

# The National Technical Assistance Centre (NTAC)

**In the latest of our insights into the machinery of the UK National Security and Crime Prevention agencies, Heligan Strategic Insights (HSI) turns its lens on the National Technical Assistance Centre (NTAC)**



## What is NTAC?

Whilst the name might suggest the National Technical Assistance Centre is a glorified IT help desk, we can assure you it is far, far more than that!

NTAC was originally established as part of the Home Office but in 2006 it became part of GCHQ. Like the other parts of the National Security apparatus of the UK, it is an operational unit that plays a central role in countering terrorism, serious crime and other threats to UK prosperity and security.

## How NTAC works

It operates through the provision of Lawful Interception capability (LI as it is referred to in the business), which is the bugging of phones to you and me...but they also have a role in recovering data from seized media and offering technical advice to some parts of government and industry on interception and data recovery.

NTAC provides technical assistance, policy advice and support to law enforcement, the UK intelligence community and wider government on all aspects of LI. NTAC also plays a lead role for the UK in engaging with international standards organisations and works with the NSA and other US agencies on the bilateral data-sharing agreement, which is the really special part of the 'Special Relationship'.





## The importance of NTAC

NTAC has a team of around 150 people and a budget of about £45m. The team is a rich mix of GCHQ employees, secondees and integrees from the intelligence community, and contractors with specialist knowledge and experience. It is jointly funded by GCHQ, the Home Office and those who benefit directly from its advice and services. It is based in the MI5 HQ (Thames House) and GCHQ in Cheltenham, with smaller footprints elsewhere across the UK.

Not everyone can simply go out and bug a phone or delve into a seized computer disk. To do so you need a warrant issued under section 19 of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. And to get that, you need a really, really good reason that is legally compliant, proportionate and can clearly demonstrate the protection of communications of those not under the warrant.



**There are only 9 Agencies in the UK permitted to obtain these warrants. They are:**

- The National Crime Agency (NCA)
- The Metropolitan Police Service
- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- The Police Service of Scotland
- Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- The Ministry of Defence
- The Security Service (MI5)
- The Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)
- GCHQ



**So more than a help desk and an integral part of the intelligence collection infrastructure the UK is privileged to have at its disposal...please, just don't call them up expecting them to fix your printer!**