

**Branch template letter on academic freedom in Turkey**

Dear (send to VC, Head of International, Head of Mobility, Strategic Partnerships)

We, as UCU XXX Branch, are writing to you with regard to the continued targeting of academics in Turkey.

A good summary of events and injustices is summarized here in an [article](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfreehttps://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/11/erdogan-turkey-academics-terrorism-violence-kurdish-people%20/2017/dec/11/erdogan-turkey-academics-terrorism-violence-kurdish-people) in the Guardian by two academics.

There is also [published academic research](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17539153.2017.1326559) on the criminalization of academics in Turkey.

UCU XXX Branch would like to raise specific questions with regard to our university’s responses to and relationships with *certain* academic institutions that target academics in Turkey.

1. As you know, our university is a member of [CARA](http://www.cara.ngo/who-we-are/partners-and-supporters/cara-scholars-at-risk-uk-universities-network/), a Network which ‘aims to facilitate cooperation and collaboration between UK higher education institutions in support of persecuted and at-risk academics, and in the defence and promotion of academic and university freedoms worldwide.’

As part of CARA, our university therefore commits, in principle, to actively consider hosting a persecuted or at-risk academic, with a fee waiver and possibly other support. We have three questions in this light.

1. What specific support has so far been offered by our university?

2. What specific future support does our university plan to provide?

3. How will our university take an active part in CARA to promote academic and university freedoms worldwide?

2. Following on from the questions above, what specific plans does our university have in place in terms of offering material support including temporary fellowships, scholarships or visiting lectureships, to higher education professionals and students from Turkey who have been targeted by the Turkish government?

University of Edinburgh, for example, has set up a programme called [‘Visiting Postgraduate Research – Academics Beyond Borders’](https://reclaimedinburgh.wordpress.com/2017/12/15/visiting-postgraduate-research-academics-beyond-borders/). Alarmed with the repression of academics and PhD students in Turkey, the University of Edinburgh now provides the PhD student signatories in Turkey whose study have been interrupted with support at a distance, in the form of online mentoring, light supervision and digital library access.

Is our university willing to support such a scheme or a scheme which is similar?

3. Academics for Peace – UK (AfP-UK) is the solidarity organisation established in the UK to support the peace signatories who have been under attack in Turkey and beyond. In cooperation with their academic colleagues in Turkey, AfP have identified a number of higher education organisations in Turkey which have been responsible for taking action against academics, particularly

the signatories of the peace petition. The key organisations include:

The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey ([TÜBİTAK](http://www.tubitak.gov.tr/en)) and The Council of Higher Education in Turkey([YÖK](http://www.yok.gov.tr/en/web/cohe/homepage))

AfP have also identified approximately [115 universities](https://academicboycottofturkey.wordpress.com/complicit-universities/) in Turkey which have been involved in serious violations of academic freedom (e.g. encouraging staff or students to spy on and incriminate academics suspected of a critical stance towards the Turkish government). As a result of these systematic attacks on academic freedom, AfP are calling for UK universities to take a *tougher approach* towards ‘complicit universities’ and higher education organisations in Turkey. Amongst other recommendations, the campaign calls for a moratorium on future collaborations with the Higher Education Council (YÖK) and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK).

We have 2 specific questions in this regard:

1. Does our university have any existing collaborations with these institutions listed above, in particular (YOK) and (TUBITAK) or with any of the 115 universities?

2. Has our university called, or is willing to call for a moratorium, on existing and any future collaborations with these two institutions and the aforementioned 115 universities?

We strongly feel that the reputation of our university requires that we take precautions so as not to be complicit in turning a blind eye to attacks on academics in Turkey, especially by continuing to collaborate with complicit institutions and universities. Continued collaboration with higher education institutions that violate academic freedom in Turkey is highly likely to damage the reputation of our university – if not now, in the near future. Many UK (and other) universities are taking a stance. We therefore need to find out our university’s position. Thank you.

We are looking forward to hearing from you.

UCU XXX branch