

# Revealed: Key Assange Prosecution Witness Is Part of Academic Cluster Which Has Received Millions of Pounds from UK and US Militaries

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*One of the US prosecution's key medical witnesses in the Julian Assange hearing, who claimed that Assange's risk of suicide is 'manageable' if extradited to the US, works for an academic institute that is funded by the UK Ministry of Defence and linked to the US Department of Defence, it can be revealed.*

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Dr Nigel Blackwood, a [reader](#) in forensic psychiatry at King's College London (KCL), [told](#) the extradition hearing in London last week that Julian Assange was suffering only "moderate" depression.

Giving evidence as an expert witness for the US prosecution, Dr Blackwood [rebutted](#) other experts' findings on the seriousness of Assange's condition, adding his suicide risk was "manageable". He told the court: "Mr Assange has proved himself to be a very resilient and very resourceful man, and he has underplayed that."

At the request of US prosecution lawyers, Dr Blackwood [examined](#) Assange during two meetings in March. In his written submission to the court, he [said](#) that it would "not be unjust" to extradite Assange to the US.

*Declassified* has discovered that Dr Blackwood's professional work at KCL is linked to a cluster of academic groups which are funded by or associated with the British and American militaries.

*Declassified* has seen a contract showing that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) provided more than £2-million to KCL's Institute of Psychiatry for the years 2013-16 for a project which KCL is forbidden to mention in public without MOD approval. It is likely the contract has been renewed and is still active.



**CTLBC/2114**  
**ENABLING CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF OP**  
**TELIC/HERRICK PERSONNEL WELLBEING STUDY (PHASE 4)**

DES-ComrcI-CC-JFC-CM4  
Room 1.2.24, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow  
G2 8EX

SCRIBD

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The £2.2m contract between King's College London's Institute of Psychiatry and the UK Ministry of Defence. [Click here to read the document.](#)

The project is managed "on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence" and is for Phase 4 of a "wellbeing" study of veterans of Britain's recent military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Seeking to "inform MOD decision-making", the project began in 2003.

The value of the first three phases of the contract is not known but if the Institute of Psychiatry received a similar level of funding for Phase 4 as they had previously, the total contract value would be more than £8-million. A spokesperson for the institute refused *Declassified's* request to divulge the amount of funding from the MOD.

Dr Blackwood [works](#) in the Department of Forensic and Neurodevelopmental Sciences, which is [part](#) of KCL's Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience. He told *Declassified* he was aware of MOD funding the institute in which he works, but said he had never personally worked on an MOD contract.

Asked by *Declassified* if he declared any conflicts of interest to the hearing, Blackwood responded, "I had no conflicts to declare."

However, *Declassified* has found that the [Forensic Research Group](#) (FRG) that Dr Blackwood heads at KCL — and which "explores the complex relationship between mental disorders and crime" — is conducting research which [uses data](#) from Phase 3 of the MOD-funded project.

In addition, the FRG works "[in collaboration](#)" with the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR), which is [part-funded](#) by the MOD and was "originally [funded](#) by the US Department of Defence". A KCMHR webpage, which is undated, [states](#) that "latterly" the

centre is being funded by the Department of Defence “again”.

#### US Department of Defence

The King’s College website [states](#) that the KCMHR is “the leading civilian UK centre of excellence for military health research and independent of the UK Ministry of Defence”. The centre [notes](#) that it also “collaborates” with the UK Ministry of Justice and the US Department of Defence.

The KCMHR is a “[joint initiative](#) between the Institute of Psychiatry and the Department of War Studies and makes significant contributions to UK military personnel policy”, the university website states.

KCL’s Departments of War Studies and Defence Studies “have a number of contracts/agreements with various departments within government, including the Cabinet Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Ministry of Defence”, according to a response to a Freedom of Information Act request sent to KCL by *Declassified*.

However, “more specific information” on the contracts themselves was withheld by KCL because “the majority of contracts are listed as classified under UK security legislation. This means we are not permitted to disclose details, since they predominantly involve areas either directly or pertaining to the UK security services.”

The university also said disclosure would damage its commercial opportunities. “Two of the largest contracts [with the UK government] are due for renewal in the next 12 months and will go to open tender,” it explained.

US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta visited King’s College War Studies Department in 2013, [saying](#): “I deeply appreciate the work that you do to train and to educate our future national security leaders, many of whom are in this audience.”

Panetta, who also served as director of the CIA from 2009 to 2011, recently [said](#) in an interview that the purpose of prosecuting Assange was to stop other journalists from revealing information about the US government: “All you can do is hope that you can ultimately take action against those who were involved in revealing that information so you can send a message to others not to do the same thing.”

One of the two [co-directors](#) of the KCHMR, which collaborates with Dr Blackwood’s FRG, is Nicola Fear, a professor of epidemiology and a former MOD [staffer](#) who is on the [study team](#) working on the MOD “wellbeing” project.

According to the [centre](#), Professor Fear “leads several studies... which have been awarded funding from the UK Ministry of Defence and the US Department of Defence”.

One recent [project](#) led by Professor Fear for the KCHMR, which was funded by the US Department of Defence, [studies](#) how the military deployments of parents affect children’s emotional development.

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Matthew Kennard

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20 August 2020

Dear Matthew Kennard,

**Request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act")**

Further to your recent request for information held by King's College London, I am writing to confirm that the requested information is held by the university.

**Your request**



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King's College London rejects a Declassified Freedom of Information Act request for its UK government contracts "since they predominantly involve areas either directly or pertaining to the UK security services". [Click here to read the document.](#)

A [biography](#) of Professor Fear notes that "Nicola frequently briefs senior government officials and military leaders on the work of KCMHR and the impact of service life on personnel, veterans and families". From 2014-15, she worked on a US army [contract](#).

*Declassified* has also discovered other KCMHR projects [funded](#) by the US Department of Defence. Different KCL researchers have received [funding](#) from the US Office of Naval Research for a project which "examined the political, social and the strategic dimension of cybersecurity".

The KCMHR's other [co-director](#) is the vice-dean of Academic Psychiatry, Professor Sir Simon Wessely, who is one of the "approved" researchers on the MOD "wellbeing" contract.

The KCHMR has been developing data-sharing links with colleagues in the US, [according](#) to the university's webpage. "We want to make increasing use of the possibilities of electronic data linkage, reflecting the fact that the UK and US have been fighting the same war," Professor Wessely is quoted as saying.

Wessely and Fear are two of the four members of the "senior team" of KCL's Academic Department of Military Mental Health (ADMMH) which, according to KCL's website, appears to be [funded](#) solely by the MOD. The ADMMH "works directly" with the KCMHR, with which it shares a research policy, and [has](#) "both academic and military personnel seconded to the unit".

The other two [senior members](#) of the ADMMH, Lieutenant Colonel Norman Jones and Major

Amos Simms, are both serving UK military personnel.

The ADMMH [says](#) its “mission is to act as the uniformed focus for military mental health research” for the UK military. It adds: “The centre aims to gather, assess and report on information that will enhance the health and operational effectiveness of the United Kingdom’s Armed Forces.”



## THE KIDS STUDY

Funded by the US  
Department of Defense

A slide from a presentation by Professor Nicola Fear, the co-director of the King’s Centre for Military Health Research, advertising the centre’s US Department of Defense-funded study on the children of military personnel.

### Forensic research

Dr Blackwood told *Declassified* he had never personally worked with the KCMHR, adding that his “colleague” has “worked with” the centre examining Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the ex-service population.

That colleague, Dr Deirdre MacManus, is the [co-team leader](#) with Dr Blackwood of the FRG and — according to the KCL website — a [member](#) of the KCMHR team. She is also part of the [study team](#) working on the MOD “wellbeing” contract.

[MacManus](#), a clinical senior lecturer in forensic psychiatry, has been [funded directly](#) by the UK military to produce research. MacManus also appears to have published a number of [outputs](#) produced from the MOD “wellbeing” contract alongside academic [papers](#) co-authored with, among others, a serving member of the British army.

Dr MacManus and Dr Blackwood [co-authored](#) an academic paper in September 2019 on the subject of PTSD in prisons, which “identified significant associations between PTSD and suicidality”. This was a subject on which Blackwood gave evidence to the Assange hearing.

### Intelligence training

The War Studies Department at KCL, which co-founded the KCMHR with the Institute of Psychiatry, is also linked to the UK and US intelligence community.

The department was in the mid-2000s [commissioned](#) by the “professional head of intelligence analysis” — working within the Cabinet Office’s Intelligence and Security Secretariat — “to develop a course for experienced [intelligence] analysts” in order to “enhance the analytic capability of the United Kingdom’s intelligence community”.

A study titled “Teaching Intelligence Analysts in the UK” and [published](#) in the US Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA’s) in-house journal, notes that: “Exposure to an academic environment, such as the Department of War Studies at King’s College London, can add several elements that may be harder to provide within the government system.”

Co-written by David Omand — a former director of the UK’s largest intelligence agency, GCHQ, who [teaches](#) on KCL’s War Studies course — the article notes that “the CIA had recognised as early as 1960 how beneficial it would be to use universities as a means of intelligence training”.

The paper continues by noting that KCL “offers a containing space in which analysts from every part of the [intelligence] community can explore with each other the interplay of ideas about their profession”.

The Department of War Studies is currently home to a number of personnel connected to the US [military](#) and [intelligence](#) community.

The university also runs a cross-department centre — called the Academic Centre of Excellence in Cybersecurity Research — which brings King’s College academics together to look at the “sociotechnical aspects of cybersecurity”. The body runs [“in association”](#) with the National Cybersecurity Centre, an arm of GCHQ.

#### Consent of the MOD

The contract seen by *Declassified* is made out between the “Secretary of State for Defence” and the “Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College London”. Worth £2.17-million, Phase 4 of the project ran from February 2013 to January 2016. Earlier phases were renewed in 2006 and 2010.

The Institute for Psychiatry refused to disclose to *Declassified* the total level of funding provided by the MOD, saying that the university’s “web pages are very comprehensive and should help with your queries”. KCL’s website does not appear to provide such details.

The contract stipulates that KCL cannot “without the prior written consent of the [MOD], advertise or publicly announce that work is being undertaken for the [MOD]”. It adds that KCL researchers “may not communicate on these matters with any communications media representatives” unless they are granted written permission by the MOD.

*Declassified* searched the British government’s contract database and could find no other contract between the MOD and a department of psychiatry in the UK.

The contract states that “the Ministry of Defence did not expect, and was unprepared for, the criticism that arose some years after the 1991 Gulf conflict over the so-called Gulf War Syndrome”. The project’s purpose is to “have early warning of any similar problem arising from the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and to be in a position to respond appropriately with targeted medical research”.



## 12. PUBLICITY

12.1 Neither the Contractor nor any appointed agent or sub-contractor shall, without the prior written consent of the Authority, advertise or publicly announce that work is being undertaken for the Authority.

13.1.2 The Contractor, his staff and sub-contractors may not communicate on these matters with any communications media representatives unless specifically granted permission to do in writing by the Designated Officer. As a rule, information deriving from the Contract relating to the Ministry of Defence may not be communicated to a third party without specific permission to do so in writing from the Designated Officer.

Excerpts from the contract between King's College's Institute of Psychiatry and the UK Ministry of Defence.

### Funding of the Forensic Research Group

Dr Blackwood told *Declassified* his FRG at King's College had never received funding, directly or indirectly, from the MOD.

The group does, however, receive funds from organisations associated with the British military. One of its six listed [funders](#) is Help for Heroes, which supports wounded military personnel. The organisation receives [funds](#) from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, an [MOD-funded](#) charity that was until 2018 [based](#) inside the ministry.

Another funder of the FRG is the Forces in Mind Trust (FIMT), which supports former British military personnel. The chair of FIMT's board, [Hans Pung](#), is President of RAND Europe and a former US army officer.

Other [directors](#) include Major General Martin Rutledge, who served in UK military headquarters during the Iraq campaign, and General Sir John McColl, a former deputy commander of Nato.

\*

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*Matt Kennard is head of investigations and Mark Curtis is editor of Declassified UK, an investigative journalism organisation that covers the UK's role in the world.*

*Featured image: US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta speaks at Kings College in London, England, 18 January 2013. (Photo: DoD / Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo)*

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