secrets of GCHQ

It is a great relief to have finished the book so I can leave alone the lead box I have been carrying my phone around in for the last eight years covered by these applications for “call content”, as applications may refer to organisations rather than individuals. “We think there are 2,000 or 3,000 applications a year, but that might cover more than 2,000 or 3,000 people,” says Aldrich. “The problem is finding the bad guys among the millions of messages. We are moving from a private intelligence community to a global one,” he adds. “The problem is finding the bad guys amongst all the normal communication. How do you find the single email that ought to be on the Prime Minister’s or the President’s desk tomorrow?”

Globalisation has mixed the waters on intelligence gathering and blurred not only national borders but the investigative remit of the security agencies. “We have got global terrorism. We have international organised crime. The distinction between foreign and domestic is breaking down,” says Aldrich. “GCHQ always used to portray itself as a foreign intelligence organisation, which worked abroad, broke the codes of foreign countries and brought us intelligence on the bad guys. But now the main enemy for the last ten years has been terrorists and they are moving seamlessly between locations in the UK, Pakistan, Afghanistan. GCHQ are picking up the same voices, people with Birmingham and Bradford accents, in Afghanistan.”

“Local authorities can do this as well. Data-mining by governments and their organisations rather than individuals.”

Aldrich explains: “They don’t need a warrant to get a list of everybody you have telephoned. What we are seeing is a shift from looking at the content of telephone calls to finding out who you are telephoning. They only have to fill out a little form to get at the call data. “A very difficult decision has had to be made to bring the public finances back under control. We understand the need for compulsory redundancies. It is not a pleasant process,” he says. “Voluntary redundancies will be considered based on business needs. This route is the most favourable and may assist the college in avoiding the need for compulsory redundancies. We have already been called to discuss “restructuring and redundancy” and it is not a pleasant process.”

It is the fifth round of job cuts in five years at the college, according to UCU regional official Nick Varney. “We have suffered redundancies at other colleges due to reductions in the funding of adult learners announced at the beginning of this year,” he said. Ms Bailey said that construction of the college’s new £77 million campus in Spon Lane, West Bromwich, would not be affected by the cuts.

“Financing of the new college is separate from the funding for courses at the existing college,” she said.