RIGHT-SIZING RESEARCH SECURITY: A SURVEY OF CHINESE-BACKGROUND SCIENTISTS IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

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October 2026

Australia-China Relations Institute
澳中关系研究院

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Published by
Australia-China Relations Institute
University of Technology Sydney
PO Box 123
Broadway NSW 2007
Australia

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australia-china-relations-institute-uts

Front cover image: cifotart / Shutterstock

ISBN 978-0-6459176-9-7

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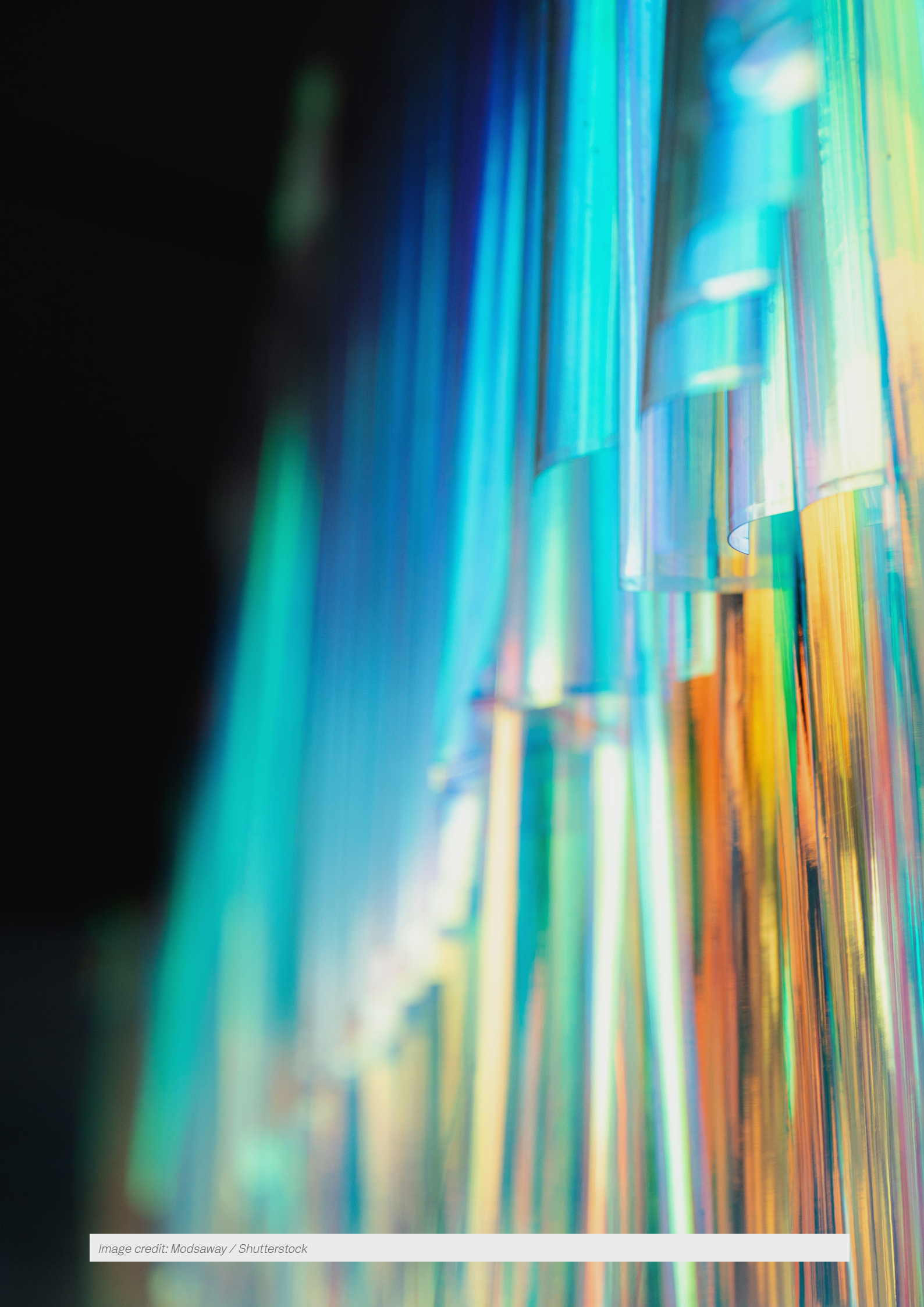


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Executive Summary

This report examines how Chinese-background researchers working in STEM fields at Australian universities experience the changing environment for China-related research collaboration.[1] It draws on 109 complete survey responses collected in July and August 2026 from academic and professional research staff who were working, or had worked, within the previous five years, at an Australian university. Nearly all respondents (96%) reported being born in mainland China, while 94% were Australian citizens or permanent residents. The sample was relatively senior and experienced.

The composition is relevant because respondents are firmly established in Australia's research system while many also bring direct experience of, and continuing professional connections with, China. Their perspectives are particularly significant given China's position as one of the world's largest research systems and a major source of global R&D activity.

The survey findings point to a consistent distinction between support for managing research security risks and concern about how those risks are identified and managed in practice. Respondents overwhelmingly valued research collaboration with China and favoured case-specific risk assessment, while reporting increased security scrutiny, uncertainty about policy boundaries and changes to research behaviour.

These findings sit within a research system that is both highly internationalised and important to Australia's wider innovation performance.

Australian higher education organisations performed $16.4 billion of R&D in 2024, postgraduate research students accounted for 52% of R&D effort within higher education, and 90% of Australia's 50 most-cited papers between 2013 and 2023 involved international co-authors. China is a major part of these networks, with China-based collaborators involved in around 52% of Australian top-decile cited STEM publications since 2020. Changes affecting collaboration, research talent, mobility and funding may therefore have implications beyond individual research projects.

A companion qualitative report, *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice: Interviews with Chinese-Background Scientists in Australian Universities* (October 2026), published by the Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology Sydney, draws on extended interviews with a smaller group of researchers to examine in greater depth how these issues are experienced and navigated in practice.[2]

1 For the purposes of the survey, *Chinese-background researchers* were defined as researchers of Chinese heritage, including Chinese-Australian researchers and Chinese nationals working in Australia. In practice, the respondent group was more specific with 96% reporting being born in mainland China. *China-related research collaboration* was defined in the survey as research involving researchers, institutions or partners in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau.

2 Wanning Sun, Elena Collinson, James Laurenceson, Marina Yue Zhang and Xunpeng Shi, *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice: Interviews with Chinese-Background Scientists in Australian Universities*, Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, October 2026 <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2026/10/right-sizing-research-security-in-practice>.

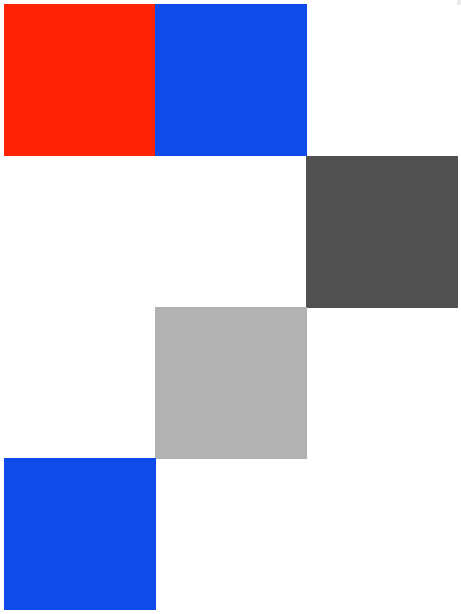
Key survey findings:

- **China-related research collaboration remained extensive, although some more structured forms were reported less frequently than five years earlier.** Ninety-three percent of respondents had current or previous experience of China-related research collaboration and 63% were currently collaborating. Co-authorship and informal scholarly exchange were broadly stable, while joint grants, research projects, co-supervision, researcher visits and infrastructure sharing were reported less frequently. These retrospective comparisons do not definitively establish that research security policy caused the changes but they are consistent with it. Policy is now also moving to more tightly regulate co-authorship and informal scholarly exchange.
- **Respondents near-unanimously saw important benefits to Australia from China-related collaboration. They also generally supported research security safeguards in principle, but were less likely to regard China-related collaboration itself as presenting distinctive risks.** Twenty-six percent agreed that some China-related collaboration can raise national security risks for Australia, while 19% considered those risks different in nature or degree from collaboration with many other countries. Sixty-two percent agreed that Australia needs policies to manage national security risks in international research collaboration and 57% supported a legitimate role for universities in managing such risks. At the same time, 96% agreed that China-related collaboration provides important benefits to Australia's research system and 73% favoured case-by-case assessment.
- **Perceptions of increased security attention were substantially more widespread than perceptions that the underlying risk had increased.** Thirty percent considered the national security risks associated with China-related collaboration to have increased over the previous five years. By comparison, 64% said China-related collaboration was viewed through a national security lens to a greater extent, 69% said universities had become more cautious and 69% said government and university policies required greater consideration of security risk.
- **The strongest concerns related to clarity, differentiation and proportionality.** Seventy-five percent disagreed that policies were applied consistently across countries according to the specific risks of each collaboration; 72% disagreed that current policies protected national security without unnecessarily restricting academic freedom; 71% disagreed that government guidance was clear and practical; and 70% disagreed that policies adequately distinguished lower- from higher-risk collaboration. Eighty-four percent considered the overall level of scrutiny applied to China-related research collaboration too strict.
- **Research security requirements were reported to have affected research practice.** Seventy-three percent said security-related requirements had affected their research at least moderately, including 45% who reported a significant or very significant effect. Fifty-seven percent agreed that they had avoided, changed, delayed or ended China-related collaboration because of research security policies, procedures or related institutional expectations. The most commonly reported changes concerned collaborator selection (74%), grant applications (63%), supervision, hosting or recruitment (62%), research topics (59%) and international co-authorship (54%). Sixty-one percent said they considered security implications often or very frequently when making research decisions.
- **Respondents also reported effects on professional comfort and belonging.** Fifty-two percent did not feel comfortable discussing China-related collaborations within their university, 55% were not confident that aspects of their personal background did not inappropriately influence how their collaborations were perceived, and 61% reported that current debates had negatively affected their sense of belonging within Australian academia. Half did not feel comfortable maintaining visible connections with China-related research networks, topics or public discussion.

- **Respondents strongly endorsed the potential bridging role of Chinese-background researchers but were less positive about whether current conditions enabled it.** Seventy-seven percent agreed that Chinese-Australian and Chinese-background researchers could play a constructive bridging role between Australia and China, while 59% disagreed that current conditions allowed that role to be played effectively. Seventy-two percent considered reduced institutional understanding of China a somewhat or very likely potential outcome of current research security settings.
- **Career effects were reported by a minority and were generally one factor among several.** Twenty-three percent reported either uncertainty about continuing their academic career in Australia or no longer being based at an Australian institution, with research security concerns at least one factor.
- **Respondents' preferred changes focused primarily on implementation rather than removing safeguards.** The highest priorities were more transparent, predictable and timely review processes (83%), clearer written guidance distinguishing higher- from lower-risk collaboration (80%) and greater dialogue between government, universities and Chinese-background researchers (78%). Majorities also prioritised more accessible advice, clearer appeal mechanisms, greater transparency around evidence and reasoning, and additional training.

Respondents generally accepted the need to manage legitimate risks while questioning whether current settings consistently distinguish higher-risk activity from routine academic collaboration. Their responses point particularly to clarity, case-specific assessment, proportionality, procedural transparency and predictability.

The survey was conducted before the new foreign research project requirements introduced by the 2026 amendments to the *Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Act* took effect. As such, it provides a snapshot of the preceding research security environment and a baseline for assessing subsequent changes. The survey was voluntary and self-selected and is not statistically representative of all Chinese-background researchers at Australian universities. As such, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting the experiences and views of respondents rather than as estimates of their prevalence across the wider population.



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Introduction

Australia's research relationship with China sits at the intersection of extensive scientific collaboration and growing security scrutiny. China is an important source of research capability for Australian universities, particularly in STEM fields, while its universities operate within a system in which research, technology, data and information are subject to extensive state oversight. Australia, meanwhile, has progressively expanded the range of international university activity subject to national security and foreign policy scrutiny. The policy challenge is therefore not simply whether China-related collaboration[3] should be scrutinised, but how to identify and manage risks without unnecessarily restricting legitimate research.

Chinese-background researchers occupy a particularly relevant position within this relationship. Many have built long careers in Australia while retaining scientific, linguistic and professional networks extending into China's much larger research system. These connections can facilitate access to collaborators, expertise and research capability, but may also become more salient as China-related research attracts greater scrutiny. This does not imply that Chinese background itself creates greater security risk. Rather, researchers working in Australian universities while maintaining professional connections with China may encounter more directly the practical boundary between legitimate security assessment and broader institutional caution towards China-related engagement.

This report examines that boundary through 109 complete survey responses from Chinese-background academic and professional research staff in STEM fields who were working, or had worked, within the previous five years, at an Australian university. Nearly all survey respondents (96 percent) reported being born in mainland China, while 94 percent were Australian citizens or permanent residents. The sample therefore primarily captures the experiences of researchers with strong personal and professional links to both Australia and mainland China.

The report examines how respondents assess the benefits and risks of China-related collaboration, whether they perceive security attention to have changed, how institutional requirements affect research decisions, and what these settings mean for professional inclusion, academic careers and the ability of Chinese-background researchers to contribute to Australia-China scientific engagement.

The report forms part of a broader study of how research security settings are experienced within the Australian research system. A companion qualitative report, *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice: Interviews with Chinese-Background Scientists in Australian Universities* (October 2026), draws on in-depth interviews with 12 senior Chinese-Australian scientists.[1] While the present report uses survey data to identify patterns across a larger group of researchers, the companion study examines in greater depth how research security settings are interpreted, implemented and navigated in day-to-day academic practice. The two studies use different methods and samples and should be read as complementary rather than directly comparable sources of evidence.

3 In this report, *China-related research collaboration* refers to research involving researchers, institutions or partners in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau.

01

Background

1.1 Australia–China scientific collaboration

The Australia-China scientific relationship is substantial. Analysis of Clarivate data indicates that, among Australian publications in the top 10% of most-cited STEM research since 2020, around 52% involved collaboration with researchers in China, approximately three times the share involving US collaborators.[2] The relationship also extends beyond co-authorship. Australian universities maintain joint institutes, research centres, doctoral programs and other institutional partnerships with Chinese counterparts.[3]

International collaboration is particularly important for smaller research systems such as Australia, where overseas networks provide access to expertise, infrastructure and talent that cannot always be reproduced efficiently at home.[4]

This reliance on international networks is also evident in Australian research performance. An Australian Academy of Science analysis found that 90% of the 50 most-cited papers by Australian authors between 2013 and 2023 involved overseas co-authors.[5] More recent Australian Research Council data show that 416 of the 536 Discovery Projects approved for funding commencing in 2025, or 78%, foreshadowed international collaboration, involving researchers across 65 overseas locations.[6] Such networks can also be persistent. Long-standing research relationships develop through repeated interaction, shared routines and professional trust and may adjust more slowly than diplomatic or regulatory settings. At the same time, interconnectedness can create vulnerabilities where collaboration involves sensitive knowledge, dual-use capabilities or strategically important technologies.

Australia's exposure to changes in these networks is significant. China had overtaken the United States as Australia's largest international research partner by 2019, appearing on 16.2% of Australian publications compared with 15.5% involving US researchers.[7] More recent analysis of Australia-China co-publications suggests that, in several fields, bilateral publications accounted for roughly one-third to two-fifths of Australian output by 2025.[8] These publication shares do not establish dependence or irreplaceability, but indicate that disruption to scientific ties may carry material opportunity costs for Australia.

China's wider position in global research has also continued to strengthen. The 2026 Nature Index, based on publications in its selected journals during 2025, ranked China first among countries and territories by research share overall, as well as first in natural sciences and applied sciences.[9]

Chinese-background researchers have played an important role within this relationship and within Australian STEM fields more broadly. It is estimated that around one-quarter of Clarivate Highly Cited Researchers affiliated with Australian institutions in 2025 were researchers of Chinese background, while 13 researchers of Chinese background had been elected Fellows of the Australian Academy of Science since 2020.[10] Many have built careers in Australia while retaining professional networks spanning both research systems, creating channels through which Australian institutions can access collaborators, facilities and emerging research developments in China.

The scale of university research and its reliance on research talent provide a broader context for these networks. Australian higher education organisations performed $16.4 billion of R&D in 2024 and devoted 85,951 person-years of effort to research.[11] Universities Australia estimates that higher education accounts for approximately 39% of Australia's total R&D effort.

Postgraduate research students contributed 44,889 person-years, equivalent to 52% of R&D effort within higher education, while 42% of higher degree by research graduates in 2024 were international students.[12]

These activities also sit within Australia's wider innovation and productivity system. The Australian government's Australian Innovation Statistics framework identifies R&D investment, human capital and skills, collaboration and networks, international trade and the domestic business environment as enabling factors of innovation. It describes innovation as a key driver of long-term productivity growth and identifies the creation and diffusion of knowledge and technology as important outcomes of the innovation system.[13]

This is relevant in a policy environment in which Australia is seeking to strengthen its innovation performance. The Australian government's 2025 Strategic Examination of Research and Development reported that business R&D expenditure had fallen to 0.9% of GDP, compared with an OECD average of 1.99%. Econometric modelling commissioned for the review estimated that, after 10 years, each dollar invested in business R&D would generate $4.60 in private returns and $7.14 in broader economic returns.[14] This broader context is relevant when considering the potential costs as well as the benefits of changes affecting research talent and collaborative networks.

These patterns make the research relationship strategically important but do not mean that all China-related collaboration carries the same benefits or risks. The nature of the research, the institutions involved, funding arrangements, data and technology and intended use can differ substantially from one collaboration to another. That variation is central to the research security debate examined in this report.

1.2 Research security and the changing policy environment

The research security context is shaped in part by significant differences between the Australian and Chinese research systems. China continues to promote international academic exchange, participation in major international research projects, joint laboratories and researcher mobility. Its Education Powerhouse Plan 2024-2035 calls for expanded international academic and research cooperation and greater capacity to attract global talent. At the same time, the plan places universities and research more closely within national strategic objectives, emphasising Communist Party leadership, the integration of education, science and talent development, and the strengthening of national scientific and technological capability and self-reliance.[15]

International scientific collaboration therefore operates within a system of extensive state oversight over universities, researchers, information and international engagement. In recent years, controls affecting overseas academic exchange, access to research materials, publication, data and technology transfer have tightened, particularly where national-security, political or strategic considerations arise.

Restrictions on overseas academic engagement have been criticised from within China itself. In 2024, Peking University professor and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference member Jia Qingguo described restrictions applying to Chinese academics and retired officials participating in international exchanges as 'overly stringent'. He proposed removing prior-approval requirements for ordinary academics participating in many overseas exchanges, while retaining stronger controls for individuals in leadership positions or with regular access to classified information. Reporting at the time noted that Chinese academics generally required approval to attend overseas conferences and that university approval for engagement with foreign media had also become increasingly common.[16]

The connection between international mobility and national security has subsequently become more explicit. The State Council's exit and entry regulations that took effect on September 15 2026 provide that Chinese citizens may be prevented from leaving the country where violations of export control or technology import and export rules may endanger national industrial or technological security. Citizens who engage in specified unlawful or criminal conduct overseas that endangers national security or interests may also be prohibited from leaving China again for between six months and three years after returning. The regulations were introduced in the context of heightened concern over transfers of sensitive technology and technical knowledge.[17]

Controls also affect the conditions under which some foreign scholars can conduct research in China. *Reuters* reported in 2024 that tighter access to archives, visa restrictions, censorship and the expansion of national security and anti-espionage legislation had made areas of China-based research more difficult. Researchers working on politically sensitive areas described shifting topics, relying increasingly on overseas archives or modifying research practices in order to maintain access.[18]



Security concerns have also extended to the outward dissemination of scientific research. *The Financial Times* reported in July 2026 that Chinese authorities were increasing scrutiny of overseas scientific publication where research could expose sensitive technological or industrial information. China's Ministry of State Security had also emphasised requirements for review before public disclosure and approval before external release in relation to international conferences, foreign journals, cross-border academic exchange and overseas collaborative research.[19]

These developments operate within a wider legal and regulatory framework. The revised *Counter-Espionage Law*, which took effect in 2023, broadened espionage-related provisions beyond state secrets and intelligence to encompass documents, data, materials and other items relating to national security and interests. Its scope is relevant to researchers because scientific information and data may fall within broadly framed national security concepts depending on their subject matter and use.

These features provide substantive grounds for Australian governments and universities to consider institutional affiliation, sensitive technologies, data access, dual use potential, defence links and knowledge transfer when assessing collaboration with China. They do not, however, establish that all China-related collaboration presents the same type or level of risk. The extent to which research security systems distinguish effectively between circumstances is therefore an important policy question.

International evidence also points to potential costs when security controls extend beyond narrowly defined risks. Studies in the US have documented changes in researchers' willingness to collaborate, seek funding and maintain institutional ties amid heightened US-China tensions and research security investigations. One study examining more than 113,000 US scientists found that researchers with a history of China collaboration experienced declines in citation-weighted research output following National Institutes of Health investigations beginning in 2018.[20]

Australia operates from a different institutional starting point. Academic freedom is expressly recognised in the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, including the freedom to research and publish, engage in intellectual inquiry and contribute to public debate. Australia's approach to research security has also placed emphasis on proportionality and risk-based safeguards. The University Foreign Interference Taskforce (UFIT) guidelines, for example, state that security measures should protect academic freedom and research collaboration and be proportionate to risk. The regulatory perimeter around international research has nevertheless widened considerably.

1.3 The expansion of Australia's research security framework

Australian controls relevant to research security pre-date the recent focus on foreign interference. Universities and researchers have long been subject to export control requirements governing military and dual-use goods and technologies, including under the *Defence Trade Controls Act 2012* and the Defence and Strategic Goods List. The establishment of UFIT in 2019 marked a broader and more coordinated focus on foreign interference risks across the university sector, extending attention beyond controlled technologies to institutional governance, due diligence, cybersecurity, research partnerships and other forms of international engagement. Subsequent guidance and legislation have progressively widened and formalised this framework.

The most recent expansion is the *Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Amendment Act 2026*. The legislation passed Parliament on August 20 2026 and received Royal Assent on August 26 2026. Once the relevant amendments commence, the previous 'foreign relations' test in key parts of the Foreign Arrangements Scheme will be replaced by the broader question of whether an arrangement adversely affects, or is likely to adversely affect, Australia's national interest.[21] 'National interest' is not exhaustively defined in the legislation, and explanatory material indicates that it can encompass national and economic security alongside foreign relations and foreign policy. This gives decision-makers a broader basis on which university arrangements may be assessed.

The amendments also extend the framework more directly into researcher-level activity. Universities will be required to maintain processes to identify research projects undertaken by their researchers with researchers employed or engaged by foreign entities, assess whether those projects could adversely affect Australia's national interest or conflict with Australian foreign policy, and manage identified risks.

The significance lies in the breadth of activity potentially subject to assessment. Where relevant concepts are broad and the consequences of error are potentially significant, universities may respond cautiously through additional review, delayed decisions or narrower interpretations of acceptable collaboration.

Recent developments illustrate the increasingly case-specific questions raised by research security. In August 2026, Foreign Minister Penny Wong terminated two China-linked university arrangements under the existing Foreign Arrangements Scheme: an Australian National University teaching partnership with Shandong University and a University of Queensland research project with the Chinese Academy of Sciences.[22]

Scrutiny has also extended to researcher-to-researcher links. Recent public debate has examined Australian academics who had co-authored research with scientists at Chinese institutions associated with defence research, including cases where the Australian researchers or their universities described the particular work as fundamental, openly published or unrelated to military applications.[23] These examples illustrate how research security questions increasingly extend from formal institutional arrangements to the activities and professional networks of individual researchers.

The timing of this study is therefore important. Survey responses were collected in July and August 2026, during the period in which the amendments were being considered and enacted, and before the new foreign research project provisions took effect. The findings therefore provide a snapshot of how the preceding research security environment was already being experienced immediately before its further formal expansion.

02

Respondent Profile

50% were permanent residents of Chinese heritage; **44%** were Australian citizens



96% were born in mainland China



58% identified engineering or technology as their main field; **29%** identified natural sciences



58% were associate professors or professors



60% had more than 10 years of research experience in their field



85% had conducted research in Australia for at least seven years



69% reported working in a critical or emerging technology field



2.1 Residency status and place of birth

Most respondents were either Australian citizens or permanent residents. Half (50%) were permanent residents of Chinese heritage and 44% were Australian citizens. A further 6% were Chinese nationals in Australia on temporary visas, including work, student or visiting scholar visas, while 1% were researchers of Chinese heritage who held citizenship of another country and were in Australia on a temporary visa (Table 1).

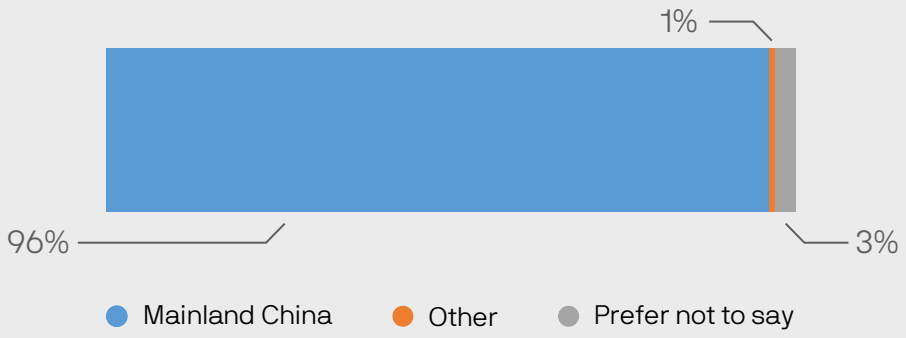
Nearly all respondents (96%) reported being born in mainland China. One respondent (1%) reported another place of birth, while 3% preferred not to say (Figure 1).

Table 1. **Current or previous status in Australia**

Current or previous status in Australia	**%**
Australian citizen	44%
Permanent resident of Chinese heritage	50%
Chinese national in Australia on a temporary visa, such as a work, student or visiting scholar visa	6%
Researcher of Chinese heritage holding citizenship of another country, in Australia on a temporary visa	1%

See also Appendix Table 1A.

Figure 1. Place of birth



See also Appendix Table 2A.

2.2 Academic position and research experience

The sample included a high proportion of senior academics. More than half of respondents (58%) were associate professors or professors. One-fifth (20%) were lecturers or senior lecturers and a similar proportion (19%) were postdoctoral researchers or research fellows. Two percent were professional research staff, while 1% preferred not to state their position (Table 2).

Respondents also generally had substantial research experience. One-third (33%) had been actively engaged in research in their current field for 11-20 years, while just over one-quarter (27%) reported 21 years or more. A further 26% had 6-10 years of experience and 14% had five years or less. Overall, six in 10 respondents (60%) had more than 10 years of research experience (Table 3).

Experience conducting research in Australia was also substantial. Nearly two-thirds (62%) had conducted research in Australia for more than 10 years and almost one-quarter (23%) had done so for 7-10 years. Eleven percent reported 3-6 years of research experience in Australia and 3% reported less than three years. Overall, 85% had conducted research in Australia for at least seven years (Table 4).

Table 2. **Current academic position**

Current position	**%**
Postdoctoral researcher / research fellow	19%
Lecturer / senior lecturer	20%
Associate professor / professor	58%
Professional research staff	2%
Other	0%
Prefer not to say	1%

See also Appendix Table 3A.

Table 3. **Years of active research experience since highest academic degree**

Years actively engaged in research	%
0-5 years	14%
6-10 years	26%
11-20 years	33%
21 years or above	27%
Prefer not to say	1%

See also Appendix Table 4A.

Table 4. **Years conducting research in Australia**

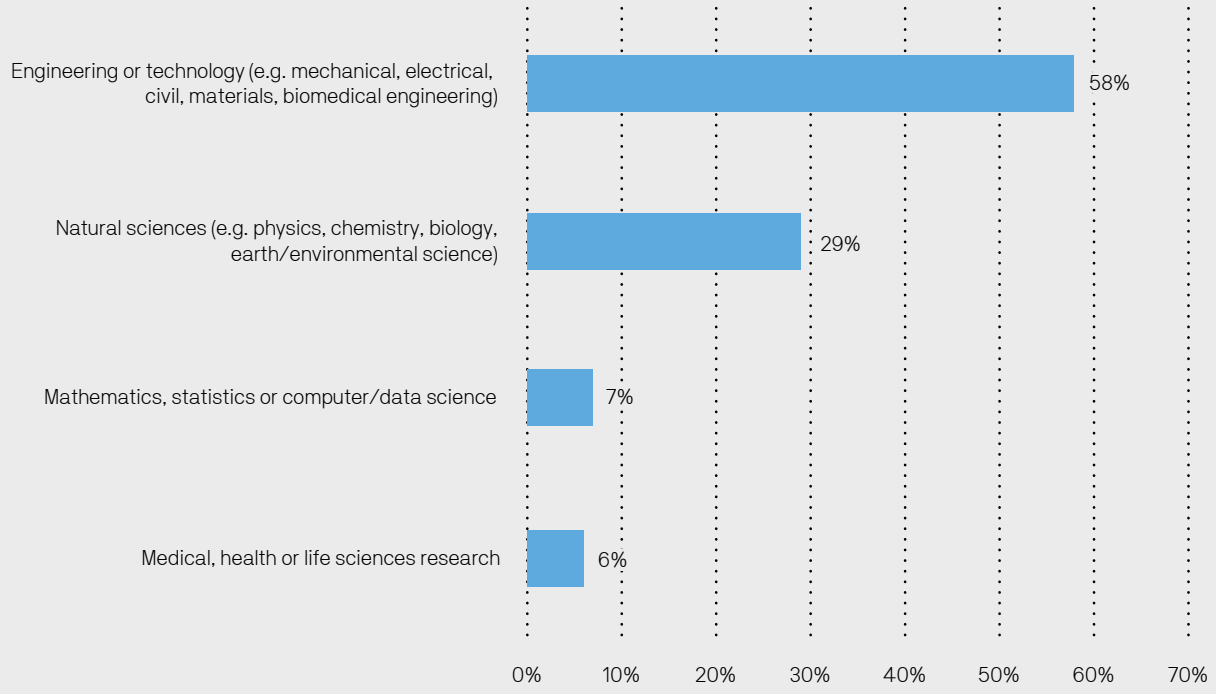
Years conducting research in Australia	%
Less than 3 years	3%
3-6 years	11%
7-10 years	23%
More than 10 years	62%
Prefer not to say	1%

See also Appendix Table 5A.

2.3 Research discipline

Engineering or technology was the most commonly reported main field of research, accounting for 58% of respondents. Nearly one-third (29%) identified the natural sciences as their main field, while 7% worked primarily in mathematics, statistics or computer/data science and 6% in medical, health or life sciences research (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Main field of research



See also Appendix Table 6A.

2.4 Research characteristics relevant to research security

More than two-thirds of respondents (69%) reported that their research involved a critical or emerging technology field, such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, cybersecurity, biotechnology, space, energy or critical minerals (Table 5).

Other listed research characteristics were considerably less common. Nine percent reported research involving dual-use applications, while one respondent (1%) reported defence- or security-related funding or partners. No respondents reported working with sensitive, restricted or export-controlled data or materials. Around one-quarter (26%) selected none of the listed characteristics, while 3% preferred not to say (Table 5).

The prevalence of critical or emerging technology research is relevant to the research security context. The Australian government identifies critical technologies as technologies capable of affecting the national interest, including economic prosperity and national security, and notes that some underpin future defence, intelligence and national security capabilities. Critical technologies are also identified as an area of international geostrategic competition. At the same time, government policy emphasises both managing these risks and supporting universities and businesses to undertake world-class research and international collaboration.

Against this policy context, the finding that 69% of respondents worked in critical or emerging technology fields indicates that research security considerations may have particular relevance to a substantial proportion of the sample. However, classification within a critical or emerging technology field does not mean that all research undertaken within that field is sensitive or dual-use. Only 9% of respondents themselves identified their research as involving dual-use applications, and none reported working with sensitive, restricted or export-controlled data or materials.

These latter figures should also be interpreted cautiously. The categories were self-reported, and researchers may differ in their awareness or interpretation of whether their work has potential dual-use applications or other security-related characteristics.

Table 5. **Research characteristics relevant to research security**

Research characteristic	**%**
A critical or emerging technology field (e.g. AI, quantum, cybersecurity, biotechnology, space, energy, critical minerals)	69%
Dual-use applications (uses with both civilian and military or security potential)	9%
Defence- or security-related funding or partners	1%
Sensitive, restricted, or export-controlled data or materials	0%
None of the above	26%
Prefer not to say	3%

Note: Multiple responses were permitted. Percentages therefore do not sum to 100%.

See also Appendix Table 7A.

03

Research Collaboration with China

93% had current or previous experience of China-related research collaboration.

63% were currently collaborating.

87% currently reported at least one co-authored publication per year, compared with

83% around five years ago.

81% had established collaboration through personal academic networks

72% established collaboration through academic activities such as conferences, seminars and visits.

60% currently reported at least one informal scholarly collaboration or research advice interaction per year, compared with

59% five years ago.

More structured forms of collaboration were reported less frequently than five years ago.

	5 years ago		Current	Change
Joint grants	39%	→	26%	↓ -13pp
Joint research projects	38%	→	28%	↓ -10pp
Co-supervision	47%	→	37%	↓ -10pp
Hosting or visiting researchers	63%	→	55%	↓ - 8pp

3.1 Experience and current status of collaboration

International research collaboration was common within the sample. Nine in ten respondents (90%) reported that their research involved collaboration with researchers or institutions outside Australia, while 8% reported that it did not and 2% preferred not to say (Table 6).

Experience of collaboration with researchers or institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau was also widespread. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) reported that they were currently engaged in such collaboration. A further 20% had collaborated within the previous five years but reported that the collaboration had since stopped, while 9% had collaborated previously but not within the preceding five years. One respondent (1%) reported never having collaborated with researchers or institutions there, and 6% preferred not to say (Table 7).

Overall, 93% of respondents reported some current or previous experience of China-related research collaboration (Table 7). China-related collaboration was therefore not a peripheral activity for this sample, but an established part of the professional experience of most respondents.

Table 6. **International research collaboration**

Response	**%**
Yes	90%
No	8%
Prefer not to say	2%

See also Appendix Table 8A.

Table 7. **Current status of China-related research collaboration**

Collaboration status	**%**
I currently collaborate with researchers or institutions there	63%
I collaborated within the past five years, but it has now stopped	20%
I collaborated before, but not in the past five years	9%
I have never collaborated with researchers or institutions there	1%
Prefer not to say	6%

See also Appendix Table 9A.

3.2 Channels through which collaboration was established

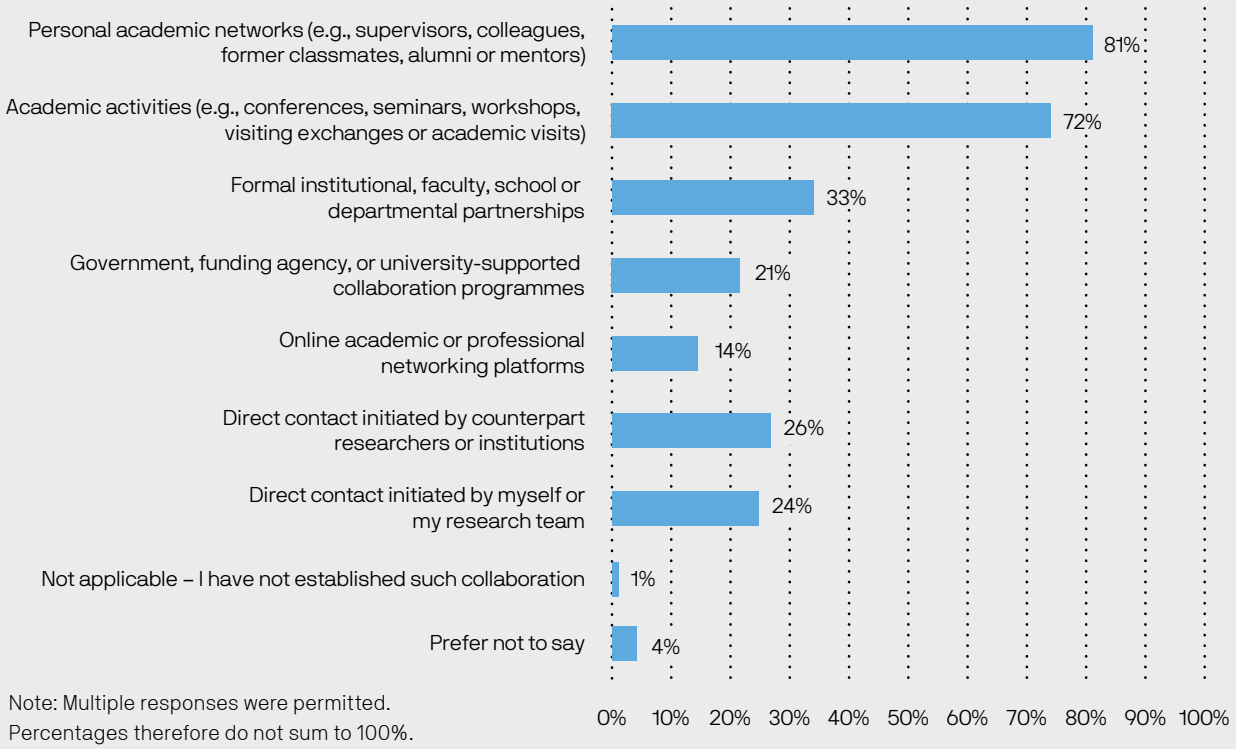
China-related research collaboration was most commonly established through researchers' own academic and professional networks. Personal academic networks, including supervisors, colleagues, former classmates, alumni and mentors, were reported by 81% of respondents, while 72% reported establishing collaborations through academic activities such as conferences, seminars, workshops, visiting exchanges and academic visits (Figure 3).

Formal institutional, faculty, school or departmental partnerships were reported by one-third of respondents (33%). Around one-quarter reported direct contact initiated by counterpart researchers or institutions (26%), while 24% reported initiating contact themselves or through their research team. Government, funding-agency or university-supported collaboration programmes were reported by 21%, and 14% identified online academic or professional networking platforms (Figure 3).

The pattern indicates that China-related collaboration within the sample was substantially researcher- and network-driven. Personal relationships and participation in ordinary academic activities were much more commonly identified as pathways into collaboration than formal institutional partnerships or government- and university-supported programmes. This does not mean that formal institutional mechanisms were unimportant, but it suggests that much of the collaboration developed through the interpersonal and professional networks that normally underpin academic research.

This distinction is relevant to research security policy because measures affecting individual contacts, conference participation, researcher mobility or professional networks may reach beyond formally constituted institutional partnerships.

Figure 3. Channels through which China-related research collaboration was established



Note: Multiple responses were permitted. Percentages therefore do not sum to 100%.

See also Appendix Table 10A.

3.3 Types, frequency and reported changes in collaboration over five years

Respondents reported a wide range of collaboration with researchers and institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau. The frequency and reported change over time varied substantially by type of activity. The clearest distinction was between direct scholarly activities, which were broadly stable, and several more structured or institutionally intensive forms of collaboration, which were reported less frequently than around five years earlier.

3.3.1 Publication and informal scholarly collaboration

Co-authoring academic publications was the most common form of collaboration. Currently, 87% of respondents reported at least one co-authored publication per year, compared with 83% around five years earlier. In both periods, 48% reported four or more co-authored publications per year (Figure 4).

Informal scholarly collaboration or research advice was similarly stable. Sixty percent currently reported at least one such interaction per year, compared with 59% around five years earlier. The proportion reporting two or more interactions per year was somewhat lower in the current period, at 42% compared with 46%, but overall participation changed little (Figure 4).

These results indicate considerable continuity in direct researcher-to-researcher scholarly relationships. In particular, there is little evidence within the survey of a broad withdrawal from co-authorship or informal academic exchange (Figure 4).

3.3.2 More structured forms of collaboration

A different pattern was evident for several forms of collaboration involving greater institutional commitment, funding, researcher mobility or administration.

The proportion reporting at least one joint research project per year declined from 38% around five years earlier to 28% currently (Figure 4).

Joint grant applications or funded research programmes showed one of the largest differences. Thirty-nine percent reported at least one such activity per year around five years earlier, compared with 26% currently, a decline of 13 percentage points (Figure 4).

Co-supervision of research students was also reported less frequently, with 37% currently reporting at least one instance per year compared with 47% around five years earlier. Similarly, hosting or visiting researchers declined from 63% reporting at least one activity per year to 55% (Figure 4).

The largest reported reductions were therefore concentrated in activities involving projects, funding, student supervision and researcher mobility, rather than publication itself.

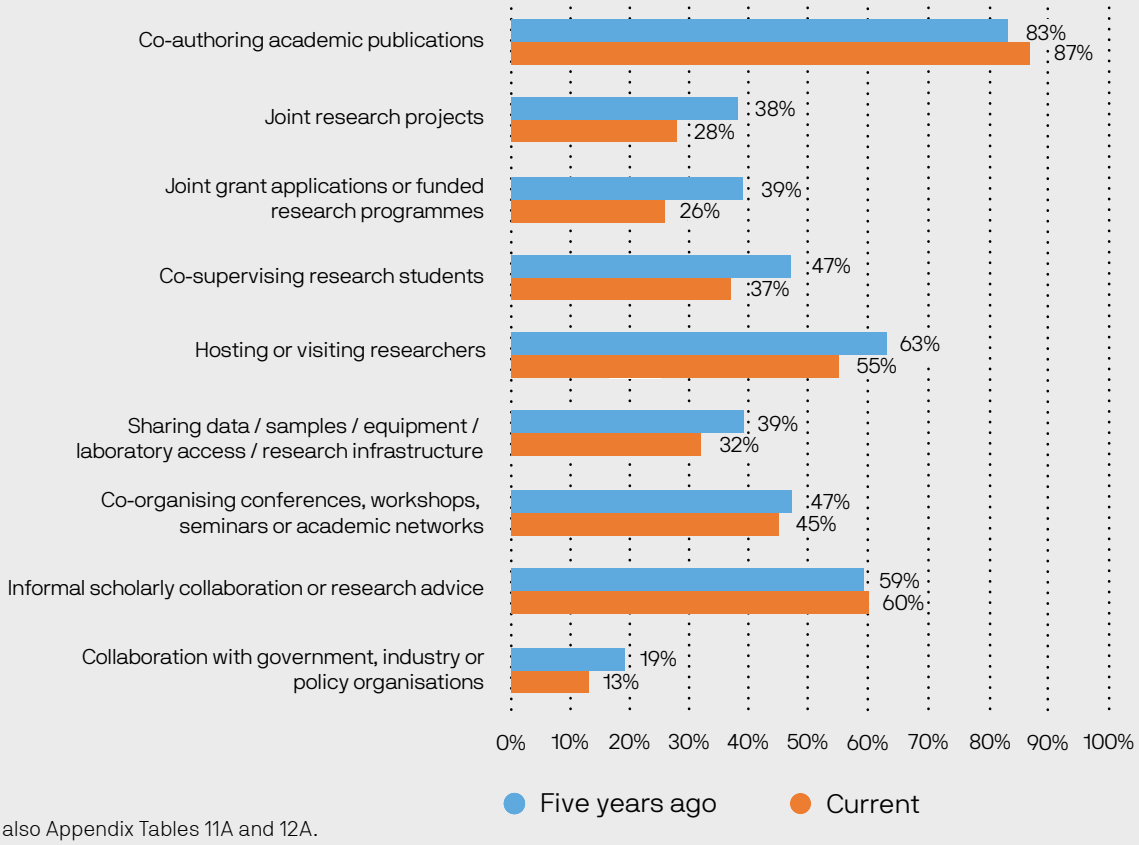
3.3.3 Other forms of collaboration

Data, equipment and research infrastructure sharing was reported by 32% of respondents at least once per year currently, compared with 39% around five years earlier (Figure 4).

Participation in conferences, workshops, seminars and academic networks was comparatively stable in terms of whether respondents participated at all: 45% currently reported at least one such activity per year compared with 47% five years earlier (Figure 4). However, higher-frequency participation was less common, with 19% currently reporting two or more such activities per year compared with 29% previously (Appendix Tables 11A and 12A).

Collaboration with government, industry or policy organisations was the least common activity in both periods. Thirteen percent currently reported at least one such collaboration per year, compared with 19% around five years earlier (Figure 4).

Figure 4. China-related research collaboration: current versus around five years earlier



See also Appendix Tables 11A and 12A.

3.3.4 Five-year pattern

The comparison does not show a uniform contraction in China-related research collaboration. Instead, it indicates a change in the composition of reported collaboration.[24]

Direct scholarly relationships were comparatively resilient. Co-authorship was at least as prevalent as five years earlier, while informal scholarly exchange was broadly stable. Conference and network participation also remained relatively widespread, although more frequent participation was lower.

By contrast, several activities requiring greater institutional commitment or coordination were reported less frequently. Compared with around five years earlier, the proportion reporting at least one activity per year was lower for joint grants by 13 percentage points, joint projects and co-supervision by 10 percentage points each, hosting or visiting researchers by 8 percentage points, data and infrastructure sharing by 7 percentage points, and government, industry or policy collaboration by 6 percentage points (Figure 4).

The reported pattern is therefore one of lower activity in some formal and institutionally intensive forms of collaboration rather than uniform disengagement from China-related research. Researcher-to-researcher scholarly ties were reported as comparatively resilient, while collaboration involving funding, mobility, supervision, infrastructure or greater institutional involvement was reported less frequently.

This pattern is consistent with evidence that scientific networks are often path-dependent and can persist even as political and regulatory conditions change. Established relationships may be reinforced by trust, shared routines and repeated interaction, while highly connected participants can play an important role in sustaining wider collaboration networks.[25] The survey cannot establish that policy changes caused the differences reported over time, but the relative resilience of co-authorship and informal scholarly exchange is consistent with this broader literature.

04

Views on Research Security Risk and Policy Settings

62%

agreed or strongly agreed that Australia needs policies to manage national security risks in international research collaboration.

96%

agreed or strongly agreed that China-related research collaboration provides important benefits to Australia's research system.

73%

agreed or strongly agreed that research security risks in China-related collaboration should be assessed case by case.

71%

disagreed or strongly disagreed that Australian government guidance on research security risk is clear and practical.

75%

disagreed or strongly disagreed that research security policies are applied consistently across countries according to the specific risks of each collaboration.

84%

considered the overall level of scrutiny applied to China-related research collaboration to be too strict.

Perceived change in underlying risk over the past five years *(context)*



There was no majority view that national security risks in China-related research collaboration had increased.

Australian research security policy provides an important benchmark for interpreting respondents' views. The UFIT Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector are intended to guide university decision-making based on proportionate risks while enabling Australian universities to continue producing world-class research. The guidelines emphasise greater consistency across the sector and state that security should safeguard academic freedom and research collaboration and be proportionate to organisational risk.

The findings in this section should therefore be read not simply in terms of whether respondents support or oppose research security measures, but also in terms of how they assess the identification, differentiation and management of risk under current policy and institutional settings.



Image credit: ultramansk / Shutterstock

4.1 Principles, benefits and perceived China-related risk

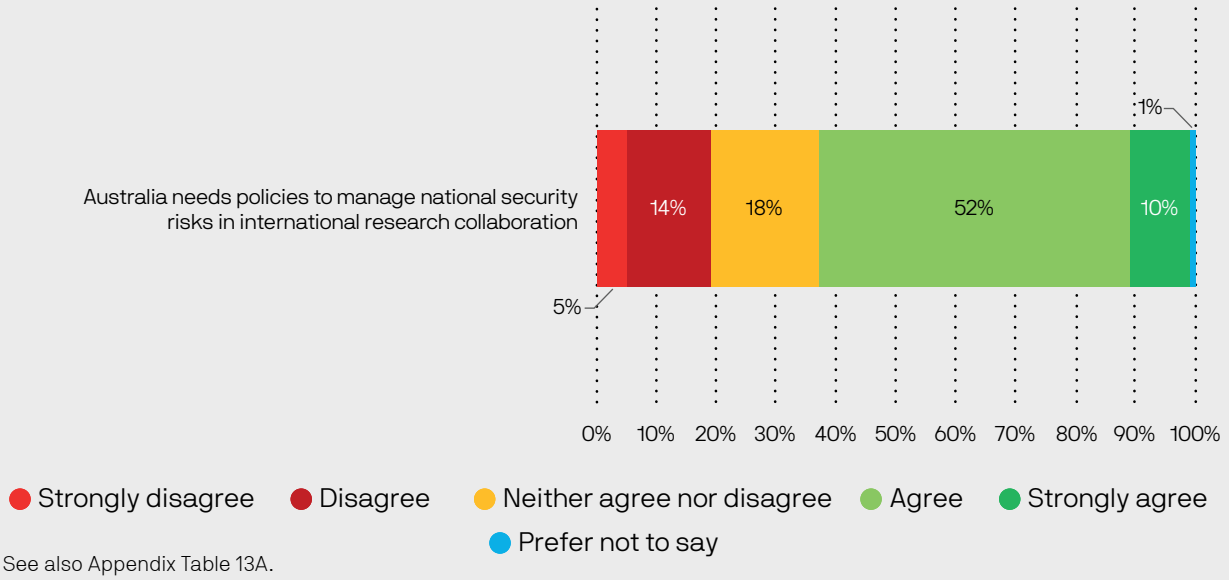
4.1.1 Support for research security policy and institutional responsibility

Respondents generally supported the principle that national security risks in international research collaboration should be managed, while expressing considerably less agreement that China-related collaboration itself presents distinctive security risks.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that Australia needs policies to manage national security risks in international research collaboration. Eighteen percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 18% were neutral, and 1% preferred not to say (Figure 5).

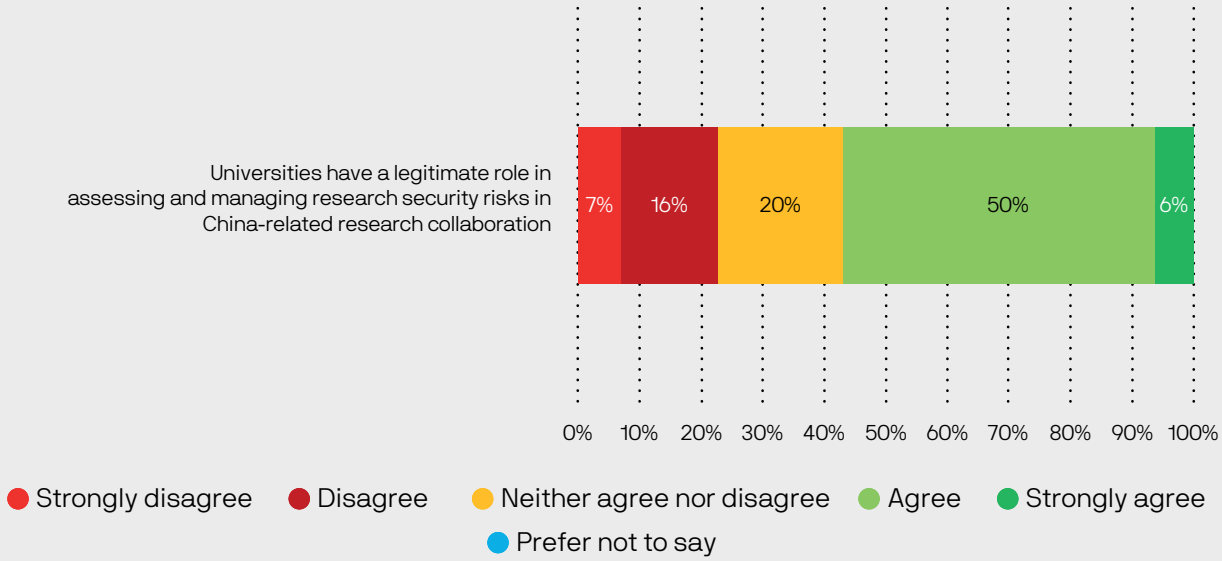
A majority also supported a role for universities in managing research security risks. Fifty-seven percent agreed or strongly agreed that universities have a legitimate role in assessing and managing risks associated with China-related research collaboration, compared with 23% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Twenty percent were neutral (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Need for research security policies



See also Appendix Table 13A.

Figure 6. University role in managing research security risk



See also Appendix Table 13A.

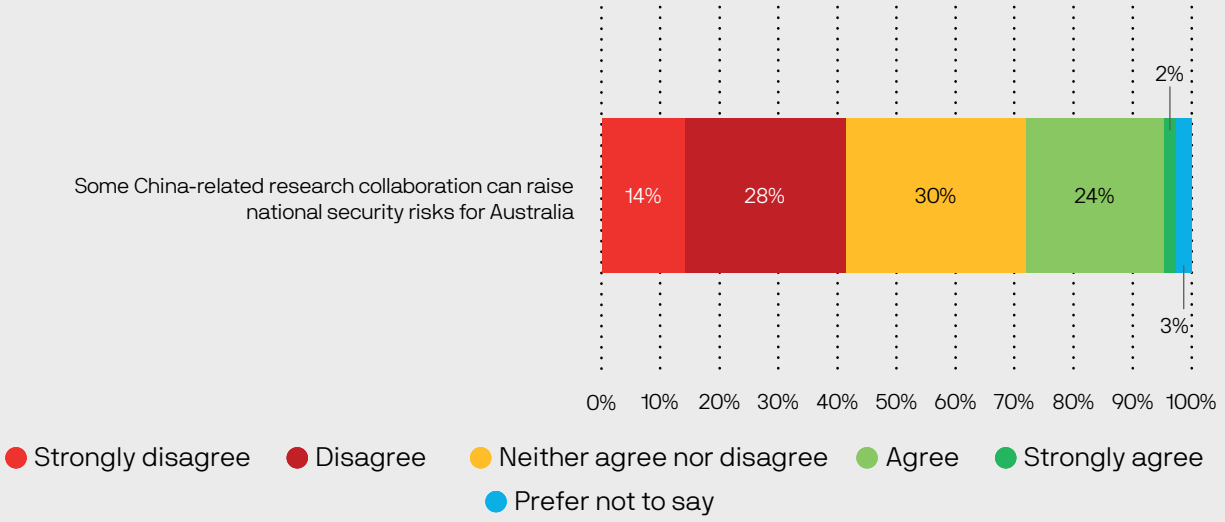
4.1.2 Perceptions of China-related research security risk

Support was lower when respondents were asked more directly about the nature of the security risks associated with China-related collaboration. Twenty-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that some China-related research collaboration can raise national security risks for Australia, while 41% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thirty percent were neutral or unsure and 3% preferred not to say (Figure 7).

This was substantially lower than the 62% who supported the general need for research security policies and the 57% who supported a legitimate role for universities in managing China-related research security risks.

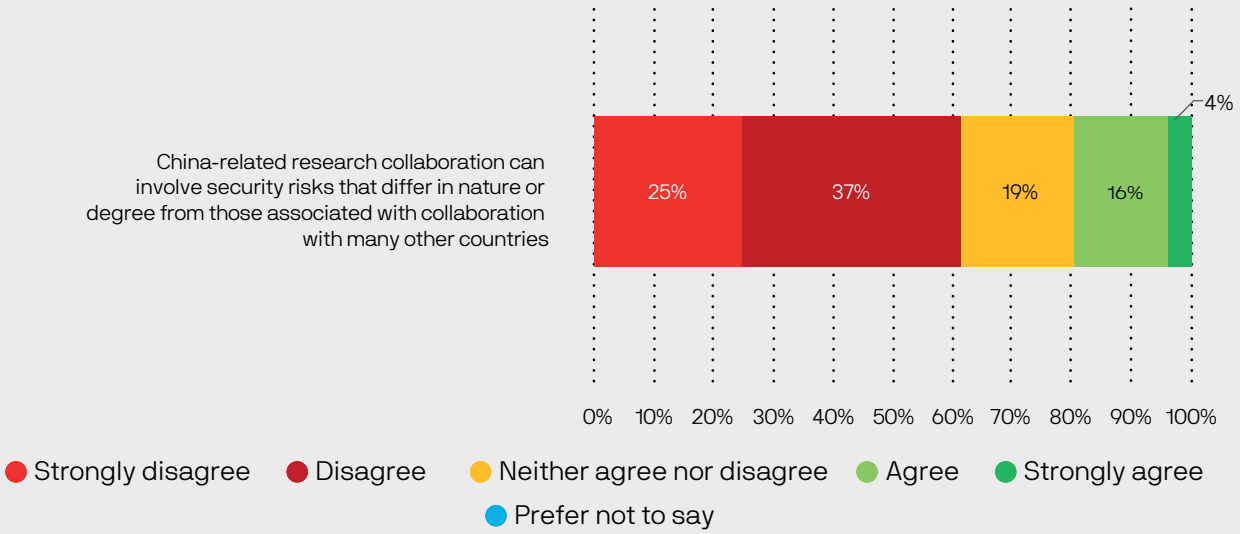
Respondents were even less likely to regard those risks as distinctive relative to collaboration with other countries. Nineteen percent agreed or strongly agreed that China-related research collaboration can involve security risks that differ in nature or degree from those associated with collaboration with many other countries, while 61% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Nineteen percent were neutral or unsure (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Security risks in China-related research collaboration



See also Appendix Table 13A.

Figure 8. Distinctiveness of China-related research security risks

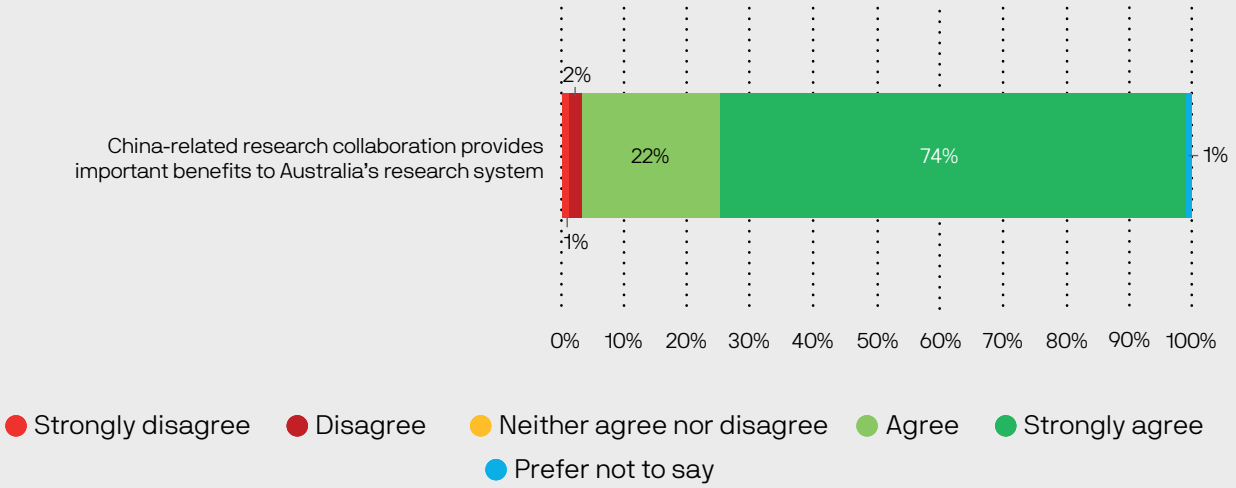


See also Appendix Table 13A.

4.1.3 Benefits and case-specific risk assessment

By contrast, respondents expressed near-unanimous support for the benefits of China-related research collaboration. Ninety-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that such collaboration provides important benefits to Australia's research system, including 74% who strongly agreed. Three percent disagreed or strongly disagreed and 1% preferred not to say (Figure 9).

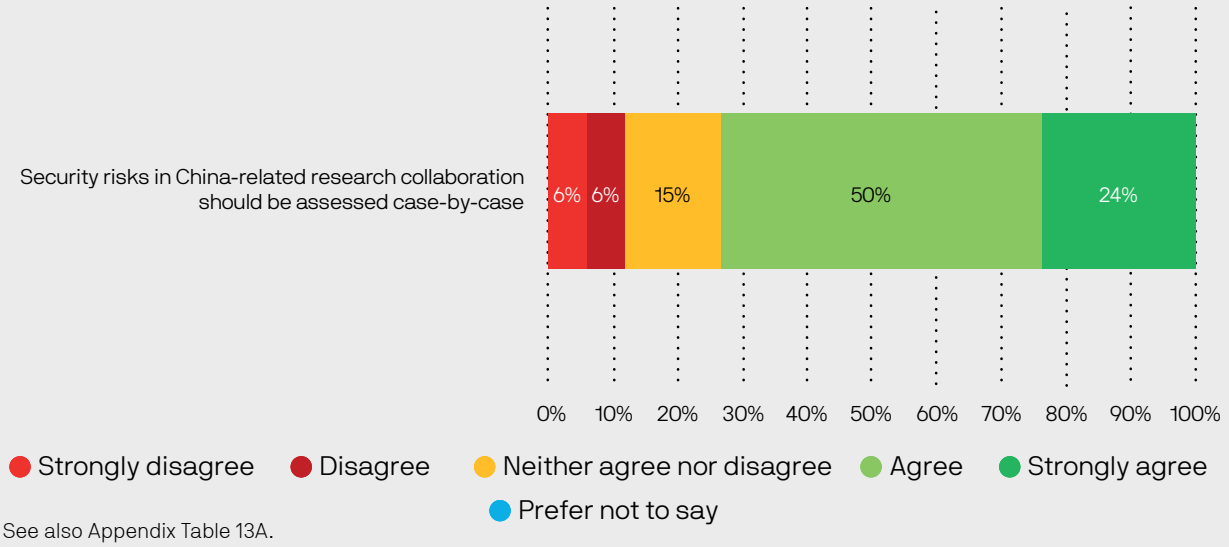
Figure 9. Benefits of China-related research collaboration



See also Appendix Table 13A.

There was also strong support for differentiated, case-specific assessment. Seventy-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that security risks in China-related collaboration should be assessed case by case, taking into account factors such as the research field, partner institution, funding source, data, technology and intended use. Twelve percent disagreed or strongly disagreed and 15% were neutral or unsure (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Case-specific assessment of research security risk



See also Appendix Table 13A.

These results show a distinction between support for managing research security risks in principle and respondents' assessment of China-related risk. Within the sample, support for the general need for safeguards coexisted with strong support for the benefits of China-related collaboration and for differentiated, case-specific assessment.

This distinction was also evident in the companion interview study, *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice: Interviews with Chinese-Background Scientists in Australian Universities* (hereafter, *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice)* (October 2026).[26] All 12 senior scientists interviewed accepted that research governance should take national security considerations into account and did not dispute universities' role in managing research security risks. Their criticism was directed primarily at the assumptions, boundaries and implementation of current settings rather than at the principle of research security itself.

4.2 Underlying risk and security attention over the past five years

Respondents were asked how they believed the national security risks associated with China-related research collaboration had changed compared with around five years earlier.

Three in ten respondents (30%) considered the risks to have increased, including 20% who considered them to have increased substantially. An equal proportion (30%) considered the risks to have remained about the same, while 14% considered them to have decreased. Seventeen percent were unsure and 9% preferred not to say (Table 8 and Appendix Table 14A).

There was therefore no majority view that the underlying national security risk had increased. Forty-four percent considered the risk to be either unchanged or lower, compared with 30% who considered it to have increased. A further 26% were unsure or preferred not to say (Appendix Table 14A).

Respondents were also asked about changes in the wider security environment. Almost two-thirds (64%) considered research collaboration with China to be viewed through a national security lens to a greater extent than around five years earlier. Sixty-nine percent reported that Australian universities had become more cautious towards research collaboration with China, and 69% considered government and university policies to require researchers to consider security risk to a greater extent (Table 8 and Appendix Table 15A).

The contrast between these measures is analytically important: perceptions of increased security-oriented policy and institutional attention were considerably more widespread than perceptions that the underlying national security risk itself had increased.

Table 8. Perceived change in underlying risk and security attention

Measure	Reported increase, %
Underlying national security risk associated with a China-related collaboration	30%
China-related collaboration viewed through a national security lens	64%
University caution towards China-related collaboration	69%
Government and university requirements to consider security risk	69%

See also Appendix Tables 14A and 15A.

4.3 Clarity, proportionality, consistency and strictness

Respondents' most consistently negative assessments concerned how current settings were perceived to distinguish and manage different levels of risk.

Three-quarters (75%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that current policies are applied consistently across countries according to the specific risks of each collaboration rather than broad assumptions about any one country. Seventy-two percent disagreed that current policies protect national security without unnecessarily restricting academic freedom, 71% disagreed that government guidance is clear and practical, and 70% disagreed that current policies adequately distinguish between lower- and higher-risk collaboration (Table 9).

The companion interviews reported in *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice* (October 2026) provide a more concrete illustration of this uncertainty. One senior scientist described the policy environment as follows:

> *I don't think I've seen a clearly written document telling me precisely what I can do or cannot do. It feels more like a policy direction that's communicated to us by universities using very opaque language.*
>
> **Senior Chinese-Australian scientist interviewed for *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice***

Clarity around dual-use was also questioned: 58% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the concept of dual use is clearly defined, compared with 17% who agreed. Separately, 84% considered the overall level of scrutiny applied to China-related research collaboration to be too strict (Table 9 and Appendix Table 16A).

Concerns also extended to the wider public and political environment. Fifty-three percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that media coverage and political debate about China-related research collaboration generally distinguish evidence-based security risks from broader political concern or speculation, compared with 15% who agreed or strongly agreed (Table 9 and Appendix Table 16A).



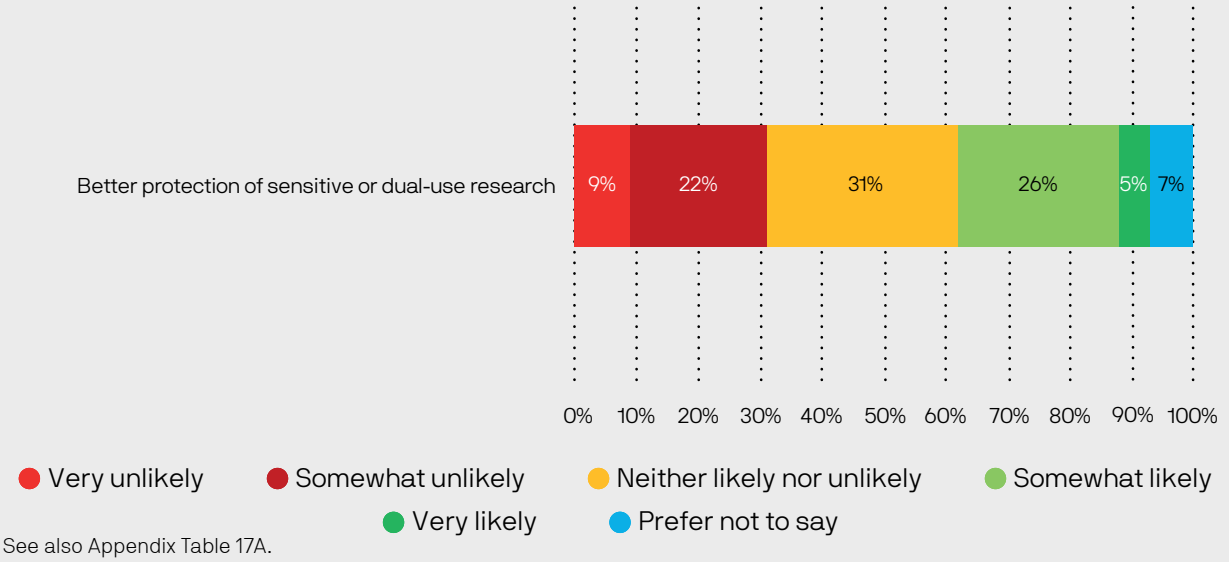
Table 9. Assessments of current policy settings

Measure	Headline result
Policies applied consistently across countries according to specific risk	75% disagreed
Policies protect national security without unnecessarily restricting academic freedom	72% disagreed
Government guidance is clear and practical	71% disagreed
Policies adequately distinguish lower- from higher-risk collaboration	70% disagreed
The concept of dual use is clearly defined	58% disagreed
Overall scrutiny of China-related collaboration	84% considered it too strict
Media coverage and political debate about China-related research collaboration generally distinguish evidence-based security risks from broader political concern or speculation	53% disagreed

See also Appendix Table 16A.

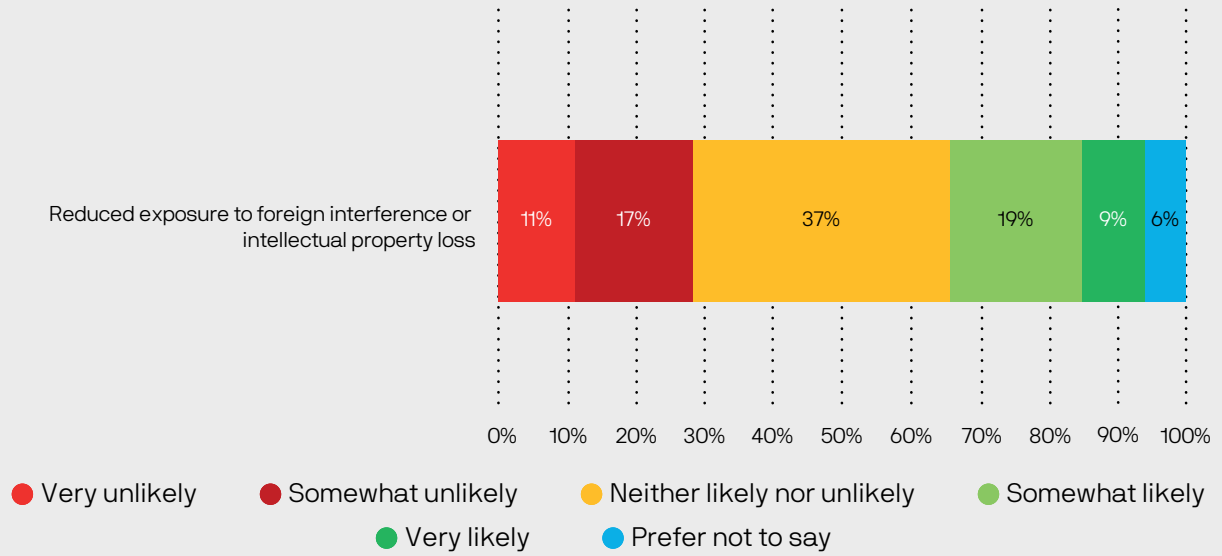
Respondents were also mixed in their expectations of whether current settings would deliver particular protective outcomes. Thirty percent considered better protection of sensitive or dual-use research somewhat or very likely, while 31% considered this unlikely (Figure 11). Views on reduced exposure to foreign interference or intellectual property loss were evenly divided, with 28% considering this likely and 28% unlikely (Figure 12). Relatively large proportions were neutral or unsure on both measures (Figures 11 and 12).

Figure 11. Perceived likelihood of better protection of sensitive or dual-use research



See also Appendix Table 17A.

Figure 12. Perceived likelihood of reduced exposure to foreign interference or intellectual property loss



See also Appendix Table 17A.

05

Experience of Research Security Requirements and Effects on Research

60%

had received research security training.

Among those trained, **48%** rated it at least moderately useful.

39%

reported that China-related collaboration had prompted additional questions, review, follow-up or approval beyond routine processes.

73%

reported that security-related requirements had affected their research at least moderately.

45% reported a significant or very significant effect.

63%

reported visa-related complications.

50% reported difficulties hosting, supervising or recruiting.

49% reported project approval delays.

57%

reported having avoided, changed, delayed or ended China-related collaboration because of research security policies, procedures or related institutional expectations

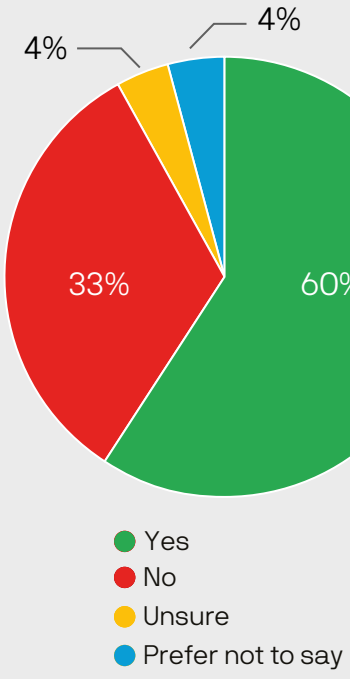
61%

often or very frequently consider security implications when making research decisions.

5.1 Training and additional review

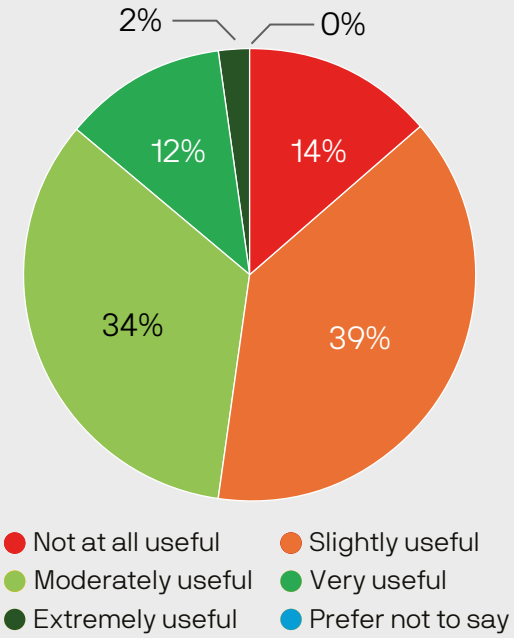
Six in ten respondents (60%) reported having received training related to managing research security risks in international research collaboration. One-third (33%) reported that they had not received such training, while 4% were unsure and 4% preferred not to say (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Receipt of research security training



See also Appendix Table 18A.

Figure 14. Usefulness of research security training among respondents who received training



See also Appendix Table 19A.

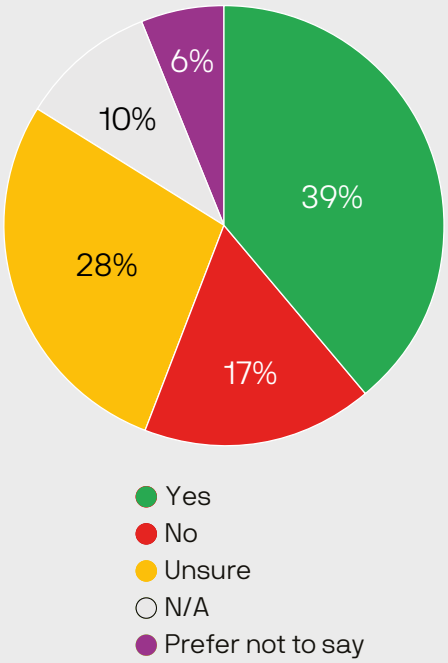
Among the respondents who reported receiving training, assessments of its usefulness were mixed. Thirty-nine percent considered the training slightly useful and 14% not at all useful. One-third (34%) considered it moderately useful, while 12% considered it very useful and 2% extremely useful (Figure 14).

Overall, 48% of those who received training rated it as at least moderately useful, while 52% rated it as only slightly useful or not useful at all (Figure 14).

Respondents were also asked whether, beyond routine conflict-of-interest or disclosure processes applying to researchers in Australia generally, their China-related collaboration had specifically prompted additional questions, review, follow-up or approval steps.

Thirty-nine percent reported that it had. Seventeen percent reported that it had not, while a relatively large proportion (28%) were unsure. Ten percent selected not applicable and 6% preferred not to say (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Additional review or approval processes associated with China-related collaboration

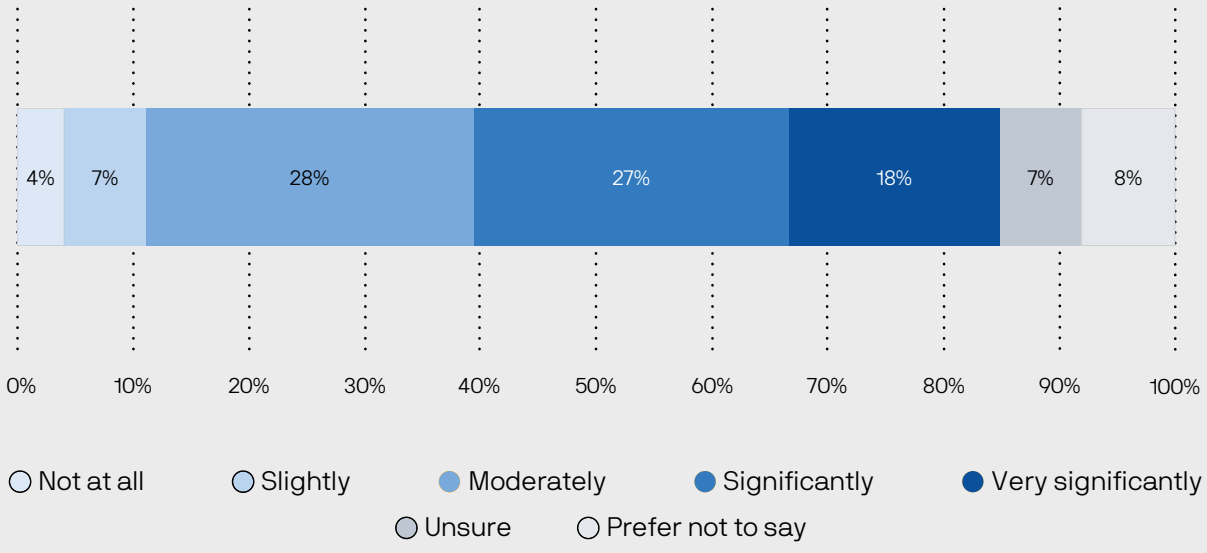


See also Appendix Table 20A.

When asked more broadly about the extent to which security-related requirements had affected their research activities, nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) reported at least a moderate effect. Twenty-eight percent reported a moderate effect, 27% a significant effect and 18% a very significant effect (Figure 16).

A further 7% reported that their research was slightly affected and 4% not affected at all. Seven percent were unsure and 8% preferred not to say. Overall, 45% reported that security-related requirements had affected their research significantly or very significantly (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Extent to which security-related requirements affected research activities



See also Appendix Table 21A.

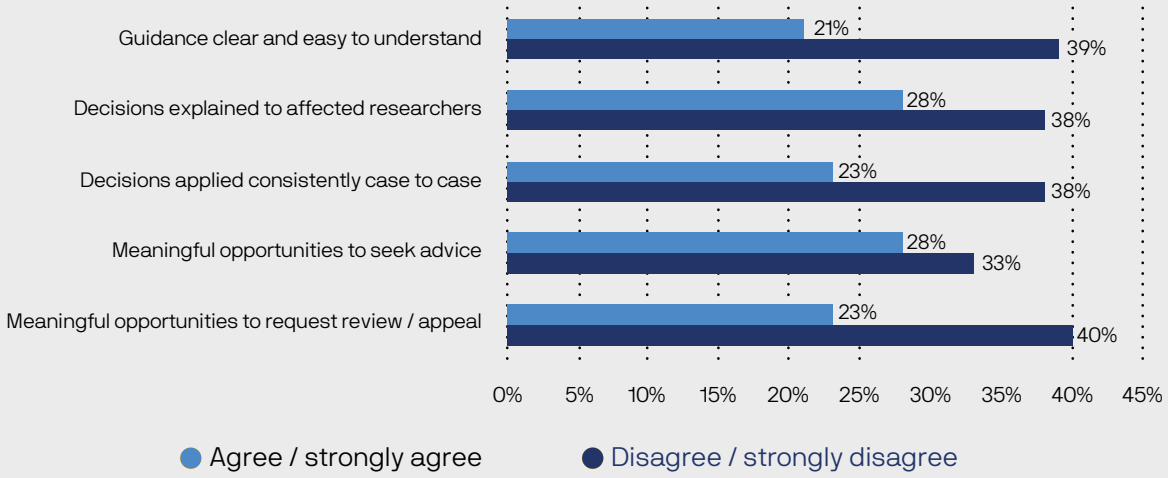
5.2 Institutional guidance, transparency and review processes

Assessments of institutional processes were mixed to negative, with sizeable neutral or unsure groups.

Thirty-nine percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that institutional guidance was clear and easy to understand, compared with 21% who agreed. Thirty-eight percent disagreed that decisions were explained to affected researchers and 38% disagreed that decisions were applied consistently from case to case (Figure 17).

Views on access to advice were more evenly divided, while 40% disagreed that researchers had meaningful opportunities to request review or appeal, compared with 23% who agreed (Figure 17). Across the five measures, 24-28% selected neutral or unsure (Appendix Table 21A).

Figure 17. Institutional guidance, transparency and review processes



See also Appendix Table 22A.

5.3 Practical experiences beyond routine research processes

Respondents reported a range of experiences associated with China-related collaboration that they regarded as additional to routine administrative, ethics, disclosure, grant or approval processes applying to comparable research.

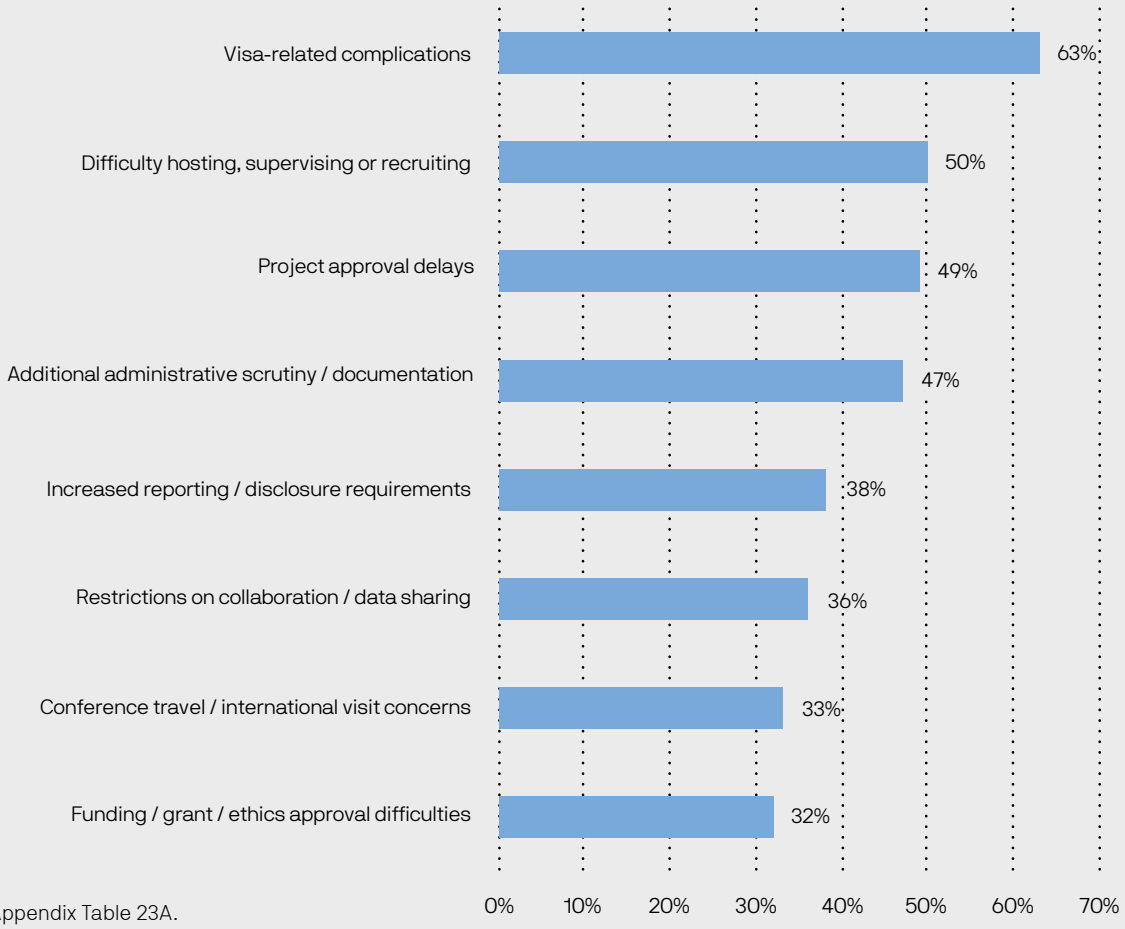
Visa-related complications for collaborators, students or visitors were the most frequently reported experience, selected by 63% of respondents. Half (50%) reported difficulty hosting visiting scholars, supervising students or recruiting staff, while 49% reported delays in project approval (Figure 18).

Almost half (47%) reported additional administrative scrutiny, such as extra questions, checks or documentation. Thirty-eight percent reported increased reporting or disclosure requirements, while 36% reported restrictions on collaboration or data sharing (Figure 18).

Around one-third reported concerns about conference travel or international visits (33%) or funding, grant or ethics approval difficulties (32%) (Figure 18).

Twelve percent selected none of the listed experiences, 4% selected not applicable and 2% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 22A).

Figure 18. Experiences beyond routine processes in relation to China-related research collaboration

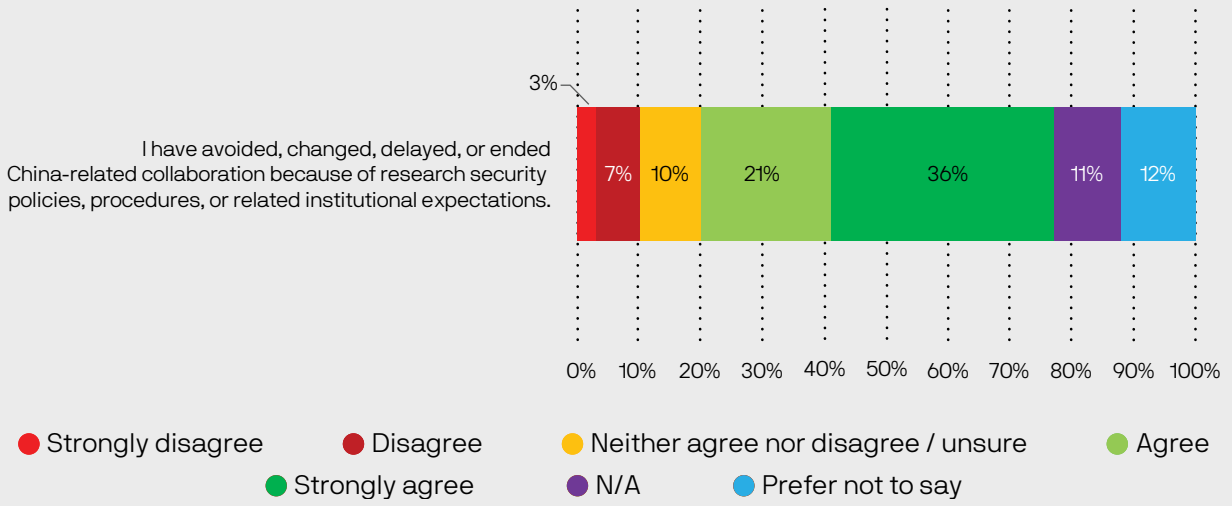


See also Appendix Table 23A.

5.4 Effects on research decisions and behaviour

A majority (57%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had avoided, changed, delayed or ended China-related collaboration because of research security policies, procedures or related institutional expectations. Ten percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 10% were neutral or unsure, 11% selected not applicable and 12% preferred not to say (Figure 19).

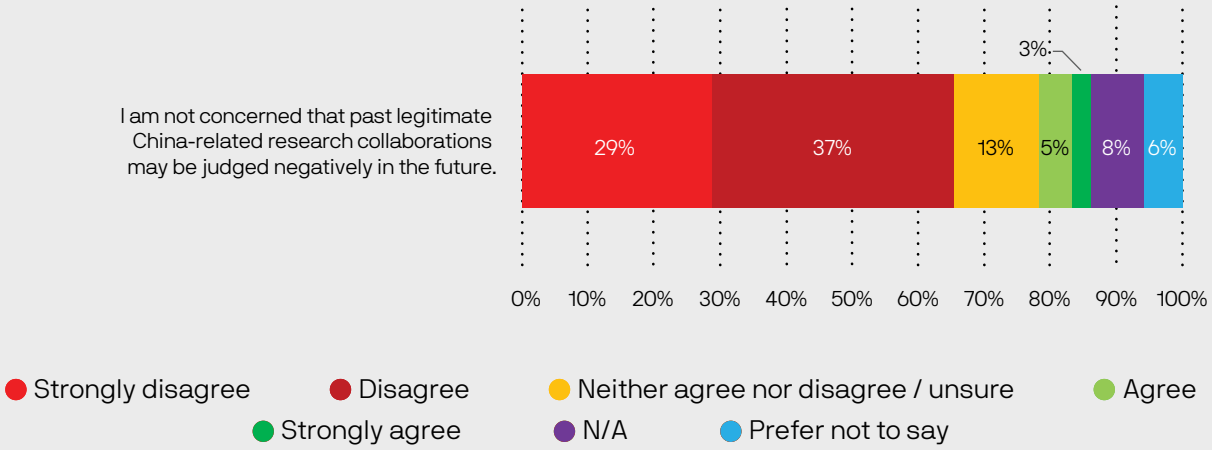
Figure 19. Changes to China-related collaboration in response to research security policies and institutional expectations



See also Appendix Table 24A.

Concern about the future interpretation of previous collaboration was also common. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they were not concerned that past legitimate China-related research collaborations might be judged negatively in the future. Seven percent agreed or strongly agreed, 13% were neutral or unsure, 8% selected not applicable and 6% preferred not to say (Figure 20). Because the statement was negatively framed, this indicates that a substantial proportion reported concern about how previous collaboration might subsequently be perceived.

Figure 20. Concern that past China-related research collaborations may be judged negatively in the future

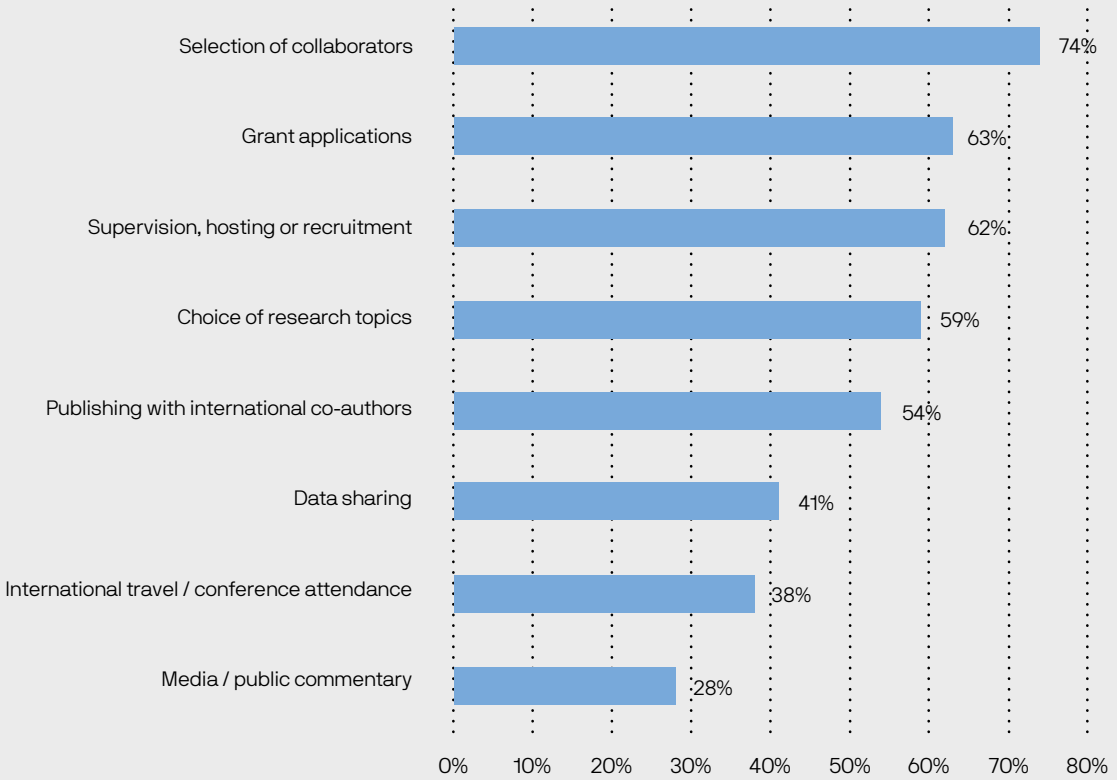


See also Appendix Table 24A.

A more detailed activity question indicates where behavioural change was concentrated. Seventy-four percent reported changing how they select collaborators, 63% how they approach grant applications, 62% supervision, hosting or recruitment, 59% their choice of research topics and 54% publishing with international co-authors (Figure 21).

Changes were also reported in data sharing (41%), international travel or conference attendance (38%) and media or public commentary (28%) (Figure 21). Nine percent selected none of the listed activities (Appendix Table 24A).

Figure 21. Research activities respondents reported approaching differently



Note: Multiple responses were permitted. Percentages therefore do not sum to 100%.

See also Appendix Table 25A.

Security implications were also considered regularly when making research decisions: 61% reported considering them often or very frequently, while 28% did so sometimes, 5% rarely and none selected never (Table 10).

Table 10. **Frequency of considering security implications when making research decisions**

Frequency	Responses, %
Never	0%
Rarely	5%
Sometimes	28%
Often	35%
Very frequently	26%
Prefer not to say	7%

61% reported considering security implications often or very frequently.

See also Appendix Table 26A.

The behavioural changes reported in the survey have parallels in international research. Studies of the US have documented changes in collaboration, funding behaviour and researcher mobility associated with heightened scrutiny of China-related scientific links. Research following the US 'China Initiative' and related investigations has found reduced international collaboration among affected researchers, while other studies have reported heightened concerns among Chinese and Chinese-origin scientists about surveillance, discrimination and professional risk.[27]

Similar mechanisms can operate without a formal prohibition on collaboration. Researchers may decide not to approach a particular partner, restructure a grant proposal, avoid a research topic perceived as sensitive, or redirect recruitment if approval or visa outcomes are uncertain. UTS:ACRI research has already documented visa delays affecting China-related study and research planning.[28] In the present survey, these mechanisms are reflected in the high proportions reporting changes to collaborator selection, grant applications, supervision and recruitment, research topics and international co-authorship.



Image credit: PanuShot / Shutterstock

06

Inclusion, Belonging and Career Intentions

52%

did not feel comfortable discussing collaborations with institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau within their university.

55%

were not confident that their personal background does not inappropriately influence how their collaborations are perceived.

61%

reported that current debates had negatively affected their sense of belonging within Australian academia.

50%

did not feel comfortable maintaining visible connections with China-related research networks, topics or public discussion.

77%

agreed that Chinese-background researchers can play a constructive bridging role between Australia and China.

59% did not consider current conditions to allow that role to be played effectively.

23%

reported uncertainty about remaining in Australia, or having left, where research security concerns were at least one factor.

6.1 Inclusion and belonging and the bridging role of Chinese-background researchers

Responses indicated concerns about comfort, belonging and the perceived influence of personal background on research collaboration. These findings provide a researcher-level perspective on the wider environment described in Section 4.2, where respondents reported substantially greater security attention towards China-related collaboration over the preceding five years than perceived increases in the underlying national security risk.

Just over half of respondents (52%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt comfortable discussing collaborations with institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau within their university (Figure 22). Twenty percent agreed or strongly agreed, 23% were neutral or unsure, and 5% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 26A).

Fifty-five percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were confident their ethnicity, language background, birthplace, family ties or personal networks do not inappropriately influence how their collaborations are perceived (Figure 22). Seventeen percent agreed or strongly agreed, 21% were neutral or unsure, 1% selected not applicable and 6% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 26A).

Views on assumptions about loyalty or trustworthiness were more dispersed. Forty-one percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had not encountered such assumptions, while 19% agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 22). Thirty-two percent were neutral or unsure, 1% selected not applicable and 6% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 26A). Because the statement was negatively framed, disagreement is consistent with respondents reporting that they had encountered assumptions concerning loyalty or trustworthiness.

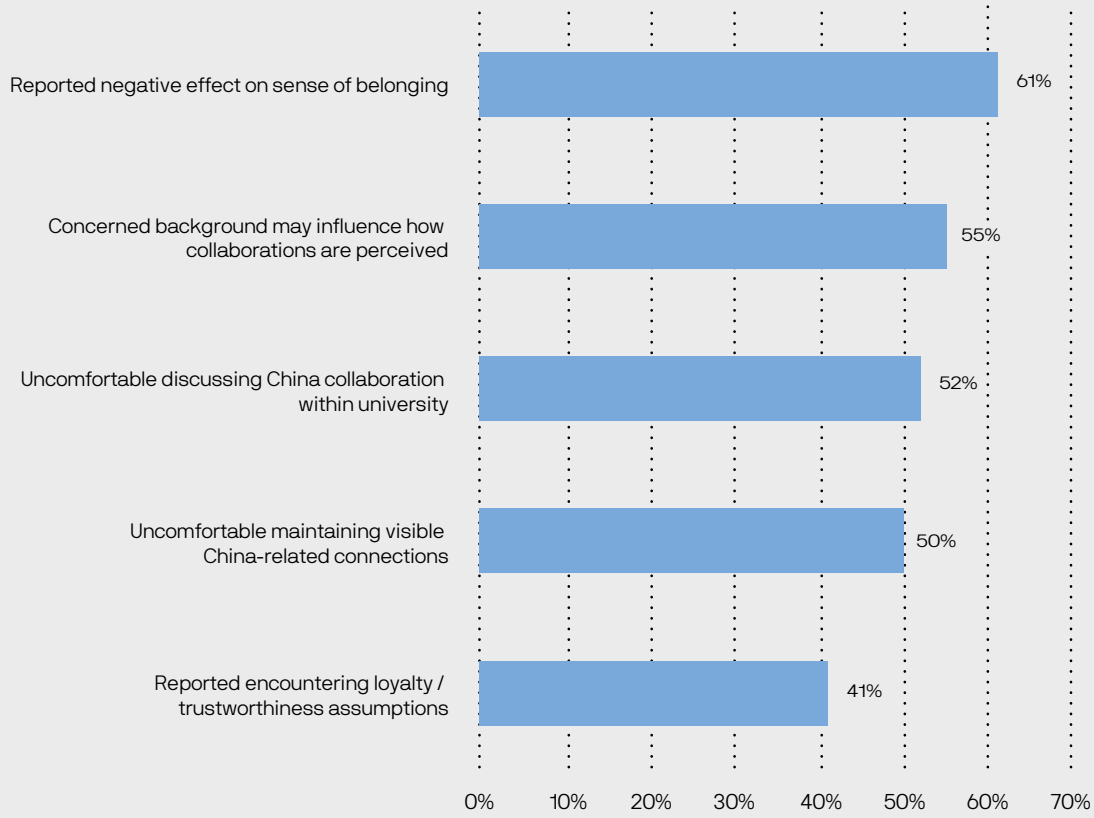
Six in ten respondents (61%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that current debates had not negatively affected their sense of belonging within Australian academia (Figure 22). Ten percent agreed or strongly agreed, 23% were neutral or unsure and 6% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 26A). Again, because the statement was negatively framed, disagreement indicates a reported negative effect on belonging.

The companion interviews in *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice* (October 2026) also show that concerns about belonging did not necessarily imply weaker attachment to Australia. One scientist, reflecting on a 20-year career in Australia, said:

> *I've been working in Australia for 20 years now, and I'm also an Australian citizen. To be honest, I'm incredibly grateful to Australia... I've always wanted to give something back and make a genuine contribution to this country.*
>
> **Senior Chinese-Australian scientist interviewed for *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice***

Half of respondents (50%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt comfortable maintaining visible connections with China-related research networks, topics or public discussion (Figure 22). Sixteen percent agreed or strongly agreed, 28% were neutral or unsure and 6% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 26A).

Figure 22. Inclusion and belonging



See also Appendix Table 27A.

Bridging role

Respondents distinguished strongly between the potential value of Chinese-Australian and Chinese-background researchers as a bridge between Australia and China and their assessment of whether current conditions enable that role.

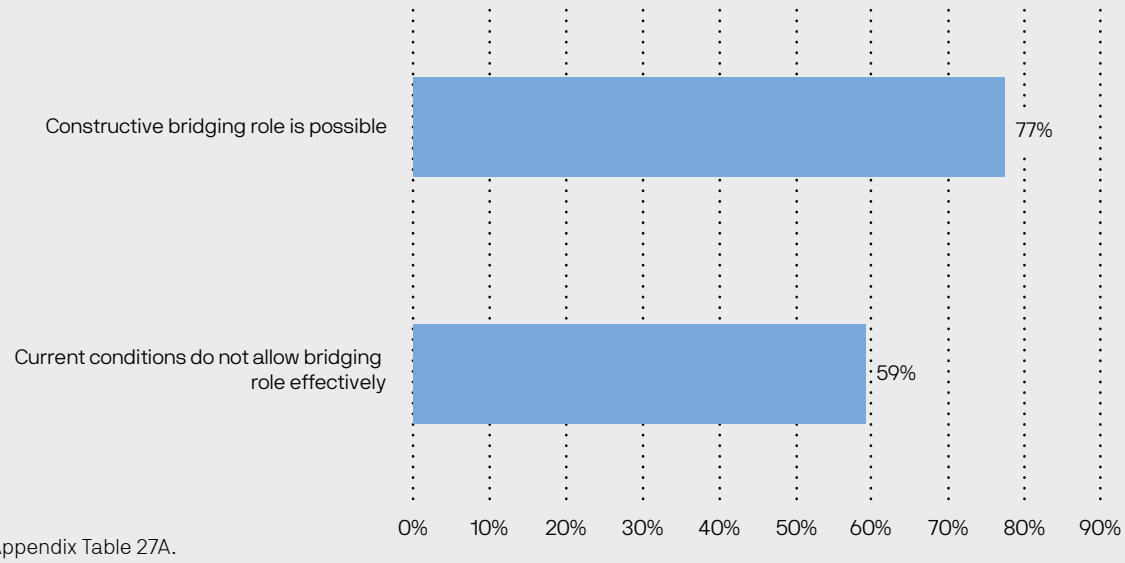
More than three-quarters (77%) agreed or strongly agreed that Chinese-Australian and Chinese-background researchers can play a constructive bridging role between Australia and China (Figure 23). Eight percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 8% were neutral or unsure, 1% selected not applicable and 6% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 26A).

By contrast, 59% disagreed or strongly disagreed that current conditions allow these researchers to play this bridging role effectively (Figure 23). Thirteen percent agreed or strongly agreed, 22% were neutral or unsure and 6% preferred not to say (Appendix Table 26A).

The companion interviews in *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice* also suggest that some Chinese-Australian scientists understand this bridging role as extending beyond research collaboration to knowledge of both research systems. One interviewee said:

> *Some may say that because I am Chinese-Australian that I should stay silent. In fact, I think I have even more reason to speak out, because I understand China better.*
>
> **Senior Chinese-Australian scientist interviewed for *Right-Sizing Research Security in Practice***

Figure 23. Bridging role



See also Appendix Table 27A.

6.2 Academic career intentions

Almost half of respondents (48%) reported that they were based at an Australian institution and expected to continue their academic career in Australia. Ten percent were based at an Australian institution but were uncertain whether they would continue for reasons unrelated to research security (Table 11).

Research security concerns were reported as relevant to career uncertainty by some respondents. Fourteen percent were uncertain whether they would continue in Australia and identified research security as one factor among others, while 7% identified research security concerns as the main reason for their uncertainty (Table 11).

Three percent were no longer based at an Australian institution for reasons unrelated to research security, while 2% were no longer based at an Australian institution and identified research security concerns as one factor among others (Table 11).

Seventeen percent preferred not to state their situation (Table 11).

Table 11. **Academic career intentions**

Current situation	**%**
Expect to continue academic career in Australia	48%
Uncertain – reasons unrelated to research security policy	10%
Uncertain – research security policy one factor among others	14%
Uncertain – research security policy main reason	7%
No longer based at an Australian institution	
Reasons unrelated to research security	3%
Research security one factor among others	2%
Research security main reason	0%
Prefer not to say	17%

Across the full sample, 23% reported either being uncertain about continuing their academic career in Australia or no longer being based at an Australian institution, where research security concerns were at least one factor.

See also Appendix Table 28A.

07

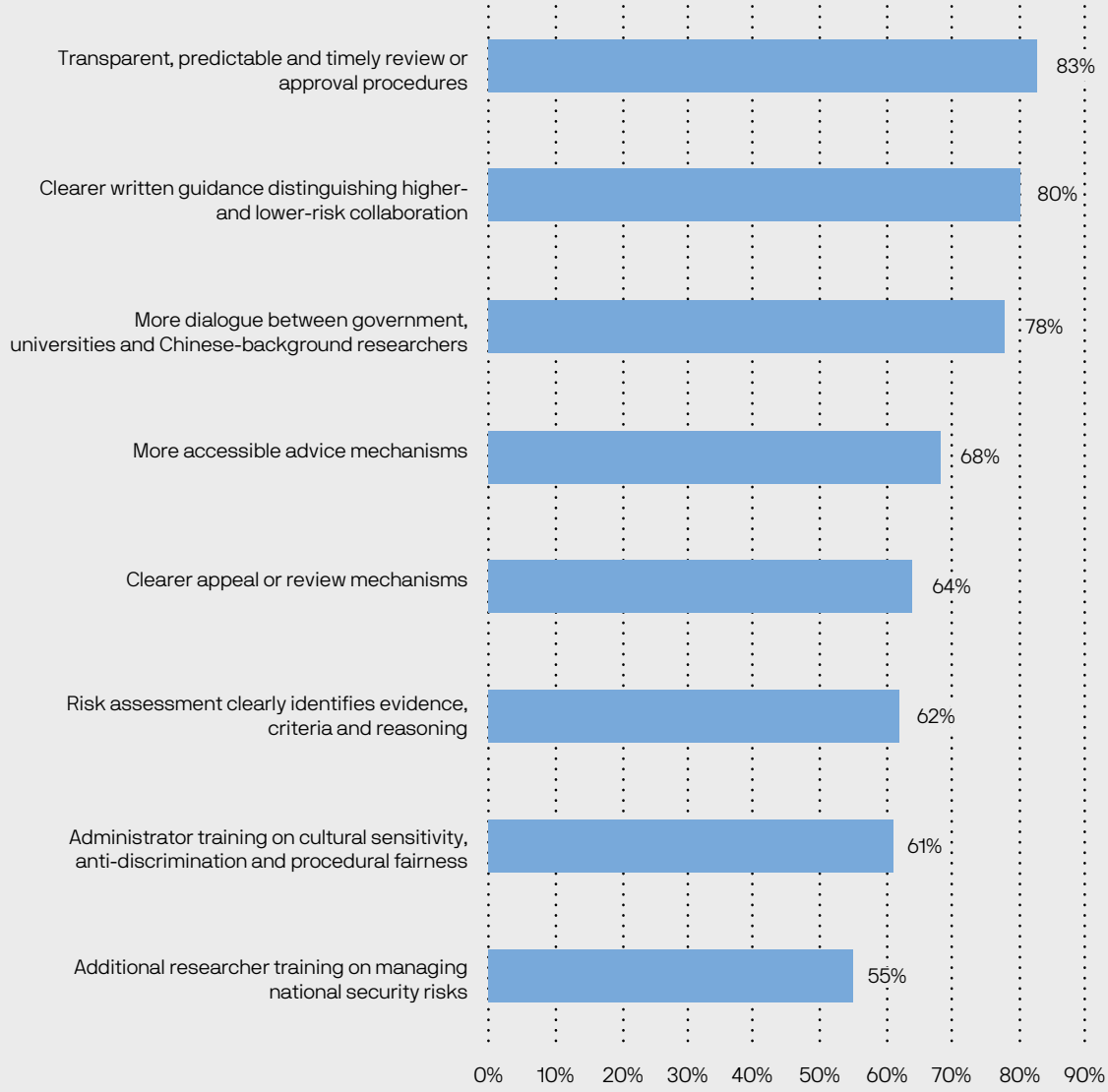
Priorities for Improving Research Security Policy and Implementation

Respondents were asked to rate eight possible improvements intended to manage research security concerns while supporting legitimate collaboration. The strongest priorities concerned the operation of the review system itself. Eighty-three percent rated more transparent, predictable and timely review or approval procedures as a high or critical priority, 80% prioritised clearer written guidance and practical examples distinguishing higher- from lower-risk collaboration, and 78% prioritised more opportunities for dialogue between government, universities and Chinese-background researchers (Figure 24).

The remaining proposals also received majority support at the high or critical level: more accessible advice mechanisms (68%), clearer appeal or review mechanisms (64%), clearer evidence and reasoning in risk assessment (62%), additional training for administrators on cultural sensitivity, anti-discrimination and procedural fairness (61%), and additional researcher training on managing national security risks (55%) (Figure 24).

Several of the highest-ranked priorities therefore concern clearer and more consistent implementation of risk management rather than the removal of research security safeguards. This is consistent with earlier findings showing support for the general principle of managing security risks alongside criticism of the clarity, differentiation and proportionality of current settings.

Figure 24. Priorities for improving research security policy and implementation



See also Appendix Table 29A.

08

Open-Ended Survey Perspectives

Open-ended survey questions were optional and were answered by a minority of the analytical sample. These responses are distinct from the separate companion interview study referenced elsewhere in this report. They are used here to add context and explanation to the quantitative findings, rather than to estimate the prevalence of particular views or experiences.

Across the responses, criticism of current arrangements did not necessarily amount to opposition to research security safeguards. Several respondents recognised legitimate security objectives while questioning how risks were defined, differentiated and managed in practice. Others described effects on collaboration, recruitment and professional confidence, while also identifying substantial benefits from research engagement with China. A smaller number raised concerns about intellectual property, incentives, reciprocity and the distribution of benefits from international collaboration. The responses highlight tensions and qualifications that are not fully captured by the closed-ended survey measures.

8.1 Support for safeguards, but concern about how risk is managed

Some respondents explicitly recognised legitimate purposes for research security policy. One described the benefits of current arrangements as:

> *Current policies have improved research security, strengthened due diligence, and better protected sensitive technologies and intellectual property.*

The same respondent nevertheless argued that the framework did not sufficiently distinguish between different levels of risk and called for a more targeted approach. Another similarly observed:

> *Current policies appropriately recognise that some research collaborations may involve national security, foreign interference, intellectual property or sensitive technology risks.*

This respondent referred positively to due diligence, disclosure of conflicts and foreign affiliations, assessment of research partners, and compliance with export controls, sanctions and defence-related regulations. A further respondent argued that the principal strength of current policy was that it recognised the need for 'due diligence, transparency and national security safeguards', while also advocating stronger scrutiny in strategically sensitive fields and greater attention to whether collaborations deliver tangible benefits to Australia.

A recurring distinction in these responses was between scrutiny based on identifiable risks and scrutiny based on researchers' backgrounds. One respondent said:

> *These issues should be assessed on the basis of conduct, incentives, institutional arrangements and evidence, not ethnicity, nationality or cultural background.*

The respondent identified financial interests, affiliations, conflicts of interest, intellectual-property arrangements, technology and knowledge flows, dual-use risks and the distribution of longer-term benefits as legitimate considerations.

These responses suggest that at least some respondents saw research security and international collaboration as compatible objectives. Their principal concern was not whether safeguards should exist, but whether scrutiny was sufficiently evidence-based, differentiated and proportionate.

8.2 Unclear boundaries, broad definitions and inconsistent application

A prominent implementation theme concerned uncertainty about where legitimate collaboration ends and higher-risk activity begins.

One respondent described the central issue as:

> *The critical piece for Chinese-background academics in Australia is the lack of written guidance.*

The same respondent characterised the space between clearly permitted and clearly prohibited activity as:

> *The way in the middle is essentially an arbitrary judgement of whether an Australian academic has crossed the line.*

Other respondents expressed similar concerns more briefly, describing guidance as 'very vague' or 'too broad', while one described current arrangements as 'often complex, cautious and inconsistently applied.'

A related concern was whether policy adequately distinguishes specific security risks from broader concerns associated with China. One respondent wrote:

> *They may not clearly distinguish specific, evidence-based risks from general concerns about China.*

The same respondent said that:

> *Broad definitions of critical or dual-use technology can capture fundamental, openly published research with limited security sensitivity.*

Their response linked this uncertainty to unclear assessment criteria, lengthy approval processes, visa delays and the possibility that researchers may avoid legitimate collaboration because of anticipated scrutiny or reputational consequences.

Respondents also provided examples of perceived inconsistency. One referred to a reported prohibition on collaboration with China's 'seven sons of defence' institutions 'on any topic, allegedly', but contrasted this with university activity they believed involved one of the same institutions. They concluded:

> *It is thus extremely confusing what we can or can't do.*

Another respondent, discussing recruitment and approval processes, wrote:

> *The process can lack transparency, clear timeframes and sufficient distinction between genuinely sensitive work and routine academic research.*



8.3 Changes to research practice, recruitment and opportunity

Respondents also described how the policy environment had affected their own research decisions.

One respondent stated:

> *The current security debates have made me more cautious about engaging in collaborations with China.*

They went on to say:

> *I have avoided pursuing collaborations with Chinese partners and have been reluctant to apply for government research funding.*

The respondent linked these decisions to uncertainty about how China-related collaboration might be perceived and reported consequences for research opportunities and professional confidence.

Another respondent described adapting through greater compliance activity:

> *I now devote more attention to compliance, partner due diligence, disclosure requirements and how research topics may be perceived.*

They described this as creating 'additional administrative burden' and noted that uncertainty could extend beyond collaboration itself to student recruitment and academic exchange.

Recruitment and researcher mobility featured particularly strongly. One respondent highlighted 'The increasing difficulty and extended processing times faced by PhD candidates from China in obtaining student visas' and associated this with reduced ability to attract research talent and effects on research quality.

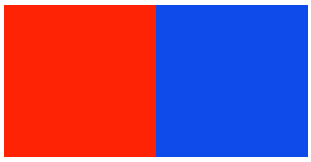
Another observed that 'strong candidates may withdraw or accept positions elsewhere because they cannot wait indefinitely.' This respondent referred to Chinese PhD candidates and visiting researchers in advanced materials and engineering, where visa processing and security review were reported to create uncertainty despite the research being described as fundamental, civilian and intended for open publication.

Some accounts described more concrete consequences. One respondent reported:

> *PhD admission was declined due to dual-use technology last year.*

Another described withdrawing from collaboration after encountering what they regarded as discouraging institutional processes:

> *The paperwork and attitude from the organisation made you feel any collaboration is not encouraged, so I simply gave way.*



8.4 Professional identity, trust and belonging

A further group of responses concerned professional identity and respondents' sense of their place within Australian academia.

Some comments framed the issue primarily in terms of trust. One respondent wrote, 'I will feel disappointed if the Australian system doesn't trust us', while another described restrictions on collaboration as 'somehow not making us feel we are very welcomed by the local research community.'

A longer response described the effect of broader suspicion in professional terms:

> *Broad suspicion directed towards China-related collaboration can make researchers feel that their professional judgement, integrity or international connections are being questioned.*

The respondent nevertheless explicitly supported risk management, concluding:

> *Security risks should be managed, but assessments should remain evidence-based, project-specific and independent of ethnicity.*

Other respondents described effects on belonging more directly. One wrote:

> *It affects my sense of belonging in Australian academia strongly.*

A small number described stronger experiences of exclusion or differential treatment, including one respondent who stated:

I feel that I have been treated as a second [-class] citizen.

Another reported that colleagues associated Chinese background with the possibility of espionage:

> *A large number of non-Chinese academics treat China or [those from] Chinese cultural backgrounds as spies and say it semi-openly in the office.*

One respondent combined support for rigorous security scrutiny with opposition to ethnicity-based assumptions:

> *They have made me more conscious that nationality or ethnicity should neither create suspicion nor provide exemption from scrutiny. Researchers of Chinese background should be treated as Australian researchers on the same individual, evidence-based basis as everyone else. At the same time, concerns about foreign interference, undisclosed conflicts and inappropriate technology transfer should not be dismissed simply because discussing them is politically uncomfortable. In my view, rigorous scrutiny of institutions, funding relationships and individual conduct is compatible with an inclusive Australian academic community.*

8.5 Benefits of collaboration: capability, infrastructure, talent and training

Respondents also provided concrete examples of what they regarded as benefits from collaboration with China. These included access to specialist expertise and infrastructure, student and researcher training, research investment, joint publications and access to research talent.

One respondent described collaborations in renewable energy and electric vehicle technologies and referred to the availability of solar panels, inverters and control modules in Australia for both consumers and researchers. Another, working in health and medical research, reported having 'facilitated collaborations that brought Chinese academics to Australia to transfer advanced animal models and research techniques', which they said provided 'training for Australian students and researchers.'

Another example came from advanced materials. The respondent wrote:

> *These partnerships have combined Australia's strengths in polymer processing, testing and industry engagement with complementary expertise, facilities and research capacity in China.*

The respondent reported that the collaboration 'produced joint publications, trained graduate researchers and enabled access to specialised materials and experimental capabilities' that would otherwise have been difficult or costly to access in Australia.

Other respondents similarly emphasised access to facilities, talent, postdoctoral researchers and expertise.

8.6 Benefits were not viewed as automatic: reciprocity, intellectual property and security concerns

The qualitative responses also complicate a simple benefits-versus-security framing. Some respondents who supported international collaboration nevertheless argued that its value to Australia should be scrutinised rather than assumed.

One respondent cautioned that:

> *[I]t is important to distinguish between successful academic outputs and demonstrable benefits to Australia.*

They noted that 'Publications and citations are relatively easy to measure', whereas the distribution of intellectual property, know-how, funding and longer-term strategic benefits is harder to assess.

Similarly, when respondents were asked about challenges arising from collaboration itself, not all focused on Australian policy barriers. One raised concerns about intellectual property protection in China. Another described a potential 'principal-agent problem' and said:

> *[T]he interests of individual researchers, universities and the Australian public should not automatically be assumed to be identical.*

They called for attention to 'intellectual property arrangements, technology and knowledge flows, dual-use risks, and the distribution of long-term benefits.'



Image credit: Flukycliks / Shutterstock

Conclusion

The findings point to a policy challenge of adjustment rather than a simple choice between openness and security. Respondents generally accepted the need to manage research security risks but questioned whether current settings distinguish sufficiently between higher-risk activity and routine academic collaboration.

The survey suggests that this distinction matters in practice. Researchers reported changes not only to formal collaboration, but also to how they select partners, pursue grants, recruit students and staff, choose research topics and engage publicly. At the same time, many continued to see substantial scientific value in collaboration with China and in the bridging role of Chinese-background researchers.

The clearest pattern in respondents' views concerned implementation. Respondents consistently prioritised clearer guidance, more transparent and predictable review processes, case-specific assessment and better explanation of how decisions are made. These are not arguments for weaker safeguards, but for safeguards that are more targeted and easier to navigate.

Because the survey was conducted immediately before the latest expansion of Australia's foreign research framework, it provides a useful baseline for assessing how the new arrangements are implemented. A key question will be whether broader scrutiny can be applied with sufficient clarity and proportionality to protect genuinely sensitive research without unnecessarily constraining legitimate collaboration.

This question is particularly important for Australia. Its research system is relatively small and highly internationalised, while China's much larger domestic research base gives it greater capacity to absorb disruption to individual international relationships or diversify towards alternative partners. Existing publication evidence does not establish that China-related collaboration is irreplaceable for Australia but suggests that the opportunity costs of disruption are unlikely to be distributed evenly.[29]

The policy challenge is therefore not simply to choose between research openness and security. It is to identify where risks lie, protect sensitive research accordingly, and avoid imposing unnecessary costs on the international networks through which Australia also acquires scientific capability, talent, knowledge and innovation capacity.

Methodology

Responses were collected between July 9 and August 17 2026, yielding 109 eligible responses from Chinese-background academic and professional research staff who were working, or had worked within the previous five years, at an Australian university.

Respondents were recruited through academic and professional networks. Participation was voluntary and self-selected, and no identifying information was used in the analysis.

The survey was exploratory rather than statistically representative. Quantitative results are reported as counts and percentages, generally using the full sample of 109 respondents unless otherwise indicated. Where questions were asked only of a subset of respondents, the relevant denominator is stated. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. For multiple-response questions, percentages do not sum to 100%.

Several questions asked respondents to compare current research activity with around five years earlier. These comparisons are retrospective and should be interpreted as reported differences rather than direct measures of change. Open-ended responses were optional and are used to illustrate the range of views expressed, not their prevalence. Quoted responses were selected to illustrate recurring themes and relevant qualifications in the open-ended material.

For the purposes of the survey, Chinese-background researchers were defined as researchers of Chinese heritage, including Chinese-Australian researchers and Chinese nationals working in Australia. In practice, the respondent group was more specific with 96% reporting being born in mainland China. The term 'research security policies' refers to government and university rules, guidance, approval processes, disclosure requirements and risk assessments applying to international research collaboration. China-related research collaboration refers to research involving researchers, institutions or partners in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau.

Limitations

The findings are based on a voluntary, self-selected sample and cannot be assumed to represent all Chinese-background researchers in Australian universities. The realised sample was also more narrowly concentrated than the survey's broader eligibility definition, with the overwhelming majority of respondents reporting being born in mainland China. The findings therefore primarily reflect the experiences of this subgroup rather than the full diversity of Chinese-background researchers in Australia. The sample was also relatively senior and experienced, so the results may reflect established researchers more strongly than early-career researchers.

Because participation depended on respondents becoming aware of and choosing to complete the survey, those with stronger views or more direct experience of China-related research collaboration and research security issues may have been more likely to participate.

The findings are self-reported and were not independently verified. As a cross-sectional survey, the study can identify reported experiences, perceptions and associations, but cannot establish causation.

The survey was conducted immediately before the new foreign research project provisions introduced through the 2026 amendments to the *Foreign Relations Act* took effect. It therefore provides a snapshot of the preceding research security environment rather than an assessment of the new framework.



Image credit: RossHelen / Shutterstock

Appendix

Table 1A. **Current or previous status in Australia**

Which best describes your current or previous status in Australia?

Current or previous status in Australia	Responses, n (%)
Australian citizen	48 (44%)
Permanent resident of Chinese heritage	54 (50%)
Chinese national in Australia on a temporary visa, such as a work, student or visiting scholar visa	6 (6%)
Researcher of Chinese heritage holding citizenship of another country, in Australia on a temporary visa	1 (1%)
Other	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	0 (0%)

Table 2A. **Place of birth**

Where was your place of birth?

Place of birth	Responses, n (%)
Australia	0 (0%)
Mainland China	105 (96%)
Hong Kong	0 (0%)
Macau	0 (0%)
Taiwan	0 (0%)
Other	1 (1%)
Prefer not to say	3 (3%)

Table 3A. **Current academic position**

What is your current academic position?

Current position	Responses, n (%)
Postdoctoral researcher / research fellow	21 (19%)
Lecturer / senior lecturer	22 (20%)
Associate professor / professor	63 (58%)
Professional research staff	2 (2%)
Other	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	1 (1%)

Table 4A. **Years of research experience since highest academic degree**

Since completing your highest academic degree, for how many years have you been actively engaged in research in your current field?

Years actively engaged in research	Responses, n (%)
0-5 years	15 (14%)
6-10 years	28 (26%)
11-20 years	36 (33%)
21 years or above	29 (27%)
Prefer not to say	1 (1%)

Table 5A. **Years conducting research in Australia**

How many years have you been conducting, or have conducted, research in Australia?

Years conducting research in Australia	Responses, n (%)
Less than 3 years	3 (3%)
3-6 years	12 (11%)
7-10 years	25 (23%)
More than 10 years	68 (62%)
Prefer not to say	1 (1%)

Table 6A. **Main field of research**

Which best describes your main field of research? (Select one)

Main field of research	Responses, n (%)
Natural sciences (e.g. physics, chemistry, biology, earth/environmental science)	32 (29%)
Engineering or technology (e.g. mechanical, electrical, civil, materials, biomedical engineering)	63 (58%)
Mathematics, statistics, or computer/data science	8 (7%)
Medical, health, or life sciences research	6 (6%)

Table 7A. **Research characteristics relevant to research security**

Does your research involve any of the following? (Select all that apply)

Research characteristic	Responses, n (%)
A critical or emerging technology field (e.g. AI, quantum, cybersecurity, biotechnology, space, energy, critical minerals)	75 (69%)
Dual-use applications (uses with both civilian and military or security potential)	10 (9%)
Defence- or security-related funding or partners	1 (1%)
Sensitive, restricted, or export-controlled data or materials	0 (0%)
None of the above	28 (26%)
Prefer not to say	3 (3%)

Table 8A. **International research collaboration**

Does your research involve collaboration with researchers or institutions outside Australia? (Select one)

Response	Responses, n (%)
Yes	98 (90%)
No	9 (8%)
Prefer not to say	2 (2%)

Table 9A. **Current status of China-related research collaboration**

Which of the following best describes your current collaboration status with counterpart researchers or institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau? (Select one)

Collaboration status	Responses, n (%)
I currently collaborate with researchers or institutions there	69 (63%)
I collaborated within the past five years, but it has now stopped	22 (20%)
I collaborated before, but not in the past five years	10 (9%)
I have never collaborated with researchers or institutions there	1 (1%)
Prefer not to say	7 (6%)

Table 10A. **Channels through which China-related research collaboration was established**

Through which of the following channels have you established research collaboration with counterpart researchers or institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau? (Select all that apply)

Channel	Responses, n (%)
Personal academic networks (e.g., supervisors, colleagues, former classmates, alumni or mentors)	88 (81%)
Academic activities (e.g., conferences, seminars, workshops, visiting exchanges or academic visits)	78 (72%)
Formal institutional, faculty, school or departmental partnerships	36 (33%)
Government, funding agency, or university-supported collaboration programmes	23 (21%)
Online academic or professional networking platforms	15 (14%)
Direct contact initiated by counterpart researchers or institutions	28 (26%)
Direct contact initiated by myself or my research team	26 (24%)
Other, please specify	0 (0%)
Not applicable – I have not established such collaboration	1 (1%)
Prefer not to say	4 (4%)

Table 11A. **Current frequency of China-related research collaboration, by type of activity**

For each type of collaboration, please indicate your approximate level of activity currently with researchers or institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau.

Please select 'Not applicable' if you were not conducting research in Australia, or this type of activity was not relevant to your role, during the period in question.

Type of collaboration	None	1/year	2-3/year	4+/year	N/A	Prefer not to say
Co-authoring academic publications	7 (6%)	8 (7%)	35 (32%)	52 (48%)	7 (6%)	0 (0%)
Joint research projects	69 (63%)	13 (12%)	7 (6%)	10 (9%)	7 (6%)	3 (3%)
Joint grant applications or funded research programmes	71 (65%)	14 (13%)	7 (6%)	7 (6%)	9 (8%)	1 (1%)
Co-supervising research students	57 (52%)	15 (14%)	11 (10%)	14 (13%)	12 (11%)	0 (0%)
Hosting or visiting researchers (including visiting scholar arrangements)	39 (36%)	27 (25%)	20 (18%)	13 (12%)	10 (9%)	0 (0%)
Sharing data / samples, equipment / laboratory access / research infrastructure	60 (55%)	11 (10%)	9 (8%)	15 (14%)	13 (12%)	1 (1%)
Co-organising conferences, workshops, seminars, or academic networks	49 (45%)	28 (26%)	11 (10%)	10 (9%)	10 (9%)	1 (1%)
Informal scholarly collaboration or research advice	36 (33%)	19 (17%)	22 (20%)	24 (22%)	7 (6%)	1 (1%)
Collaboration with government, industry or policy organisations	83 (76%)	7 (6%)	2 (2%)	5 (5%)	12 (11%)	0 (0%)

Table 12A. **Frequency of China-related research collaboration around five years earlier, by type of activity**

For each type of collaboration, please indicate your approximate level of activity around five years ago with researchers or institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau.

Please select 'Not applicable' if you were not conducting research in Australia, or this type of activity was not relevant to your role, during the period in question.

Type of collaboration	None	1/year	2-3/year	4+/year	N/A	Prefer not to say
Co-authoring academic publications	5 (5%)	12 (11%)	27 (25%)	52 (48%)	13 (12%)	0 (0%)
Joint research projects	51 (47%)	19 (17%)	7 (6%)	15 (14%)	16 (15%)	1 (1%)
Joint grant applications or funded research programmes	51 (47%)	24 (22%)	7 (6%)	11 (10%)	15 (14%)	1 (1%)
Co-supervising research students	42 (39%)	18 (17%)	14 (13%)	19 (17%)	16 (15%)	0 (0%)
Hosting or visiting researchers (including visiting scholar arrangements)	25 (23%)	27 (25%)	21 (19%)	21 (19%)	15 (14%)	0 (0%)
Sharing data / samples, equipment / laboratory access / research infrastructure	45 (41%)	14 (13%)	12 (11%)	16 (15%)	22 (20%)	0 (0%)
Co-organising conferences, workshops, seminars, or academic networks	42 (39%)	19 (17%)	19 (17%)	13 (12%)	16 (15%)	0 (0%)
Informal scholarly collaboration or research advice	30 (28%)	14 (13%)	22 (20%)	28 (26%)	14 (13%)	1 (1%)
Collaboration with government, industry or policy organisations	67 (61%)	10 (9%)	5 (5%)	6 (6%)	21 (19%)	0 (0%)

Table 13A. **Views on research security risks, benefits and policy settings for China-related research collaboration**

For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your view.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Prefer not to say
Australia needs policies to manage national security risks in international research collaboration	5 (5%)	15 (14%)	20 (18%)	57 (52%)	11 (10%)	1 (1%)
Universities have a legitimate role in assessing and managing research security risks in China-related research collaboration	8 (7%)	17 (16%)	22 (20%)	55 (51%)	7 (6%)	0 (0%)
Some China-related research collaboration can raise national security risks for Australia	15 (14%)	30 (28%)	33 (30%)	26 (24%)	2 (2%)	3 (3%)
China-related research collaboration can involve security risks that differ in nature or degree from those associated with collaboration with many other countries	27 (25%)	40 (37%)	21 (19%)	17 (16%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)
China-related research collaboration provides important benefits to Australia's research system	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	24 (22%)	81 (74%)	1 (1%)
Security risks in China-related research collaboration should be assessed case by case, taking into account the field, partner institution, funding source, data, technology, and intended use	7 (6%)	6 (6%)	16 (15%)	54 (50%)	26 (24%)	0 (0%)

Table 14A. **Perceived change in national security risks associated with China-related research collaboration compared with five years earlier**

Compared with five years ago, how do you think national security risks associated with China-related research collaboration have changed? (Please select the response that best reflects how you think national security risks associated with China-related research collaboration have changed compared with around five years earlier.)

Perceived change in national security risk compared with five years ago	Responses, n (%)
Much decreased	11 (10%)
Somewhat decreased	4 (4%)
Stayed about the same	33 (30%)
Somewhat increased	11 (10%)
Much increased	22 (20%)
Unsure	18 (17%)
Prefer not to say	10 (9%)

Table 15A. **Perceived change in security attention towards China-related research collaboration**

For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your view.

Statement	Much more securitised	Somewhat more securitised	About the same / Unsure	Somewhat less securitised	Much less securitised	Prefer not to say
Compared with around five years ago, to what extent is research collaboration with China viewed through a national-security lens in Australia?	49 (45%)	21 (19%)	19 (17%)	7 (6%)	1 (1%)	12 (11%)
Compared with around five years ago, how has the level of caution shown by Australian universities towards research collaboration with China changed?	54 (50%)	21 (19%)	19 (17%)	5 (5%)	0 (0%)	10 (9%)
Compared with around five years ago, to what extent do government and university policies require researchers to consider security risk when undertaking China-related research collaboration?	54 (50%)	21 (19%)	20 (18%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	10 (9%)

Table 16A. **Assessments of current policy settings**

For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your view.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree / Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	Prefer not to say
Current policy frameworks strike an appropriate balance between research openness and national security risk	22 (20%)	43 (39%)	29 (27%)	6 (6%)	6 (6%)	3 (3%)
Australian government guidance on research security risk is clear and practical	28 (26%)	49 (45%)	21 (19%)	8 (7%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
Current policies distinguish adequately between low-risk and high-risk research collaboration.	23 (21%)	53 (49%)	18 (17%)	10 (9%)	2 (2%)	3 (3%)
Current policies protect national security without unnecessarily restricting academic freedom	34 (31%)	45 (41%)	16 (15%)	6 (6%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)
Current policies are applied consistently across countries, based on the specific risks of each collaboration rather than broad assumptions about any one country	46 (42%)	36 (33%)	13 (12%)	8 (7%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)
Media coverage and political debate about China-related research collaboration generally distinguish evidence-based security risks from broader political concern or speculation.	29 (27%)	29 (27%)	28 (26%)	6 (6%)	10 (9%)	
In research governance, the concept of “dual-use” is clearly defined.	22 (20%)	41 (38%)	25 (23%)	14 (13%)	5 (5%)	2 (2%)

Statement	Far too lenient	Somewhat too lenient	About right	Somewhat too strict	Far too strict	Prefer not to say
Overall level of scrutiny applied to China-related research collaboration.	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	8 (7%)	38 (35%)	54 (50%)	8 (7%)

Table 17A. **Perceived likelihood of potential outcomes of current research security settings**

For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your view.

Outcome	Very unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Prefer not to say
Better protection of sensitive or dual-use research.	10 (9%)	24 (22%)	34 (31%)	28 (26%)	5 (5%)	8 (7%)
Reduced exposure to foreign interference or intellectual-property loss.	12 (11%)	19 (17%)	40 (37%)	21 (19%)	10 (9%)	7 (6%)

Table 18A. **Receipt of research security training**

Have you received training related to managing research security risks in international research collaboration?

Response	Responses, n (%)
Yes	65 (60%)
No	36 (33%)
Unsure	4 (4%)
Prefer not to say	4 (4%)

Table 19A. **Usefulness of research security training among respondents who received training**

(If yes) How useful was the training?

Response	Responses, n (%)
Not at all useful	9 (14%)
Slightly useful	25 (39%)
Moderately useful	22 (34%)
Very useful	8 (12%)
Extremely useful	1 (2%)
Prefer not to say	0 (0%)

Table 20A. **Additional review or approval processes associated with China-related collaboration**

Other than routine conflict-of-interest or disclosure processes that apply to researchers in Australia generally, has your China-related collaboration specifically prompted additional questions, review, follow-up or approval steps?

Response	Responses, n (%)
Yes	42 (39%)
No	19 (17%)
Unsure	31 (28%)
N/A	11 (10%)
Prefer not to say	6 (6%)

Table 21A. **Extent to which security-related requirements affected research activities**

To what extent have security-related requirements affected your research activities?

Extent	Responses, n (%)
Not at all	4 (4%)
Slightly	8 (7%)
Moderately	31 (28%)
Significantly	29 (27%)
Very significantly	20 (18%)
Unsure	8 (7%)
Prefer not to say	9 (8%)

Table 22A. **Institutional guidance, transparency and review processes**

For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your experience.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree / Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A	Prefer not to say
My institution's guidance on China-related research collaboration is clear and easy to understand.	15 (14%)	28 (26%)	31 (28%)	18 (17%)	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	7 (6%)
Research security decisions are explained to the researchers they affect.	14 (13%)	27 (25%)	29 (27%)	25 (23%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)	6 (6%)
Research security decisions are applied consistently from case to case.	13 (12%)	28 (26%)	31 (28%)	19 (17%)	6 (6%)	6 (6%)	6 (6%)
Researchers have meaningful opportunities to seek advice about research security requirements.	9 (8%)	27 (25%)	31 (28%)	26 (24%)	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	6 (6%)
Researchers have meaningful opportunities to request review of, or appeal, research security decisions.	15 (14%)	29 (27%)	26 (24%)	19 (17%)	6 (6%)	7 (6%)	7 (6%)

Table 23A. **Reported experiences beyond routine research processes**

In relation to China-related research collaboration, have you experienced any of the following beyond the routine administrative, ethics, disclosure, grant or approval processes that would normally apply to comparable research? (Select all that apply)

Experience	Responses, n (%)
Additional administrative scrutiny, such as extra questions, checks or documentation	51 (47%)
Delays in project approval	53 (49%)
Restrictions on collaboration or data sharing	39 (36%)
Increased reporting or disclosure requirements	41 (38%)
Visa-related complications for collaborators, students or visitors	69 (63%)
Funding, grant or ethics approval difficulties	35 (32%)
Difficulty hosting visiting scholars, supervising students or recruiting staff	55 (50%)
Concerns about conference travel or international visits	36 (33%)
None of the above	13 (12%)
Not applicable	4 (4%)
Prefer not to say	2 (2%)

Table 24A. **Reported effects of research security settings on research decisions and behaviour**

For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your experience.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree / unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A	Prefer not to say
I have avoided, changed, delayed, or ended China-related collaboration because of research security policies, procedures, or related institutional expectations.	3 (3%)	8 (7%)	11 (10%)	23 (21%)	39 (36%)	12 (11%)	13 (12%)
I am not concerned that past legitimate China-related research collaborations may be judged negatively in the future.	32 (29%)	40 (37%)	14 (13%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)	9 (8%)	6 (6%)

Table 25A. **Research activities respondents reported approaching differently**

Have recent debates and policies on research security changed how you approach any of the following? (Select all that apply)

Research activity	Responses, n (%)
Selecting collaborators	81 (74%)
Applying for grants	69 (63%)
Supervising students, hosting visiting scholars or recruiting staff	68 (62%)
Choosing research topics	64 (59%)
Publishing with international co-authors	59 (54%)
Sharing data	45 (41%)
Travelling internationally or attending conferences	41 (38%)
Engaging with media or public commentary	31 (28%)
None of the above	10 (9%)
Prefer not to say	4 (4%)

Table 26A. **Frequency of considering security implications when making research decisions**

How often do you consider security implications when making research decisions?

Frequency	Responses, n (%)
Never	0 (0%)
Rarely	5 (5%)
Sometimes	30 (28%)
Often	38 (35%)
Very frequently	28 (26%)
Prefer not to say	8 (7%)

Table 27A. **Inclusion, belonging and bridging role**

For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your experience.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree / unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A	Prefer not to say
I feel comfortable discussing research collaborations with institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau within my university.	18 (17%)	39 (36%)	25 (23%)	17 (16%)	5 (5%)	0 (0%)	5 (5%)
I am confident that my ethnicity, language background, birthplace, family ties, or personal networks do not inappropriately influence how my collaborations are perceived.	16 (15%)	44 (40%)	23 (21%)	13 (12%)	5 (5%)	1 (1%)	7 (6%)
I have not encountered assumptions about loyalty or trustworthiness related to my Chinese background.	16 (15%)	29 (27%)	35 (32%)	18 (17%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	7 (6%)
Current debates have not negatively affected my sense of belonging within Australian academia.	22 (20%)	44 (40%)	25 (23%)	10 (9%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	7 (6%)
I feel comfortable maintaining visible connections with China-related research networks, topics, or public discussion.	17 (16%)	37 (34%)	31 (28%)	12 (11%)	5 (5%)	0 (0%)	7 (6%)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree / unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A	Prefer not to say
Chinese-Australian and Chinese-background researchers can play a constructive bridging role between Australia and China.	3 (3%)	6 (6%)	9 (8%)	30 (28%)	54 (50%)	1 (1%)	6 (6%)
Current conditions allow Chinese-Australian and Chinese-background researchers to play this bridging role effectively.	20 (18%)	44 (40%)	24 (22%)	11 (10%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	7 (6%)

Table 28A. **Current academic situation and career intentions**

Which best describes your current academic situation and future career intentions?

Current situation	Responses, n (%)
Based at an Australian institution, and expect to continue my academic career here	52 (48%)
Based at an Australian institution, but uncertain whether I will continue here - for reasons unrelated to research security	11 (10%)
Based at an Australian institution, but uncertain whether I will continue here - research security concerns are one factor among others	15 (14%)
Based at an Australian institution, but uncertain whether I will continue here - research security concerns are the main reason	8 (7%)
No longer based at an Australian institution - for reasons unrelated to research security	3 (3%)
No longer based at an Australian institution - research security concerns were one factor among others	2 (2%)
No longer based at an Australian institution - research security concerns were the main reason	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	18 (17%)

Table 29A. **Priority assigned to potential improvements in research security policy and implementation**

What level of priority should be given to each of the following improvements for managing research security concerns while supporting legitimate research collaboration?

Improvement	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Critical priority	N/A	Prefer not to say
Clearer written guidance and practical examples distinguishing higher-risk from lower-risk research collaboration.	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	12 (11%)	53 (49%)	34 (31%)	3 (3%)	6 (6%)
More transparent, predictable, and timely procedures for review or approval of research collaboration.	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	9 (8%)	52 (48%)	38 (35%)	3 (3%)	6 (6%)
Improved or additional training for researchers on managing national security risks in research collaboration.	6 (6%)	8 (7%)	26 (24%)	45 (41%)	15 (14%)	2 (2%)	7 (6%)
Improved or additional training for administrators on cultural sensitivity, anti-discrimination, and procedural fairness.	2 (2%)	7 (6%)	25 (23%)	38 (35%)	28 (26%)	2 (2%)	7 (6%)
Risk-assessment processes that clearly identify the evidence, criteria, and reasoning used.	1 (1%)	5 (5%)	23 (21%)	46 (42%)	22 (20%)	2 (2%)	10 (9%)

Improvement	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Critical priority	N/A	Prefer not to say
Clearer or more accessible advice mechanisms when collaboration is delayed, questioned, or blocked.	0 (0%)	4 (4%)	21 (19%)	48 (44%)	26 (24%)	3 (3%)	7 (6%)
Clearer or more accessible appeal or review mechanisms when collaboration is delayed, questioned, or blocked.	0 (0%)	5 (5%)	23 (21%)	44 (40%)	26 (24%)	3 (3%)	9 (8%)
More opportunities for dialogue between government, universities, and Chinese-Australian or Chinese-background researchers in Australia.	0 (0%)	5 (5%)	11 (10%)	50 (46%)	35 (32%)	1 (1%)	7 (6%)

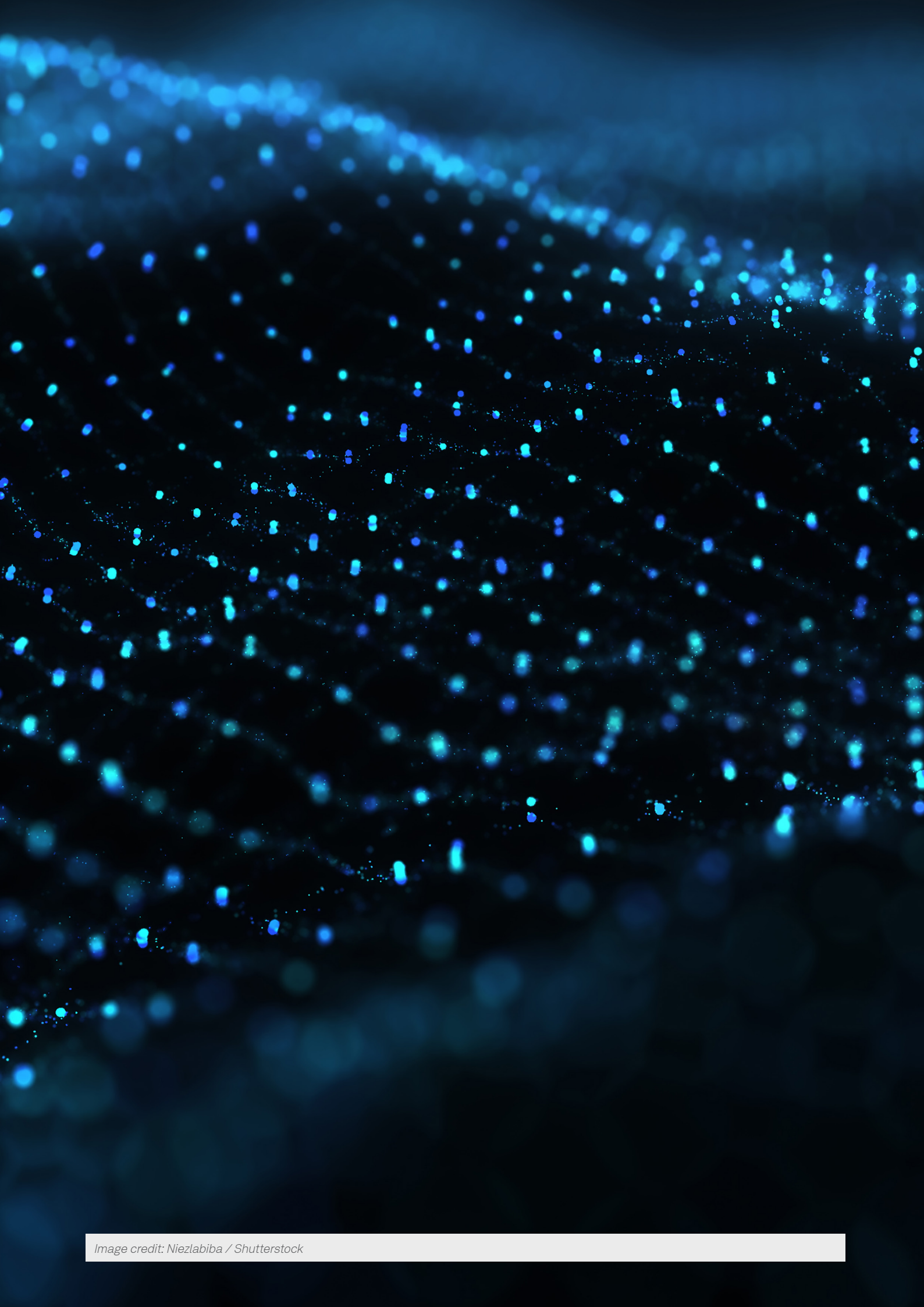


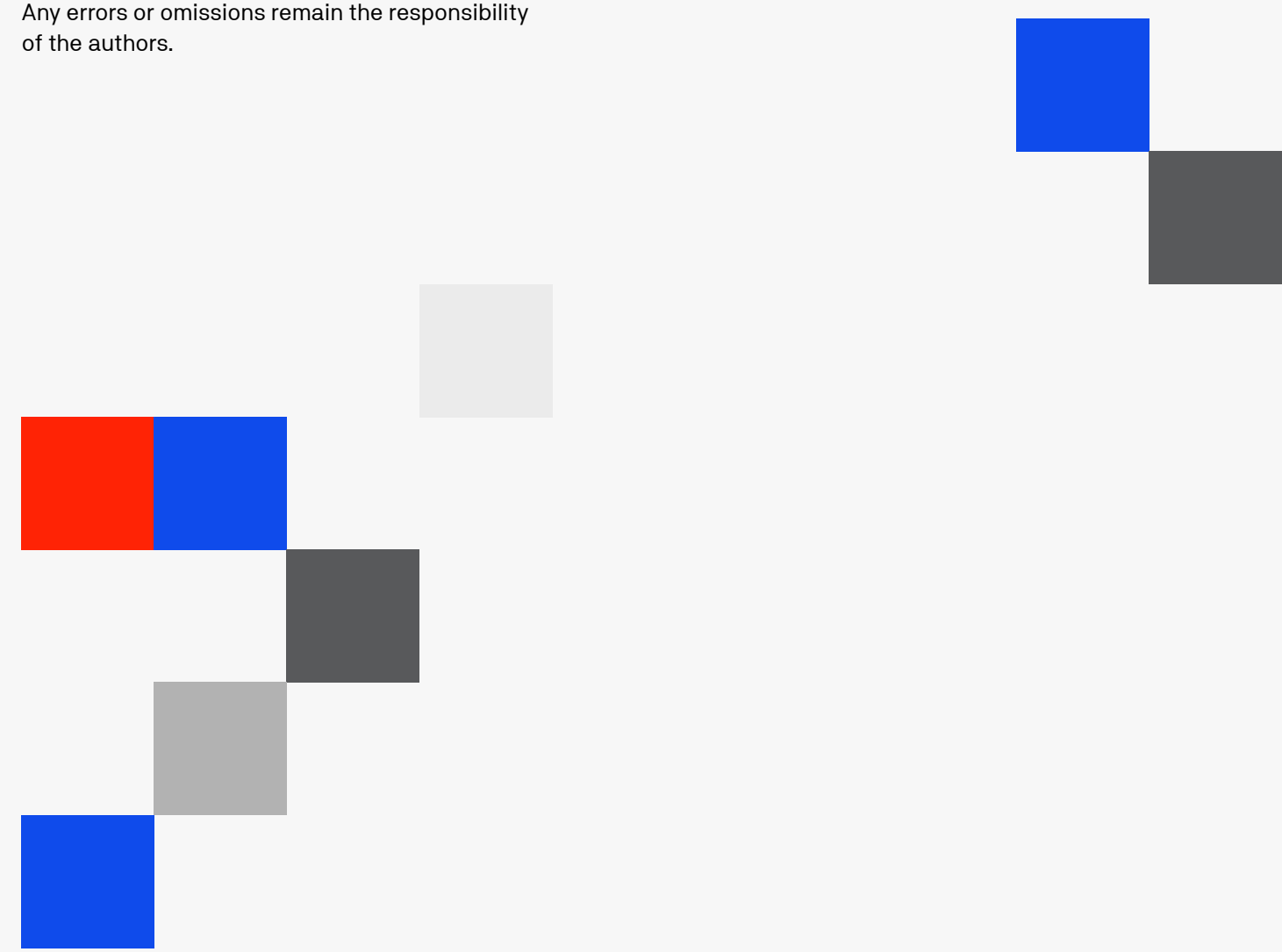
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Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the survey participants for their contribution to the study, as well as the individuals who assisted with survey distribution and outreach.

The authors also thank Celia Ngou, Events and Communications Officer at the Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, for her careful proofreading and coordination of the report's production and publication. They are grateful to Claudia Iacovella for the report's graphic design.

Any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.



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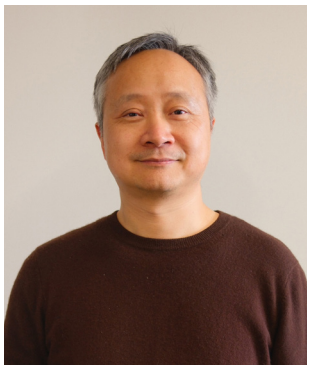
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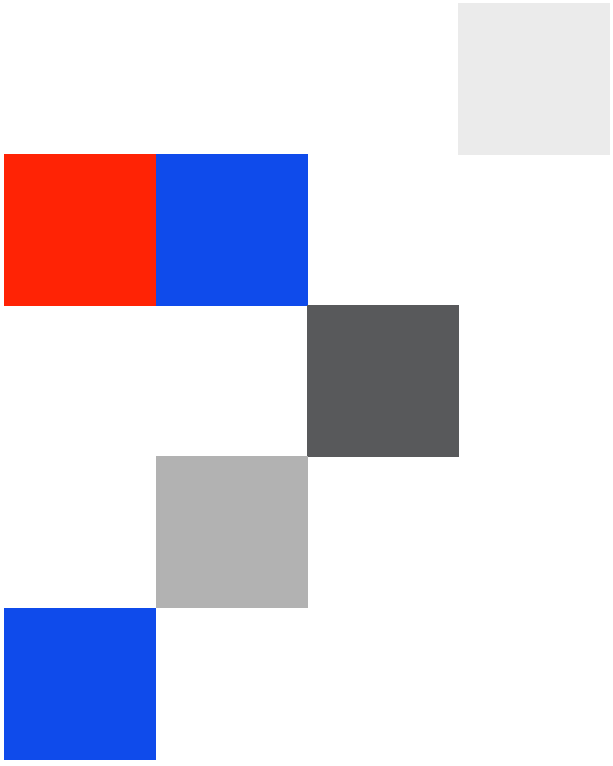
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About UTS:ACRI

The Australia-China Relations Institute (UTS:ACRI) is an independent, non-partisan research institute established in 2014 by the University of Technology Sydney. Chinese studies centres exist in other Australian universities. UTS:ACRI, however, is Australia's first and only research institute devoted to studying the relationship of these countries.

In the past Australia's dominating economic relationships have been with the British Empire, the United States and Japan. Australia's most important trading relationship is now with China, a nation very different in governance, politics and values. As China's economy grows, so too does its strategic weight and the challenges and opportunities this presents to Australia.

UTS:ACRI seeks to inform Australia's engagement with China through research, analysis and dialogue grounded in scholarly rigour.



Endnotes

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