

Harry Potter, British Spies, and the Arms Corporations Penetrating UK Schools

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GCHQ, the UK's largest intelligence agency, is secretly promoting arms companies involved in war crimes to British school children, apparently without the informed consent of parents, it can be revealed.

Declassified UK can reveal that a secretive GCHQ programme is allowing officials from [British](#) and [American](#) arms companies involved in human rights abuses against children overseas to enter dozens of UK schools and recruit children for “work placement opportunities”.

The UK's largest arms exporter, BAE Systems, is being facilitated to offer careers advice and workshops to children aged 9-12 years old.

In some cases, pre-teenage and teenage children are being taught by arms company staff how to build drones and “sniff” on their classmates' internet connections.

The programme, known as the [Cyber Schools Hub](#) (CSH) or CyberFirst, is operating in over 40 schools and gives GCHQ access to British children as young as four for activities promoting so-called “cyber security”. The UK government plans to roll out the programme nationwide. Programme literature shows that GCHQ is aggressively pushing for arms companies to enter schools.

It can further be revealed that the programme, paid for by British taxpayers, is providing equipment to the world's largest arms company, the US corporation Lockheed Martin, to incentivise it to enter schools in Gloucestershire, the county in southwest England where the CSH pilot scheme is mainly running.

The taxpayer has paid undisclosed sums for school children to attend work experience at Lockheed Martin, which opened a £3-million “Cyber Works” [facility](#) in Gloucester in 2017.

Lockheed Martin, which has been awarded exclusive “associate” status in GCHQ's schools programme, manufactures the Mark 82 bomb which was used by Saudi Arabia in August 2018 to [blow up](#) more than 40 children on a school bus in Yemen.

The ongoing war in Yemen, which began in 2015, has produced the world's largest humanitarian disaster where 2.2-million children are acutely malnourished.

Other arms companies involved in the CSH programme include giant US corporations

Northrop Grumman and Raytheon, the latter a manufacturer of arms for use in Yemen and Iraq which have [killed](#) scores of civilians, including children.

BAE Systems, meanwhile, with the support of the British government, plays a [key role](#) in sustaining the Saudi war in Yemen, [maintaining](#) Saudi warplanes at their main operating bases. Amnesty International is [calling](#) for both BAE and Raytheon to be investigated by the International Criminal Court for complicity in war crimes.

A number of schools involved in the GCHQ programme have hosted “cyber days” where arms companies such as Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, among others, undertake visits for what GCHQ calls a “speed dating” experience with pupils. One school aimed this “experience” at Year 8s (i.e. 12-year-olds).

A permission slip in one school seen by *Declassified* suggests that parents are not being fully informed about the involvement of arms companies or GCHQ in the CSH programme. Only limited details about the project have been made public and the overall cost is classified.

Andrew Smith of Campaign Against Arms Trade told *Declassified*:

“This is very concerning. Arms companies exist for one reason only, and that is to sell as many weapons as possible. GCHQ should not be allowing them into schools under the guise of education. They are not investing time and resources into visiting schools because they care about education, they are doing it because they want to influence young people and improve their image among parents.”

Smith added:

“The arms company reps won’t be highlighting the terrible damage that their weapons have caused around the world. BAE and Raytheon, for example, will not be talking about the schools that have been bombed in Yemen, which their fighter jets and bombs have played a key part in. This programme needs to be stopped.”

Taught by Raytheon

GCHQ runs the Cyber Schools Hub programme through one of its arms, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), which opened in 2016. The programme has been running since 2018 and [lists](#) a number of “partners” which include major private arms companies from the US and UK.

However, the true extent of arms company involvement is larger than declared by the programme. *Declassified* has seen evidence that French arms manufacturer Thales has entered one school to “support” a group of Year 8 girls (i.e. 12 year-olds) despite having no official or public connection to the programme.

Another company, Raytheon, was only recently listed as a CSH “partner” despite being involved since at least January 2019. It is not known if other arms companies are operating in the schools off-the-books.

Raytheon, the Massachusetts-based arms corporation, made [£59-billion](#) in sales last year, while its UK subsidiary is a [major supplier](#) to the British Ministry of Defence.

The company's factory in Glenrothes, Scotland, produces [circuit boards](#) for the Paveway missiles, which are exported by Britain to Saudi Arabia whose air force has used them to devastating effect in the war in Yemen.

Pictures have been [posted](#) of children from Denmark Road High School for Girls in Gloucester building quadcopters - often used as drones - with Raytheon. At Crypt School, also in Gloucester, a team of Year 9 students took part in the Quadcopter Challenge, [organised](#) by Raytheon. The aim was to design, build, programme and test a quadcopter, before competing against other local schools.

"Ambassadors from Raytheon will be on hand to support the students in developing new skills," the school [notes](#) proudly.

Another school, Kingsholm primary in Gloucester, hosted a "Raytheon junior cyber day" where students undertook activities such as "learning how you can eavesdrop on a computer screen using a simple radio tuner, antenna and free software". The event was hosted by 12 staff from Raytheon along with members of the Gloucestershire and Manchester police.

Photos were also recently posted of Raytheon delivering talks at another school, Cleeve, in Cheltenham - where GCHQ has its headquarters - to mark International Women's Week in March.

In 2015, Raytheon [opened](#) a Cyber Innovation Centre in Gloucester that it says is focused on "big data, analytics and network defence", while Gloucestershire Conservative MP Jack Lopresti received gifts [worth](#) £320 from Raytheon UK in January 2020.

In 2017, Lopresti [lobbied](#) a government minister in parliament for the RAF to retain a surveillance aircraft, Sentinel, whose [radar system](#) has been developed by Raytheon. The [chair](#) of Raytheon UK is Lord Strathclyde, a former Conservative [leader](#) of the House of Lords.

Careers advice for 11 year olds

GCHQ divulges little information about arms company activities in the CSH programme. But *Declassified* has seen a newsletter produced for a short period from December 2018 to July 2019, which gives some details.

One newsletter [notes](#),

"Industry engagement is a massive bonus for schools in general, but for cyber schools in particular. Massive enterprises such as Northrop Grumman and Raytheon are involved with the programme, developing special work placement opportunities and realising that there are a whole group of non-degree educated youngsters they might miss out on."

The companies themselves [do not list](#) their activities in the CSH programme on their

websites.

The CSH programme advertises the fact that BAE Systems – the UK’s largest arms corporation with sales of £20-billion in 2019 – has [delivered](#) workshops for Year 5 (age 9-10) students. It adds that BAE has also [provided](#) “careers advice” for Year 7 (age 11-12) students at a school which is not part of the programme, in its national careers week.

BAE has also been [“acting as guardians”](#) for the “CyberFirst Girls” teams entered by two local schools, although it is unclear what this involves.

On one occasion, GCHQ noted it “had just got BAE Systems on board” and passed on a “request for support” from another school, Wyedean, also in Gloucestershire, for a GCHQ programme aimed at Year 8 girls. The newsletter notes, “Together with Tom, the BAE Systems project coordinator, they very quickly organised a large number of staff volunteers to support the school.” Thales was also contacted to provide support, to which it agreed. These arms companies were focused on “forming” the Year 8 children’s “thought processes”, the newsletter notes.

When another school, Ribston Hall, wanted to improve its 15th position in the “CyberFirst Girls” competition, it put out a “cry for help”. “This cry for help was answered by both Lockheed Martin and BAE Systems, with staff from both companies going into school to help the girls again in a pastoral/thinking perspective,” the newsletter notes.

The NCSC [states](#) that it has set up “distribution centres with the support of the schools and industries involved in the project” to loan out technology. It is unclear which arms companies, if any, are involved in this activity.

But the NCSC has said that staff at Lockheed Martin – “working closely” with the computer science teacher at one school – [facilitated](#) three students on a week’s work experience opportunity at the firm, funded by the NCSC project team. The children were meant to “learn about all the different ways into industry and what the company does”. The experience at the arms company ended with a “BBQ social”.

Offering work experience in arms companies is an expanding programme.

“Having a flexible time for work placements and selecting appropriate students will help us increase the number of placements,” notes one newsletter, adding, “Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman are expanding the numbers of students that they can accommodate.”

Further information about the nature of these work placements and what the parents of the children are told has not been made public. One newsletter notes, however: “Northrop Grumman continues to undertake E-mentoring with both Year 11 and Year 13 Cleeve School students helping them prepare for their recent exams”. This mentoring has utilised Skype and email.

The philosopher’s den of cyber innovation and magic

In mid-2019, Wyedean School – where Harry Potter author JK Rowling was a pupil – hosted 200 Year 5 primary school children for a full day of “experiencing” cyber security. Some 40 representatives of arms and cyber companies, including BAE Systems and Raytheon, also

took part. The “experience” finished with a Harry Potter afternoon tea.

It is not known if the children’s parents knew arms companies were giving them lessons.

Wyedean School also launched the “Philosopher’s Den of Cyber Innovation and Magic”, used to support “lunchtime, breaktime and after school” cyber security events.

The new “Den” included 10 Harry Potter themed workstations funded by the NCSC as well as “Interactive Picture Frames (just like on the stairs in the Harry Potter movies)” and “Hagrid’s Cottage (a very upcycled summer house that has been skilfully decorated and animated by staff and students)”.

The newsletter adds as an aside: “Local companies also supported the development of the Den”, without divulging which companies. The Den, however, was officially opened with BAE Systems in attendance.

Funding arms companies

One newsletter, under the heading “Can we help you develop an activity?”, notes that “when the NCSC team visit a company who are keen to support schools with computer science, we quite often run into the issue that while companies can provide the time for their staff to go into schools, they do not have funding lines that they can tap into to provide equipment to support the activity.” It adds: “so the NCSC team are now supporting companies with equipment”.

One recipient is Lockheed Martin, which was given equipment “to help develop activities on logic gates and 3D printing”. Lockheed, based in Maryland, USA, with a large UK operation, is the biggest arms company in the world with [revenue](#) in 2019 of £47.6-billion. Lockheed Martin’s UK operation is [headed](#) by Peter Ruddock, a former Air Marshal in the Royal Air Force.

There is evidence that GCHQ’s programme is not following guidelines on obtaining parental consent. The [permission slip](#) for parents in one school seen by *Declassified* makes no mention of the arms companies involved in the programme.

Neither does the slip mention that the NCSC is part of GCHQ, which was in 2013 exposed as running programmes of mass surveillance and was [found](#) by the European Court of Human Rights to be breaking the law.

Good practice school guidelines [state](#): “Where consent is required, the key is to provide parents with sufficient information to make an informed decision about the participation of their child”. The NCSC told *Declassified* that in the CSH programme, “Parents are consulted through the schools’ standard processes.”

In the seven newsletters *Declassified* has seen – which run to 22,000 words – the words “arms” or “weapons” do not appear once. The manufacturers of deadly weapons are referred to simply as “companies” or “enterprises”. It is not known if that is how they are presented to unwitting parents.

When *Declassified* asked the NCSC what information is given to parents about the programme, the agency replied: “We have no contact with parents. What teachers/schools share with parents is done independently of NCSC.”

After answering questions on *Declassified's* [first investigation](#) of its school programme, the NCSC did not respond to further questions about the role of arms companies.

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