

Behind Closed Doors

A Report on the Military Influence in UK Universities

Press Release 12 June 2008

A report by UK scientists reveals the secrecy surrounding the growing influence of the military on the research agenda in British universities.

Behind Closed Doors, published today by Scientists for Global Responsibility, is the result of an in-depth investigation into 16 of Britain's universities, including some of the most prestigious.

Using new data gained under the Freedom of Information Act, the report's authors estimate that the average level of military funding of UK universities is up to five times larger than government figures suggest. [1]

The report also reveals the pervasive extent of the military influence in UK universities. The authors encountered significant disquiet among some university staff about the growing presence of military and commercial influences on campus, and their effect on the research agenda.

The report highlights how, since 2002, new military research groups have sprung up in universities supported by publicly-funded research councils, military corporations and the Ministry of Defence. The expansion of such groups has been accelerated by the 2006 Defence Technology Strategy.

The UK is the world's third biggest spender on military research and development, approximately £2.5 billion net expenditure by the Ministry of Defence alone in 2005/6. [2]

The military targets 'high-prestige' universities for the highest funding, thus diverting some of Britain's finest scientists away from crucial areas such as health and the environment into military research.

The report's authors call for a full public debate on the role of the military in UK universities. They are Dr Chris Langley, an independent scientific consultant and writer; Dr Stuart Parkinson, an ex-military sector electronic engineer and former expert reviewer for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; and Dr Philip Webber, who has written widely on science and military issues, previously a research scientist at London's Imperial College.

Chris Langley said "The creeping influence of the military establishment in our universities is deeply disturbing. We encountered secrecy, evasiveness and a lack of accountability while researching this report. Many university officials expressed concerns about military funding but were afraid to speak out. There must be complete transparency if public confidence in science is to be maintained".

Universities investigated were Birkbeck College London, Bournemouth, Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Exeter, Imperial College London, Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan, Newcastle, Oxford, Plymouth, Sheffield, Southampton,

University College London, and the West of England.

Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR) is an independent organisation of ethically-concerned science, design and technology professionals, founded in 1992 - see: <http://www.sgr.org.uk/>

ENDS

To download a copy of the report, go to:

<http://www.sgr.org.uk/ArmsControl/MilitaryInfluence.html>

To order a printed copy of the report, go to:

<http://www.sgr.org.uk/publications.html>

For further information, contact SGR at <info@sgr.org.uk> or 01303 851965

Notes to Editors

1) The most recent government figure for military funding of UK universities is £44 million in 2004, an average of less than £400,000 per year for each of the higher education institutes. (Dept for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform; Dept for Innovation, Universities and Skills)

2) Defence Analytical and Statistical Agency

<http://www.dasa.mod.uk/natstats/ukds/2007/c1/sec1intro.html>

3) In 2006, governments in the rich, industrialised countries spent \$96 billion on military R & D, compared to \$56 billion on health and environmental R&D and \$1.1 billion on renewable energy R&D. (OECD and International Energy Agency)

4) Previous reports published by Scientists for Global Responsibility:

* Langley C. (2005). Soldiers in the Laboratory: military involvement in science and technology - and some alternatives.

* Langley C., Parkinson S., Webber, P. (2007). More Soldiers in the Laboratory: the militarisation of science and technology - an update.
<http://www.sgr.org.uk/ArmsControl/MilitaryInfluence.html>