

## Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) – data notes

20.11.2023

UK-China Transparency (UKCT) has published the results of a Freedom of Information (FOI) campaign to 92 British universities concerning Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs).

The campaign is in two parts. The first part was conducted by UKCT and its volunteers and consists of two FOI requests sent to the 24 members of the Russell Group of universities (see Appendix 1). The results of this campaign were shared with the Henry Jackson Society (HJS) prior to the publication of HJS's research report on CSSAs, *'Studying Abroad to Serve China: Research on the Systematic Threats of CSSAs in the UK'*.<sup>1</sup>

The second part was conducted by HJS itself and involved two FOI requests to 92 British universities (see Appendix 2). Results have been shared with UKCT for publication in the interests of aiding other scholars and researchers interested in CSSAs.

Finally, a small number of FOIs published online by other parties, which UKCT alerted HJS to, have been replicated and included in the data (in the 'Footnote data' folder, see below).

### Data organisation

The data is hosted in a folder entitled 'Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (Henry Jackson Society project)', hosted in UKCT's digital library at [www.ukctransparency.org/library](http://www.ukctransparency.org/library)

The main folder contains three subfolders, described below.

In each subfolder, individuals documents are named with reference to the relevant university. For example, '[Liverpool] CSSAUK-Embassy invitations', and '[Oxford] CSSA emails, governing body scrutiny' relate to Liverpool's and Oxford's CSSAs respectively.

#### 1 - Footnote data

This includes all the FOI data referenced in the footnotes of the HJS report. It is published in a dedicated folder for ease of use by scholars, researchers and journalists interested in digging deeper into the evidence used in the report.

#### 2 – UKCT FOI requests

This includes all the responses to the following FOI request, which was sent by UKCT to universities in the Russell Group:

*"Please provide all emails between email addresses belonging to university employees and the CSSA's email address, [email address] or any other email address of a representative of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association. Please provide all emails from the past four years, from 2019 to the present.*

*"Please provide all documentation regarding the CSSA submitted for the consideration of the university's governing body or its members or committees, e.g.*

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Anson-Report.pdf>

*reports, notes etc. If the body and its committee has never considered the matter of the CSSA, please say so.”*

Where a CSSA email could be found, this was inserted where the text above reads ‘[email address]’. Where one could not be found, the text of the FOI request was slightly different but to the same effect.

In response to the request for emails, most universities stated that there was no data, that it would take too much time to search for the data, or that there was so much data that it could not all be provided for some reason (for example, because it would take too long to filter out sensitive personal data). Therefore, overall, the results are sparse.

In a small handful of cases, however – those of Bristol, Newcastle and Sheffield – a huge number of emails was provided. These cases may be of special use to scholars and the results of the relevant FOI requests are located in sub-subfolders, so huge were the files, which also had to be split.

In response to the request for documentation regarding CSSAs that had been considered by university governing bodies, their committees or members, not one university could provide any data.

One case, that of the London School of Economics (LSE), raises the prospect that concerns about CSSAs might have been considered by universities at the executive level, but not at the level of the governing body. A briefing note, “LSE and China – Our Engagement as of June 2019”, prepared for LSE’s director (not a governing body member) in 2019 gives an interesting account of the forced disbanding of LSE’s CSSA. (This FOI request and response are available online<sup>2</sup> and have been republished by UKCT.<sup>3</sup>) LSE stated, however, that this matter was not referred to the governing body, which has never considered matters pertaining to the CSSA.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the FOI results contained in subfolder 3 (see below) suggest that even at the executive level, universities have not considered the matter of CSSAs.

### ***Nota bene***

Information provided to UKCT contains important case studies subsequently analysed by HJS, for example, in the case of Bristol, emails sent by Bristol University’s CSSA as part of a campaign of political pressure against a student union group that was based on misleading information.<sup>5</sup>

In another case not analysed by HJS, that of Queen’s University Belfast, the initial response contained reference to CSSA annual reports. After receiving this response, UKCT then sent a follow-up email requesting the reports and they were provided. The reports and associated

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/foi\\_request\\_chinese\\_embassygover\\_5#incoming-1482695](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/foi_request_chinese_embassygover_5#incoming-1482695)

<sup>3</sup> <https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/London-School-of-Economics-LSE-China-matters-CSSA-disbanded.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/London-School-of-Economics-LSE-CSSA-emails-governing-body-scrutiny.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Bristol-Xinjiang.pdf>

minutes were found to contain reference to cooperation with an unspecified “propaganda department”.<sup>6</sup> Details such as this may be of use to researchers.

UKCT also sent the following FOI request to the Russell Group universities:

*“Please provide the constitution of the university's Chinese Students and Scholars Association, if held.*

*“Please provide any minutes of the university's governing body that mention the Chinese Students and Scholars Association.*

*“Please provide the number of disciplinary cases involving the Association.”*

UKCT has not published the responses to this request because they are all more or less the same. Where the constitution of the relevant CSSA was not already online, it was not provided. No governing body minutes mentioning CSSAs were identified by any universities. Finally, where universities stated that they had looked (and they did not do so in all cases), no disciplinary cases mentioning a CSSA were identified.

For researchers or scholars curious about the responses of particular universities, please email [info@ukctransparency.org](mailto:info@ukctransparency.org) and we will endeavour to assist you.

### 3 – HJS FOI requests

This folder contains results from two requests sent by HJS to 92 UK universities (see Appendix 2).

Typically, files labelled ‘D’ relate to the following request or similar:

*“Please provide all documentation the university holds about the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA). This is a student group at your university controlled by the Chinese embassy.”*

Typically, files labelled ‘F’ relate to the following request or similar:

*“Please provide a list of all financial interactions between the university and its subsidiary institutions and the Chinese Society. IE, please provide a list of funding provided to the Chinese Society.”*

Please note that many universities did not respond or did not share any substantial data for one or other reason. For example, some universities stated that they were not aware of hosting a CSSA group. Others ignored the requests. Many stated that no data was held.

As of the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, UKCT has published those FOI responses provided to UKCT by HJS. For researchers or scholars curious about the responses of particular universities where those responses have not been published by UKCT, please email [info@ukctransparency.org](mailto:info@ukctransparency.org) and we will endeavour to assist you in obtaining the responses.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Queens-University-Belfast-CSSA-emails-governing-body-scrutiny.pdf>

## APPENDIX 1

### Russell Group Universities (in no particular order)

- Imperial College London
- University College London
- King's College London
- Queen Mary University of London
- University of Sheffield
- Newcastle University
- Cardiff University
- London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)
- University of Southampton
- University of Bristol
- University of Oxford
- University of Birmingham
- University of Exeter
- University of Nottingham
- University of Warwick
- University of Cambridge
- University of Manchester
- University of Liverpool
- University of York
- University of Leeds
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Glasgow
- Durham University
- Queen's University Belfast

## APPENDIX 2

### Universities sent FOI requests by the Henry Jackson Society (in no particular order)

- Imperial College London
- University College London
- King's College London
- Queen Mary University of London
- University of Sheffield
- Newcastle University
- Cardiff University
- London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)
- University of Southampton
- University of Bristol
- University of Oxford
- University of Birmingham
- University of Exeter
- University of Nottingham
- University of Warwick
- University of Cambridge
- University of Manchester
- University of Liverpool
- University of York
- University of Leeds
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Glasgow
- Durham University
- Queen's University Belfast
- City, University of London
- Birkbeck College
- Brunel University
- Royal Holloway, University of London
- Royal College of Music
- Royal College of Art
- University of Greenwich
- Middlesex University
- University of South Bank
- University of the Arts London
- University of Westminster
- SOAS University of London
- Loughborough University
- Roehampton University
- University of Kent
- University of Sussex
- University of Portsmouth
- University of Winchester
- University of Surrey
- University of Reading
- Oxford Brookes University
- Royal Agricultural University
- Bournemouth University
- Bath University
- Bath Spa University
- University of Plymouth
- Cardiff Metropolitan University
- University of South Wales
- Swansea University
- Bangor University
- Aberystwyth University

- University of Leicester
- De Montfort University
- Coventry University
- University of Lincoln
- Nottingham Trent University
- University of Northampton
- University of Essex
- Cranfield University
- University of Hertfordshire
- University of Bedfordshire
- University of East Anglia
- University of Wolverhampton
- Teesside University
- Derby University
- Lancaster University
- University of Huddersfield
- Staffordshire University
- University of Bolton
- University of Bradford
- University of Central Lancashire
- Northumbria University
- University of Keele
- University of Hull
- University of Chester
- Edge Hill University
- University of Sunderland
- University of Salford
- University of Aberdeen
- Heriot-Watt University
- Edinburgh Napier University
- University of Dundee
- University of Strathclyde
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- University of the West of Scotland
- University of St. Andrews
- University of Stirling
- Ulster University