WOMEN IN THE UK INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

A report by the
Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament

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53%

of the Civil Service are women

37%

of the intelligence Agencies are women

38%

of senior civil servants in the Civil Service are women

19%

of senior civil servants in the intelligence Agencies are women

23%

of FTSE100 Board members are women

35%

of intelligence Agency Board members are women

50%

of new entrants to the Civil Service are women

38%

of new entrants to the intelligence Agencies are women

Introduction
Women in the intelligence and security Agencies

"Diversity can improve the reputation of an organisation, help attract and retain talented people, improve innovation and creativity amongst employees and encourage the motivation and efficiency of staff."

The three intelligence and security Agencies – the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and MI5 – are specialised organisations employing over 12,000 dedicated men and women. The work of their staff may not be widely known, but it requires high levels of expertise. They carry out highly skilled work in various areas, including intelligence-gathering, in-depth assessments, agent-handling and data analysis, all of which need to be underpinned by strong leadership and effective relationships. A wide range of skills is therefore vital in order to achieve the successful delivery of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy and for the Agencies to perform the tasks vital to the UK's national security.

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament oversees the work of the three intelligence and security Agencies. This includes the policies they follow, the operations they conduct and their staffing and finances. As part of this work, for some years the Committee has examined what proportion of the Agencies' staff are white, black or minority ethnic, men or women, able-bodied or disabled, over 50, under 50, etc. We have accumulated a wealth of statistics about the organisations. However, these statistics do not really give any indication of what is actually happening in the Agencies. Are they diverse organisations? Are they drawing on the best talent? Is this affecting the ability of the Agencies to deal effectively with threats to the UK's national security? And what is being done to attract and promote the best people?

This is not just an ethical issue: it is vitally important from an intelligence perspective. Both the public and private sectors increasingly realise that organisations benefit from a diverse workforce. This is not in order to meet targets or tick boxes, but because diversity provides a competitive advantage: different people approach the same problem in different ways and find different solutions, and this competition, collaboration and challenge is essential to making progress. Organisations have moved on from the dreary mandatory half-day training courses to fulfil what they saw as their moral or ethical obligations, and now recognise diversity as an investment in the business itself. Diversity can improve the reputation of an organisation, help attract and retain talented people, improve

> "... if all intelligence professionals are cut from the same cloth, then they are likely to share 'unacknowledged biases' that circumscribe both the definition of problems and the search for solutions."

innovation and creativity amongst employees and encourage the motivation and efficiency of staff.

The same holds even more true for the intelligence community, given the nature of their work. Logically, if all intelligence professionals are cut from the same cloth, then they are likely to share 'unacknowledged biases' that circumscribe both the definition of problems and the search for solutions. Diversity should therefore be pursued not just on legal or ethical grounds – which are important in themselves – but because it will result in a better response to the range of threats that we face to our national security.

The Committee has heard from the heads of each of the Agencies about the obstacles they face in trying to achieve greater diversity and, where there is an imbalance, what they are doing to try to tackle it. However, leaving aside the best efforts of those at the top, there is no substitute for hearing from the individuals who are part of these organisations in order to understand the issues that they face and how they think their organisation could improve. So, as part of the oversight remit of the Committee, I have been visiting the three intelligence and security Agencies to talk to staff about diversity issues and hear their experiences.

There are a number of aspects of diversity, and it is obvious that there is no 'one size fits all' solution. Therefore, rather than seeking to address all the issues that arise, I have chosen to focus first on the position of women in the Agencies. It is this particular aspect to which this first Report is devoted. In my discussions with staff, I explored recruitment policy and practice; maternity-related issues, childcare and flexible working; career and promotion prospects; and cultural and behavioural issues.

I have been impressed by the readiness of staff to share their views and experiences openly. The key findings and recommendations of this Report are based on the contributions of those working at all levels in the Agencies. I am grateful to all those who have contributed to this work for taking the time to engage with this process.

I hope that this Report will galvanise support for, and lead to further concerted efforts to create, a more gender diverse workforce in the Agencies. I have seen progress during the time I have been examining these issues and I have highlighted specific examples in this Report. I have also highlighted those areas where improvement is needed: there is always room for improvement.

I believe that there is a strong business imperative for greater diversity in the Agencies. They should reflect the population they serve but, most importantly, they cannot fulfil their mandate without drawing on the broad range of talent and skills that a diverse workforce can offer. We must ensure that the Agencies are investing in the right skills and capabilities, and that they are not losing talented people unnecessarily due to unconscious bias or unnecessary barriers.

I personally want women to be attracted to a career in intelligence and to feel there is the prospect of real advancement. While highlighting issues for the Agencies to address, this work is ultimately intended to strengthen the Agencies. I applaud the vital work that the Agencies undertake to safeguard our national interests. They work in difficult, ever-changing and sometimes dangerous circumstances to try to prevent the considerable threats that exist against our country, our people and our society from becoming a reality. They should be praised for the dedication, bravery and professionalism they demonstrate.

The Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, MP

> "[The Agencies] should reflect the population they serve but, most importantly, they cannot fulfil their mandate without drawing on the broad range of talent and skills that a diverse workforce can offer."

> "I hope that this Report will galvanise support for, and lead to further concerted efforts to create, a more gender diverse workforce in the Agencies."

Foreword

Diversity is essential for the intelligence and security Agencies: perhaps more so than for any other sector given the nature of their work. The Committee is therefore extremely grateful to Hazel Blears for the very valuable work she has done to address the issues faced by women in the UK intelligence community. Her commitment and effort on behalf of the rest of the Committee are greatly appreciated.

Whilst the work has been driven by Ms Blears, this Report has the complete backing of all members of the Committee and we expect the Agencies to take forward the recommendations contained in the Report. The heads of the Agencies have expressed a clear intent to increase diversity in their organisations and we are pleased to note the progress that has been achieved so far on this issue. However, more must be done, and we expect to see further improvements.

Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament

Gender diversity in the intelligence Agencies

- The business case for diversity

- Gender diversity

- Commitment to diversity
  – statements from the heads of the Agencies

'Diversity' is used expansively, referring to a workforce that is varied and representative along all possible cultural discriminators, including but not limited to race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and class.

This Report examines the case for greater gender diversity within the Agencies, staff experience on a day-to-day basis, the initiatives the Agencies have implemented, and – crucially – what more could, and should, be done.

The business case for diversity

1. Diversity is not about ticking boxes and complying with legal requirements. Whilst it is important that public sector organisations should try to reflect the communities that they serve, that in itself is not a business driver. Why should an organisation be diverse? What is in it for them? Of course, by casting the recruitment net wide – regardless of age, race, gender or sexual orientation – organisations are ensuring that they capture the widest possible talent pool. But most importantly, it is the variety of ideas, the competition, the challenge, the lack of 'group think', and the interesting collaborations, that a diverse workforce brings to an organisation. If organisations are only recruiting and promoting one sort of person, then they are only going to get one sort of solution to a problem. Even with some of the brightest and the best, if they are cut from the same cultural cloth, this will inevitably result in a narrower perspective.

2. The private sector has begun to realise that an organisation will get a competitive advantage from a diverse workforce. Diversity is increasingly seen as an investment in the business itself. Diversity can improve the reputation of an organisation, help attract and retain talented people, improve innovation and creativity amongst employees and improve the motivation and efficiency of staff. Although, even with the benefit of this enlightened thinking, the private sector has some way to go to achieve a diverse workforce.

3. There is some room for optimism given recent progress in terms of increasing women's representation on Boards. Three years on from a review by Lord Davies of Abersoch into 'Women on Boards', there are now a growing number of women in decision-making roles. Figures from October 2014 show that women now account for 22.8% of Board positions in the FTSE100, up from 12.5% in 2011. However, it is noteworthy that only five FTSE100 companies have women Chief Executives. Equally, other problems still persist. In the technology sector, for instance, just 17% of jobs in the UK in 2011 were held by women (a disappointing drop from 22% in 2001) and the percentage of technology and science degrees awarded to women also saw a dramatic fall from 37% in 1985 to 18% in 2011.

4. It is clear that any public sector organisation where 65% of employees are male, rising to 83% in the senior levels, and nearly 100% of senior staff are either white or have not declared their ethnicity, does not reflect the community it serves.[1] The intelligence Agency described in these statistics was criticised by the Cabinet Office for its 'poor' delivery against diversity targets; and the then Director admitted candidly to this Committee in 2012 that their performance in this area "*… is not good enough*".[2] The Committee, in its 2011–2012 Annual Report, described progress as "*lacklustre*".[3] While the wider Civil Service has seen the percentage of women grow from 46% in

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1   *Written evidence – GCHQ, 19 September 2012 and August 2014.*
2   *Oral evidence – GCHQ, 1 March 2012.*
3   *Intelligence and Security Committee, Annual Report 2011–2012.*

1991 to 53% in 2013/14, it is notable that the intelligence Agencies have lagged behind, with women making up only 37% of the total workforce in 2013/14.

Women in the Civil Service and the intelligence Agencies

53%

Percentage of women in the Civil Service 2013/14

37%

Percentage of women in the three intelligence Agencies 2013/14
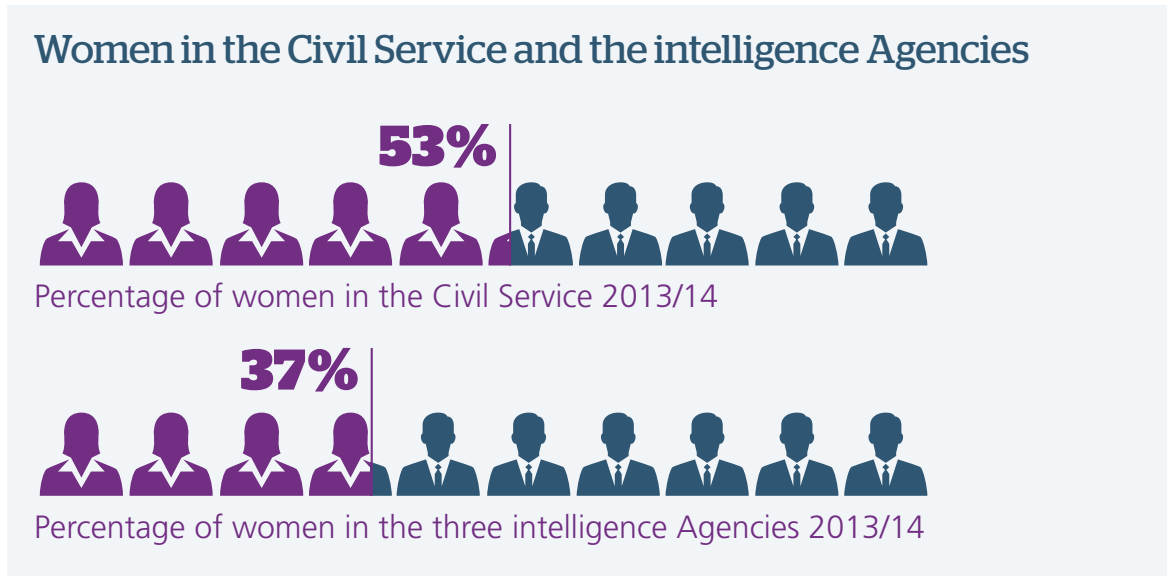
5. In the intelligence community change is too slow, yet arguably they have a greater need for a diverse workforce – not just in terms of encouraging a wide range of skills and the biggest talent pool, but because by the very nature of their work they need to encourage diversity of thinking that will only come from a diverse workforce. If all intelligence professionals are from similar backgrounds and have similar characteristics, they are likely to share 'unacknowledged biases' that circumscribe both the definition of problems and the search for solutions. By contrast, diversity not only gives the organisation a broader perspective in itself, but by encouraging 'difference', staff feel less pressure to conform, which can lead to greater originality of thinking. Diversity in the intelligence community should therefore be sought not only on legal or ethical grounds but because increased diversity will lead to better intelligence analysis, and a better response to the range of threats that we face to our national security.

6. There is a clear imperative to increase diversity in order to achieve operational aims. As the previous Director General of MI5 observed:

> If you look like me, then you can't operate in the operational areas that we need to operate in. So we are making progress on [recruiting black and minority ethnic and female black and minority ethnic staff], but it takes time for that to filter through the sort of hierarchy at the service.[4]

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4   Oral evidence – MI5, 23 February 2012.

The new Director of GCHQ made the same point in relation to his organisational needs:

> *We will not be able to keep innovating at the scale we need if we can't address the critical business case for diversity.*[5]

7. The Agencies certainly recognise the importance of casting their recruitment net as wide as possible. The former Director of GCHQ acknowledged this in a speech paying tribute to Alan Turing:

> *I strongly believe* [an intelligence] *agency needs the widest range of skills possible if it is to be successful, and to deny itself talent just because the person with the talent doesn't conform to a social stereotype is to starve itself of what it needs to thrive.*[6]

Gender diversity

GCHQ

"Diversity is not about ticking boxes and complying with legal requirements."

8. GCHQ recognises the benefits in terms of diversity of thinking and better decision-making – the former Director elaborated on the benefits he saw from an increase in gender diversity at Board level:

> *… it's radically different with two women on the Board rather than one, it is radically different, and I find that the Board operates in a different way and I find that the discussions are deeper, I think they are more emotionally intelligent, and, if you like, I think there is more intuition in the room. So it's been good for us. I'd love to feel what it was like with three.*

We note that since these comments to the Committee in 2012, GCHQ now has four women on the Board: a 100% increase in two years, which we applaud.

9. Sir Iain Lobban's remarks are supported by a Canadian study, 'Not just the right thing… But the bright thing',[7] which found that Boards with three or more women on them showed very different governance behaviours from those with all-male Boards:

> *Inclusive and diverse Boards are more likely to be effective Boards, better able to understand their customers and stakeholders and to benefit from fresh perspectives, new ideas, vigorous challenge and broad experience. This in turn leads to better decision making.*

It is this broader range – *"fresh perspectives, new ideas, vigorous challenge"* – that is the real benefit of greater diversity. Whilst it is true that some women may bring greater emotional intelligence, or intuition, that is a very simplistic view of the benefits women bring to Boards.

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5   *Letter from Robert Hannigan, Director GCHQ, to the Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, MP, dated 11 December 2014.*

6   *Sir Iain Lobban (former Director of GCHQ), 'GCHQ and Turing', 3 October 2012.*

7   *The Conference Board of Canada, 'Women on Boards, Not just the right thing… but the bright thing', June 2002.*

"... it is the variety of ideas, the competition, the challenge, the lack of 'group think', and the interesting collaborations, that a diverse workforce brings to an organisation."

10. In 2013, the Director of the US Central Intelligence Agency (the equivalent of SIS) commissioned a report to look at improving career progression for women in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), after concerns over the low percentage of women being promoted into senior roles. The 'Women in Leadership' report[8] was produced by the Director's Advisory Group, led by former US Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright. It states – in clear and unambiguous language – that "*not maximising women's talents and expertise directly and negatively impacts the mission*". The Director of the CIA welcomed the report and emphasised its wider benefits, saying:

> *… perhaps the most important point I want to make here is that the recommendations will benefit not just women of our workforce, but the entire workforce. These recommendations are about developing and managing all of our people in a way that optimizes talent.*

The UK Agencies have talent – the Committee has seen first hand the commitment and dedication of their staff. It is therefore right to consider what more can be done to develop and manage them, and to be clear that any improvements that can be made will benefit not just the women in those organisations, but all members of staff.

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8   *'Women in Leadership', CIA Director's Advisory Group. An unclassified copy of the report, published in March 2013, can be found on the CIA website (www.cia.gov).*

STATEMENTS ON DIVERSITY FROM HEADS OF THE THREE INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

Diversity is a strategic priority for MI5 and I am committed to providing an inclusive workplace, where everyone is valued for their contribution and has the opportunity to reach their full potential. If this doesn't include a representative number of women MI5 will be missing out – something I am not prepared to accept. Our efforts in recent years are paying off. We are making progress against our targets for the Service as a whole and at senior levels and feeder grades, and we now have four women at Board level (three internal and one non-executive Director). I recently joined the 30% Club, an initiative aiming to get 30% women on FTSE Boards by 2015, which was recently extended to the public sector. We have also made significant improvements in the support we offer those wishing to work part-time or flexibly to balance work and caring responsibilities. Some of this is challenging, but we have set this as a priority, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because we believe diversity at all levels contributes to our objective of keeping the country safe.

Andrew Parker, Director General of MI5

We are proud of the progress SIS has made over the past three years in our work on diversity and inclusion and, particularly, in gender equality. Our innovative work in the areas of recruitment, internal appointments, HR policies (especially maternity leave), unconscious bias, talent management and career development have really begun to have an impact as more women move into senior roles. We are committed to doing more to encourage talented women from all backgrounds to join the Service, stay to develop their careers, and progress into our leadership. We are committed to creating a diverse SIS in every respect, as diversity strengthens performance and brings a wider range of talent, skills and approaches to our work. Our goal is a Service that reflects society, where our leadership is representative of the Service as a whole, and where all our staff have the confidence to flourish.

Joint statement: Alex Younger, Chief, and Sir John Sawers, former Chief, SIS

GCHQ's week-long Diversity Festival in May 2014 epitomises our strategic approach on diversity and inclusion. This Department-wide engagement featured prominent women from the fields of business, politics, academia and sport, among them Dame Kelly Holmes and Chief Constable Suzette Davenport, each of whom shared life stories about their own and others' triumphs, challenges and experiences. We are in no doubt that this event, deliberately celebratory in nature, significantly shifted mindsets around an affirmative and exciting diversity narrative. Building on this, we remain committed to attracting and developing a more gender-balanced workforce. Four of the ten Board members are women (two internal and two non-executive Directors).

Establishing a stronger female talent pipeline is a challenging area for us, particularly given the current emphasis on technical recruitment, where we are redoubling our efforts to appeal to the decreasing number of women in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) arena. We have a vibrant and proactive Women's Network with a refreshed strategy, new guidance for the business on recruitment and selection, and we're continually improving our flexible working offer.

We are proud of the progress the Department has made to date in recognising the power of diversity both in style and in approach – an area where improved gender diversity is a powerful distinguishing factor. There is of course much for us to do to translate our intent into the fabric of GCHQ's workforce, but we are confident we are on the right path.

Joint statement: Robert Hannigan, Director, and Sir Iain Lobban, former Director, GCHQ

"If organisations are only recruiting and promoting one sort of person, then they are only going to get one sort of solution to a problem."

Commitment to diversity

11. It is clear that there is support and commitment to diversity at the top of the intelligence Agencies: the Heads of all three Agencies recognise both the cultural and operational advantages of a diverse workforce. We have included the statements that they have made.

12. However, as a 2012 Economist Diversity Summit noted, *"Diversity is counting the numbers, inclusion is making the numbers count".*[9] Whether an organisation has 10% or 90% of women, or few black or minority ethnic staff, may not in itself be a problem; it is how those staff feel. If they consider that the playing field is not level, then there is a problem. What matters is whether the staff at a working level feel valued and included, and whether their experiences demonstrate that the organisation is positively committed to achieving a diverse workforce.

13. Following meetings at each Agency with a variety of staff, we have set out our impressions and recommendations in this Report. In so doing, we note that these were informal meetings where the agenda was very much driven by those who were invited and who chose to attend. Our intention is not to single out any particular Agency, but to raise general issues that might be addressed commonly – and for the common good.

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9   *www.economistinsights.com/businessstrategy/event/diversity-summit-2012*

Key findings

- Recruitment policy and practice

- Maternity-related issues, childcare and flexible working

- Career and promotion prospects

Women in the UK intelligence Agencies today

- Women comprise 37% of the workforce of the three intelligence Agencies and this figure has remained stable over the last few years. This is considerably smaller than the figure of 53% for the Civil Service as a whole.

- Women in the intelligence Agencies comprise disproportionately more of the workforce at junior grades: they only represent 19% of Senior Civil Service (SCS) grades (on average). Again, this figure has not changed over the last few years. MI5 has a slightly greater ratio of women at SCS grades than SIS and GCHQ, with just over a quarter of their senior posts filled by women. Both MI5 and SIS have increased the proportion of women at SCS grades over the last few years. The proportion of women at SCS grades in GCHQ has remained largely stable, although there was a slight reduction in 2014.

- Again, these figures compare poorly with the Civil Service as a whole, where women account for approximately a third of the SCS.

- However, the ratios of women on the Boards of the three intelligence Agencies compare favourably with the Boards of the FTSE100 companies. All the Agency Boards have at least 25% women members and, in the case of GCHQ and SIS, 40% when non-executive Board members are taken into consideration.

- Looking ahead to the future, 38% of new entrants to the three intelligence Agencies are women. This figure does hide some variations between the Agencies: while women make up 44% of new entrants to SIS, they comprise only 29% of new entrants to GCHQ. To put those figures into context, 50% of new entrants to the Civil Service are women and the UK workforce overall is 46% women.

14. We have identified three key areas on which our work is focused. Each area is part of the normal career cycle:

- The first is the **recruitment** process – how women are attracted to apply to join the intelligence Agencies in the first place. A diverse field of applicants is a fundamental first step to achieving a diverse workforce. For the Agencies this has traditionally been a problem, particularly given the technical nature of some of the work; fewer women have traditionally worked in this field.

- Next, we focused on how the Agencies deal with **maternity-related issues, childcare and flexible working arrangements**. There is a real danger that if the Agencies do not do more to help, and encourage, mothers to return to

work, then they will lose an entire sector of their workforce: not only will this result in a 'skewed' balance in the organisation, but they will lose the investment they have made in such individuals.

- Finally, we examined **career and promotion prospects** for women: traditional appraisal systems can carry an inherent bias, but there are other ways in which the Agencies can nurture the talented women they have.

Recruitment policy and practice

15. Over recent years, the Agencies have reviewed their recruitment campaigns in an attempt to increase the diversity of applicants and in particular to target women applicants. This should be commended. Recruiting a diverse workforce is absolutely key: if women are not applying to the Agencies in the first place, then any subsequent actions to increase the gender diversity of organisations cannot succeed.

16. Use of women role models. The use of women role models, and scenarios to which women can relate, is now more prevalent in the Agencies' recruitment literature. MI5 is using what the organisation refers to as 'gender attraction strategies'. For example, to coincide with the launch of its graduate recruitment campaign in 2013, MI5 launched a video on its website which showed the working life of a female intelligence officer with a focus on work–life balance. The 'day in the life' area of the website also includes the (anonymised) career stories of two senior MI5 women. The success of this approach was confirmed by many of the new recruits who attended our meetings, who said that they initially responded to adverts because of the presence of women role models.

17. Use of focus groups. In the case of SIS, the Service ran a series of focus groups that targeted different demographics, including women, and then used the outputs from these to inform and shape a recruitment campaign for Intelligence Officers. A decision to employ alternative communication channels to reach out to potential women recruits was a result of this input.

18. Advice from women's networks. In all three Agencies, staff representing the women's networks were given the opportunity to comment on the recruitment material prior to it going live. We would encourage this, particularly in the early part of any planning for a recruitment campaign. Not only is it a 'free' source of feedback, but their own staff will know best what will attract the kind of people the organisation wants.

19. Reaching out in new ways. There is some recognition from within the Agencies of the need to reach out to women in new ways, and to move away from the more traditional mechanisms for recruitment. We should make clear that it has been a long time

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Best practice case study

'Women are great spies. We save the world and we pick up the children'.
(The Times, 31 March 2014)

As an example of positive advertising to encourage more women to join the intelligence Agencies, the interview with a female member of SIS in March 2014 stands out. It helps to dispel the *"stereotypical macho, lone ranger image of spies as portrayed by James Bond"*.[10] The interviewee points out the qualities required of a good intelligence officer and why women can be very suited to the work.

Recruitment campaigns have to evolve to challenge the norms, particularly those surrounding the seemingly male-dominated intelligence world. We should encourage the use of more positive role models to break down the stereotypes that have been established and reinforced by the entertainment industry.

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10   *The Times, 'Women are great spies. We save the world and we pick up the children',*
     31 March 2014.

since the Agencies practised the traditional 'tap on the shoulder' at university: there is now a far more modern and inclusive approach to 'sourcing' candidates. At SIS, recruitment adverts are placed in lifestyle magazines and on social media, rather than just in the broadsheet newspapers and on the Agency's website. The advantage of this is that they might catch the eye of someone who would not necessarily have thought of a career in intelligence or who might not have gone looking for it.

"Recruitment campaigns have to evolve to challenge the norms, particularly those surrounding the seemingly male-dominated intelligence world."

"I first came across the MI5 advert in the Metro newspaper. The wording made me think that I would have suitable skills for the role, and I also thought that if you are going to be a Security Officer it doesn't get much better than doing the role at MI5! I thought it would be something different from the norm.

I can't remember whether the advert was particularly designed to appeal to women, but then Security Officer isn't a role usually associated with women. The advert appealed because of the way it described the skills required. [NB: There was an image of a female security officer in the advert.]

I wasn't aware of any negative bias in the recruitment process. The website specifically said that they were looking for women and I didn't feel disadvantaged in any way throughout the recruitment process.

Another female security officer joined around the same time as me and there were three other women on my induction course and about six men.

When I joined MI5 my first thought was how friendly everyone was. Throughout my first week everything seemed efficient and well organised. In my section it is predominantly men but I have never felt at a disadvantage because of that. Everyone is really friendly and I love what I do."

Recent female recruit at MI5

20. Outcome. Has this activity had a measurable impact on the numbers of women applying and being successfully recruited?

(i) In terms of applicants:

"There is some recognition from within the Agencies of the need to reach out to women in new ways."

- SIS figures show that they are now attracting more women applicants – albeit that the percentage increase from 2012 to 2014 is a small one.

- We sought to make similar comparisons for applicants to MI5 and GCHQ. However, MI5 record their data by recruitment campaign rather than by year, while GCHQ-recorded data on applicants is incomplete.[11]

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11 *In the case of GCHQ, it is worth noting that the Agency does have data for 2013 and January to September 2014, and this indicates that the number of women applying is rising (25% in 2013 compared with 34% in 2014).*

"We should encourage the use of more positive role models to break down the stereotypes that have been established and reinforced by the entertainment industry."

- It is important that data on applicants is recorded so the Agencies can judge if progress is being made in attracting women to apply. If the Agencies do not have the data, they cannot solve the problem.

(ii) In terms of how this translates into the number of women actually recruited:

- The statistics indicate that this is growing in overall terms, and as a percentage of the total workforce, at a steady rate.

- Last year more than 40% of recruits to SIS and MI5 were women. In the case of MI5 the increase was significant (from 29% in 2010 to 41% in 2014).

- In addition, the statistics show that proportionately those women who did apply did slightly better through the recruitment process than their male equivalents. In SIS, for instance, while 36% of those who applied were women, 44% of those who were eventually employed were women.

Women applicants and recruits to the intelligence Agencies

	2012	2014
% of applicants to **SIS** who were women	34%	36%
% of actual recruits to **SIS** who were women	42%	44%
	2010	**2014**
% of applicants to **MI5** who were women	x	x
% of actual recruits to **MI5** who were women	29%	41%
	2010	**2013**
% of applicants to **GCHQ** who were women	x	25%
% of actual recruits to **GCHQ** who were women	x	29%

x = data not available. In addition, dates may vary due to lack of comparable data.

While it may be too early to judge the effects of the most recent recruitment campaigns, we would expect these rises to continue. Certainly MI5 has set challenging targets and its Board is now accountable for reaching these.
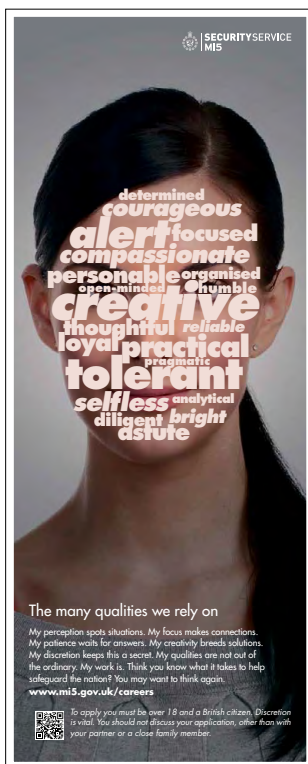
MI5 job advert

"… the Agencies have reviewed their recruitment campaigns in an attempt to increase the diversity of applicants and in particular to target women applicants. This should be commended."

"A job at SIS had always been in the back of my mind, and I was attracted by the advert. I don't remember the advert specifically referring to the recruitment of women, but it did emphasise the importance of a diverse workforce.

During the recruitment process, I was interviewed by both men and women for the first two interviews and had a mix of both during the assessment centre. I never felt that my gender was important during this process. My vetting officer was a woman, which I was pleased about as it made it easier to talk in detail about personal aspects of my life.

Although there had been more men than women on my assessment centre, I assumed that there would be more of a balance in my actual intake. I was thus surprised to find on my first day that, out of 12 recruits due to start intelligence officer training, only three of us were women. Not only that, but all of us (men and women) fit into the category of 'white and middle-class', which compounded a feeling that the organisation was a long way off from being the diverse employer it desired to be in the advert I had initially seen.

In terms of the perception that the organisational culture is male-dominated, I think that this is the case in some respects but not in others. I was told once during training that I could have used my 'womanly charms' to build rapport by a role player, which I found very frustrating as I wondered what my male colleagues did to build rapport without such charms. I also noticed that all of the senior colleagues who came to talk to us were male, except in HR. This disparity is less obvious in my current day-to-day job, as there are many women in my team and in the office as a whole."

Recent female recruit at SIS

21. Recruitment to technical and specialised areas. Whilst there is progress overall, some areas are proving more difficult to crack. All the Agencies have reported problems recruiting women to more technical and specialised areas. At GCHQ, where these skills are particularly necessary, there remains concern that there has been no real increase in the diversity of recruits. This has prompted a comprehensive review of the end-to-end process to identify where effort is needed to make the step change improvement to which GCHQ is committed.

22. We recognise that technical and specialised skills are in short supply in the UK and are highly prized by the private sector. Furthermore, this is an area which is typically under-represented in the female student population. GCHQ – who face this problem to a greater extent due to the nature of their work – have therefore sought to broaden the range and scope of their recruitment.

Attracting young women

In addition to the valuable programmes already being run, there may be other routes worth exploring to address the lack of gender diversity in the technical and specialist talent pool. For example:

1. setting up a volunteers programme to build links with schools – for example, running an after school technology club for girls;

2. investing in a technology summer camp for female school-age students; and

3. establishing a mentoring scheme to encourage female undergraduate students to apply. Recent entrants could be asked to mentor a student over a ten-month period, and run a 'development centre' prior to the application period.

"While I don't think there were any overt gender biases in the application process (in my case at least), we are perhaps guilty of recruiting a 'standard' sort of person with a defined set of skills (who are more likely to be men), rather than taking more risks and recruiting from a wider range of backgrounds."

Recent female recruit at GCHQ

23. Education outreach. GCHQ has an extensive education outreach programme designed to promote engineering careers to young people. GCHQ has taken a long-term approach to broadening the talent pool, including initiatives designed to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects in schools and to identify and nurture young talent. We urge GCHQ to ensure that these activities encourage girls to engage at an early age, in order to overcome damaging perceptions that these are not subjects they might be interested in.

"I first heard about GCHQ's mathematician summer scheme through an email that had been sent into our university's maths department, which was then forwarded to me. I hadn't heard of GCHQ prior to this, but the opportunity to come here for the summer, learn more maths and use it in an applied way really appealed to me.

I don't believe there were any biases in the recruitment process as there were no advertisements; the email had come directly to my university therefore I believed it to be an opportunity for me to apply. Gender biases were not something that I considered – there were four females out of a total of ten recruited onto the scheme.

The building itself is awe-inspiring and the work interesting and varied. The fact that I am able to continue to expand my knowledge in a subject area I enjoy and apply such skills to real world tasks is the reason why at the end of my summer placement, when the opportunity to apply for a full-time role came up, I did not hesitate to apply. Again there was no advertisement, so I cannot comment on any gender biases or female role models.

The department I work within is male-dominated, however I don't feel there is a biased nature to the culture of the organisation. I have often been the only female in a meeting, but personally, this has never concerned me or been an issue. I was one of around 40–50 new entrants in October 2013, of whom a number of us were female – and four out of a total of 14 recruited for maths jobs were female."

Recent female recruit at GCHQ

24. We were also particularly interested in the GCHQ-led Intelligence Agency Higher Apprenticeship Scheme, launched in September 2012. This offers its applicants the opportunity to continue their academic study whilst earning a salary. This scheme – which all three Agencies participate in – will help to diversify the Agencies' workforce by providing employment opportunities to young people from a range

of backgrounds. Only one apprentice in the 2013 intake of 18 was female, so we are pleased to hear that, of the 71 applicants who were offered places for the 2014 scheme, 11 were women. We hope to see this upward trend continuing.

25. By contrast, MI5 has found difficulties reaching out into education, as they stated in written evidence they provided in September 2013: "*We have explored the feasibility of forging links with schools or with undergraduate students, but cover and security issues have proved intractable.*" We do not dismiss the security concerns that must govern the Agencies' work. We note that MI5 face different security issues from GCHQ which make outreach programmes more complicated. We encourage MI5 to continue to strive for innovative solutions.

Recruitment – how are the Agencies doing?

26. Undoubtedly, the failure to recruit a fully representative workforce, perpetuating the imbalance for the future, also sends the wrong message both inside and outside the organisation about its culture and values. Clearly, all three Agencies are making concerted efforts to address this, and these have made some impact as the numbers of women recruited are rising. It is encouraging to hear of reviews of recruitment campaigns and the involvement of focus groups in recruitment to encourage greater diversity of applicants.

> "We urge the Agencies to continue to explore more creative approaches to accelerate the pace of change and in the longer term develop a workforce that better represents the community it serves and offers it the broad range of views it needs."

27. The use of women role models, training for Recruiting Officers (such as 'unconscious bias' training) and the use of alternative communication channels are all ways of increasing the gender diversity of recruits. We urge the Agencies to continue to explore more creative approaches to accelerate the pace of change and in the longer term develop a workforce that better represents the community it serves and offers it the broad range of views it needs.

28. As a general point, we cannot emphasise strongly enough that professional advice should always be sought on how women perceive advertisements (MI5 has made it clear that they always do this). For example, whilst it might be thought sensible to place an advert saying 'we want the best', this approach may deter a more self-effacing applicant and evidence shows that women are more likely to be just that.

> "The Agencies need to broaden the range and scope of more of their recruitment campaigns to appeal to middle-aged and/or mid-career women, non-graduates and trainees."

29. If there was one thing the Agencies could do better, we would suggest a broadening of the range and scope of their recruitment. In some areas there is an almost total focus on graduates. While this is understandable in some respects, we wonder if it is rather limiting. When it comes to graduates, everyone is fishing in the same pool – and not just the public sector. The private sector might not be able to offer the challenge, fascination and reward of a job in the Agencies, but it can offer significantly better salaries. If the Agencies are serious about increasing the diversity of their organisations then there are other, well-stocked pools to fish in. The Agencies need to broaden the range and scope of more of their recruitment campaigns to appeal to middle-aged and/or mid-career women, non-graduates and trainees. The feedback we received from women at GCHQ, and to a lesser

> "If the Agencies are serious about increasing the diversity of their organisations then there are other, well-stocked [recruitment] pools to fish in."

extent from MI5, suggested that recruitment was too focused on graduates and educational qualifications at the expense of middle-aged applicants with more life experience, such as women restarting their careers after a number of years raising children.

Maternity-related issues, childcare and flexible working

30. From talking to staff it is clear that maternity-related provision has been an area that in the past received relatively little attention from the Agencies and, as a consequence, the loyalty and morale of those women who took time away from work to have children suffered. A lot of progress has been made in recent years – there have been a number of reviews and initiatives that have been instigated by the Agencies in an attempt to overcome some of these issues, and the situation is much better than it was. From talking to staff it was clear that those with more recent experience of maternity-related issues are more satisfied than their predecessors.

> *"I am due to start a second period of maternity leave shortly. I've already noticed a number of improvements. In particular: there is now a dedicated team handling maternity leave in HR which should make maintaining contact a bit easier; all vacancies are now advertised, and women are now encouraged to apply for a role on return, which will hopefully give me a bit more control over my career; and those on maternity leave are now able to retain their office passes and access to IT, which should make coming into the office to apply for jobs more straightforward."*
>
> Working mother at MI5

31. However, it was still an area where we heard a number of criticisms. These included:

- not having sufficient information before taking maternity leave and feeling isolated when on maternity leave (in one Agency, an individual who got so frustrated with the lack of information created a wiki page with a checklist for others in the same situation);

- on returning to work, there is an assumption that new mothers would take up business support functions, such as Human Resources (HR) or administration, rather than continue in operational roles; and

- no support when returning to work: having to make all the arrangements themselves through their own networks of friends and colleagues.

We have examined each of these areas.

32. Keeping in touch. Continuous engagement before and during maternity leave is vital. All the Agencies operate a 'Keeping in Touch'

policy for those on maternity leave. While this is to be commended, it is sometimes not carried through in practice. Women need to be encouraged to maintain connections with the working environment, and equally line managers and HR staff need to stay in touch with staff. A buddy-type or mentoring/coaching system is useful in this regard and we note that these initiatives are beginning to develop in the Agencies. 'Keeping in Touch' days take place and should be occurring regularly. One new initiative was the first Maternity, Paternity and Adoption (MPA) event which MI5 hosted in April 2014, at which 25 staff currently on MPA leave were offered advice on MPA-related issues.

> *"I am a manager of a small team working on operations. When I fell pregnant, I arranged that I would take six months' maternity leave and return to the same post. The information available from HR on the process was reasonably detailed and I benefited from a Wiki page that previous maternity leavers had set up which was full of useful information. I received confirmation from HR about my maternity leave but no other contact. My line manager was pleased for me and supportive. However, getting performance management cover for my team proved difficult and was a source of stress.*
>
> *During the leave, I had a phone call from HR at the mid-way point but no other contact from work, managers or colleagues. After contacting my work area myself, my line manager came to visit me. I decided to take an extra month of leave on statutory maternity pay and this was organised reasonably easily. I visited the office twice for short 'Keeping in Touch' days."*
>
> Working mother at GCHQ

"Continuous engagement before and during maternity leave is vital."

33. One aspect of 'Keeping in Touch' that staff have raised with us has been the limitations that the need for security places on access to premises. We were told that at least one Agency removes security passes from its staff when they go on maternity leave. While this is not an impossible obstacle to overcome, it does deter engagement and should be re-examined. We note that the 2013 study on the CIA also found that security and IT checkout procedures severed important connections with those individuals.[12]

34. Returning to work. One of the key issues is what happens to women when they want to return to work. Many women wish to return after maternity leave, but are faced with some stark choices. Some of those who attended our meetings felt strongly that the organisation wanted women to return to corporate roles, such as HR, on the basis that they would want part-time and UK-based employment and could not therefore fill a frontline operational role. We have been told by MI5 and SIS that they have now adopted clear policies that women can return to their previous roles. However, whilst senior management regard this as explicit and well-advertised,

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12 'Women in Leadership', CIA Director's Advisory Group.

it is clear from our conversations that there is still a misunderstanding amongst staff, and further publicity is therefore needed.

"However, once in the office, there were implied restrictions on what jobs you could do as a working mother – often from men who were assuming they were being helpful, along the lines of: 'Oh you wouldn't want to do that job, there's too much travel for a mum'. How one resolves one's childcare arrangements is a very personal decision, based on both finances and on parenting choices, so I found these assumptions (largely made by husbands with stay-at-home wives) galling. You are much less likely to get a male manager saying that now. For practical childcare reasons, and through personal choice, we still don't have loads of mothers of small children hopping on planes to meet agents, or running stations, but we have enough women who have simply scoffed at the idea that they might not be able to do something, and just done it anyway, to have disproved some largely unspoken prejudices about the operational roles of women, and of mothers in particular."

Working mother at SIS

35. There has been some work by the intelligence Agencies to examine how to accommodate the wishes of the returnee against the needs of the organisation. At least one Agency now ensures that posts are held open for returnees. There are ways in which a woman on maternity leave can maintain her skills during leave to ease the difficulty in returning to the same post. For instance, staff in all of the Agencies receive up to ten paid days to maintain their skills during maternity leave. Returning to the role they left, if that is what they want, should be standard practice.

"I was fortunate to arrange to return to the post I held before I went on maternity leave, which I believe is unusual practice. In one sense, it was not the best thing for my career (another post would have given me broader experience). However, what I have gained has probably offset this. I was able to return to a frontline post, yet work part-time. I still receive encouragement to take on challenging job objectives 'despite' working part-time. The post is demanding (including lots of travel) which I am willing to do due to the support I have received from my team."

Working mother at GCHQ

"Flexible working hours can be a make-or-break issue for those with childcare responsibilities."

36. **Childcare support.** All the Agencies offer some financial help with childcare. In the case of SIS, this is an allowance to help with the cost of childcare and a scheme through which parents can purchase tax-free vouchers for childcare. Whilst there is a broadly positive view of the allowances and schemes from staff at the Agencies, there was also feedback from some individuals that the allowance was too small considering the growing cost of childcare, especially in London, and that having a digital version of the childcare vouchers would be more

> "There seems to be some inconsistency in the way managers in the UK Agencies are dealing with flexible working policies."

usable. Nursery provision is an area that may need attention: none of the Agencies currently have on-site nurseries and places at other Government-run nurseries are generally in short supply.

> *"The cost of childcare is a difficult external issue and not one the Service can easily resolve. Being a case officer based in London requires going abroad to meet agents – it is the definition of the job, and there is not much the office can do to change this. Support from other halves for childcare, therefore, is crucial to the careers of SIS officers if they need to travel, or to work long hours in London during a crisis. It is a huge financial burden that SIS officers – and all civil servants – struggle to cope with, but it is the finances, not any cultural issues posed by SIS, that are most important here. Parents who need to leave to meet nursery pick-up times are generally able to walk out of the door when they need to."*
>
> Working mother at SIS

37. Flexible working arrangements. Flexible working hours can be a make-or-break issue for those with childcare responsibilities. We recognise that working from home is not a viable solution, given the security constraints (although this should be revisited as circumstances can change). However, we believe it is essential that requests for flexible working hours are taken seriously and the wishes of staff are accommodated as far as possible.

> *"I can't work from home. I can see that there are real barriers in terms of securing our information, but I would really like to be able to do this at least one day a week. This issue does make me think that I might leave the Service, because most other employers encourage this style of working and it really helps working parents.*
>
> *But I have had a really good experience in terms of being able to work the hours I wanted and people supporting my 'hard stop' at the end of the day. I feel that the Office is one of the better employers out there in actually making part-time jobs available, rather than just saying they will. Certainly amongst my peers I have been fairly unique in the flexibility my employer has shown."*
>
> Working mother at SIS

SIS

Flexible working arrangements in the Agencies (2013/14)

SIS	24% of female staff work flexible hours compared with 6% of male staff.
MI5	28.6% of female staff work part-time or compressed hours.
GCHQ	35% of female staff work part-time compared with 4% of male staff.
Cabinet Office	11.4% of female staff work part-time compared with 1% of male staff.
Civil Service	38% of female civil servants work part-time compared with 8% of male civil servants.

38. Is it offered? The Agencies all have policies that support flexible working arrangements. Many other major employers outside the Civil Service have embraced flexible working as a way of retaining talent. At the UK–Swedish biopharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, an 'if not, why not?' approach has been taken to requests for flexible working where the assumption is that it is a good thing and is possible. The Royal Bank of Scotland has a 'work shaped around you' approach, called 'RBS choice', to enable flexible working.[13]

39. Do staff feel they can ask for flexible working hours? In some areas there remains a perception issue and individuals are reluctant to ask for flexible working in case in some way the individual might be considered to be letting the team and colleagues down, and it might reflect badly on them. There was some concern that people working part-time or flexible hours were not treated on a par with full-time colleagues, especially with regards to appraisals. It is revealing that, in an online survey by HayGroup, over 45% of 791 members of the SCS believed that you could not use flexible working arrangements without in some way harming your career.[14] The 2013 'Women in Leadership' report, which examines career progression of women in the CIA, highlights the possible stigma associated with anybody seeking flexible working arrangements. It also highlights the views from staff within the CIA that part-time work was seen by the Agency as "*not meaningful and ancillary to the mission*". The report recommends that the CIA must increase workplace flexibility.[15]

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13 'Women in Whitehall', produced for the Cabinet Office by the HayGroup, May 2014. Available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-in-whitehall-culture-leadership-talent

14 ibid.

15 'Women in Leadership', CIA Director's Advisory Group.

40. What is the view from managers? There seems to be some inconsistency in the way managers in the UK Agencies are dealing with flexible working policies. Many managers were quite discouraging to their staff working flexible hours as they were worried about the effect on their business area. In operational teams, there may be a conflict of interest but this is certainly not insurmountable and we have heard from operational team leaders who have said that they have a number of part-time individuals working for them without any loss of productivity. In one Agency, the HR Director told us that it was important that staff *"gently challenge working hours and job design with their managers"*. However, that does not take into account that it is often difficult, particularly for junior members of staff, to do this.

41. Training. Training is a particular concern. Many courses are 9 to 5 and/or residential.

> *"However, what did not come across clearly during recruitment was how inflexible and challenging the training period was, involving long hours in London as well as weeks away from home. The training team were understanding of my circumstances, and I never lacked support from them, but without immense effort from my family during this time, I would not have been able to complete the training."*
>
> New recruit and working mother at SIS

"The structure of training courses is generally too inflexible."

The structure of training courses is generally too inflexible: if women with childcare responsibilities are excluded from training courses, then they will be penalised in terms of promotion and progression. So this is an area that must be addressed. We are encouraged to hear that some courses at SIS are now available on a more modular, flexible basis but will want to see evidence of this happening more widely.

So what are the big issues?

42. Risk of 'talent drain'. While there has clearly been some progress in this area and we have received some positive feedback from women who have been on maternity leave more recently, we remain concerned at the potential for loss of significant talent if women do not return to work following maternity leave, or return to areas where their skills are not fully utilised. This may result from a lack of support before, during and after maternity leave, a lack of opportunities on return or a lack of flexibility by employers to accommodate changes in individuals' circumstances.

"While there has clearly been some progress in this area... we remain concerned at the potential for loss of significant talent if women do not return to work following maternity leave, or return to areas where their skills are not fully utilised."

43. Exclusion from operational roles. From our discussions with staff at the Agencies, it is clear that the primary barriers to women returning to operational roles following maternity leave are cultural. This needs to change. Managers should be able to adapt their teams to accommodate those with childcare responsibilities. Whilst we do not ignore the potential additional cost and impact on output in the short term that this may involve, we consider that these factors are easily

> "... the primary barriers to women returning to operational roles following maternity leave are cultural."

> "It is essential that the Agencies follow through on some of the policies and guidance on maternity issues that they have set."

outweighed by the longer-term rewards for the Agencies. Operational work is viewed by many as career-enhancing. By excluding those with childcare responsibilities the Agencies are effectively making it much more difficult for those individuals to demonstrate their skills in a pressurised frontline environment and ultimately to progress their careers. One way to address this is through further management training – particularly at the key middle management level, which we address later in this Report – in order to embed the message that operational roles are an option for women with children.

44. Implementation of policies on maternity. It is essential that the Agencies follow through on some of the policies and guidance on maternity issues that they have set. Whilst these are published, there is clearly a gap in terms of awareness: more therefore needs to be done to increase the visibility of the policies and guidance. There also needs to be consistency within each organisation in the way that the policies are applied. While they are on maternity leave, women must feel connected to the organisation and aware of opportunities upon their return. We encourage the use of 'Keeping in Touch' sessions and a mentoring/buddy system and these should be extended where possible. We would also urge the Agencies to make more use of job-sharing registers in order that individuals can seek others who might wish to share a full-time role: it is the role of HR to help staff and this is an area in which they should be doing so. We understand that these registers do exist in the Agencies but, in at least one Agency, staff are often not aware of the initiatives and management have failed to publicise them appropriately. More steps should be taken to make staff aware of these policies.

45. Countering the negative perceptions of flexible working. It is important to counter the often negative perceptions around flexible working to ensure that all staff are valued regardless of their personal circumstances. Further work also needs to be done to counter the perception that flexible working and operational roles are not compatible. We urge the Agencies to review the structure of training courses so as not to disadvantage those with flexible working arrangements and unfairly exclude a valuable sector of their workforce.

> *"When I had children I felt fully supported by colleagues and the organisation in returning to work after maternity leave. It did, however, take me some time to settle into being a part-time employee, particularly in the early years. Much of that was about my own personal adjustment to new responsibilities and different priorities. Part of it also reflects the organisation at the turn of the millennium, where flexible working, though long-established, was not yet widespread, technology was less advanced and there was a greater expectation (from me and the organisation) that part-time working patterns would necessitate different, less frontline, roles. MI5 always made it very clear to me that there would be a role for me, at my senior grade, and took time to identify roles to make the most of my skills and experience and to help develop me further."*
>
> Senior woman at MI5

Changing appraisal and promotion systems in the Agencies

Promotion to all grades was previously conducted through promotion boards, which took the form of a paper-based exercise. Only for the most senior roles was this followed by a formal interview with a board. The board would have access only to a written promotion application and to the recent performance appraisals written by the individual's line managers.

In terms of the 'new' systems, each Agency has slightly different processes, but they all involve:

- greater focus on evaluating performance against specific competencies;

- assessment centre gateways for key grades where there is a major change in the level of responsibility between the two. These are designed to ensure a more transparent and objective process, based on individuals meeting the required competencies at the higher grade. Assessment centres test these competencies through interviews, written tests and team/individual exercises, normally over the course of one or two days; and

- promotion to specific positions as and when vacancies arise (rather than via large, annual, grade-based promotion exercises).

Career and promotion prospects

46. Processes and mechanisms. We were particularly concerned following our first round of meetings with staff from the Agencies, during which we heard that the current appraisal system was seen as a barrier to progress for women. A culture of 'serving your time' was still seen to be operating which often hinders women to a greater extent, in particular when women have taken time out from work to have and bring up children, and the system of promotion boards was seen as biased against women.

47. A year on, attitudes towards promotion prospects for women seem slightly more positive. This may be partly as a result of some of the Agencies moving from promotion boards to assessment centres. At MI5, we were told that more women had now been promoted as a result of this new process.

"Promotion at MI5 is based on merit. The system recently changed from an entirely paper-based exercise to a competency-based interview for a specific role, with formal assessment centres at key promotion points. I believe this system is a better way to test a broad range of skills, rather than favouring those who write well (but may not otherwise be great communicators). The appraisal process is fair and transparent; I have not experienced gender bias. However, it is just one means of staff development. I have always found leaders in MI5 to be very receptive to a request for constructive feedback at any time of the reporting year. I try and do the same with my team."

Senior woman at MI5

48. In principle, assessment centres which reach an objective assessment of an individual's readiness for promotion are appealing. However, the policy regarding promotion appears to be in flux across the Agencies, with the introduction of assessment centres for some grades and a move to promotion to post for others. While we are confident that the intention is to create a fair, transparent and flexible approach, it remains unclear whether this will be achieved across the board.

"I think women in the Service still face an uphill battle to advance their careers into senior management. The introduction of a new promotion process has, however, transformed the ability of women to opt for and secure promotion. We are only 2.5 years into this and already know that when women do apply for promotions they are more successful than men in securing them. The task for the leadership now is to increase the number of women applying for promotion."

Senior woman at SIS

"A culture of 'serving your time' was still seen to be operating."

"Throughout my career I have never experienced any issues around my gender. My managers (men and women) have always encouraged me to stretch myself, take on new challenges and to seek promotion and I have benefited from formal and informal mentoring at various points in my career and particularly since becoming a senior manager. I have never felt disadvantaged compared to male colleagues. We keep a watchful eye on whether our promotion processes are favouring people on gender grounds. I haven't found that to be the case for me or my peers, but there is always potential for unconscious bias to come in and we can't be complacent. I use moderation processes to check for gender bias in my own teams on performance grades and promotion, and am confident that my managers are doing the same when considering my own talent review. My particular concern is that our system may favour loud confident people rather than those who are quieter, more reflective and that this will not lead to a diverse workforce in the future. Gender could be a factor in that too."

Senior woman at MI5

"A year on, attitudes towards promotion prospects for women seem slightly more positive."

49. Building women's ambition. If the new processes are resulting in more women being promoted, then that is very encouraging. However, just as with recruitment, you have to get women to apply in the first place. Women often lack the self-confidence to push themselves forward – this is self-limiting. Women need more encouragement from managers and mentors to set ambitious goals and to realise them.

"The nature of promotion in the Department is that it is driven by the ambition of the individual and their own assessment of their readiness to progress. My personal experience is, it takes women longer to build the confidence required and they need greater encouragement than their male counterparts to put themselves forward. I believe these are cultural issues rather than a bias built into the Department's processes and policies."

Senior woman at GCHQ

"Women can be their own worst enemy by self-limiting and self-censoring. I still consciously have to challenge myself and check that I'm not holding myself back unnecessarily. In recent years, with the support of, and advice from both male and female senior officers (some female officers have by now made it to senior positions in SIS) I have been able to progress to senior overseas operational positions."

Senior woman at SIS

50. In SIS, 'Leadership Learning Sets' were introduced in 2011 to examine the progression of women in the organisation and to make recommendations to the Board. The feedback we have received indicates that they have played a positive role in raising the ambition of women. However, as we explore later in this section, there is much more that can be done.

> "Changes in the promotion processes, including a move towards assessment centres, appear to have had a real impact on the way women feel about their prospects within the organisation; this is therefore a very positive step."

> *"We have no formal mentoring, sponsoring or coaching system for women. We have only the informal, but positively received Leadership Learning Sets. The women I have mentored have all had to work on their confidence in themselves, thinking more strategically, thinking more about their own leadership style and behaviour, and thinking more about how they present their evidence. However, all the women I have mentored for promotion have secured it, suggesting women at these grades do benefit from senior officer involvement and encouragement."*
>
> Senior woman at SIS

Next steps

51. 360 degrees? Changes in the promotion processes, including a move towards assessment centres, appear to have had a real impact on the way women feel about their prospects within the organisation; this is therefore a very positive step. But there is more that could be done to build on the assessment centres. Most of those we spoke to referred to 360 degree appraisal. This is a system whereby individuals can obtain feedback on their performance from others outside of their line management chain, such as customers or colleagues. While all three Agencies say that 360 degree appraisals are already widely used, we would be in favour of this being introduced across the board as it provides a more rounded assessment of an individual and can help to counter any potential bias from an unsupportive manager.

52. Career management. In terms of central processes, we also believe that the decentralising of career management – whereby HR delegated responsibility to individuals to manage their own careers – has had an adverse impact on women. If women are less likely to put themselves forward for promotion boards, or for an assessment centre, then some form of centralised career management, whereby promotion is suggested to them, and they are encouraged to apply, is necessary. We would strongly encourage the Agencies to consider reinstating such central support.

53. There are other approaches, such as talent management and mentoring/sponsorship, which can help to build the confidence of women in their abilities and promotion prospects, and we would encourage their use too:

(i) **Talent management** – a system to help the early identification of individuals who have the potential to become successful leaders and to develop that talent through tailored programmes.

(ii) **Mentoring/sponsorship** – a way of monitoring and encouraging future leaders through guidance and advice to progress their careers with a view to the long term. Senior individuals will mentor a number of more junior staff and in so doing help to share best practice.

> "It is clear that all the Agencies are making progress on gender diversity, and the benefits of this should start to be seen on both operational and corporate effectiveness."

54. We are aware that some of these ideas have been taken forward to a greater or lesser extent within some of the organisations (for example, SIS has established a talent management system), but this is not consistent, and in most cases appears targeted at more senior grades at the expense of those in junior grades. Mentoring and sponsorship in particular appear to be informal, and are not recognised as part of the appraisal system. We would agree with the May 2014 HayGroup report 'Women in Whitehall', which examines blockages preventing talented women from succeeding in the SCS, which states that *"talent governance needs more energy, more objective data, more focus"*.[16] Developing a corporate talent management strategy was one of the key recommendations of the 2013 report on women in the CIA, together with promoting sponsorship, which it considered 'critical' for high-performing individuals who wanted to reach the senior ranks.[17]

55. The Civil Service has recently published its Talent Action Plan, which seeks to *"ensure that every talented, committed and hardworking person has the opportunity to rise to the top, whatever their background and whoever they are"*.[18] We commend this plan and many of its more concrete recommendations, in particular ensuring all-male selection panels and all-male shortlists for recruitment into the SCS are by exception only. We believe this will improve diversity and would support its implementation in the intelligence Agencies.

> *"Latterly, there has been a much more visible focus on difference and inclusion here. There are more conversations that seek to answer the question, 'Where are all the senior women?' and I think we are becoming more conscious organisationally of potential bias in our processes and what we need to do to be alert to those. Personally, I'm keen to help women in the department – with the capability, if not overt ambition – to reach their full potential. I mentor three women and I sponsor a number of other females who will benefit from stretching assignments to build their confidence and reputation."*
>
> Senior woman at GCHQ

56. As with all change, as new processes are introduced, it is essential that the Agencies make a concerted effort to communicate the changes to staff, linking them to diversity objectives and highlighting the expected benefits of a transparent process with fair outcomes. It is the cultural aspects, as we explore further in our conclusion, that are the key to success.

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16 *'Women in Whitehall', HayGroup, May 2014.*
17 *'Women in Leadership', CIA Director's Advisory Group.*
18 *Civil Service Talent Action Plan, 5 September 2014. Available at www.gov.uk/ government/publications/talent-action-plan-removing-the-barriers-to-success*

Conclusions

- Changing the culture

57. It is clear that all the Agencies are making progress on gender diversity, and the benefits of this should start to be seen on both operational and corporate effectiveness. It is equally clear that the problems faced by each organisation are nuanced and therefore a 'one size fits all' approach is unlikely to be effective. Greater collaboration on diversity between the Agencies, with their partner Agencies around the world, and possibly private industry, would no doubt bring benefits.

Cross-fertilisation: it's not just the UK

We are aware that there are regular cross-Agency meetings that take place at different levels of the organisations. While we commend the Agencies for these, we also believe that more can be made of them. While we would encourage the sharing of best practice so that the Agencies can learn lessons from each other, particularly on ways of tackling cultural issues, there will be opportunities to burden-share, for instance on policies and strategies. We would strongly urge that a more formal approach is taken to this work under the direction of a cross-Agency, top-level 'diversity taskforce', which would include the Board-level Diversity Champions.

We are aware that one of the barriers to greater collaborative working that is often cited is that the three Agencies are quite different in terms of the work they do and the skills they value. If they cannot look to each other, then the answer is to look elsewhere. The UK Agencies have strong working relationships with their counterparts in a number of countries – particularly the US. Where there are shared values and a close working relationship, there should be no reason why that cannot extend to workforce issues as well as operational issues. Tackling gender diversity is not something that the UK needs to do in isolation: we are sure we can learn from the approaches and initiatives of our allies.

Changing the culture

58. One of the key themes that recurred during our visits to the Agencies is the extent that cultural and behavioural issues can prevent progress on diversity issues. The culture of an organisation cuts across all of those key points in the career cycle that we have raised in this Report. Whilst the Agencies have introduced a number of processes and mechanisms to deal with diversity issues, changing the culture is the one area that is most difficult to articulate and, crucially, to take action on.

59. Even during our more recent visits, we sensed that leadership values are only slowly moving with the times and the value of a more consultative, collaborative approach is not always recognised. We are very concerned that this maintains an 'alpha male' management culture that rewards those who speak the loudest, or are aggressive in pursuing their career (and of course this can discriminate against less aggressive men as well as women). One of the key conclusions of the HayGroup 'Women in Whitehall' report is that the culture and

"... while the top and bottom of the organisation understand and are committed to diversity, there is a tier at middle management level... that seems to have a very traditional male mentality and outlook."

leadership climate prevent talented women from progressing into more senior roles. The report also highlights examples in parts of government in New Zealand and Australia where studies have found that the greatest blockages to increasing gender diversity were cultural and behavioural issues. In the case of the Australian Treasury, gender diversity initiatives alone were not sufficient to increase diversity; cultural issues had to be tackled too.

"Having entered a male-dominated workplace where there are very few female role models, women often feel intimidated or encounter unconscious bias. The robust humour which naturally develops in an all-male environment can be alien and off-putting to many women. The leadership behaviours, which many successful men demonstrate in an engineering environment, can be interpreted as very robust and unfeminine – leading to a reluctance in women to volunteer for leadership positions."

Senior woman at GCHQ

Best practice case study: Diversity Champions – are they working?

Diversity Champions have been established at Board level in each of the Agencies. These individuals are the diversity leads and have a key role in driving forward the diversity agenda. They ensure the importance of diversity is well understood and emphasised at every level of the organisation, and that guidelines for fair treatment are adhered to. It is a vital leadership role and we believe it should be strengthened. Taking on this role should ensure greater kudos and stature, ideally by granting the Champions regular one-to-one personal meetings with the heads of the Agencies to update them on progress. This role should be a high-status addition to a member of staff's career. Even if these individuals are very active 'behind the scenes', they need to be visible too.

"… there still appears to be a sense of 'this is the way it has always been done'."

60. Middle management. One of the messages that came out most strongly in our first meetings at the Agencies was that while the top and bottom of the organisation understand and are committed to diversity, there is a tier at middle management level (referred to at one of our meetings at SIS as *"the permafrost"*) that seems to have a very traditional male mentality and outlook.

61. In terms of promoting gender diversity, and ensuring that all staff are aware of the positive impact a more diverse workforce will have on the organisation's ability to deliver its business objectives (as opposed to being just a tick-box exercise), it is the middle management level at which there is a danger that the message is not getting through. This tends to be the level where individuals have been in the organisation for a while and change of any kind can be slower than at other levels. However, it is this level in an organisation where change is most important, as it is the staff here who are most visible to those lower down the organisation and who tend to set the 'tone'.

62. There does not appear to be as clear an understanding at this level of the benefits to the intelligence Agencies of a diverse workforce: rather, there still appears to be a sense of 'this is the way it has always been done'. Whilst those at the top of the organisation may be personally committed to encouraging diversity, it is by managing and tackling the behaviour of those at the middle management level that they can best demonstrate that commitment.

63. It is not clear to the members of the intelligence Agencies who we spoke to how this is being tackled. Whilst diversity strategies/policies have been produced and mechanisms (Diversity Champions, women's networks, etc.) have been established, changing how people think and how they work is much more difficult. We recognise that these things cannot be changed overnight, but senior leaders must do more to encourage the *"slow melt of the permafrost"* (as it was expressed to us).

What can be done?

64. Embracing diversity at Board level, empowering junior staff to address diversity issues and striving to recruit from the largest possible talent pool are all important steps, but there needs to be a focus on identifying and tackling the barriers that can exist at middle management level, which will inevitably create glass ceilings and an unsupportive team ethos. We have encouraged the use of Diversity Champions at Board level and while these have been established and the individuals are known, we have not been convinced that they are visibly active on a regular basis in the Agencies.

65. Compulsory diversity training for all middle managers would be a step in the right direction. We noted in particular the former Director General of MI5's evidence that he and all his Management Board had – visibly – taken the time to attend a new diversity training course on the risk of unconscious bias: such leadership commitment is crucial.

66. We are encouraged by efforts in GCHQ and MI5 to reach all parts of the organisation, including middle management. The GCHQ Diversity Festival in May 2014 raised awareness and celebrated diversity in its broadest sense; linking greater diversity to business success is to be commended. However, we note that staff have said that it is those individuals who do not engage in diversity events who are exactly the ones in more need of a change of behaviour.

67. Breaking down barriers through greater contact between staff and management can also help to change attitudes and behaviours towards diversity. We note that at MI5, lunchtime lectures and staff–management meetings with the Director General and members of the Executive Board have been organised by the women's network. We would encourage these as a useful forum in providing advice and sharing experiences.

"Building and sustaining more women's networks to counteract the influence of traditional male networks would allow women from across the organisations to come together and share experiences."

68. Building and sustaining more women's networks to counteract the influence of traditional male networks would allow women from across the organisations to come together and share experiences. It is recognised in the recently published Civil Service Talent Action Plan that increasing opportunities for networking can help talented individuals in under-represented groups reach their potential. The plan envisages roles for Diversity Champions to help to establish networks, and members of the SCS in under-represented groups to lead the networks. If these networks are officially sanctioned, organisations could make use of them to examine particular issues and to make recommendations. In order to change attitudes and behaviours, we believe that it is important that these networks should include both female and male middle managers.

MI5
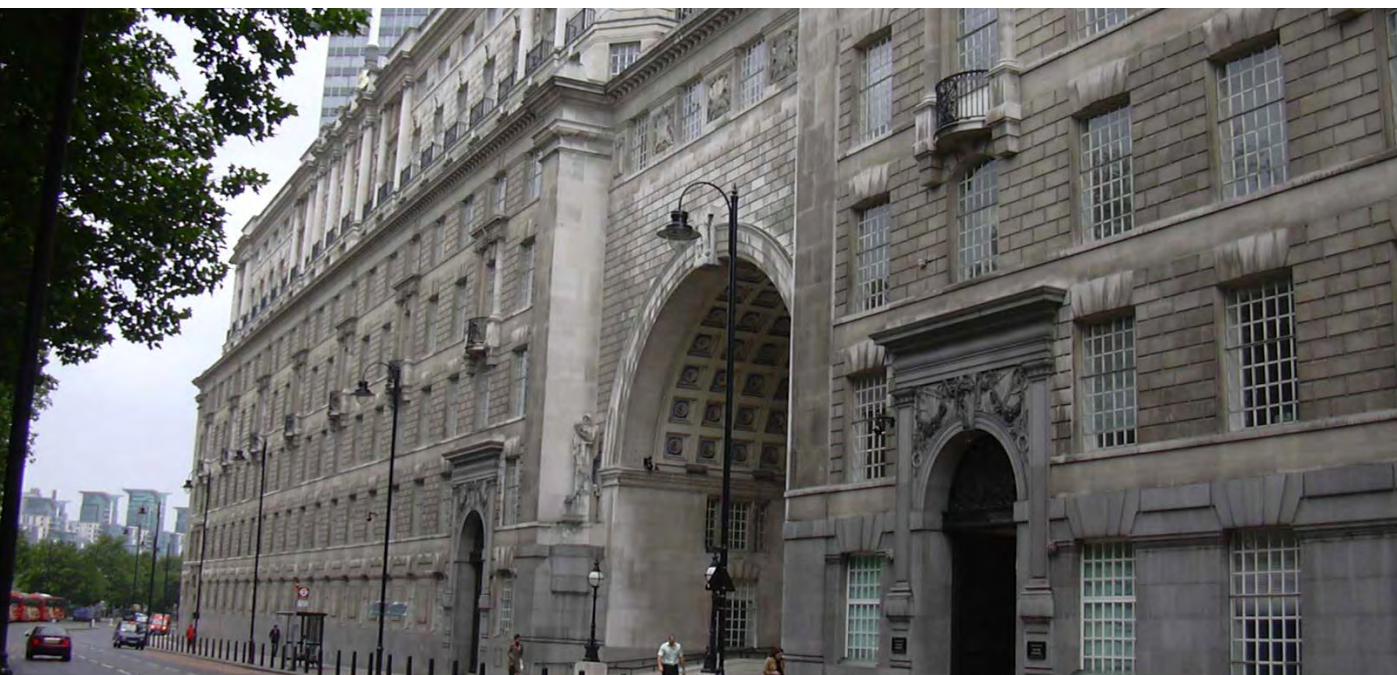
Key recommendations

Key recommendations

69. There are a number of recommendations we make in this Report, but we are aware that not everything can be done overnight. Therefore, out of all the key findings, we have chosen to highlight just six here, as a manageable number which we wish to see the Agencies focus on over the next 12 months. **The Agencies will have to demonstrate to the Committee in 2016 that they have made progress in these areas.**

Targeting specific groups of women to recruit. The Agencies should explore groups other than graduates. Women or mothers in middle-age or mid-career, who may have taken some years out to bring up children, may offer an untapped recruitment pool. The Agencies should use a broad range of mediums to advertise, including those specifically for women and mothers such as Mumsnet. The Agencies should examine their entry criteria. Many middle-aged women will have life experience but not necessarily the standard qualifications: which is more important?

Career management. There is plenty of evidence that women need more encouragement to apply for jobs or promotion. So what is the system doing about it? Agencies should provide more centralised career management, sponsorship and talent management for women to help them think more strategically about their careers, to raise their ambitions and ultimately to help them fulfil their potential.

Informal support networks. Women are just as good at networking as men, but they tend to regard it as making friends. Women need to be encouraged to set up their own networks, to involve more women from across the organisation to come together and share experiences. These could build on the women's groups that are already operating, or groups may be formed for specific purposes.

Don't limit women to certain jobs. It is such a sad waste of talent to sideline women who have successfully been filling operational roles. Just because they have had children, for instance, does not mean that their future career lies solely in corporate roles, such as HR or Finance. They have first class skills that the Agencies have helped them to build, so use them.

International connections. In addition to a more formalised approach to cross-Agency activities on diversity, the Agencies should share their experiences and best practice with their partner Agencies overseas, especially with the US. This will be a useful source of ideas and initiatives from organisations that have similar diversity issues. Agencies should also consider discussions on diversity with private industry partners.

And finally... tackle the permafrost. No initiative will succeed if it doesn't address cultural and behavioural issues which may prevent progress. If you want change, that is where to start.

Gender diversity at a glance

Gender diversity at a glance: what are the Agencies doing well...

👍 Showing **commitment to diversity from the top** of the organisation.

👍 Setting out **strategies and policies** for diversity initiatives.

👍 **Women's groups** are established and acting as the connection between staff and management. Their advice is sought and welcomed by Agency Boards and Diversity Champions.

👍 **Maternity-related issues**. There is guidance and clarity on rules and regulations for those women taking maternity leave. 'Keeping in Touch' days are occurring regularly.

👍 Use of **women role models** in recruitment.

... and where is there room for improvement?

👎 Ensuring women can **return to operational postings** following maternity leave.

👎 Recruitment of women to **technical and specialised** posts remains a challenge. This is a broader issue and we have been pleased with GCHQ educational outreach efforts.

👎 There is a need to ensure a **continual flow of women into senior positions**. Utilising 'talent management' will help facilitate this.

👎 More help is needed to **raise women's ambitions**.

👎 **Training courses** must be structured to cater for staff with flexible working arrangements.

👎 Greater **consistency across management** as to how they approach and deal with diversity issues; ensuring all staff are aware of management commitment to the issue.

👎 **Targeting recruitment** at 'middle-age' mothers, women in mid-career and non-graduates.

👎 More help from HR; and particularly **career management** for women.

Annexes

Annex A: SIS

SECRET INTELLIGENCE SERVICE MI6

1. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR ALL STAFF

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	1,525	63%
Female	905	37%
TOTAL	**2,430**	

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	**64%**	**64%**	**64%**
Female	**36%**	**36%**	**36%**

2. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR SENIOR STAFF (SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS)

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	53	85%
Female	9	15%
TOTAL	**62**	

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	**90%**	**89%**	**86%**
Female	**10%**	**11%**	**14%**

SECRET INTELLIGENCE SERVICE MI6

3. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR SIS EXECUTIVE BOARD

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	6	60%
Female	4*	40%
TOTAL	10	

Includes two non-executive Directors

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	82%	88%	60%
Female	18%	12%	40%

4. RECRUITMENT BY GENDER

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	26	56%
Female	20	44%
TOTAL	46	

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	74%	58%	55%
Female	26%	42%	45%

Annex B: MI5

SECURITYSERVICE
MI5

1. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR ALL STAFF

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	2,351	60%
Female	1,575	40%
TOTAL	**3,926**	

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	60%	60.5%	60%
Female	40%	39.5%	40%

2. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR SENIOR STAFF (SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS)

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	36	73.5%
Female	13	26.5%
TOTAL	**49**	

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	83%	83%	80%
Female	17%	17%	20%

SECURITYSERVICE
MI5

3. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR MI5 EXECUTIVE BOARD

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	10	71%
Female	4*	29%
TOTAL	**14**	

Includes one non-executive Director

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	83%	85%	85%
Female	17%	15%	15%

4. RECRUITMENT BY GENDER

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	102	59%
Female	70	41%
TOTAL	**172**	

Previous years

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Male	71%	62%	58%
Female	29%	38%	42%

Annex C: GCHQ

1. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR ALL STAFF

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	3,700	65%
Female	1,983	35%
TOTAL	**5,683**	

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	65%	65%	65%
Female	35%	35%	35%

2. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR SENIOR STAFF (SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS)

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	39	83%
Female	8	17%
TOTAL	**47**	

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	78%	76%	79%
Female	22%	24%	21%

3. MALE/FEMALE RATIOS FOR GCHQ EXECUTIVE BOARD

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	6	60%
Female	4*	40%
TOTAL	10	

Includes two non-executive Directors

Previous years

	2011	2012	2013
Male	78%	78%	67%
Female	22%	22%	33%

4. RECRUITMENT BY GENDER

August 2014

	Number	%
Male	255	71%
Female	105	29%
TOTAL	360	

Previous years

	2010	2011	2012
Male	x	x	x
Female	x	x	x

No data available due to technical problems with GCHQ's applicant tracking system

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament

The Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, MP

The Rt. Hon. Lord Butler KG GCB CVO

The Rt. Hon. Sir Menzies Campbell CH CBE QC, MP

Mr Mark Field, MP

The Rt. Hon. George Howarth, MP

Dr. Julian Lewis, MP

The Most Hon. The Marquess of Lothian QC PC

Ms Fiona Mactaggart, MP

The Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind, MP

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) is a statutory committee of Parliament that has responsibility for oversight of the UK intelligence community. The Committee was originally established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994, and has recently been reformed, and its powers reinforced, by the Justice and Security Act 2013.

The Committee oversees the intelligence and security activities of the UK, including the policies, expenditure, administration and operations[19] of the Security Service (MI5), the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The Committee also scrutinises the work of other parts of the UK intelligence community, including the Joint Intelligence Organisation and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office; Defence Intelligence in the Ministry of Defence; and the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism in the Home Office.

The Committee consists of nine Members drawn from both Houses of Parliament. The Chair is elected by its Members. The Members of the Committee are subject to Section 1(1)(b) of the Official Secrets Act 1989 and are routinely given access to highly classified material in carrying out their duties.

The Committee sets its own agenda and work programme. It takes evidence from Government Ministers, the Heads of the intelligence and security Agencies, officials from the intelligence community, and other witnesses as required. The Committee is supported in its work by an independent Secretariat and an Investigator. It also has access to legal, technical and financial expertise where necessary.

The Committee produces an Annual Report on the discharge of its functions. The Committee may also produce Reports on specific investigations. Prior to the Committee publishing its Reports, sensitive material that would damage national security is blanked out ('redacted'). This is indicated by *** in the text. The intelligence and security Agencies may request the redaction of material in a Report if its publication would damage their work, for example by revealing their targets, methods, sources or operational capabilities. The Committee considers these requests for redaction carefully. The Agencies have to demonstrate clearly how publication of the material in question would be damaging before the Committee agrees to redact it. The Committee aims to ensure that only the minimum of text is redacted from the Report. The Committee believes that it is important that Parliament and the public should be able to see where information had to be redacted. This means that the published Report is the same as the classified version sent to the Prime Minister (albeit with redactions). The Committee also prepares from time to time wholly confidential reports which it submits to the Prime Minister.

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19   *Subject to the criteria set out in section 2 of the Justice and Security Act 2013.*