

Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Inquiry into national security risks affecting the Australian higher education and research sector, 19 March 2021

Outcome: Australian Research Council (ARC) - IQ21-000024

QoN 1 – Senator Patterson (11:22:50)

Relating to 18 grants referred to Home Affairs for advice and how the ARC identified the sensitivities:

- What was the specific media reporting that drew some or all of those cases to your attention?

Response: Due diligence is conducted for all applications recommended for funding to identify whether there are sources of sensitivity or criticism for the recommended applications. The ARC also monitors open-source information including news articles, website content as well as information received through complaints. In the instance referred to, the specific media reporting includes The Sydney Morning Herald on 27 October 2017 through to The Australian on 24 and 29 August 2020.

QoN 2 – Senator Patterson (11:29:25)

Relating to the article in the Australian in August 2020:

- Were any of the proposals referred to security agencies, people not named in the article by Ms Markson?

Response: Eight out of 18 projects were referred to the Department of Home Affairs where the source of information was not from articles published in The Australian by Ms Markson.

QoN 3 – Senator Abetz (11:49:00)

Relating to UQ Professor who set up AI company in China and supplied surveillance technology to Xinjiang authorities:

- When did you become aware of that? Was it courtesy of these recent inquiries and public discussion about these matters?

Response: The ARC received an anonymous complaint about an alleged breach of the ARC Grant Agreement involving Professor Heng Tao Shen in 2016.

QoN 4 – Senator Abetz (11:52:45)

Relating to penalties to researchers who have breached and whether grant money has had to be repaid:

- Are you able to provide us with actual examples of that? And if not, can you at least indicate whether there have been examples where there has been a requirement to repay, which is not a penalty as such but at least repay it's a start, of funds that were used in a manner in breach relating to national interest. (for the last 5 years)

Response: The ARC has a standard process for administering funds granted under the National Competitive Grants Program. Where the ARC identifies a breach of the agreement, which might arise through compliance checks, research integrity checks or tip-offs, it has the capacity to withdraw or recover funding. If there has been a research integrity breach, additional penalties may be imposed on individual researchers such as being unable to apply

for grants for a certain period, undertake training, or having additional certifications on grant applications.

Over the period 2016-2020, the ARC has recovered funding on approximately 57 individual grants from universities. None of those recoveries related to a breach of national security. The recoveries related to issues such as expenditure on ineligible items, leaving the country for extended periods of time, having a dual appointment in the case of the fellowship schemes.