



User Name: AYCEID ServicetoService

Date and Time: Wednesday, January 20, 2021 7:05:00 AM EST

Job Number: 134493300

Document (1)

1. Protect academic freedom overseas

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The Times (London)

June 17, 2020 Wednesday

Edition 1, National Edition

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 30

Length: 262 words

Body

Sir, Jo Johnson is right about the need to expand the post-study work visa system and reverse the effects of a period of apparent hostility to international students ("Four-year visas needed 'to lure students'", Jun 15, and letter, Jun 16). However, we were troubled that his report did not mention the need to protect academic freedom. The quality of UK universities, and thus their global status, rests in large part on their commitment to academic freedom. But last December the foreign affairs committee expressed concern about the surveillance of some international students by their authoritarian governments and the strings sometimes attached to much-needed foreign funding for study and research. The Academic Freedom Working Group, which we have recently launched, brings together lecturers, parliamentarians and civil society to address these issues and strengthen protection for academic freedom.

Mr Johnson calls on British universities to rediscover their "bounce". This must include greater transparency about foreign funding coming into the UK and the state of academic freedom on overseas campuses. It also requires training and reporting mechanisms to protect at-risk students and academics, at home and abroad.

Professor John Heathershaw, University of Exeter; Dr Chelsea Blackburn Cohen, Scholars at Risk; Professor Chris Hughes, LSE; Dr Katarzyna Kaczmarek, University of Edinburgh; Dr Corinne Lennox, School of Advanced Study, University of London; Stephen Wordsworth, Council for At-Risk Academics; Dr Yesim Yaprak Yildiz, Goldsmiths, University of London

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: TIM

Subject: ACADEMIC FREEDOM (94%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (92%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (90%); EMPLOYMENT VISAS (90%); FOREIGN STUDENTS (90%); INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (90%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (90%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (78%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & NATIONAL SECURITY (78%); SOCIETY, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE & LIFESTYLE (78%); AT RISK YOUTH (77%); SURVEILLANCE (73%)

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Industry: PASSPORTS & VISAS (92%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (90%); EMPLOYMENT VISAS (90%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (78%); EDUCATIONAL SERVICES (78%)

Geographic: LONDON, ENGLAND (90%); UNITED KINGDOM (90%); National Edition

Load-Date: June 17, 2020

End of Document