



# **Government Response to the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament Report on Women in the UK Intelligence Community**

Presented to Parliament  
by the Prime Minister  
by Command of Her Majesty

May 2016

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## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT REPORT ON WOMEN IN THE UK INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

In March 2015, the ISC published a report on gender diversity in the UK Intelligence Agencies. In the Report, they acknowledged that “not everything can be done overnight” and that the “Agencies will have to demonstrate to the Committee in 2016 that they have made progress in these areas”. This response provides an update on the progress that has been made against each of the recommendations in the ISC’s Report.

The Government, and all Agencies agreed wholeheartedly with the ISC’s statement that “Diversity should... 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”. Since the publication of the ISC’s report, all three Agencies have further increased their focus on all aspects of diversity, including gender diversity. This work has been supported at the highest levels, with all Agencies now having Board level gender diversity champions. More broadly, SIS have established a Diversity and Inclusion Plan supported by a dedicated team, GCHQ have created a dedicated leadership post with responsibility for diversity and a Board level Diversity Steering Group, and MI5 has raised the gender diversity target to 45% by 2021. All of MI5’s Executive Board and all GCHQ SCS have diversity objectives.

This has helped drive a range of new diversity practises which have been incorporated into the Agencies’ policies and plans, together with bespoke ‘diversity surges’. These have helped the Agencies respond to the challenges and recommendations outlined in the ISC’s report (in **bold**) and are set out below.

**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?**

The Agencies are continually exploring new and innovative ways to recruit those with the right skills, mind-set and diversity of approach to help them fulfil their respective missions. They use a variety of online, print and advertising

channels to attract a dynamic and diverse workforce. Diversity is interwoven through all Agency recruitment advertising and the Agencies also run individual campaigns aimed at specific audiences.

All the Agencies have continued to target middle-age and mid-career women for recruitment. This year, for the first time and as recommended by the ISC, SIS and GCHQ have advertised on Mumsnet and are exploring other outlets targeting this demographic. MI5, which has previously advertised on Mumsnet, has also continued to target women directly, using local press to target women not currently in work and running a recruitment campaign aimed at women currently in social/care professions. MI5 also makes clear that none of its roles, including Intelligence Officers, are conditional on having a degree or other standard qualifications. GCHQ removed the core criteria of a '2:1' undergraduate degree from its Future Leaders campaign (fast stream leadership recruitment), to encourage women whose careers had followed a non-traditional graduate route. In April, MI5 was announced as a leader in gender equality and placed in The Times Top 50 Employers for Women. This was in addition to being awarded a gold banding for both gender and race in the Business in the Community Diversity and Wellbeing Benchmark 2015. GCHQ's banding in the Business in the Community awards was also raised this year (from bronze to silver). SIS participated in Business in the Community's race and gender benchmark for the first time in 2015, achieving a silver banding in each campaign.

The Agencies have made enhancements to their wider recruitment processes to improve gender diversity. MI5's new careers website deliberately includes tailored content, highlighting the Agency's supportive working culture, commitment to work-life balance and opportunities for flexible working. SIS's recent Intelligence Officer Campaign sought to attract candidates from all backgrounds with high emotional intelligence, rather than focusing on standard qualifications. The advertising campaign for GCHQ's Future Leaders Programme has also targeted female candidates specifically. GCHQ has encouraged women, and BME applicants, to remain interested throughout the recruitment process- by holding 'GCHQ Decoded' events, involving the Director and operational staff hosting visits from under-represented groups, for those reaching the latter stages of the Intelligence Analyst and Future Leaders recruitment processes.

In addition, all Agencies have invested in systems which enable them to better track the results of recruitment campaigns and to understand the data underpinning them. The Agencies anticipate that this will help them to better encourage applications from women, and other candidates with characteristics similarly under-represented across the Agencies.

The Agencies have also worked hard to proactively reach out to women. GCHQ has tailored its approach at careers fairs, ensuring mid-career staff attend and use their personal experiences to highlight the benefits of the flexible working scheme. In September 2015 MI5 also hosted an outreach event for women in technology. In January 2016, a GCHQ-led 'Women in Cyber' event which also involved MI5 and SIS, and other government departments, showcased a recruitment event at Birmingham University. This event was specifically aimed at women, with female speakers from across the community providing an insight into the organisations and career opportunities available. It helped GCHQ to improve its outreach and was responsible for 13% of offers made for GCHQ's Cyber Summer School ('Cyber Insiders') going to women, an 8% improvement on 2015. GCHQ has also stepped-up its outreach to schools to encourage more girls to pursue STEM subjects in support of the national Cyber First initiative which was announced in March 2015.

Whilst the Agencies recognise that there is much more to do, there are promising signs that these initiatives are working. In the last financial year 46% of new MI5 employees were female, a 5% increase on the previous period and up from 29% in 2010. Overall, 41.6% of MI5's workforce is female. At GCHQ, changes to maths recruitment saw the number of applications from women rise to approximately 40%, higher than previous years to a level that closely matches the female graduate population. 41% of new recruits to SIS in 2015/16 were female (a drop of 4% on the previous year to be addressed by increased female recruitment targets for 2016/17). Women make up 38.1% of all SIS staff.

**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.**

The Agencies have renewed their focus on supporting female talent and providing career support. SIS' centralised HR team has proactively identified and supported female officers, particularly (but not exclusively) those identified as showing significant potential. In the first quarter of 2016, GCHQ launched a Career Portal for all staff providing information and guidance to help staff plan their careers and empowers them to make the right decisions. Although it is early days, initial feedback has been positive. MI5's women's network has held a series of 'Inspire Me' events including talks, panel discussions and careers fairs (for example, Women@MI5 careers fair last Autumn) to showcase the full

range of available career paths and dispel any myths about limited options available to women.

The Agencies have also supported women to plan their careers strategically and consider leadership options. In September 2015 MI5 hosted the inaugural women's SIA leadership programme called "Inspiring Future Women Leaders". The highly successful event, attended by 30 women from across all three Agencies, encouraged women to pursue leadership positions. Before the programme 41% of participants strongly agreed with the statement 'I feel confident in myself as a leader'; after the course this had risen to 97%. During 2015, SIS have also ensured that women are equally represented on senior leadership development schemes: the SIS senior management development programme; international development programmes; FTSE senior mentoring programmes; MOD strategic courses; and Cabinet Office High Potential schemes. GCHQ has recently launched a scheme whereby all members of its SCS will sponsor junior staff from the under-represented groups, including women.

The Agencies have taken steps to improve gender diversity specifically at senior levels. In MI5 existing Senior Managers focused on encouraging female applicants to their Senior Manager promotion gateway (where the promotion assessment panels all had a gender split). SIS' central HR team also encouraged women to put themselves forward for their Senior Management assessment centre and ensured female officers' flexible working patterns did not inhibit recognition of high potential and performance. Similarly, GCHQ ensured female prioritisation on their Senior Management Development Programme (SMDP) and by scheduling career conversations with talented female staff.

These initiatives are having real impact. In 2016 47% of applicants to MI5's Senior Manager promotion gateway were female, up from 38% two years ago. The overall proportion of women at SCS grades in MI5 has increased from 20% in 2013 to 25% today; the proportion of women on MI5's Executive/Management Boards is 29%. Separately, 100% of female applicants to SIS' most recent Senior Management assessment centre were successful. Women now make up 23% of the SCS in SIS (up from 14% in 2013) and the Strategic Board is 60% female. The proportion of women at SCS level at GCHQ has increased to 26% (up from 21% in 2013). GCHQ's Board is 40% female.

**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.**

The Agencies have all taken steps to encourage the development of informal support networks for women. GCHQ's Women's Network (GWN) and MI5's 'Women@MI5' network and SIS's gender equality group, DEUCE, have gone from strength to strength, providing a vehicle to develop contacts, share experiences and provide mutual support. GCHQ's Women in Technology (WiTTY) group supports female staff working in technology roles. The Agencies have also established a joint Senior Women's Group to provide networking opportunities at senior leadership positions, as well as to driving forward gender issues and providing support and advice to more junior women in their career development. Since the publication of the report, GCHQ has also established its own internal SWN, aimed at building the courage and capability of female talent at GCHQ through the provision of mentoring, coaching and sponsorship for female colleagues, by improving the visibility of senior women and through monitoring of GCHQ's internal talent pipeline. In January, SIS hosted the first annual SIA Diversity Conference bringing together representatives of the network groups from all three Agencies to encourage more networking and greater collaboration in their efforts to create a more inclusive SIA which more closely reflects the country it serves.

SIS has extended its Women's Leadership Learning Sets programme to include junior grades in addition to middle/senior managers, and this year also opened the initiative to both MI5 and GCHQ. In November 2015 over 150 women from across SIS, MI5 and GCHQ attended a Learning Set which helps women form SIA wide networks to pursue their career goals with support from senior sponsors. SIS is also developing further initiatives including a speed-mentoring event to help raise awareness and uptake of mentoring opportunities both in the UK and in overseas.

All Agencies have also hosted a number of high profile, senior external women speakers who have delivered inspirational talks to groups of female staff and provided them with strong female role models.

**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.**

Over the past year, the Agencies have worked to ensure that all women and particularly those with children can pursue their desired career path. Women

successfully fill posts in all work spheres including frontline intelligence and operational roles.

The Agencies have all taken further steps to promote a flexible working culture, including for women and men with childcare commitments. SIS has mandated that flexible working is the default position for all UK-based roles unless there is an exceptional reason not to. SIS has also improved accessibility to training by making operational and management courses modular and non-residential. In MI5 operational and intelligence sections have proactively encouraged women to apply for jobs. MI5 have also issued dedicated flexible working guidance: 99% of MI5 posts across all business areas offer flexible working and/or compressed hours. In MI5 29.1% women now work part-time or on compressed hours. GCHQ has issued guidance to ensure that no job is designed in a way which could limit applications from staff with working reduced hours or with caring responsibilities, without a compelling operational reason to do so. In addition, in 2015 GCHQ issued further guidance on internal job adverts to avoid inadvertently dissuading women from applying. The number of posts restricted to full-time applicants has reduced markedly.

The Agencies have taken measures to ensure that women returning from maternity leave can return to jobs in their desired field. In MI5, the vast majority of those returning from maternity (and also paternity or adoption) leave have the option of taking up their last posting, including in intelligence and operational roles. MI5 also ensures that those still on maternity leave have visibility of upcoming jobs through dedicated communications, outreach and 'keep in touch' days. SIS has initiated career momentum workshops which support women returning from maternity leave or other career breaks to re-establish professional confidence; early feedback suggests participants have welcomed the chance to spend time with others and discuss approaches to overcoming similar challenges. GCHQ has further increased the accessibility of their 'keep in touch' days, which help women maintain visibility of available jobs and return to a post best suited to their skills and experience, by enabling their children to also attend.

**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.**

The three Agencies have all taken steps to learn from international and external experience on gender diversity issues. The SIA now represents the entire UK

intelligence community on an international working group which has been established to address gender diversity issues across intelligence communities in the UK, United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. This network allows practitioners to exchange perspectives and experiences, facilitates discussion of planned initiatives and provides opportunities to seek the views of counterparts on key issues and questions. The three Agencies have also strengthened cross-SIA collaboration to share best practice, including setting up a quarterly diversity working group.

The Agencies have also taken bilateral measures with international partners to share best practice. GCHQ has drawn on the United States National Security Agency's (NSA) success enhancing women representation at senior leadership levels, and MI5 has held a valuable exchange on diversity issues with the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). In addition, SIS has held initial consultations on diversity issues with a range of Allied intelligence services and 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.**

All three agencies have run programmes of 'unconscious bias' training which explore strategies for increasing inclusive behaviours. The Agencies targeted this training at those in leadership positions and separately staff involved in recruitment and promotion decisions. From April 2016 unconscious bias training will be an integral part of SIS' induction pathway, helping to embed desired behaviours from the outset. MI5 has enrolled a number of staff, including middle managers, on unconscious bias e-learning and will be delivering further face-to-face sessions over the next financial year. GCHQ, who already mandate unconscious bias training for SCS, are reviewing their approach to the training to improve the subsequent embedding of benefits and promotion of culture change in the business.

GCHQ are updating their Leadership Ethos (the criteria underpinning the assessment of senior staff's behaviour and much of GCHQ's upcoming leadership development) to further increase focus on diversity and inclusivity. GCHQ's newly set up Diversity Steering Group has also agreed a mandate covering a broad range of issues, including recruitment, talent development, and fostering an inclusive culture, agreeing targeted actions for all three. SIS has introduced specific diversity objectives for senior officers, and also refined its Leadership and People Management competency for all other grades to help promote inclusive behaviours. SIS has also begun to recognise and reward officers who demonstrate inclusivity and is publicising this across the

organisation. MI5's Executive Board has taken part in a bespoke session to explore 'inclusive leadership' and all now have specific diversity objectives, for which they are personally accountable.

The three Agencies support gender diversity at all levels within their respective organisations and actively promote a diverse and inclusive culture. The cumulative impact of the initiatives outlined above have further reinforced this open culture and positive behaviours. This has been acknowledged and celebrated this year as all three Agencies reached their highest ever positions in the Stonewall top employers workplace equality index, and MI5 were named Stonewall's Inclusive Employer of the year for 2016. There is much more to be done to maintain focus and build upon this success. The Agencies have publically and enthusiastically committed to doing so.

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