



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

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5 September 2023

File ref: FOI2023/00561

John Lubbock

Sent by email: request-1009727-
b87dfc80@whatdotheyknow.com

Dear John Lubbock

Freedom of Information request: FOI2023/00561

Thank you for your email of 31 July 2023 requesting information about work with BGI Genomics or any subsidiaries.

The University of Edinburgh is a global university, rooted in Scotland. We are internationally recognised for our research, development and innovation and we have provided world-class teaching to our students for more than 430 years. We are the largest university in Scotland and in 2021/22 our annual revenue was £1.3 billion, of which £331 million was research income. We have just under 50,000 students and over 15,000 staff. We are a founding member of the UK's Russell Group of leading research universities and a member of the League of European Research Universities.

BGI Genomics

In your previous request of 25 April 2023 you asked whether the University has ever had any contract or business relationships with BGI Genomics or its UK subsidiary MGI Tech UK. In our response of 25 May, we explained that to answer your request we had contacted the areas most likely to hold such information, the University Procurement team, Edinburgh Innovations and Edinburgh Research Office (ERO). Both the Procurement team and Edinburgh Innovations confirmed that they have no record of business dealings or contracts with BGI Genomics or MGI Tech UK. However we provided details of a collaborative research project from ERO, and we also provided information about BGI's sponsorship of '[A Cell for All Seasons: Macrophages in Health and Disease](#)', a conference that took place in the University on 1 June 2023. I have repeated this information in this letter for your reference and then provided a response to your new request. As I have broadened the scope of areas consulted for this new request I have found additional information that is relevant to your previous request, which I will also provide.

Previously provided information about research project

We stated that ERO had confirmed that from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2021, the University undertook a collaborative research project with BGI called 'Extracellular matrix (ECM) programming of pathogenic macrophages'. This project, undertaken through the [MRC Centre for Reproductive Health](#), aimed to determine the mechanisms by which disease (breast cancer and arthritis associated ECM) govern the pathogenic behaviour of macrophages. The long-term goal of this work is to identify features of the macrophage interactions that are therapeutically targetable, thus allowing reprogramming of pathogenic macrophages and improving treatment.

We explained that this project did not involve access to the UK biobank, and thus there are no terms of access required, and no records of the UK biobank transferred to China. No samples were sent to China for genomic sequencing and thus no payments were made from the University to China in regard to this project.

Previously provided information about conference

In the response of 25 May we also stated that BGI Genomics were the sponsor of '[A Cell for All Seasons: Macrophages in Health and Disease](#)', a conference that took place in the University on 1 June 2023. There was no formalised contract between the University and BGI Genomics in relation to this event. BGI Genomics agreed to support the conference financially to cover costs of speakers' travel and accommodation, and any other costs incurred by the University. They were a 'Gold' sponsor which means in exchange for a financial contribution they had a stand in the exhibition area and had a five minute 'flash' talk to highlight their products/services.

Current request

For your current request, you have asked whether the University has done any joint work with BGI Genomics or any subsidiary of BGI Group, including any joint research collaborations or events.

As stated above and in our previous response of 25 May, there was a collaborative research project between the University and BGI between 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2021, and a BGI Genomics sponsored event on 1 June 2023.

For your current request, I have broadened the scope of areas consulted to include the School of Biological Sciences, the Deanery of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences, as well as again consulting ERO, Edinburgh Innovations, and the Procurement team.

There are currently no collaborations or collaborative research carried out between the University of Edinburgh (UoE) and the BGI Group or any of its subsidiaries. Please note, we are interpreting 'collaboration' to refer to joint work done with intellectual contribution from all parties towards the formulation of a scientific hypothesis, the generation of data, and the solution of a scientific question/problem. On occasion, scientific collaborations are also based on the direct financial contribution of one or more of the parties towards the work done by the other(s). The main implication of such collaborations is generally the shared ownership of (some of) the data generated, resulting in co-authorships on scientific publications, joint patents, and overall reciprocal acknowledgement of the

parties' contributions. Please let us know if you have a different interpretation of 'collaboration'.

However, in broadening the scope of areas contacted for this request, we have found information that pertains to your previous request. The University has recently been involved in commercial interactions with BGI Group's subsidiaries, including BGI Genomics, BGI Research and MGI Tech. These companies develop, produce and supply reagents and instrumentations used for genomic studies.

Between October and November 2022, researchers from different institutes and centres across have been beta-testing a new technology developed by BGI Research and commercialised by MGI Tech. To carry on this work, reagents were purchased from MGI Tech, and experiments were carried out under the supervision of BGI Research staff members. This was solely due to the technical complexities relative to the use of such technology, while no intellectual contribution towards University research was made by BGI/MGI representatives.

Between 2022 and 2023, the University has been evaluating a contract to demo-test an instrument developed and manufactured by MGI Tech for a period of six months followed by an additional six months. The contract is currently being evaluated by ERO as a material transfer agreement (MTA); it does not involve any payment from the University towards the BGI Group and its subsidiaries including MGI Tech, nor any financial contribution from the BGI Group and its subsidiaries including MGI Tech towards the University. If the agreement is positively evaluated and accepted, the University will have to purchase NGS reagents from MGI Tech at standard prices to operate the instrument. However, this agreement does not involve any form of intellectual contribution towards University research by BGI/MGI representatives.

In 2022/23, the University purchased goods and services from BGI Genomics and MGI Tech. Purchases were completed upon signature of single sales contracts. There was no intellectual contribution towards University research by BGI/MGI representatives.

Right to review

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may ask the University to conduct a review of this decision by contacting the University's Records Management Section in writing (e.g. by letter or email) or in some other recorded form (e.g. audio or video tape). You should describe the original request, explain your grounds for dissatisfaction, and include an address for correspondence. You have 40 working days from receipt of this letter to submit a review request. The contact details for the Records Management Section are at the top of this letter. When the review process has been completed, if you are still dissatisfied, you may use the [Scottish Information Commissioner's guidance on making an appeal](#) to make an appeal to the Commissioner. If you do not have access to the Internet, please let me know and I will provide a copy of the relevant web pages.

Privacy notice for information request applicants

[The University of Edinburgh's request privacy notice](#), which describes how we use the information you have supplied about yourself and your request, is published on the University website.

Yours sincerely

David Ward
Records Management Section

If you require this letter in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background, please contact the Records Management Section on 0131 651 4099 or email recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk