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Dear Colleagues,

### **Expansions to the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS)**

Firstly, our sincere thanks to all of you and your teams for working with us over what has been an extremely challenging year. The decision to close ATAS in April last year was not taken lightly, and we appreciated the support we received from UK Universities that minimised the disruption as far as possible.

UK universities and academic research continue to be world leading – at the forefront of research into dual use and militarily applicable technologies; they significantly benefit the UK economy and we must protect that. It is essential that breakthroughs are protected from exploitation, or misappropriation, by Hostile State Actors. Growing fusion between military and civilian research efforts has increased targeting of UK universities as a source of technology and knowledge to support military programmes of significant concern - including those developing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Trusted Research and the expansion of ATAS to include Advanced Conventional Military Technology (ACMT) in October 2020 as applied to research students has gone some way to mitigate this risk. We are pleased to see Universities UK (UUK) taking a leading role here too, publishing [guidelines on managing this and other security related issues](#) last year. There remains, however, a significant threat to the UK's national and broader global security if we do not go further.

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have therefore agreed that, from 21 May 2021, researchers will also be required to hold an ATAS certificate before applying for a visa to conduct activities on UK soil that could result in the Intangible Transfer of Technology (ITT) to WMD and ACMT programmes of concern. As well as the national security benefits, this extension of ATAS will also enhance the protection of UK sensitive intellectual property. The Home Office will update immigration rules to reflect this in routine spring changes.

At the point of this change we will also transition to version 1.3 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) codes. We do not envisage large changes to the number or type of subjects requiring ATAS. All subject areas requiring ATAS for students will now also be required for researchers.

We have included Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) below, and will be reaching out through the relevant sector bodies regularly to provide detailed information.

Yours sincerely,

The Academic Technology Approval Scheme

### **Why is the expansion of ATAS necessary?**

The expansion of ATAS is designed to protect UK research from exploitation and from inadvertently supporting the proliferation of WMD or advanced conventional weapon technologies. It is essential we provide the relevant vetting to ensure Universities do not inadvertently support foreign military programmes of concern.

### **Will there be further expansions to ATAS in the academic year 2021/2022?**

ATAS is kept under constant review to ensure that it is able to mitigate the threat posed by Hostile State-Actors wishing to exploit research to support military programmes abroad.

### **Who exactly will be required to hold ATAS?**

The updated legislation will use the term 'researcher' as we are aware that formal classification between institutes will not exist. We will require ATAS for any individual entering the UK to undertake research in one of the listed areas. For example, this will include: post-doctoral researchers; visiting researchers and academic staff (not exhaustive). ATAS certificates will be required for the following routes if the individual will be undertaking research at PhD level or above in an area which currently require ATAS as postgraduate level:

- Skilled Worker
- Government Authorised Exchange Worker
- International Agreement Worker
- Intra-company Transfer

### **Will visiting academic researchers need to apply for ATAS before travelling to the UK?**

Researchers coming to the UK as a visitor will need to apply under ATAS before they begin any research subject to ATAS. They will not need to do so before making a visa application, but must have a valid certificate before beginning their research in the UK.

### **What do you define as a researcher?**

HMG defines a researcher as an individual conducting investigation into a problem or situation, where the intention is to identify facts and/or opinions that will assist in solving the problem or dealing with the situation. A researcher may be working independently or as part of team.

### **What areas will require ATAS?**

The subject areas requiring an ATAS certificate will be the [same](#) as for postgraduate students. You can see a list of academic subjects relevant to ATAS on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-atas-academic-technology-approval-scheme-atas>

### **Which nationalities will require ATAS?**

Exemptions will continue to exist for the European Economic Area, Switzerland, The United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore and the Republic of Korea.

### **What if the research focus changes during the time the researcher is in the UK?**

As with the current system, if the research focus is changed a new ATAS will be required.

### **Should we expect delays in processing?**

The ATAS team is being expanded rapidly to ensure the relevant analytical capability exists to support increased demand. We are investing significant resource in the ATAS system to enable tailored questions relevant to researchers. We will be reducing the intended processing time for researchers to 10 working days (15 in the busy periods). The FCDO has invested significantly in the ATAS tool and additional ATAS officers.