

<b>Institution: University of Salford</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 25</b>		
<b>Title of case study: 'Open Secret'? Transforming public and practitioner understanding of intelligence</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: December 2006 – November 2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Daniel W.B. Lomas	Lecturer in International History	October 2012 – Present
Dr Christopher J. Murphy	Senior Lecturer in Intelligence Studies	December 2006 – Present
Dr Samantha Newbery	Reader in International Security	January 2010 – Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 – November 2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>Salford's research challenges the widespread assumption beyond academia that the world of intelligence is secret and unfathomable. It has led to four types of impact: (i) correcting the cliché-ridden media portrayal of intelligence, facilitating a more critical and informed view; (ii) increasing understanding of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) as an effective tool for researching intelligence; (iii) highlighting that much more information about controversial methods of collecting intelligence (such as torture) is now in the public domain; (iv) arguing there can, and should, be greater engagement with issues of race and diversity in relation to the UK intelligence agencies. Two audiences have been impacted upon by this work: the general public and intelligence practitioners. The work underpinning this case study demonstrates that official material concerning UK intelligence, previously off limits to researchers, can now be accessed; its exploitation is transforming our understanding of intelligence.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>The research which led to impact on public and intelligence practitioners' perceptions forms part of a new wave of intelligence history, based on the opening up of previously secret material: it has sought to correct misplaced assumptions about intelligence by exploiting to the full the new opportunities offered by the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. In the absence of official information, there has often been a tendency to fall back on fictional stereotypes, distorting popular views of what spies and intelligence agencies do, and creating unrealistic expectations that agencies are often all-seeing and all-knowing with a 'license to kill'.</p> <p><b>2.i. Challenging public, practitioner and media portrayals of intelligence</b>  In the absence of easily accessible information on intelligence and security, fiction has played a disproportionate role in shaping public and intelligence practitioners' attitudes. Salford's research challenges the tendency of journalists to rely on a stereotypical James Bond-esque image of intelligence rooted in fictional and media portrayals, distorting wider understanding of the work of UK agencies. As a consequence, popular views are conditioned by notions of contemporary intelligence as male-dominated and largely non-diverse, controlled by all-powerful agencies, perceptions far removed from real-world intelligence activities. Murphy's research on the portrayal of wartime interrogation at Camp 020 (1940 – 1945) – in this case, the use of physical violence during interrogation – through dramatic reconstruction by the BBC in the early 1980s draws attention to how this contested historical narrative can be given authenticity and credibility in the eyes of the general public, owing to the reluctance of the government and BBC at the time to correct the false impression created [3.1].</p>		

**2.ii. FOI Act (2000)**

The misplaced belief in the reach of official secrecy has encouraged public audiences and even intelligence practitioners to believe that FOI is not an effective tool for researching intelligence [3.2]. Murphy and Lomas' use of FOI legislation has led to the release of new government papers for research that, in turn, has created new knowledge, also showing to others that it is possible to obtain new files under FOI [3.2]. Illustrative of Lomas and Murphy's work is the creation of an FOI Archive, a repository holding material on intelligence collected via FOI. Located at the University of Salford and launched in 2016, the collection is an outcome of FOI research and is open to academics and the public. It is home to material on LGBT history, intelligence memoirs including *Spycatcher* and Cold War British intelligence.

**2.iii. Controversies over intelligence collection techniques since 1945**

Secrecy has also led to a flawed understanding of how much can be discovered about interrogation policies and techniques. This leads the public to put unrealistic and inappropriate pressure on Governments regarding the treatment of prisoners [3.3]. Newbery has been able to detail the policy-making processes that led to the use of torture in connection with interrogations during Britain's retreat from the Empire, the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the Iraq War (2003 – 2011). This work reveals that the British government and its armed forces did place importance on having appropriate legislation and guidelines in place for interrogation as well as on making it publicly known that they were aware of and abided by this legislation and guidelines. It has shown that although the interrogation of terror suspects sometimes involves torture, the picture is far more complex than popular portrayals would suggest. For instance, interrogation ordinarily involves interviews that fall within legal and ethical frameworks, with torture – although dominating public perceptions – a measure of last resort and in some cases used as a result of sadism and other non-intelligence reasons [3.3, 3.4].

**2.iv. Diversity, intelligence and security**

False perceptions about government secrecy have also resulted in a lack of engagement with issues of race and diversity in relation to UK intelligence, an emerging theme in Lomas' work. Although working on LGBT issues and security since 2016, the issue of race and nationality remained a gap in intelligence studies and one that only really emerged through the release of new file material into the public domain and efforts to decolonise the intelligence studies literature, moving the subject from studies of intelligence operations and agencies to recruitment and inclusivity. Work on this topic led to a report in *The Guardian* newspaper in November 2018 showing that MI5 believed black people to be a 'security risk' in the 1960s, as well as a journal article showing how nationality rules and internal government prejudice led to, to use the language of the time, a 'colour bar' impacting BAME perceptions of intelligence agency and civil service recruitment – a legacy felt even now [3.5]. Such work on the cultural dimension of intelligence in the UK is important, as reflected by the findings of the Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee's 2018 report on diversity that acknowledged the UK's agencies did not reflect modern-day Britain. It also sheds light on the careers of BAME officials in the agencies and is the subject of an ongoing research project looking at security screening and UK national security. Lomas discovered the 1981 report of the Security Commission – a previously unpublished document – highlighting that sexuality was a significant Cold War security issue even into the late 1980s [3.6]. Based on this work Lomas was able to advise the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) history team for the authorised history of the agency published in October 2020.

**3. References to the research**

**3.1. Christopher J. Murphy**, Dramatising intelligence history on the BBC: the Camp 020 affair, *Intelligence and National Security*, 34/5, 2019, pp. 688-702.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2019.1595466>

**3.2. Christopher J. Murphy and Daniel W.B. Lomas**, Return to Neverland? Freedom of information and the history of British intelligence, *The Historical Journal*, 57/1, 2014, pp. 273-287. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X13000423>

**3.3. Samantha Newbery**, Interrogation, Intelligence and Security: Controversial British Techniques (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2015). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1mkbczd> (REF2)

**3.4. Samantha Newbery**, Ireland v UK: the European Court of Human Rights and international relations, 1971–1978, *European Human Rights Law Review*, 2017 (3), pp. 272-284.

Available at: <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/42582/>

**3.5. Daniel W.B. Lomas**, “Crocodiles in the Corridors”: Security vetting, race and Whitehall, 1945–1968, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 49/1, 2019, pp. 148-177.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1648231> (REF2)

**3.6. Daniel W. B. Lomas**, Security, scandal and the security commission report, 1981, *Intelligence & National Security*, 35/5, 2020, pp. 734-750.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2020.1740387>

References **3.1**, **3.2**, **3.4**, **3.5** and **3.6** are peer reviewed journal articles. **3.3** is a monograph.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Intelligence practitioners represent an audience that is difficult to reach. While the existence of intelligence agencies such as GCHQ, MI5 and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) is not in itself a closely guarded secret, those who apply to work in intelligence are instructed to inform only their closest family of their decision, while those who are employed also sign the legally-binding Official Secrets Act. As of March 2018, the UK's intelligence community numbered 13,630 ([ISC Report, 2018](#)). To make an impact on this audience therefore poses a significant challenge. Understanding and knowledge gained through our research has benefitted practitioners working in the intelligence and security field through the University of Salford's unique attendance and distance learning postgraduate taught programmes. The University is one of only a handful of UK-based institutions offering programmes that are exclusive to intelligence practitioners, the teaching allowing us to develop in-house community attitudes to intelligence [2.i-iv]. Since 2014, 165 intelligence and security practitioners have studied with us, representing countries including Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Nigeria, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United States.

Outside of this closed community, our work has reached a wider audience of **626,000,000 readers, listeners and viewers** through news media appearances between January 2015 and July 2020 [5.1]. This work directly challenges the popular views of intelligence [2.i], arguing that such views are simplistic. Research has also been shared through social media, news publications, with further pathways including workshops, public talks and an exhibition for LGBT History Month in 2020. Social media analysis (up to 27 July 2020) highlighted **1,094 public comments**, **2,234 public engagements** (social media likes) and **3,326 reshares** of pieces by Lomas, Murphy and Newbery [5.2]. For *The Conversation*, reports authored by the researchers reached **236,181 readers**.

##### 4.i. Challenging public, practitioner and media portrayals of intelligence

Three-quarters of the intelligence practitioners surveyed said they were surprised at the quantity of openly available information; running counter to their original views, several acknowledged that there was a ‘*great deal*’ of material [5.3]. ‘*It was surprising that so much is there*’, one official noted, while pointing out that, if you understand ‘*ways that these can be manipulated further, real benefits can be ascertained*’ – a reflection that intelligence is not always ‘*secret*’ [5.3]. Another was ‘*shocked...I was thinking before my course that these discussion[s] were only very limited [...] I've learnt [a] huge amount*’ [5.3]. Reflecting on how far their understanding of the world of open source had changed because of study, one practitioner replied ‘*colossally*’ [5.3].

Beyond the unexpected quantity of public information, intelligence practitioners reflected on the contrast between the ‘*real world*’ of intelligence and popular perceptions, views encapsulated by one respondent: ‘*Before coming to Salford all I thought was in the public domain was just the “story telling of James Bond”*’ [5.3]. Another picked up that in the media there were ‘*James Bond references galore*’. Media coverage of intelligence was ‘*poorly portrayed*’, most stories having a ‘*007 association, which is just plain stupid*’. Several were ‘*very surprised*’ and shocked when they considered the media impact, given, as one noted, ‘*I didn't realise how much [fictional] figures were referred to [as] “factual” in the media*’ [5.3]. Half of all respondents felt that their trust in media portrayals of intelligence had decreased as a result of our research [5.3].

Respondents also reflected upon the impact of our research-led teaching on their own professional work. One saw the need to improve policy around the handling of informers. *'It was apparent a large portion of the anti-poaching squad [in Malawi] knew about a particular [informer]',* resulting in a new standard operating procedure on handling these kinds of sources [5.3]. Another alumnus explained his work practice changed *'dramatically... my mind broadened'*. Another reflected their educational experience had *'opened up my perspectives on security overall, and has allowed me to educate my peers, supervisors, and teams'*, sharing knowledge to develop best practice [5.3], a theme reflected in other responses: *'It allows me to engage with experienced practitioners in the field, which allows me the opportunity to continually develop my skills and understanding. I was able to pass on my knowledge of ethics'* [5.3].

#### 4.ii. FOI Act: increasing public and media awareness

Alumni who are intelligence practitioners, as well as the general public surveyed talked of a growing awareness of the UK's FOI Act as a result of the research. One respondent reported being *'amazed by what people had previous[ly] received [under FOI]'* [5.3], while another admitted *'I did not know that FOI was also a way of research for intelligence'*. Others were *'surprised'* at how much intelligence information was available - despite the numerous exemptions for national security, international relations or sensitive information [5.3]. Overwhelmingly, respondents declared that the knowledge and methodologies developed by Salford have inspired and helped them to use FOI in their own work [5.3]. Intelligence practitioners have also said that their awareness of FOI has impacted upon their working practice. A police officer appreciated the importance of diligent record keeping: *'I have to make a record of every decision I make as it may be used as evidence [...] Knowing that that information could be made public [...] makes it even more important to state accurate and relevant information'* [5.3]. Members of the public have also reported a greater understanding of FOI, for example that it does not provide access to all government files [5.4]. Another respondent stressed that *'the ability for universities to utilise these documents to help explain our recent past is pretty vital'* [5.5].

Following historic claims of child sexual abuse, Murphy was able to identify a file that was held at The National Archives but unavailable to the public and advise *Sky News* on making an FOI request; the file, covering 'unnatural sex' and a FO official, was released in January 2015, leading to an urgent question in the House of Commons on 22 January 2015 to the Home Secretary [5.6]. Murphy's intervention resulted in the identification of new files; a Cabinet Office Minister admitted in February that, following media reports, Cabinet Office officials identified four further files, passed to the Wanless Inquiry which was set up in 2014 to review historic sex abuse claims [5.6]. Media reporting on the file, including Murphy's intervention, reached an **audience of 8,300,000** [5.7]. After media reports claimed the 2017 Manchester Bombing was an 'intelligence failure', work by Lomas argued against 'hindsight bias', with the BBC Home Affairs Correspondent commenting that it was *'a good read on why it's reasonable to expect MI5 to miss threats'*. Another reader added, *'A really interesting article... Combine this with media outlets searching for a headline and writing cheap and easy headlines'*, another commenting *'good summary of the current situation [...] the various services responded commendably'* [5.7].

#### 4.iii. Changing perceptions of intelligence collection techniques

Surveyed alumni who are intelligence practitioners were surprised at how much information is in the public domain about interrogation techniques and policies, gaining new insights into the importance of transparent policies, allowing agencies to act with honesty and integrity [5.3]. Attendees at a public talk by Newbery reported a correction to their understanding by learning that there is a 'wide gap' between interrogation and torture [5.8]. 100% of attendees reported increased understanding of how British intelligence, police forces and the military operate [5.8]. 90% of respondents said the talk made them more critical of how interrogation and torture are portrayed by the media [5.4].

Evidence submitted by Newbery to Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights was reflected in their October 2020 report into the Covert Human Intelligence Sources ((CHIS) Criminal Conduct) Bill. The House of Lords has since amended the Bill in keeping with



Newbery's evidence that CHIS – more commonly known as informers – should not be given criminal or civil immunity for murder or torture [5.9].

#### 4.iv. Diversity, intelligence and security

Attendees from both audiences at a public talk and exhibition on 'Security and Sexuality' learnt that national security and sexuality are linked [5.5]. Knowledge of the Foreign Office's attitudes to LGBT officials pre-1991 showed research in this area was viable, contributing to public knowledge [5.5]. The importance of this work is underlined by the commitment of UK government agencies and departments to diversify their workforce and acknowledge the wrongs of the past. By working in this field, researchers at Salford help contribute to an environment in which the intelligence and security agencies' recruitment goals can be achieved, illustrating how far their recruitment practices have changed. Work on this subject by Lomas featured in the first published authorised history of the GCHQ [5.10, p. 778], the agency history noting the unofficial advisory role ('understand issues and to find evidence') played by Lomas in the acknowledgements [5.10, p. 805].

Research on the subject reached a wider public audience through social media, news stories and FOI. Research by Lomas on MI5 and BAME candidates, initially reported by *The Guardian*, and reprinted elsewhere, reached an **audience of 5,347,385** (*The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *Irish Times* and *Yahoo!*), the story reported across BBC local and national radio via the BBC's BAME network, 'UK Black'. Social media analysis identified several impacts: a wider discussion of diversity and the UK's agencies; drawing attention to the treatment of minorities across government; and highlighting the relationship between past and present for the public, researchers and campaigners [5.2]. Twitter users found the article contents '*shocking*', with one post recognising '*The 60's were only 58 years ago. I have family members who grew up in a time where MI5 thought black people couldn't be trusted*' [5.2]. Social media analysis reveals **938 shares** of diversity-related work, **1,762 reactions** and **634 comments** [5.2].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**5.1.** Media Statistics: TV, radio, print news on Salford's research (January 2015 – July 2020) (4)

**5.2.** Social Media: analysis data (July 2020), highlighting public comments and engagements (4) and comments on diversity (4.iv)

**5.3.** Survey Data: Salford alumni (March 2020), highlighting the changed views of intelligence practitioners (4.i), increased public awareness around FOI (4.ii) and changed perceptions of intelligence collection techniques (4.iii)

**5.4.** Survey Data: using FOI for academic research (March 2020), highlighting greater understanding of FOI (4.ii) and changed perceptions of media portrayals (4.iii)

**5.5.** Survey Data: Security and sexuality: tales from the FOI archive (March 2020), on using FOI to explain our recent past (4.ii) and the links between national security and sexuality (4.iv)

**5.6.** Hansard Report: 1) Hansard, House of Commons (HoC) debates, 22 January 2015, Vol. 581, Cols. 367-9; 2) Hansard, 4 February 2015, Vol. 592; 3) Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 21 July 2015, Vol. 598, Cols. 92WS, available at:

[Government Files - Wednesday 4 February 2015 - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)  
[Wanless and Whittam - Tuesday 21 July 2015 - Hansard - UK Parliament](#) (4.ii)

**5.7.** Social Media: reader comments on online print news dissemination of research (January 2015 – July 2020), particularly regarding HoC debates and the 2017 Manchester Bombing (4.ii)

**5.8.** Survey Data: Festival of Research talk (July 2018), available at:

[https://salford.figshare.com/articles/dataset/Questionnaires\\_collecting\\_feedback\\_on\\_impact\\_after\\_Newbery's\\_Festival\\_of\\_Research\\_lecture\\_2018/7798673](https://salford.figshare.com/articles/dataset/Questionnaires_collecting_feedback_on_impact_after_Newbery's_Festival_of_Research_lecture_2018/7798673), on intelligence perceptions (4.iii)

**5.9.** Report: HC. 847, Joint Committee on Human Rights. *Legislative Scrutiny: Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) Bill* (10 November 2020), available at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3339/documents/32164/default/> and CHIS0009 evidence by Newbery: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/13421/html/> (4.iii)

**5.10.** Book Extracts: *Behind the Enigma: The Authorised History of GCHQ, Britain's Secret Cyber-Intelligence Agency*, John Ferris (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), refs on pp.778, 805 (4.iv)