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GCHQ begins trial use of lie detectors in vetting

By a Correspondent

Lie detectors come into use in Britain for the first time today as part of vetting procedures at Government Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham.

After the disastrous effects of the Geoffrey Prime spying scandal, members of the Security Commission visited America to investigate ways in which security could be tightened up.

They concluded that the polygraph (lie detector), which has been used by the CIA and GCHQ's US counterpart, the National Security Agency, should be introduced to weed out staff who posed a possible security risk.

Despite widespread criticism of the machine's reliability by MPs and numerous security experts, the Government has

decided that it should be used on a random basis for a trial period of six months.

The almost unanimous opposition to the move by the 7,000 staff at the base was one reason why the Government rushed through last month's union ban and withdrew the rights of industrial tribunal representation.

A senior GCHQ security officer has spent several months in America being trained in the operation of the polygraph, and over the next few months hundreds of staff will undergo the tests as part of their positive vetting checks, which take place every five years.

Senior management at GCHQ Cheltenham are being urged to volunteer to take the test to try to quell suspicion over the machine's trustworthiness.