

20 July 2021

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee  
By email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

**Questions on Notice and Responses**  
**Inquiry into Funding for public research into foreign policy issues**

**Written QoNs from Senator Kitching**

- **Should the sanctions in relation to Iran apply to all doing business with Iran except for Universities?**

The two sanctions regimes– the UN Security Council sanctions and the Australian autonomous sanctions regime – impose sanctions measures for the listed countries, with both covering Iran. The sanctions to be followed in relation to Iran are precisely set out and **do not exempt universities**. Go8 universities respect the national interest and national security drivers that underpin such sanctions and comply with the required measures for all sanctioned countries including Iran, as has previously been discussed in the Go8 submission to the PJCIS Inquiry into National Security Risks Affecting the Australian Higher Education and Research Sector.

- **Should universities be able to partner with military institutions in places like China and Russia?**

Go8 universities scrutinise and manage their potential and existing partnerships in accordance with relevant legal, regulatory, policy or ethical standards, and this is particularly the case with defence related research – where the approach is characterised by being one of tall fences around small areas with trusted partners.

Australian universities are subject to the Defence Trade Controls Act which governs the supply of defence and strategic goods list technologies. The emphasis is on the nature of the goods – which can include research – rather than the nature of the partner (including originating country) that the university is working with at the institutional or individual level. As previously noted to PJCIS, Go8 universities apply their own pre-screening in addition to DTC considerations, including through detailed discussions with researchers regarding the possible implications of their research beyond the intended use.

This is consistent with the Australian Government's country-agnostic approach in a range of foreign interference and influence focused regulation. Go8 universities are cooperating with increased scrutiny of foreign interference in our universities and greater transparency of whom our universities partner under the UFIT *Guidelines* and in compliance with funders' reporting requirements. The UFIT *Guidelines* are also currently undergoing a refresh process, including consideration of enhanced due diligence measures to ensure a high level of scrutiny of any partnership proposals.

Universities are also subject to legislation such as the Australia's Foreign Relations Act 2020. This gives the Foreign Minister ultimate authority over any arrangements universities propose to enter into.

The Consolidated List under Australian Sanctions law which prohibits providing assets to or dealing with the assets of listed persons or entities provides another checkpoint that universities use to assess their prospective partnerships and does list certain military entities including foreign universities. While the Australian Government has not adopted the US approach of targeting for non-entry to the country, students and researchers working in fields that contribute to certain military activities, our visa system does screen applicants on security as well as other grounds. It should be noted that the Australian Government has not – to the Go8's knowledge – endorsed the China Defence Universities Tracker released by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) or any like instrument.

- **Your submission underlined the importance of protecting universities' independence. Do you have views on how this can be achieved at the same time that they are encouraged to produce policy-relevant research outputs?**

The Go8 believes that independence is critical to the production of high-quality research, that can be used to inform public policy. The Go8 submission particularly emphasised the independence of our research, by virtue of being subject to world-recognised peer review processes that provide an impartial and independent assessment of our research, not only to ensure the quality of the research but to ensure its accountability. These checks and balances add important scrutiny to the process of research in our universities from when research proposals are received through to selecting material for publication - as well as assessing the research of higher degree by research (HDR) candidates. Peer review ensures through this independent assessment that research is accurate, thorough and credible. The Go8 therefore promotes and supports this level of rigour and scrutiny as a means of protecting the independence of our research. It is also worth recognising that peer review is relevant even when our universities inform urgent or more pressing public policy creation, given that our experts would invariably draw on an existing bank of their own or other peer reviewed research.

It is also important to note that protecting university independence is one of the key purposes of the UFIT Guidelines. By putting in place a range of measures to mitigate against the risk of foreign interference, universities – in partnership with government and security agencies – are working to ensure the independence that is critical to academic freedom and the provision of high-quality advice.

The Go8 also recognises the value of retaining universities' institutional autonomy and will continue to work with the Australian Government through the UFIT process and others to ensure that the independence so necessary to policy-relevant research outputs is not compromised. Our submission to the PJCIS Inquiry into National Security Risks Affecting the Australian Higher Education and Research Sector noted examples of where research projects had been refused because of internal scrutiny raising concerns of foreign interference, as well as several measures within our institutions to further ensure the integrity of our research, its transparency and that due diligence has been applied throughout the research process.

- **Another witness talked about moving past traditional quality measures for research, particularly when that research aims to be policy relevant. What are your views on this?**

The Go8 consistently supports the rigorous assessment of the quality of our research through a variety of lenses, that demonstrate its impact whether to discovery, society, the economy, to aiding the resolution of global issues or wicked problems endemic to Australia, to the development of new products and commercial solutions and to public discourse and policy development.

The Go8 has both informed over time the development of the Australian Government's Engagement and Impact of research measure, first deployed in 2018 by the Australian Research Council, and participated extensively in the process that assesses research for its role in impacting economic, environmental, social, cultural and other benefits. Impacts measured by the Government can include the influence on policy and adoption of public policy.

An examination of highly rated impact studies under the 2018 Engagement and Impact measure demonstrates that Go8 universities scored highly in a range of impact studies that influenced health policy (Medical Benefits Schedule listings; hepatitis C focused health policy), education policy (school space allocation in Victorian schools), indigenous architecture policy, policing policy (police interactions with people of different backgrounds), ageing population policy, and climate policy, to pick a few examples.

We would also argue that a focus on speed is not always in the national interest. Good public policy needs a level of rigour if it is to be effective and achieve its goals, and this in turn requires a level of confidence in the quality of the research that underpins it. The key lies in achieving a good balance between quality of output and time of production.

In my evidence provided to the Committee, I outlined two examples of where the Go8 has demonstrated this balance and capacity in response to times of great national need. The two examples given – of the production of the [COVID-19 Roadmap to Recovery](#) in a three-week period, and production of the original UFIT Guidelines in 90 days – clearly demonstrate our capacity to harness the talent and resources that lie within our eight institutions to assist the Government to rapidly determine a policy solution to issues that were highly time-sensitive.



- **Do you think there is merit in the idea of reciprocal visiting fellowships between government departments and universities? Would the government officials need to be PhD qualified in such a scheme?**

There is significant merit in reciprocal visiting fellowships or like mechanisms to provide government officials a chance to gain experience in a university setting, or for academics to acquire exposure to government and policy making environments in practice – allowing for the useful exchange of ideas, experience, and the growth of valuable connections. A prime example is the opportunity provided through the ANU’s National Security College for public servants to be seconded from Federal Government departments as advisers or other expert roles in the college, with current secondees being from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It does not require government secondees to have a PhD nor does the Go8 think this a necessary qualification for participation in such schemes. In reverse, the Australian Science Policy Fellowship Program run from the Office of Australia’s Chief Scientist has, for three years, offered key opportunities for academics (PhD graduates to mid-career researcher) including from Go8 universities to receive on the job training and exposure to policy making.

Yours sincerely

**VICKI THOMSON**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**