

ACTION ALERT AA 18-5: 'MILITARISATION' OF UNIVERSITIES

As Quakers, we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

The armaments industry pervades many areas of political and economic/social life today. This Brief looks at the implications for teaching and research at our universities, and suggests questions that need to be raised with those higher education institutions.

International Trends

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2018 Yearbook, world military spending in 2017 reached \$US1739b, the highest level since the end of the Cold War. Part of the trend is the greater involvement of institutions of higher education in the military-industrial complex. An investigation by *VICE News* in 2015 (William Arkin and Alexa O'Brien) found that the top 100 universities in the US with military connections received funds for intelligence technologies, cyber security and big data analysis. For further details, see www.sipri.org

Jamie Daward and Greg Bennett (*The Guardian*, 1 April 2018) reported that the close relationships between academia and the defence sector in the UK is sustaining jobs but causing unease among scientists. In the past three years, fifteen universities with engineering departments have received \$40m for defence-related research. Over 700 scientists and academics from 19 countries have signed an on-line statement calling on the EU to stop funding military research, which is fueling the arms race. They have urged the EU to focus on investment in civilian research areas such as health, environment and the conflict resolution. See www.researchersforpeace.eu

Australia's Universities

Alex Edney-Browne and Tilman Ruff (Melbourne University) produced a report on 16 March 2018 on the partnerships between universities and arms manufacturers:

- Research partnerships between Australian universities and the defence industry may be at odds with academic freedom. The federal government's aim to invest \$3.8b in the industry has led to pressure to get more graduates with appropriate skills. Melbourne University has a partnership with (US) Lockheed Martin to create a joint research centre, and a similar agreement with (UK) BAE Systems.

- Adelaide, Flinders and UniSA are part of a research network funded by BAE to create defence-focused courses and research. Thirty-two Australian universities are part of the Defence Science Partnerships program.
- Alleged corrupt practices by Lockheed and BAE, and their involvement in Middle East wars, raise serious ethical questions.

The Defence Science Partnerships Program seeks to align national resources and research effort “to tackle the challenging scientific and technological problems in the interest of the nation’s security”. See www.dst.defence.gov.au The US-Australia International Multidisciplinary University Research Initiative (AUSMURI) provides universities with grants of up to \$3m for research in defined areas. The 2019 area is “Active perception and knowledge exploitation in navigation and spatial awareness”. See www.business.gov.au These military grants are focussed on the science and physics faculties which predominantly benefit male students. Very little is focussed on programs which predominantly involve women.

Disarm Universities is a student movement “to highlight corporate, government and university complicity in the cycle of war, climate destruction and abuse of refugees” (*Green Left weekly*, July 2018). A large protest was held in Melbourne on 11 July 2018. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has produced a report *Disarm your Degree* which examines Australian public university investments in nuclear arms makers. See www.icanw.org

Universities Australia has a new *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (see <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au>). It is a principle-based approach that is intended to ensure that research is honest, rigorous, transparent and accountable.

In this context, it is worth noting that there are, according to the internet, only five Australian universities that offer Peace Studies programs – Sydney, Queensland, Adelaide, New England, and Western Sydney. The areas of research that are linked with these programs include – causes of conflict, conflict resolution, justice and reconciliation, disarmament, human rights, peace and environmental challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Action that can be taken

Questions to be raised with universities include:

- What programs of research and teaching are funded by arms manufacturers? How many of these programs relate directly to enhancing weaponry?
- What criteria are used to decide which such funds are accepted, and who is involved in such decisions?
- What checks are in place to ensure that such investments are consistent with the university’s ethical standards and transparency?
- Do you have peace studies/research programs, and if not, are you prepared to consider adding them?
- To what extent is your decision to accept funding from arms companies affected by the absence of alternative sources of funds?