

Title: GCHQ: The Facts

What is GCHQ?

Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) is an intelligence and security organisation. A Civil Service department, we report to the Foreign Secretary, and work closely with the UK's other intelligence agencies (commonly known as MI5 and MI6). Our primary customers are the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and law enforcement authorities, but we also serve a wide range of other Government Departments.

What do we do?

GCHQ has two missions: signals intelligence and information assurance.

Our **Sigint** work protects the vital interests of the nation: we provide information to support Government decision making in the fields of national security, military operations, and law enforcement. The intelligence we provide is at the heart of the struggle against terrorism, and also contributes to the prevention of serious crime.

Information Assurance helps keep Government communication and information systems safe from hackers and other threats. We also help those responsible for the UK's critical infrastructure (power; water; communications etc) keep their networks safe from interference and disruption.

Who benefits?

The work done by GCHQ, MI5 and MI6 benefits everyone who is interested in ensuring that democracy and the rule of law should prevail. Our intelligence directly supports the UK Government policies, but also extends to our role within NATO and Europe, working for common defence purposes.

Why do we do it?

"Secret intelligence gives the Government a vital edge in tackling some of the most difficult problems we face...intelligence forewarns us of threats to our national security; helps the Government promote international stability; provides support and protection to our forces; contributes to our economic health; and strengthens our efforts against terrorism and serious crime."

- Tony Blair, Prime Minister

"Information systems are at the heart of modern society - and trust in them is essential. CESG's work is key to ensuring that online government is safe and reliable."

- Andrew Pinder, e-Envoy, Cabinet Office

Who are we?

GCHQ is a forward looking and truly diverse organisation. Most of our people have specialist skills - in mathematics, languages, analysis, IT and communications, engineering - and they operate at the cutting edge of their professions. We help them develop and work flexibly - in ways that suit them - so that they can give of their best. But while diversity is important to us, we also take pride in what we share: a solid commitment to serving the nation.

Some Key Dates

- 1919 UK Government recognises value of signals intelligence and establishes the Government Code and Cypher School (GCCS) in London.
- 1939 GCCS transfers to Bletchley Park to escape the threat of German air raids.
- 1940 GCCS begins to crack enemy codes, including the German Enigma code, helping Britain foil German air raids and U-boat attacks. It is estimated that the code breakers shorten the war by at least eighteen months.
- 1952 GCCS (by now known as GCHQ) relocates to two sites in Cheltenham.
- 1977 Communications-Electronics Security Group established within GCHQ.
- 1983 The role of GCHQ is made public for the first time; its function is formally avowed to Parliament.
- 1984 Trade Union rights removed from GCHQ staff by the Government.
- 1994 The Intelligence Services Act is passed, redefining GCHQ's role in the post Cold War period as new threats emerge. National security, safeguarding economic well-being , and prevention and detection of serious crime are confirmed as GCHQ's top level goals.
- 1997 Trade Union recognition restored to GCHQ.
- 2000 Plans for a new purpose-built headquarters for GCHQ in Cheltenham are approved by the Government.
- 2003 GCHQ staff begin moving into new state-of-the-art headquarters.

Are we Accountable?

People sometimes think that we cannot be accountable because we do not disclose much about GCHQ's operations and methods.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, GCHQ is subject to very rigorous oversight both by Parliament and senior members of the Judiciary, and works entirely within a legal framework which complies with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Activities at GCHQ are underpinned by the Intelligence Services Act 1994 (amended most recently by the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001) and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. The purposes for which

interception may be permitted are set out explicitly in these Acts: national security, safeguarding economic wellbeing, and the prevention and detection of serious crime. Interception for other purposes is not lawful, and we do not do it.

Did You Know?

- ◆ GCHQ is the biggest employer in Gloucestershire.
- ◆ GCHQ has one of the biggest computer complexes in Europe.
- ◆ GCHQ appears regularly in The Times Top 100 employers list.
- ◆ GCHQ's linguists are fluent in a wide variety of languages – 107 at the last count.
- ◆ GCHQ employs more mathematicians than the average University maths faculty.
- ◆ GCHQ first developed a means of sending information securely via the Internet.
- ◆ GCHQ has provided winners on TV's Krypton Factor and Countdown.
- ◆ GCHQ's forerunner, GCCS, liaised with James Bond creator Ian Fleming during World War II.
- ◆ GCHQ's community outreach scheme has attracted over 400 volunteers since it began in 2001.
- ◆ GCHQ employees are helping children improve their reading and numeracy skills at four primary schools in the Cheltenham area.
- ◆ GCHQ mathematicians invented the public key 'padlock' cryptography which was later used to make transactions on the Internet secure.
- ◆ CESG is a key player in making secure and reliable electronic voting a reality.
- ◆ The BT cabling used in the new GCHQ building would almost stretch from Cheltenham to Rio de Janeiro!

Web sites: <http://www.gchq.gov.uk>
<http://www.cesg.gov.uk>