

UK universities being integrated into military-security apparatus

Thomas Scripps
28 April 2018

Rupert Murdoch's the *Times* attempted a witch-hunt of UK academics who have questioned the government's narrative on Syria. This scurrilous campaign, targeting Professor Tim Hayward (University of Edinburgh), Professor Piers Robinson (University of Sheffield) and Lecturer Tara McCormack (Leicester University) as "Apologists for Assad," is a sharp expression of how universities have become battlegrounds in the global drive to war.

As the ruling class work to militarise society in accordance with the recently outlined Fusion Doctrine, higher education and research institutions are being transformed into appendages of British imperialism.

The process is well underway. Contrary to the *Times'* ravings about universities being hotbeds of left-wing and anti-war sentiment, the institutions and their leaderships are already deeply integrated with the armed forces and private military contractors.

In 2007, the Campaign Against the Arms Trade and Fellowship of Reconciliation used a series of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to reveal more than 1,900 military projects conducted at 26 universities between 2001 and 2006, worth a total of £725 million.

The UK Government's military research establishment—the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE)—were involved in a quarter of these projects. Arms manufacturers, led by Rolls Royce, BAE Systems and QinetiQ, sponsored the remainder.

Between 2008 and 2011, according to research by the *Huffington Post*, the Russell Group of 24 elite British universities received £83 million from the same sources listed above. Imperial College London topped the list with £15.2 million, mainly from the AWE. Imperial is joined by Bristol, Cambridge, Cranfield, and Heriot-Watt in a "strategic alliance" with the AWE: The five universities

received £15 million in the years 2010-12.

More recently, figures released under the Freedom of Information Act have revealed that, in the past three years, 15 universities with prestigious engineering departments have received £40 million in grants from military contractors. These grants have funded projects including collaboration on military submarine technology between Rolls Royce and the University of Leeds, a drone project worked on by Boeing and Bristol University, and a stealth drone project at Manchester run by BAE.

While the money involved is relatively small when compared to total university research funding, the military projects have a weight of influence beyond their size. Military funding is concentrated in institutions and departments—mainly engineering—where the armed forces and arms dealers have a special authority. Such funding is considered a prestigious source of investment, from which other grants and opportunities will flow. Military contracts are fiercely competed for and proudly advertised.

On the back of this commercial turn to the military-industrial complex, moreover, universities are working closely with the armed forces to provide education and recruitment opportunities. Fourteen institutions (including Aston, Birmingham, Cambridge, Imperial College, Loughborough, Newcastle, Northumbria, Portsmouth, Southampton and Strathclyde) are in a partnership with the MoD to provide the Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme (DTUS). This is a university sponsorship programme for students who want to join the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force or Engineering and Science branch of the MoD Civil Service as technical officers after they graduate.

There are roughly 800 of these students (who formally hold the ranks of Officer Cadet or Midshipman in their respective reserve forces) in any one year, grouped into four regional units: Taurus Squadron, Thunderer

Squadron, Trojan Squadron and Typhoon Squadron. The commanding officer of each unit has visiting lecturer status at the associated universities. Graduates are required to serve in the armed forces or MoD for a minimum of three years after graduating and completing Initial Officer Training.

University resources are thus put at the service of the military to train its key technical staff. They return the favour by lending the armed forces' support to the running of student life on campus, doubtless with the associated military ethos. Loughborough University describes how its DTUS students "regularly support Open Days, Freshers' Fairs and other student activities."

In addition to the DTUS programme, the Army, Navy and RAF provide a range of other scholarships for prospective soldiers.

The Army offers 150 standard bursaries a year, worth £6,000, as well as Technical and Enhanced Army undergraduate bursaries, worth up to £14,000 and £24,000 respectively. Students can also receive £5,000-10,000 a year through the Army Medical Service Professionally Qualified Officer bursary. The Royal Navy also offers a standard bursary, worth £1,500 a year and a Technical Bursary worth £4,000 a year. Future RAF Medical Officers can get a grant to cover all their tuition fees.

All sponsorship requires three years of service in the armed forces after completing education.

While at university, these and other students can participate in one of the University Service Units—the University Officer Training Corps, University Air Squadrons, or University Royal Navy Units—who maintain a permanent presence on numerous university campuses.

In 2015, there were 6,580 members of these organisations in Britain, spread across 19 Officer Training Corps units and 14 Air and Navy units. The fundamental purpose of these groups, besides providing a path into the officer ranks, is to train propagandists for the military within higher education and wider society. The University Royal Navy Unit at Cambridge describes its role as being to "educate and inform society's future potential opinion formers and leaders of the need for and role of the Royal Navy."

So great is the influence of the armed forces on campus that several universities have established specific military-focused degree courses.

In 2011, the University of Wolverhampton created a BSc in Armed Forces, Armed Forces and Combat Medicine, and Armed Forces and Combat Engineering.

The list of universities currently offering War Studies or related courses includes Queens Belfast, Glasgow, Kent, Coventry, Swansea, Buckingham, Bradford, King's College London (KCL) and others. KCL is home to "the only academic department in the world to focus solely on the complexities of conflict and security," comprising 95 academic staff and over 2,000 students.

Cranfield University offers courses in subjects like Military Economic Systems Engineering, Military Aerospace and Airworthiness, Communication Electronic Warfare, and Explosives Ordnance Engineering.

As well as providing training for the military, universities across the country are happy to play host to recruiting sergeants at Freshers' Fairs and Welcome Weeks. In 2013, FOI requests found that the armed forces had made 341 visits to universities in the previous two years.

None of these developments has gone unopposed. Demilitarisation campaigning groups are active at many universities, with some institutions having banned visits from the armed forces in response to student protests. Organisations like the Campaign Against the Arms and Trade and Scientists for Global Responsibility have consistently exposed and opposed the involvement of military forces in universities. All of this is testimony to the immense anti-war sentiment which exists among the student body and academics.

To wage a successful struggle against the encroachment of the military on campus, however, requires that this sentiment be consciously organised behind a socialist, anti-war perspective. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) is dedicated to the formation of such a movement on campuses across the country.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact