



INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT



PRESS RELEASE

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament has been examining diversity issues in the UK intelligence community and has today published a Report on the position of women in MI5, MI6 and GCHQ. The Report considers recruitment policy and practice; maternity-related issues, childcare and flexible working; career and promotion prospects; and cultural and behavioural issues. The Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, MP said:

“I believe there is a strong business imperative for greater diversity in the Agencies. They should reflect the population they serve but, more importantly, they cannot fulfil their mandate without drawing on the broad range of talent and skills that a diverse workforce can offer.

If all intelligence professionals are cut from the same cloth – sharing similar backgrounds and similar characteristics - then they are likely to share ‘unacknowledged biases’ which will circumscribe both the definition of problems and the search for solutions. Diversity will therefore result in better intelligence analysis and a better response to the range of threats that we face to our national security.

Women currently comprise 37% of the workforce of the three intelligence Agencies – considerably smaller than the figure of 53% for the Civil Service. They also comprise disproportionately more of the workforce at junior grades: on average across the Agencies women make up only 19% of the Senior Civil Service.

I personally want women to be attracted to a career in intelligence and to feel there is the prospect of real advancement. I applaud the vital work the Agencies do to safeguard our national security. They work in difficult, ever-changing and sometimes dangerous circumstances. They should be praised for the dedication, bravery and professionalism they demonstrate.

The Agencies have done some good work: there is a strong commitment to diversity from the top of the organisation, and they have set out clear strategies and policies for diversity initiatives. They make good use of women role models in recruitment and women’s groups have been established. But there is room for improvement. Our Report makes a number of recommendations, however the Committee has highlighted six on which we want the Agencies to focus over the next 12 months.

The first, and most important, of these is to address cultural and behavioural issues: no initiative will succeed if it doesn’t address these issues. Changing the culture is the one area that is most difficult to articulate and, crucially, to take action on, but if you want change, that is where to start. It is clear to us there are those at middle management level – referred to by some people as “the permafrost” – who have a very traditional male mentality and outlook. This can reinforce a management culture which rewards those who speak the

loudest or are aggressive in pursuing their career and does not fully recognise the value of a more consultative, collaborative approach. We therefore recommend that there is a real focus on identifying and tackling the barriers that can exist at middle management level, so that women and men can fully achieve their potential in a supportive team ethos.

We also wish to see the Agencies take steps to:

- target specific groups of women to recruit. Women or mothers in middle-age or mid-career have valuable life experience and may offer an untapped recruitment pool. The Agencies should therefore use a broad range of mediums and include those specifically aimed at women and mothers – such as Mumsnet.*
- Offer more centralised career management, sponsorship and talent management for women to help them think more strategically about their careers, raise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.*
- Encourage women to set up their own informal support networks: women are just as good at networking as men, but they tend to regard it as making friends rather than as an opportunity for career progression.*
- Not limit women to certain jobs: women who have successfully been filling operational roles mustn't be sidelined after they have children. They still have the first class skills that the Agencies helped them to build, so these should be used.*
- Share ideas and initiatives with organisations that have similar diversity issues – for example, partner Agencies overseas.*

The Committee hopes that this Report and the specific Recommendations it contains will galvanise support for, and lead to further concerted efforts to create, a more gender diverse workforce in the Agencies.”

The former US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who conducted a similar investigation examining women in the CIA, has commented:

“This important report by the Intelligence and Security Committee of the UK Parliament highlights the tremendous skills, talent, and experience of the women who are working to protect national security in the UK Intelligence Agencies. This report, spearheaded by the Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP makes a number of practical recommendations to encourage more women to join the Intelligence Community and to ensure that those already working in this area are able to make swifter progress in their chosen field.

As Ms Blears rightly says diversity should be pursued - not just on legal or ethical grounds, important as these are in their own right- but because it will result in a better response to the range of threats that threaten national security. Much of what is said in this report echoes and reinforces my own work on the Director's Advisory Group on Women in Intelligence at the CIA. I am sure we will all benefit from close cooperation on these vital issues between our two countries.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The Committee has examined the challenges facing women in the security and intelligence Agencies, the obstacles to greater gender diversity and the Agencies policies in this area. The Inquiry focused specifically on: recruitment policy and practice; maternity related issues; childcare and flexible working; career and promotion prospects; and cultural and behavioural issues.

2. This is an issue on which the Committee has not reported previously and the Report contains information that has never before been made public. The Report includes a large number of case studies that have been written by women working in MI5, MI6 and GCHQ. They provide unique insights in to what is it like to be a woman in the Agencies. Such accounts have never before been included in an ISC report in this way.

3. The key sections are:

- Women in the UK Intelligence Agencies today (page 17);
- Gender diversity in the intelligence Agencies – at a glance (page 47);
- Changing the culture (page 37);
- What can be done ? (page 39); and
- Key Recommendations (page 43).

4. In accordance with the provisions of the Justice and Security Act 2013, the Report is being made to Parliament (rather than to the Prime Minister, as was previously the case under the Intelligence Services Act 1994).

5. The ISC is a cross-party committee of nine parliamentarians from the Commons and the Lords. The Committee's membership is as follows:

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

6. The ISC was established in 1994 under the Intelligence Services Act, and was reformed last year under the Justice and Security Act 2013. This legislation made the ISC a statutory committee of Parliament and strengthened its power. The Committee now has greater access to information, including primary material held within the Agencies. Its remit has also been expanded to include oversight of intelligence and security operations, and oversight of all intelligence and security activities of Government.

7. The Committee routinely takes evidence in private, and its Members are subject to the Official Secrets Act 1989. This ensures they are able to scrutinise the most sensitive work of the intelligence Agencies which cannot be made public. However, when producing reports, the Committee aims to put as much material as possible into the public domain, subject only to restrictions on grounds of national security or *sub judice* rules.