

Would you like to be a secret agent and work undercover? Do you think the job in reality would be similar to how it's shown in films?

You might have heard of MI6 through the man known as 007. James Bond doesn't exist, of course, but what about MI6?

What is MI6?

MI6 is very real. It is an organisation that recruits agents who collect 'human intelligence', or information, from countries around the world in order to protect the security of the UK. The official name for MI6 is the Secret Intelligence Service, or SIS.

How old is MI6?

MI6 has recently celebrated its 100th anniversary. The agency started life in a small rented office in London in 1909 but it wasn't officially recognised by the British government until 1995!

Where is MI6?

The agency has its present headquarters in a huge building at Vauxhall Cross on the banks of the river Thames in London. The building is shown in a recent James Bond film *The World Is Not Enough*. In the film a bomb, hidden in a suitcase full of money, explodes inside the MI6 headquarters.

MI6 agents

The first chief of MI6 was Sir Mansfield Cumming. He always signed his name as 'C' in green ink. This tradition is continued today by Sir John Sawers, the present chief, who also signs documents with a green 'C'. John le Carré, famous for his spy novels, is a former MI6 agent. He changed his name from David John Moore Cornwell because agents weren't allowed to publish books under their own names.

Secret Missions

During the Second World War (1939-1945), MI6 communicated with agents through coded radio messages broadcast on the BBC. MI6 was also involved in the work of the code breakers who collected important enemy information at Bletchley Park in the south of England. Modern computers didn't exist at that time and the code breakers had to use huge noisy machines to help them break the codes.

MI6 online

MI6 now has an official website where anyone can learn about its history, read a glossary of Secret Intelligence Service words, have a virtual tour or even apply for a job.