



## GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS HEADQUARTERS

NEWS RELEASE: 12 NOV 2003

### **GCHQ DISABILITIES TOOLKIT LEADS THE WAY**

**An award winning 'toolkit' produced by Jo Todd of Key 4 Learning and GCHQ's Disabilities Officer to help staff with different 'thinking' styles has received praise from around the Civil Service.**

The toolkit was sponsored by the Cabinet Office at the beginning of the year and has been issued to every Civil Service Department. It is based on pioneering work by Jo and her GCHQ colleague, helping staff who are affected by dyslexia (*i.e. difficulty in learning to read words, letters and other symbols*) and dyspraxia (*generally recognised to be an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement which might also cause problems with language, perception and thought*) - both are recognised disabilities which might be better described as 'cognitive processing differences'.

Jo Todd worked at GCHQ as an educational consultant and her experience in this area informed much of the content of the toolkit which aims to help individuals overcome difficulties at work and also provide information for managers, personnel officers and colleagues. The toolkit has also been of use to staff with medical problems such as diabetes, epilepsy, depression and Multiple Sclerosis.

The GCHQ Disabilities Officer commented: "We choose the descriptor 'toolkit' because it provides a number of strategies and allows the individual to pick and mix those which work best for them."

The strategies provide help with: difficulties commonly associated with dyslexia such as reading and writing; and a number of other problem areas including memory, concentration and time management.

She continued: "The different thinking styles which dyslexia and dyspraxia can bring to a cerebral organisation like GCHQ actually add value to our work. People with dyslexia are commonly known for having problems with written work and reading, but they can be very good at problem solving and thinking laterally, team working, and articulating complex ideas. In fact, their excellent visual spatial skills mean they often gravitate towards IT work. As far as dyspraxia is concerned, we've noticed they often seem to have excellent language or mathematical skills."

Approximately 10% of the population are mildly dyslexic, with 1 in 25 people seriously affected. Famous dyslexics include Richard Branson, Bill Gates and Albert Einstein.

Dyspraxia affects about 2% of the population severely, and some 7% of children have some dyspraxic difficulties.

GCHQ's work with disabled staff has been highlighted by Tony Blair. Speaking at a recent IT Universal Enabler Forum for information technologists in London's Guild Hall, the Prime Minister praised the way GCHQ has worked closely with staff to provide the facilities they need in its new headquarters building. He also highlighted GCHQ's work with Ability Net - a

specialist organisation that advises on accessibility to information communications technology - to bring about positive changes in the working environment:

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