

Sintesi

Le università britanniche hanno continuato a stringere partnership con istituzioni cinesi legate alla difesa nonostante gli avvertimenti dell'MI5 sui rischi di spionaggio. Almeno sette università del Regno Unito hanno firmato o rinnovato accordi che potrebbero esporle a rischi elevati di contribuire involontariamente alla ricerca militare cinese. L'MI5 aveva precedentemente informato che gli stati ostili mirano a sfruttare la ricerca britannica sensibile per rafforzare i loro militari e minare la sicurezza nazionale.

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Universities do deals with China despite MI5 warning over spying

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British academia has continued to pursue partnerships with Chinese defence universities despite MI5 warnings over espionage risks from hostile states, The Times can reveal.

At least seven British universities signed or renewed agreements with Chinese universities that security experts said could leave the establishments at "very high risk" of inadvertently aiding Chinese military research.

In total, 23 British universities signed an agreement with at least one institution assessed as posing a significant risk of assisting Chinese military research, after a previous warning from MI5.

Sir Ken McCallum, the director-general of the security service, had briefed vice-chancellors last April that hostile states were targeting sensitive British research to boost their militaries and undermine national security.

The Times asked all British universities, under freedom of information laws, what partnership deals they had signed with Chinese entities in the months after McCallum's warning.

Five had signed agreements with members of the "seven sons of national defence", a university group thought to be key to China's defence industry. Two more had signed agreements with other institutions with close links to the Chinese military judged "very high risk" by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), a defence think tank.

Queen Mary University of London signed two agreements with North-western Polytechnical University (NWPU), a member of the seven sons group, based in Xi'an. This included a joint engineering school. Robert Gordon University, in Aberdeen, signed an agreement between its National Subsea Centre, which specialises in undersea engineering, and NWPU. The think tank says NWPU's research focuses on aviation, space and naval technology and it has research labs specialising in the development of unmanned aerial vehicles.

In April 2021 a Chinese businessman pleaded guilty to charges in the US that he smuggled marine technology out of the country to benefit NWPU.

Aberdeen University renewed an

agreement on a joint engineering degree with Harbin Engineering University, also part of the seven sons. The ASPI says this is a "leading centre of research and training on shipbuilding, naval armaments and maritime technology". The University of Strathclyde signed a teaching collaboration agreement with the Nanjing University of Science and Technology, reported by ASPI to have been ranked as China's top university for armaments science.

City St George's, University of London signed a teaching agreement with Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics to co-run a degree programme. According to the ASPI, the Nanjing institution specialises in military aviation research.

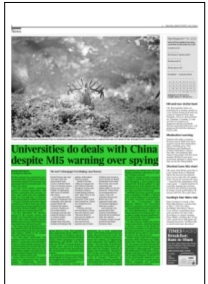
Imperial College London continued to work on materials science research with Shougang, a steel company that supplied the Chinese military. It also continued work with Huawei, the US-sanctioned communications company, on video generation technology.

Sheffield University received a grant from a subsidiary of CRRC, a Chinese state-owned rolling stock manufacturer. Leeds University received funds from the US-sanctioned China National Offshore Oil Corporation linked to a geological research project.

Luke de Pulford, executive director of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, said the sector had become "vulnerable to malign foreign interference" since universities were "making a loss on every domestic student".

Sir Iain Duncan Smith, the former Conservative leader, called the findings a "disaster" because of the British defence sector's reliance on research done in civilian universities. A spokesman for the Russell Group said its "universities are alive to the risks involved".

Robert Gordon said it had "stringent" processes, while Aberdeen and Strathclyde's were "robust". Queen Mary and City St George's said they followed official guidance. A government spokesman said it had a "robust approach". Huawei said British and US restrictions were politically motivated and that it complied with all legal obligations. Sheffield University and Imperial declined to comment. The University of Leeds and the Chinese companies and universities were approached for comment.



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Le università fanno accordi con la Cina nonostante l'avvertimento sul possibile spionaggio lanciato dall'MI5