MANAGING RISKS IN INTERNATIONALISATION: SECURITY RELATED ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Universities UK

The UK's universities co-ordinate partnerships and welcome students from across the world. Internationalisation has shaped the agenda and strategies of universities not just in the UK, but globally. It has brought significant economic and social benefits to the UK, intellectual opportunities for scholarship and transformed universities into global institutions.

The vast majority of international collaborations are beneficial to the UK, but like every activity, there are some risks involved and over the years these risks have become more dynamic and complex.

The risks to universities are not limited to the theft of intellectual property and data, or the security of university campuses. There are also threats to the values that have underpinned the success of the higher education sector: academic freedom, freedom of speech and institutional autonomy. These values are rooted in the UK's commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

It is vital that universities are aware of these risks and have proper processes in place to protect themselves, their people and their reputations.

As the representative body for 139 universities, Universities UK (UUK) has published detailed guidance for institutions on the considerations and measures they should take to guard against hostile interference and promote academic freedom.

This briefing summarises the key elements and recommendations of the guidance to the sector.

PURPOSE OF UUK'S WORK

UUK's programme of work on security related issues in higher education aims to:

1. ensure UK universities can demonstrate that they have effective approaches for protecting themselves against international security threats

2. allow UK universities to be confident and able to pursue sustainable, secure international partnerships

3. establish a clear, collaborative approach between the government and the higher education sector towards research and innovation, institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the context of security challenges

WHO IS THE GUIDANCE FOR?

The guidance is for senior leaders within UK universities. UUK is clear that an institution's security should be a priority for our members; the guidance recommends that an institution identifies a member of its senior executive leadership team to lead the implementation of the guidelines. It also recommends that the governing body of the institution receives an annual report on the security risks faced by the institution and how those risks are being managed.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The guidance sets out the key considerations for senior leaders across different areas of institutional security and makes recommendations for how to manage potential risks. As every university is unique, these recommendations should be adapted to the specific demands of individual institutions.

1. Protecting your reputation and values

The governance structures of a university should empower individuals, helping foster a culture that enables staff and students to pursue international collaborations and mitigate potential risks.

Build resilience to security related issues

Universities should place security measures at the centre of their governance and culture and set up processes for reviewing security risks. This should include an entry on the institution's risk register and an annual update report to the governing body.

Due diligence

Security risks should be embedded into due diligence processes for collaboration, similar to assessments around financial and reputational risk.

Promote the values of UK higher education

Institutions must continue to promote their autonomy, freedom of speech and academic freedom. Key recommendations include developing clear codes of conduct and processes for reporting concerns about interference.

2. Protecting your people

Guidance for protecting students, staff, and visitors of the institution:

Internal and external communications and knowledge sharing

Communications should promote a culture of awareness and reinforce individual responsibilities around managing security risks. Knowledge sharing between institutions and the government should be promoted to help parties to work together to tackle security risks.

Protecting staff and students travelling and working overseas

There should be robust processes for protecting students and staff travelling overseas, including risk assessments and due diligence procedures.

3. Protecting your campuses

Recommendations on protecting universities' infrastructures and estates regarding international collaboration, including cybersecurity issues:

Cybersecurity, estates and visitors

Cybersecurity strategies should be responsive to the possibility of cyber-attacks becoming more sophisticated and frequent. Universities should have procedures in place to protect their estates and should focus on introducing safeguards related to external visitors.

The Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure and the National Cyber Security Centre [link] have published materials around this which can also support universities.

4. Protecting your partnerships

Recommendations related to international research and transnational education partnerships:

Research security, intellectual property and export control compliance

The guidance includes details on how institutions can defend themselves against attempts to gain access to research and intellectual property. This includes advice around policies and contractual agreements to protect intellectual property, and a checklist for compliance with export control legislation.

Transnational education partnerships

Transnational education is education delivered by UK providers abroad. Universities should mitigate risks around infringements to institutional autonomy or academic freedom on foreign programmes.

WHAT NEXT?

The publication of these guidelines is the culmination of long-term work by UUK and the sector to boost the resilience of UK higher education against security threats. This work will continue over the next few years as the UK enters a new period of international collaboration. UUK will be reviewing the guidance in early 2021 and it will be updated as necessary to ensure it is responsive to the risks the sector faces. More broadly, UUK is promoting collaboration in the sector to ensure that universities in all their operations across the world remain responsive to security challenges.