

Ruling on the Evidence of the Radicalisation Expert, Dr Matthew Wilkinson

1. Dr. Matthew Wilkinson is an expert in Islamic extremism. He was instructed by the Inquiry in November 2019 to produce a report on the nature of Islamic extremism; the radicalisation of Salman Abedi ('SA') and any steps which could, or should, have been taken to prevent that radicalisation leading to the death of 22 people on 22nd May 2017.
2. In carrying out those instructions Dr Wilkinson has produced two reports. The first is general and deals with a number of aspects of Islamic extremism that need to be understood. I have no reason to believe that the contents of that report will be controversial.
3. The second report deals, amongst other things, with SA's times at different educational establishments, including the University of Salford. SA was a student at the University of Salford between 2015 and 2017. That report considers whether SA was exhibiting any signs of radicalisation while attending various educational establishments; whether any signs should have been picked up and, if they were picked up, what action could or should have been taken. That part of Dr Wilkinson's report is, to some extent, critical of the University of Salford. That criticism is not accepted by the University.
4. In June of this year Dr Wilkinson was instructed to carry out further work for the Inquiry responding to comments from Core Participants on his reports. On 9th June 2021, Dr Wilkinson informed the Inquiry Legal Team ('ILT') that from early May of this year he had been in contact with the University of Salford to see whether it would provide him with an academic base from which he could conduct a research project. The University agreed to do so. The research project is being funded by a third party but, after reaching agreement with the University of Salford that he could conduct that research as a member

of the University, Dr Wilkinson has been paid by them a relatively modest hourly rate for work he has carried out.

5. ILT immediately instructed Dr Wilkinson not to carry out any further work and Core Participants were informed of the situation and asked to provide written observations.
6. Those who agreed to this on behalf of Salford University were not aware that Dr Wilkinson was reporting to the Inquiry on matters concerning the University. Since this information has become known to the University authorities, they have ceased the relationship with Dr Wilkinson and the University will no longer host his research, nor will they pay him any money.
7. I am grateful for the written submissions from Core Participants. On 22nd June I held a short hearing so that everyone was aware of the situation and could make any additional submissions. There was considerable agreement for which I am grateful.
8. I should make it clear that there is no suggestion that Dr Wilkinson's reports are written from other than an entirely objective viewpoint. Nor is there any suggestion that Dr Wilkinson would not be objective in the evidence that he would give. That does not mean that his connection with the University of Salford and its termination does not create a potential problem for the Inquiry. It is not only important that an expert is entirely objective in the evidence he or she gives but that he or she is seen to be objective. I would not have invited Dr Wilkinson to have given his opinion as to whether the University of Salford should have recognised the risk that SA had become radicalised and if so what they should have done about it, if I had known that he was going to form a working relationship with them. That would not be because I consider that Dr Wilkinson might intentionally be favourable to the University because of the arrangement, but that the fact of the connection with the University might raise the suspicion in the mind of a reasonable observer that he might not be objective, either consciously or unconsciously, in the views he expressed. It is an important principle of any judicial hearing that justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done.
9. The consensus of views from the Core Participants is that there is no problem in Dr Wilkinson giving the bulk of his evidence, but that it is generally considered to be wiser

that he should not give his views on the conduct of the various educational establishments that SA attended. The general view was that the part of Dr Wilkinson's report that deals with educational establishments should be replaced by a report from an alternative expert. A suitable expert has been identified and ILT will make efforts to instruct her as soon as possible. As part of the submissions it was emphasised on the part of the families that they would not wish the instruction of a new expert to delay the proceedings. I see no reason why that should happen.

10. Accordingly, Dr Wilkinson will be called to give the larger part of his evidence but in relation to educational establishments a report will be obtained from an alternative expert.

Sir John Saunders

24th June 2021