**BACS Interim Statement on the Implications of China’s New National Security Law for UK Universities**

China’s new National Security Law of 1st July 2020 brings forth new considerations and challenges for employees in UK Universities as line-managers, mentors and teachers. BACS has signed the (US) Association for Asian Studies statement on the National Security Law, joining over twenty other scholarly societies. <https://www.asianstudies.org/statement-on-the-2020-hong-kong-national-security-law/> At the same time, we believe that it is necessary to state clearly the implications of National Security Law for the higher education sector in the UK. Specifically, this interim statement aims to alert **management and academics in the UK higher education sector to the challenges that the New Security Law poses to them in carrying out their professional responsibilities** to (1) safeguard academics and students and (2) safeguard the principle of academic freedom, which is fundamental to the credibility, professional ethics and brand value of UK universities and of Britain more generally.

1. Safeguarding academics and students

The National Security Law makes it an offence – punishable by a lengthy prison sentence - to criticise the rule of the Chinese Communist Party or to make subversive statements about the Party and its rule **regardless of where in the world an individual is based and regardless of their citizenship**. The law is vague about what constitutes subversion, making the implications even more worrying. A whole host of topics are potentially off-limits because of this law, topics that lie at the heart of the social sciences and humanities in the study of any other society in the world – for instance, ethnicity, sovereignty, identity, the quality of governance etc. **Teachers and students** on China-related modules (in Chinese politics, society, history, archaeology, international relations, film and literature) could therefore find themselves **deemed criminals** because of their verbal or written statements pertaining to many topics such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, social movements, the Party-state’s handling of coronavirus, ethnic unrest, ethnic identities, language policy, state surveillance, the implications of President Xi extending his term indefinitely etc. When passing through Hong Kong or China, teachers and students of any countries’ citizenship could find themselves arrested based on evidence from lecture notes, recorded lectures, or recorded class discussions because these include content that the Party-state deems subversive. The risks are especially high for individuals from mainland China and Hong Kong who study at or who previously studied at British universities.

1. Safeguarding academic freedom

Universities need to **clearly re-state their pledges to academic freedom and to actively uphold academic freedom** in the light of the National Security Law. The unofficial response of UK Universities and teachers to the National Security Law cannot be for teachers to err on the side of caution in their teaching content or for certain China-related modules to be dropped from the syllabus because they prove too challenging to deliver safely. UK universities also need to be aware that if they deliver online teaching to students based in China and Hong Kong, the course content is vulnerable to surveillance and monitoring regardless of the platform used – those are the only kinds of online platforms to which people based in China have access. At the same time, any UK universities that use platforms which the Chinese authorities agree to because they lend themselves to the pre-sanitising of reading materials and teaching content send a message to the world that the academic integrity of UK Universities is up for compromise. This will devalue the reputation of the entire higher education sector in Britain.

The British Association for Chinese Studies Council is commissioning a professional research report into the implications of the National Security Law for the UK Higher Education Sector. In the intervening time, we refer UK university management and academics to useful resources and advice compiled by experts external to BACS:

1. A memo by Harriet Evans, John Gittings and Stephan Feuchtwang on the implications of the National Security Law and advice for UK professionals working in a variety of sectors involving China in the light of this law.

<http://bacsuk.org.uk/nsl-memo-and-guidance>

1. An article on *How to Teach China This Fall* by Dimitar D. Gueorguiev and four other Chinese politics experts:

<https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/how-teach-china-fall>

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