I was pleased to have the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee on 22 October 2019 on the Government’s approach to autocratic states. During the session I agreed to provide further information on a number of points raised by the Committee members. The session was broad and many of the questions related to the work of other Government Departments so I am grateful for the opportunity to provide further detail in writing.

Sanctions

During the session Mr Bryant asked about the Government’s plans to implement Magnitsky-style sanctions. The Foreign Secretary has announced that we will establish a UK autonomous global human rights sanctions regime once we leave the European Union. A global sanctions regime will allow us to respond to serious human rights violations or abuses anywhere in the world.

The Sanctions Act gives the UK powers to impose autonomous sanctions, however, secondary legislation is required to establish the structures and processes by which the Act will operate. To implement human rights sanctions will require a new piece of secondary legislation – officials are currently working to design this legislation. It would be inappropriate to pre-announce an intent to designate particular individuals or entities. It is only once the secondary legislation is in place that we can impose sanctions on designated persons and announce those designations.

We laid the S.32 Report on regulations made under the Sanctions Act in relation to gross human rights violations on 27 June 2019. Please find a link below to the accompanying written ministerial statement:

During the session Mr Bryant also requested that we write to update the Committee on the Government’s policy on INTERPOL.

INTERPOL is a crucial organisation for police to police cooperation between 194 Member Countries.

Article 3 of INTERPOL’s constitution forbids the organisation to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character. We would take very seriously any allegations of misuse or contravention of INTERPOL’s constitution.

The Government is working with INTERPOL to ensure systems are in place to protect individuals’ rights and to maintain the integrity and independence of the organisation. The UK has taken a strongly supportive stance in relation to INTERPOL’s efforts to ensure robust systems are in place and the Home Office has been proactive in its engagement with INTERPOL on this matter.

The National Crime Agency hosts the INTERPOL National Crime Bureau for the UK and their experience to date is that INTERPOL’s systems are sufficiently robust to deal with any concerns of abuse.

INTERPOL’s Commission for the Control of Files provides independent oversight to ensure that INTERPOL processes personal data in accordance with INTERPOL’s rules and Constitution.

**Academic institutions**

The FCO is working with the Department for Education, other Whitehall departments and the academic sector to identify and mitigate the risks of influence by autocratic States, while remaining open and welcoming to overseas students. The DfE has regular meetings with officials from the Devolved Administrations to discuss a wide range of ongoing activity related to international higher education. As I said during the evidence session, the Government has enshrined the protection of academic freedom in law through the Higher Education and Research Act and if any institution feels it is coming under pressure to compromise academic freedom, it will have the Government’s full support in resisting.

To date, FCO engagement on this issue has been mostly direct with academic institutions themselves since they are the independent bodies dealing with issues of inappropriate interference. The International Education Strategy (IES) cross-government steering committee, on which the FCO plays an important role and which also includes representation from the devolved administrations, continues to consider how to address these issues.
In addition to the meeting with Universities UK to which I referred during the evidence session, which included universities from all four countries of the United Kingdom, the FCO continues to raise awareness amongst the Higher Education sector. For example, the FCO’s Chief Scientific Adviser spoke on the topic of the risks posed by hostile states at Universities UK’s annual conference in September, which brought together Vice Chancellors from all UK universities.

During the session you raised your concerns about pressures universities may face if they have remote campuses in autocratic states. Universities are, of course, autonomous institutions that make their own decisions on collaboration and investment. As independent institutions, they have their own processes in place to decide how appropriate it is to work with, or accept financial contributions from, outside organisations (including those overseas).

The Department for International Trade (DIT) supports higher education institutions when establishing transnational education (TNE) programmes overseas; this is not limited to branch campuses. There are many forms of collaboration, for example franchise partnerships, validated programmes, joint and dual degrees, blended and online learning, and branch campuses. DIT work closely with sector organisations – including the British Council and UUKi – to organise trade missions, host inward visits etc.

We encourage institutions to undertake due diligence when establishing partnerships overseas and also work with the British Council to provide advice on TNE in particular contexts. Typically, international partnerships are assessed and monitored by scrutiny panels within higher education providers, and membership typically includes senior professional services and academic staff.

More specifically, UK higher education institutions abide by the UK Quality Code in terms of provision in the UK, and their overseas programmes (transnational education delivery). The Quality Code is a key reference point for UK higher education, protecting the public and student interest, and championing UK higher education’s world-leading reputation for quality. It enables providers to understand what is expected of them and what to expect from each other. Providers’ obligations under the Code extend to any students for which the provider is the awarding body, wherever and however they study, including overseas. The Code has been developed by QAA on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment, in consultation with the higher education sector².

**Inappropriate listings and financial crimes**

As indicated in the Government’s response to the Committee’s Seventeenth Report of Session 2017-19, ‘Fragmented and incoherent: the UK’s sanctions policy’, the Government is investigating the possibility of introducing a power to block a listing on national security grounds. This includes consideration as to the existing legislative framework, and the impact this power could have on UK financial markets.

The Government is exploring what role the National Security Council and its secretariat, as well as bodies such as the FCA, would play in the use of any such

² [https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)
power, and how to formalise links with relevant departments and bodies should such a power be introduced.

**Interference in democratic processes**

The Committee asked a number of questions regarding possible inappropriate interference with Parliament and the democratic process. The Government is committed to ensuring the security and integrity of our democratic processes and defending the UK from all forms of hostile foreign state interference. To date, we have not seen evidence of successful interference in UK democratic processes. As you would expect, the Government takes any allegations of interference in UK democratic processes by a foreign government extremely seriously. In order to defend the UK from threats we work closely with international partners, for example, the UK agreed at the 2018 G7 summit in Canada to work with other G7 members on defending democracy from foreign threats. Since my appearance, the National Cyber Security Centre have released their annual review, which includes a section on “defending democracy”. This provides further examples of how HMG is working to protect the democratic process, including through monitoring threats and providing advice to political parties and individual politicians.

I hope that this answers any outstanding questions. Should you require anything further, please do get in touch.

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Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
(Minister for Asia and the Pacific)