
Response to Questions on Notice

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

La Trobe University has taken two questions on notice following the appearance of the Vice Chancellor, Professor John Dewar, at the Committee on 13 October 2020:

1. Provide details of former employee, John Qui's visit to the Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT) and details of any collaboration with BIT.
2. Provide details of procedures in place to ensure relationships with organisations (especially United Front) are 'above board'.

RESPONSE

Beijing Institute of Technology

La Trobe University does not have, and has never had, any agreements in place with the Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT).

Mr John Qui, a former employee of La Trobe University who held the position of International Development Manager (North Asia), was frequently involved in discussions with universities in that region, including China. Mr Qui was primarily responsible for student recruitment activities and visited BIT in that capacity. This visit was consistent with normal practice across the sector at the time, particularly given the good relations between the two countries and that many Chinese universities were actively seeking overseas partners. At the time of the visit, La Trobe understands BIT had established partnerships with a number of foreign universities across the globe, including for example the [University of California Berkeley](#).

Procedures in place to manage relationships with other organisations

La Trobe University has been reviewing its approach to due diligence before entering agreements with foreign entities. We have recently introduced a requirement that, where agreements are identified as presenting possible threats, we seek advice from risk advisory experts. An overview of our integrated system of due diligence and assurance is set out below. These arrangements are continuously reviewed and adapted in line with new and changing regulatory requirements and best practice approaches, including implementation of University Foreign Interference Taskforce Guidelines to counter foreign influence in the Australian university sector. This has involved changes to information held in University Risk Registers, amendment of policies and procedures as well as the development of new training and information resources for staff.

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La Trobe's Assurance Environment

La Trobe University is committed to an Enterprise Risk Management approach that effectively mitigates risks and increases organisational resilience. La Trobe's risk program is dynamic, pragmatic and agile, allowing for rapid responses in an increasingly changing environment. La Trobe's Enterprise Risk Management is overseen by a robust system of Corporate Governance and supported by a number of practical and contemporary frameworks, policies and tools – enabling the timely implementation and management of risk University-wide.



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Two examples of the outcomes delivered by these arrangements are provided for the Committee's information (noting that they have been anonymised due to commercial and legal sensitivities):

Example 1: Collaboration with an Engineering Organisation

The University was approached by an intermediary to join a research commercialisation collaboration with a foreign entity. The entity described itself as a civilian and commercially oriented organisation for engineers (the professional organisation).

The University referred the proposal to a risk advisory firm for enhanced due diligence for several reasons:

- The technology in question has potential dual-use applications.
- Concerns that an academic from the university was asked to sign a memorandum of understanding during a public conference in the foreign nation
- The professional organisation was domiciled in a nation that does not rank highly on transparency or democracy indices (the foreign nation)
- Potential connection to the United Front

The results of the enhanced due diligence inquiries showed that:

- The professional organisation was publicly endorsed by a scientist who was decorated for his contribution to advanced weapons systems in the foreign nation.

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- Each of the leaders of the professional organisation simultaneously held roles in the foreign nation's Defence industry and military technology system.
- Several of those leaders held roles in an entity involved in the development of nuclear weapons for the foreign nation.

The University resolved not to pursue the research opportunity due to a risk that the technology in question might be used to advance the design or development of nuclear weapons in the foreign nation and compromise Australian national security.

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Example 2: Joint Venture Capital Development

The University was approached to join with a foreign venture capital fund (the VC fund) to develop a research & development park in Australia. The name of the fund and the location of meetings implied that the VC fund was controlled by a prestigious university (the foreign university).

The University referred the proposal to a risk advisory firm for enhanced due diligence for several reasons:

- Representatives of the VC fund did not provide adequate information to identify the fund and its precise corporate structure, personnel and investment strategies.
- The Foreign University had multiple investment arms and holdings under numerous aliases.
- The Foreign University presented a draft MOU for the Australian University to sign which listed the name of the address of the foreign university yet was signed by the Vice-President of a separate investment holding.
- The VC fund was domiciled in a nation that does not rank highly on transparency or democracy indices (the foreign nation).

The results of the enhanced due diligence inquiries showed that:

- The corporate structure, multiple aliases and address of the VC fund could not be categorically ascertained through publicly available sources;
- The VC fund may have been controlled by a foreign government research institute which purports to focus on the integration of civil and military technology.

The University resolved not to pursue the development opportunity due to a lack of transparency.