

We need more oddballs to fight cyber crime, says GCHQ boss

By Duncan Gardham

THE security services should recruit more eccentrics and people who are socially awkward because they may have the skills to combat cyber crime, the head of GCHQ has said.

Iain Lobban, the director of the top-secret listening station in Cheltenham, Glocs, said he does not like the term "eccentric" and does not tell his workers "how to live their lives".

He made his comments in a speech to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Alan Turing, the godfather of the Enigma codebreakers and one of the founders of modern computing, who committed suicide in 1954, two years after he was prosecuted for homosexuality.

Turing, who was 41 when he died after taking cyanide, had accepted chemical castration as an alternative to jail following the case. Gordon Brown issued an official apology three years ago when he was prime minister.

The head of GCHQ described Turing as a "founder of the information age" whose work influenced everything from washing machines to smartphones. If he were alive today he would be working on fending off cyber attacks, Mr Lobban said.

Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire, the base for the Second World War codebreakers, was successful because it allowed individuals such as Turing, nicknamed "The Prof", to flourish, Mr Lobban added.

He said it was important for managers to take a leap of faith and make "space

for the unique and different contribution that each person makes".

Stories of Turing burying silver bullion and then forgetting where he had hidden it, chaining his mug to his radiator, and cycling in his gas mask to ward off hay fever, suggested a sense of eccentricity, Mr Lobban said.

But he added: "Turing was not an eccentric, unless you believe that there is only one way of being normal and to be otherwise is to be peculiar. Turing wasn't eccentric: he was unique."

He told an audience at Leeds University that he believed a signals intelligence agency needed the widest range of skills possible 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".

Mr Lobban said part of his job was to attract the best people and "not allow preconceptions and stereotypes to stifle innovation and agility".

"I want to harness the best talent there is not just so that they can be inventive, but so that they can apply themselves to the big issues of intelligence and security which challenge an organisation which simply has to remain at the cutting edge in order to survive and thrive," he added.

"I want to apply and exploit their talent: in return, I think it's fair that I don't need to tell them how to live their lives."

The fact that Turing was "unashamedly gay" was widely known to his immediate colleagues at Bletchley Park, Mr Lobban said, but it was not an issue.

