Guide to Researching Military Involvement at your University

Before you begin to campaign, it is vital that you know your facts about the organisations funding military projects at your university and what projects are being conducted.

Visit http://www.studywarnomore.org.uk/data.html for data on the military projects conducted at the 26 UK universities covered by the Study War No More report between 2001 and 2006.

Whilst researching Study War No More, we used three main tools to discover data concerning military projects at UK universities:
- Freedom of Information requests (FoI)
- University websites, and
- The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council website.

If you want to conduct research into your university, these tools can be helpful in getting detailed and accurate information. Whilst each will yield useful data if used alone, we advise that you try to use all three in your research, as there will often be different data - e.g. in number and detail - available from each. For example, through our Internet research we found data that wasn't included by some universities in their responses to our FoI requests.

Furthermore, each tool has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, it is often easier to achieve immediate results using Internet searches, as universities may be slow in responding to FoI requests and the data you receive may not fulfil your expectations or requirements. Conversely, Internet searches are highly unlikely to provide complete data and websites may change their information, whilst FoI information can be, comparatively, more detailed and reliable. Furthermore, the responses universities give to FoI requests will be consistent within the definitions and systems each university uses - though each university will have its own approach.

However you decide to proceed, the advice below gives some ideas on how best to use each resource, whether you are conducting in-depth research or a quick survey. We recommend that you read the Study War No More report's 'Methodology', in order to understand how we conducted our research and, in particular, to know how you might classify projects as military and then discriminate between military research projects and military-related projects. Also, Section 3.3 of the report is a useful starting point for identifying the major military projects in existence, as it lists examples of university-military programmes and projects, of which your university may be a participant.

Finally, when gathering your data, we recommend that you are systematic and careful in order to manage ensure efficiency and maintain good presentation, recording the key information for each project, including notes on the original source material. For an example of this, visit http://www.studywarnomore.org.uk/data.html to see how we collated and recorded the data entries for each of the 26 universities covered by the report. Please send us any information you gather on military involvement at your university - so that we can discuss its uses with you and possibly include links to it from the SWNM website.

Freedom of Information Act Requests (FoI)

Frequently Asked Question (FAQs)

What is it?

The FoI Act is a key tool for retrieving information regarding the grants and contracts received by public bodies. The Act covers universities, colleges, central government, and schools, among others. It does not cover private companies, such as the arms companies named in the Study War No More report.

How can I use it?

A FoI request needs to be a standard letter or email which mentions the FoI Act and states your request clearly and specifically. Any request for information is actually a FoI request, but it might avoid delays to state explicitly that you are asking under the FoI. If the public body finds your request unclear, or believes that the scope is too wide, they need to let you know and should advise you on making a new or refining your request.

What information should I ask for?

When asking for information from your university, it is important that you are concise and specific in your request, so that the information you receive about funding received by military organisations is relevant, detailed and in an accessible format.

Whilst researching Study War No More, we asked for information on the income provided to universities by several military organisations, which mainly comprised private arms companies e.g. BAE Systems, Rolls Royce, QinetiQ and public military organisations e.g. the Ministry of Defence. A useful website for identifying those arms companies you may want to enquire about is Defense News's Top 100, which lists the Top 100 arms companies in the world according to their revenue from military sales. This can be found at the Defense News website at http://www.defensenews.com/index.php?S=07top100.

In our letters to universities, we also made general enquiries regarding military contracts, grants, research and student sponsorship/ collaboration undertaken by the university in question. As part of these requests, we asked the university to give information listing:

- The amount and date of the grants made
- The department to which the grants were made
- The companies and/ or organisations providing the grants
- The titles of the projects which the grants were used to fund

Using this kind of structure helps universities sort and search for relevant information and also provides a useful means of presenting the data if you choose to publish it.

What problems might I face?

The FoI Act should have a positive impact on the accuracy and relevance of information received from universities, and will enable campaigners to follow up negative responses where previously a dead end would have been reached. It is important to remember that under the Act, public bodies:

- Cannot refuse to provide the information requested unless it is exempt (see below);
- Must indicate whether they possess the information requested;
- Must assist or advise where it is 'reasonable ' to do so;

- Must respond within 20 working days (this may be extended if a body is considering the 'public interest' but this extension must be 'reasonable');
- Cannot charge you for retrieving the information unless the cost is calculated to come to more than £450. If the cost is lower than this then they can legitimately charge you for any photocopying or postage fees incurred by your request. The Act encourages charges of under £5 to £10 to be waived; and,
- Must inform you of the appeal process.

Using the Freedom of Information Act

The following extracts from the Act seem to be the most relevant for the Study War No More campaign:

Part 1 - Access to Information held by Public Authorities
(1) Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled:

(a) To be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
(b) If that is the case, to have that information communicated to them.

Section 17 - Refusal of Request
(1) A public authority which, in relation to any request for information, is to any extent relying on a claim that any provision of Part 2 relating to the duty to confirm or deny is relevant to the request, or on a claim that information is exempt information must, within the time for complying with section 1 (1), give the applicant a notice which –

(a) states that fact

(b) specifies the exemption in question, and

(c) states (if it would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

Part 2 - Exempt Information
(See below)

Exemptions

Some categories of information are exempt from disclosure. The exemptions most likely to be cited in response to Study War No More enquiries are:

Exemption 24 - This covers the release of information which could potentially threaten national security. In practice exemption 24 is very hard to contest, however a public interest test needs to be applied before the exemption can be enforced, and it is good to ask for one to be applied, if it is not automatically.

Exemption 41 - This covers 'information provided in confidence' by private companies or governmental bodies to the university. While this exemption is absolute, there are two ways to contest it:

1) Asking the university to ask the body for permission to disclose the requested information; and,
2) Ask for the confidentiality agreements establishing the 'information provided in confidence'. Both of these may provide some further relevant information.

Exemption 43 - This covers 'information which would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person including the public authority holding it'. Unfortunately, Section 84 of the Act, which defines the meaning of a number of words and phrases, does not include a definition of 'commercial interests' so interpretation will be subject to Case Law. However, it is outlined in the Act that it is in the public interest that public funds are accountable and transparent, and this is worth bearing in mind. A public body cannot just decide that something is commercially sensitive - all exemptions must be justified and supported with evidence.

Other FoI Resources

There are many websites to help you in understanding the FoI Act, how to submit requests, and how to appeal refusals. Some of these are listed below:

- **The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**, which explains the Act, and seeks to answer questions asked by the public on the FoIA. http://www.ico.gov.uk/
- **The Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA)** has a full copy of the FoIA on their website, and further information. http://www.foi.gov.uk/
- **The Campaign for Freedom of Information** works to improve public access to official information and ensure that the Freedom of Information Act is implemented effectively. http://www.cfoi.org.uk/
- **Other Guides** by Rob Evans include:
    - "For Your Information" http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/jan/04/localgovernment.freedomofinformation,
    - "Guide: Public Information" http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/dec/30/freedomofinformation.uk2, and
    - "Guide: Scottish Information" http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/dec/30/freedomofinformation.uk.

University Websites
e.g. departmental pages, staff pages, annual reviews and press releases

University websites and the most productive search engines (e.g. Google) can be rich sources of information regarding the involvement of military organisations in your institution, if you know where to look and what to look for. As with FoI requests, you should first establish which military organisations you are interested in and what kind of data you need in order to show a verifiable link between your university and the organisation in question.

Let's say, for example, that you want to know whether a particular arms company is involved in funding any of the departments at your university. Simply searching for that company in the university website's search engine is a good place to start. You should then be prepared to carefully read through the text of each of the search results, looking for keywords relevant to your enquiry. If you do find mention of the organisation in question, make a note of the type of relationship described in the text, so that you can determine the type of link you have found. For example, record any mention of a military organisation (as well as the one you're focusing on) working with your university, particularly if the text suggests a particular project for which the university received funding. Once you have identified a project or relationship, you can then begin to investigate this further in order to gain a clearer picture of what it entails.

We recommend that you record the information you discover using the following categories wherever possible:

- The amount received and the date of the project
- The department conducting the project
- The companies and/ or organisations involved in the project
- The title of the project

Whether or not you discover information relevant to your investigation using the university's search engine, you should also try and look through departmental and staff pages. This is important, as you can sometimes find information here that is not available using search engines. As a general rule, you should begin by focusing on your university's engineering department, because our report found that this is predominantly where military projects are conducted. You should then go on to scrutinise the web pages of other science and technology departments, for our report found them more likely to have links with the military sector.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
(**http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/default.htm**)

The EPSRC is the "UK Government's leading funding agency for research and training in engineering and the physical sciences", and as such is a key resource for researchers wishing to investigate their universities' ties to the military sector. As outlined in the Study War No More report, engineering departments conduct by the far the largest amount of military research at universities, followed by other schools of science and technology. Moreover, the EPSRC annually collaborates on hundreds of projects with arms companies and the Ministry of Defence, providing funding through various support schemes.

As a publicly funded body, the EPSRC provides a good deal of useful data on the projects it funds, including dates, amounts, titles, descriptions and the organisations involved. To get the most out of the EPSRC website in terms of information you should use the 'Grants on the Web' facility, which allows you to search the data online in several ways. It is important to approach the EPSRC search engine systematically, as you may otherwise end up repeating searches. A good place to start to get a feel for the kind of information the website can provide is by using the "Free Text" search and typing in an arms company e.g. Rolls Royce. At this stage you can also choose whether you want to limit your search to 'Current Grants' or for all grants 'Announced after 1 April 1994'.

The resulting search will provide hundreds of results which you may then sort through to see if your university is listed as working with Rolls Royce. If you do find a project, it is important that you read the text of the result so that you can ascertain:

    i)   If the military organisation under investigation is listed as a project partner
    ii) If the military organisation is referred to in the main abstract as working with the university on the project in question , and
    iii) What type of project is being conducted.

The latter category is important, as you may be able to discover both the project's 'Industrial Sector' and what kind of work is being conducted. If, for example, the 'Industrial Sector' is listed as being 'Aerospace and Defence', then this bolsters the likelihood of the project being intended for a military application. Similarly, look out for indications in the text which point to military connections e.g. the involvement of other military organisations in the project and links to projects other projects you already know to be military.

There are many other ways in which you can use the EPSRC website to search for military projects conducted at your university. We found one of the most fruitful to be searching each of the projects at each of the departments of your university listed online. Then, if you've found a project with a military connection e.g. a military organisation as a project partner, to search the history of the 'Investigator' listed as being involved in the project. You can do this by simply clicking on the investigator's name and then going through the projects they've conducted alongside the EPSRC. It often transpires that investigators who've received money from or worked with a military organisation, have done so on more than one occasion.