7/7 – the questions still unanswered

Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed argues in The London Bombings that the attacks, which left 37 dead and 700 injured, can be fully understood only in the light of extensive co-operation between Islamist extremists and Western intelligences in central Asia.

Nafeez, a leading authority on Western foreign policies and international terrorism, has been writing about these subjects since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. He obtained his MA in Contemporary War & Peace Studies from Sussex in 2004 and is currently a doctoral candidate and tutor in the International Relations department.

Nafeez, who is also director of the Institute for Policy Research & Development, based in London, says: “The London bombings, much like the attacks on New York in 2001, were a widely predicted consequence of the West’s global strategy. If we do face a future of terrorism we should at least understand the extent to which our governments have accepted this as the price of business as usual.”

Looking beyond the platitudes and deceptions of the war on terror, Nafeez asks what exactly we mean by the national interest and whether we are really well served by policies that promote terror abroad and tolerate extremism at home.

In over 300 pages, based on more than 500 references, Nafeez examines contradictions and anomalies in official claims about the type of explosives used, the nature of the explosions, the bombers’ movements prior to and on 7 July and the connections of the bombers to a wider terrorist network inside the UK.

“At first, the police were sure that the 7/7 bombers used weapons-grade plastic explosives and sophisticated times,” points out Nafeez. “Two weeks later, they changed their minds – the bombs were home-made and were detonated manually. Since then the official account has changed repeatedly and remains riddled with anomalies and confusion.”

He also looks at the British government’s domestic tolerance and protection of extremist groups linked to terrorist activity, the details of the 21 July attacks and the police shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes.

For more information on Nafeez and his new book, see: www.independentinquiry.co.uk. Read Nafeez’s blog at www.nafeez.blogspot.com.

Sussex careers adviser wins prestigious national teaching award

A University of Sussex careers adviser has been recognised nationally for her excellence in teaching and for inspiring others in her profession.

Catherine Reynolds, from the Career Development and Employment Centre (CDEC), is one of 50 university teachers nationwide to receive the prestigious National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) award for 2006.

“I’m really pleased that careers and CDEC are acknowledged in this way, as an important part of the whole student experience,” she says. Catherine is the only careers adviser among this year’s NTFS winners, who were selected from a record 242 nominations submitted by higher education institutions across England and Northern Ireland.

Catherine is well respected as a careers teacher within CDEC, the University and the higher education careers profession nationally. Her excellence was recognised with a Sussex Teaching Award in 2005.

She developed and manages CDEC’s Student Development Fund, which fosters students’ independent learning, creativity and skills. Students work in teams to design and implement extra-curricular projects, which have included making a video, developing a website, producing a magazine and putting on a drama production.

Catherine also developed the Student Tutoring and Mentoring Programme, which takes students off campus to learn independently. Students work as volunteers in local schools and colleges to mentor pupils or assist classroom teachers.

She is currently leading a project for DPhil students in the humanities, encouraging them to reflect on their experience as researchers and to articulate their research profile.

Catherine’s work was recognised in 2005 with two national awards, one from the Institute of Careers Guidance and one from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). Through AGCAS she is a national trainer of careers staff in higher education.

She says: “I feel passionately that my work supports the life of the University and our students by equipping individuals with skills and resources to reflect on their experience and to make well considered decisions about their progression.”

Catherine will be in London on 19 September for the award ceremony, at which she will be presented with a cheque for £10,000 to support her learning and teaching.

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Investing in Excellence: update

At their termly meetings last month, Senate and Council approved plans to advertise a further 15 posts as part of the Investing in Excellence programme.

These posts will be in the School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, the School of Life Sciences and SPRU. They are in addition to 28 posts already advertised in Humanities, the Sussex Institute, and Science and Technology.

However, there have been new cost pressures since the initial plans for Investing in Excellence were presented in March. Most significant is additional pay costs, over and above those allowed for in financial forecasts. By 2009–10 these will add an extra £2.5 million to the University’s costs. In addition, income from student numbers and research in the early years of the plan is expected to be £1 million lower than previously forecast.

As a result, the second phase of academic investment has been deferred. During 2006–07 senior managers will assess what additional academic investment can be made in that and future years, in light of progress made on growing income and reducing costs.

At their meetings last month, Senate and Council also agreed that consideration should be given to extending the operation of the early retirement/voluntary redundancy scheme for academic staff. This would depend on the number of applications received by the closing date of 30 June. The early retirement/voluntary redundancy scheme for academic staff has now been extended to 31 October 2006. It has also been widened to other groups of staff. The closing date may be extended for these other groups pending the Professional Services Review in the autumn.

Senate and Council also agreed that the Redundancy Committee – established by Council in May 2006 on a contingency basis – should develop redundancy selection criteria in case the early retirement/voluntary redundancy process for academic staff fails to achieve the required savings and compulsory redundancy proves necessary.

The criteria will help staff to understand the framework within which decisions on redundancy would be made. Senate will receive a report on the proposed selection criteria before any redundancy scheme is implemented and this report will be the subject of consultation with the University and Colleges Union (UCU).

Similar procedures for the Professional Services will be addressed at a later date, in an appropriate way. The principle remains that the University will seek to achieve savings through early retirement/voluntary redundancy where possible.

“We all recognise that going through these processes is difficult,” said the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alasdair Smith. “But early retirement, voluntary redundancy and redundancy are not ends in themselves. They are mechanisms to help the University achieve the goals and plans – and the savings targets – of the programme for strategic investment.”

LETTERS

Excellence is already at Sussex

I always thought that there was a problem with the phrase ‘Investing in Excellence’.

The problem is that in my opinion excellence is already here. And that we have no need to look outside for it, or to try to persuade others to retire early so we can bring others in who may, or may not turn out to be excellent either.

The only excellence we need to invest in is already at Sussex and I certainly see it and feel it with the people I interact with on a daily basis. They are all just brilliant.

Not investing in our own excellence is like pushing the self-destruct button.

Mick Henry, Chemistry

Professor Alasdair Smith, Vice-Chancellor, replies:

I entirely agree with Mick that existing staff at Sussex do excellent work of which we can all be proud.

However, the key to the future strength of the University is stronger performance: in research, in student recruitment and in income generation.

If we are to improve performance, we need to invest in areas of academic excellence. And by bringing in academic faculty from outside the University, we aim to build on the excellence that is already here and to strengthen it further.

Part-time degrees take longer

The main story on the cover of the 23 June Bulletin stated: "undergraduates...find out results of their efforts over three or four years of study at Sussex". Students on CCE degree courses take six years to conclude their studies and sometimes longer when various family and work commitments are considered.

Geoffrey Mead, Convener for Local History, Centre for Continuing Education (CCE)
Finalists to graduate as normal

Graduation will go ahead as planned on 20 and 21 July, now that all undergraduate finalists have received their degree results.

Hard work by Sussex academics and administrative staff since the academic unions' boycott of assessment was suspended last month meant that all finalists got their results on time.

Owen Richards, Academic Registrar, said: "It is a great tribute to our staff that we were able to publish all results on time. I would also like to thank students for bearing with us patiently in what was a very stressful situation for them and their families."

Results for undergraduates who are continuing into their next year of study at Sussex should also be published as scheduled, by Friday 14 July. Owen Richards and Dr Helen Prance, chair of the Taught Programmes Committee, will be issuing guidance to examine boards to deal with the relatively small number of cases in which the pay dispute disrupted normal assessment.

In addition, assessment arrangements for Sussex postgraduates are being put back on track.

The University is also mindful of the position of students from other universities who may have been adversely affected by the unions' assessment boycott and are applying to do postgraduate study at Sussex. Applicants have been reassured that Sussex will exercise maximum flexibility with regard to waiting for degree results that are delayed or subject to an appeal process.

Camp promote interest in chemistry

One hundred teenagers from schools all over the UK were on campus at the end of last month to participate in two residential chemistry camps.

The Salters' Chemistry Camps aimed to motivate the 15-year-olds to develop both awareness of and a long-term interest in the subject through an action-packed programme that focused on pharmaceutical chemistry.

Each student was given an opportunity to tackle a variety of activities over three days. They used their skills to investigate chemiluminescence, or 'cold light', to find out what makes fireflies glow. They also worked on researching the properties of benzocaine (a local anaesthetic) and got to see how different-coloured complex ions are formed.

But it wasn't all chemistry; the campers enjoyed a varied social programme including ten-pin bowling and a quiz.

The Salters' Chemistry Camp at Sussex was sponsored by the Salters' Institute; GlaxoSmithKline; the Association for the British Pharmaceutical Industry; and the Royal Society of Chemistry.

A walk on the wild side

As this time last year, we find ourselves once again away from campus among the stunning limestone scenery of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. And as last year, our editor has given us leave to pen this letter from the Dales providing that it contains matter relevant to our Sussex campus.

We are here, we should explain, to introduce our ecology students to the wonders of the British uplands. While breakfasting we look out on the 62-hectare Malham Tarn, at 381 metres the highest calcareous lake in Britain.

We confided our editorial dilemma to the students. "Why don't you write about the Raspberries?", one suggested. While walking through the wood behind the house on the first morning, we had asked them to tell us what was missing. There were the usual familiar Dog's Mercury, Herb Robert and Samicle and it took a few minutes for the penny to drop. There were no Brambles! The point was not made any easier to spot by the luxuriant stands of wild Raspberries that take their place. It is an interesting fact that as one travels north in Europe, Brambles (Blackberries) become increasing scarce and Raspberries more common.

A comparison of the limestone grassland with our South Downs turf uncovers further differences. For one thing, the former is much more comfortable to work on; our ubiquitous Stemless Thistle hardly makes it north of the Humber!

The students, from our BSc in Ecology and Conservation and MSc in Biodiversity Survey, have also detected some differences in bird population trends.

For example, a few years ago every dales farm seemed to have a breeding colony of House Sparrows. Numbers have been falling, possibly due to greater protection of stored cereal grain, and so far this year we have not seen a single sparrow. By contrast, House Sparrows on campus are increasing in numbers, having become very scarce during the 1990s. This recovery has coincided with the provision of food throughout the year in the Clougher 1 courtyard.

In other cases, the picture is rosier up here. Malham is home to a thriving population of Spotted Flycatchers, a species that has declined on campus from eight breeding pairs in 1985 to being no more than a scarce visitor now. As their name implies, Spotted Flycatchers capture flying insects. The long lists of insect species identified by our students suggest that finding food here presents little problem.

Despite all the differences, there are some similarities. For example, the woods around the Tarn are just as alive with parties of young Blue Tits as those in Sussex. Several readers have remarked on the large numbers of Blue Tits successfully rearing young on campus this year. Over two-thirds of the nest-boxes were used, as well as some more unusual sites such as ashtrees outside Falmer House and Arts A.
Robotics expert comes to the rescue

Dr Blay Whitby, Lecturer in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence, has accepted an invitation to join the Scientific Advisory Board of the confusingly named Lifeboat Foundation, which has nothing to do with saving lives at sea. It's actually an organization concerned with ensuring ethically proper applications of new technologies, from nanotechnology and genetic engineering through to robotics - which is Blay's main area of interest.

Advocates of the technologies often call people like me who raise social and ethical issues 'Luddites'. I'm not a Luddite - far from it - I believe that technology is the main route to improvement in the lives of human beings. However, I believe it is necessary to stand up for the rights of all humans.

I've been publishing on the social and ethical impacts of new technologies for 20 years now. It felt a rather lonely area until quite recently. There has been a general awakening to the fact that we are currently developing technologies which could completely change what it means to be a human being.

It's easy to see a way by which, in the very near future, people could be enhanced by genetic selection, cognition-enhancing drugs, neurosurgery and cybernetic enhancement. It sounds like science fiction, perhaps, but I'm talking about research going on now.

One of the things that is likely to happen in the mid-term future is that many of these technologies will be combined in novel ways.

News in brief ↓

New sabbatical team

The new Students' Union sabbatical officers start work on Monday (10 July). They are: Michael Alexander, Activities; Sophie Flax, Welfare; Dan Glass, President; Adam Lindsay, Finance, Sophie Priestley, Education; and Emma Reynolds, Communications.

Seaside book launch

Professor Fred Gray will be at the Old Market in Hove on Thursday (13 July) to launch his new book, Designing the Seaside. Enjoy a glass of wine while learning about changing attitudes to holidaymaking and its setting. Tickets for the event, at 6.30pm, are available from City Books.

Summer activities for children

Activities - including basketball, cricket, hockey, squash, trampolining and yoga - take place at the Sport Centre or Falmer Sports Complex. For further information contact Luke Terrell, Sports Development Officer, on ext. 7687, email l.o.terrell@sussex.ac.uk.

Competition winner

Lisa Fox, an Admissions Assistant in the School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, will be enjoying a free hotel stay thanks to one simple bit of online research. Lisa looked at the list of University-approved hotels and guest houses (www.sussex.ac.uk/about/hotels) to find out where the Hotel Seattle is located (Brighton Marina) and how many different room types there are (four). Her reward is a midweek stay including dinner, bed and breakfast.

Academic events ↓

TUE 11 JUL
1pm IDS seminar: Steven Robins (Stellenbosch) and Abdelkader Bacha (International HIV/AIDS Alliance), AIDS: Questions for development, AIDS and citizenship in a globalised world. IDS 221.

WED 19 JUL
1pm Genome seminar: Howard Lindsay (Sussex), title tbc. GDSC Seminar Room.

Small ads ↓

To let: 3-bed furnished house in Lewes. Garden, gas C/H, £750 pcm. Pref. short let - 3-4 mths. Email czobenjames@uk2.net.

Summer let: 3/4-bed house nr Fiveways, 7-30 Aug. Cheap rent in return for care of cat. £150-£200 p/w (depending on numbers). Email j.s.james@sussex.ac.uk, T Sarah on 551937.

For sale: Villager cast-iron wood-burning stove + flues (angled & straight), £250 ono. Email dbby@sussex.ac.uk, ext. 8028.

Wanted: Midweek accommodation (Mon-Thu) for staff member. Tel 0877 507446.

Arts events ↓

PERFORMANCE

Mon 17 July
7.30pm One-Off Productions - Shakers Re-Stirred

Four long-suffering waitresses in a cocktail bar. By John Godber and Jane Thornton. Gardiner Arts Centre.