

Ministry of Colleges and Universities    Ministère des Collèges et Universités

Data, Research and Innovation Division    Division des données, de la recherche et de l'innovation

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October 6, 2023

Hilary Smyth, Clerk  
Standing Committee on Science and Research  
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ms. Smyth:

**Re: Use of Federal Government Research and Development Grants, Funds, and Contributions by Canadian Universities and Research Institutions in Partnerships With Entities Connected to the People's Republic of China**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Science and Research on this important topic.

Discoveries and innovations stemming from Ontario colleges, universities and research hospitals are helping to solve some of the most pressing social, environmental and health challenges of our day. This vital work is shaping our understanding of society and the cosmos, redefining industries, and creating new economic opportunities.

In today's increasingly complex and globalized world, our province's researchers want and need to work collaboratively with top researchers and scientists around the world, to solve global challenges. However, without appropriate safeguards in place, these important innovations and discoveries could be at risk of foreign interference.

We have learned that research security is essential, and to implement it effectively, we must all work together. This is why we appreciate your committee's efforts and why we are pleased to collaborate with the federal government on mitigating these threats.

To thrive in the global economy, Ontario is committed to investing in research and innovation. Since 2016, we have funded approximately 1,500 research projects worth just under a billion dollars.

We are also committed to ensuring that the economic benefits resulting from discoveries made in Ontario, stay in Canada, so that all Canadians can benefit from them. That's why Ontario, in partnership with colleges and universities in our province, began implementing a country-agnostic, risk-based security review for our competitive research programs in 2019.

Any applicants who want to receive funding through our province's competitive research programs, must complete an Economic and Geopolitical Risk Checklist and disclose their foreign affiliations and sources of funding. Each application also undergoes a comprehensive scientific review, followed by a security review that is conducted by a dedicated security office within the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Each security review includes an analysis of the nature of the research, as well as the research team's collaborations with international partners. This comprehensive security review leverages both open-source websites and public information. Following the implementation of this approach in 2019, no research projects identified as 'high-risk' have received funding from the Ontario government.

This past spring and summer, our government and our province's postsecondary education institutions came together to discuss how we can collectively further enhance Ontario's research security landscape, and how we can work together to best protect Ontario's researchers and their research from foreign interference.

Many colleges and universities spoke passionately about the need to protect the gains they have made when it comes to equity, diversity and inclusion. They also spoke about the importance of providing clarity and transparency, to dispel any notions that all collaborations with researchers from specific countries are problematic. Our postsecondary education institutions said it was important to equip them with the information they need to make informed decisions about any future collaborations with other researchers around the world. And lastly, they also requested greater alignment between both provincial and federal research security processes and requirements.

We are looking forward to the upcoming federal announcements on research security as we anticipate that any changes will likely provide provinces and postsecondary institutions with much needed transparency, clarity and consistency going forward.

Earlier this fall, Ontario introduced a number of new security measures that were created based on the feedback we recently received from postsecondary institutions. These new measures include:

- Clearer application guidelines for our province's competitive research programs, including additional space for researcher disclosure, to ensure all affiliations are disclosed.
- A new attestation and risk reduction/mitigation initiative that provides institutions and researchers the opportunity to address identified risks before funding decisions are made. This ultimately will help reduce the number of projects that are not funded due to security concerns.

- Spot audits to confirm compliance with the agreed upon risk reduction and mitigation measures over the course of the projects.
- Annual disclosure of the institution's foreign relationships. This information will help the province gain a better understanding of the institution's foreign affiliations overall, because we, like the federal government, fund only a fraction of their research.
- Information sessions to ensure that both institutions and researchers stay on top of all Ontario government directed best practices and requirements.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not also acknowledge the enormous amount of work that is being done by postsecondary institutions themselves. To adjust to our ever-changing environment, postsecondary institutions have developed new risk-based internal protocols and have been working closely with their researchers to implement them. All research-intensive universities in Ontario have already hired research security directors and are building teams that will help support their researchers in navigating the ever-shifting geopolitical landscape. These institutions have also established a province-wide community of practice to share their experiences and lessons learned and have developed and shared a best practices guide.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that research security remains an issue of enormous importance to not just the province of Ontario, but to the entire postsecondary education sector. We take issues of foreign interference very seriously and are continuing to take appropriate steps to ensure that the national and provincial security within our world-class research ecosystem is of the utmost priority.

To remain globally competitive, we encourage the commercialization of intellectual property developed in our province. However, we also need to take appropriate actions to minimize the risk that Ontario-led research may be misused by entities that do not share our Canadian values.

This is not a job for just one government, or one entity, but is a shared responsibility that should involve all provinces, our federal research funding partners, our postsecondary institutions and the researchers themselves. By working together, we can ensure that our research is safeguarded from foreign interference for years to come.

Sincerely,



Colleen Hogan

Assistant Deputy Minister (A), Ministry of Colleges and Universities

c: Scott Allinson, Interim Chief of Staff, Minister's Office, Ministry of Colleges and Universities  
David Wai, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities