

Senate Standing Committees on Economics

The Australian manufacturing industry

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 11 November 2021

Outcome: Higher Education

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ21-000153

Senator Anthony Chisholm provided in writing.

Research programs

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Question

Covid-19 has exposed the extent to which Australia's university sector is reliant on international students, and prior to Covid-19, there were already several reports highlighting the over-reliance on students from one or two countries. Beyond simple student attendance, there has been a fair bit of discussion about the challenges with university research programs delivered through partnerships with institutes in overseas countries. While these international linkages can be desirable, they also need to be managed for risk, particularly when research programs are linked to industry outcomes both here and abroad. As we consider new industry-linked research partnerships, potentially involving off-shore partners, what safeguards have been put in place to ensure that geopolitical risks are being appropriately monitored and managed, in a way that ensures Australian IP is not improperly taken overseas, or used for questionable purposes?

Answer

Broader Australian Government efforts to counter foreign interference include some measures specifically addressing the risks faced by Australia's universities.

The Australian Government has worked collaboratively with the university sector through the *University Foreign Interference Taskforce* (UFIT) to support and strengthen the sector's responses to the threats of foreign interference and build awareness and resilience to these potential and real risks.

The Minister for Education and Youth and the Minister for Home Affairs recently released the refreshed *Guidelines to counter foreign interference in the Australian university sector* (the Guidelines). The Guidelines are accompanied by a suite of complementary leading practice guidance resources which can be found online: <https://www.dese.gov.au/guidelines-counter-foreign-interference-australian-university-sector>

The Guidelines were designed to encourage universities to put in place effective strategies to help mitigate the risk of foreign interference. The Guidelines are one part of a whole-of-government response including the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018*, *Defence Trade Controls Act 2012*, *Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Act 2020* and the *Security Legislation Amendment Bill (Critical infrastructure) Bill 2021* as part of the critical infrastructure reforms.

The Government will be monitoring the sector's implementation of the Guidelines over the course of 2022 culminating in an independent review to be conducted in late 2022.