

National Language Competition 2026

16-20 November 2026

NLC Stakeholder Toolkit

GCHQ is running its fifth annual National Language Competition (NLC) in November 2026, with the aim of promoting language learning in schools and encouraging the uptake of languages at GCSE/N5. Given GCHQ's statutory purpose to advise government and wider society on languages, the NLC falls under our remit to promote languages, and sits alongside our thriving language outreach programme to schools. The NLC aims to inspire language learning across the UK, with a particular focus at schools in socio-diverse areas, by making languages fun.

Last year, over 2000 teams from schools across the UK took part in the NLC 2025. After a week of teams completing various interactive language-based challenges, the winner was announced and invited to GCHQ's headquarters in Cheltenham.

We plan to run the NLC again this year, taking place from 16-20 November 2026. The competition is aimed at students in Year 9 in England and Wales, Year 10 in Northern Ireland, and S2 in Scotland, before they select their GCSE or N5 options. There are 12 regional winners' categories, to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of teams across the UK. We also widened participation to include home educated children.

Initial advertising of the competition went out via the [GCHQ NLC website](#) asking schools who did not participate last year to register their interest via email. All schools who participated last year have automatically had their interest registered for the competition this year. We will continue to advertise the competition via GCHQ social media and have asked schools to spread the word about the competition.

When? 16-20 November 2026

Who is this aimed at? Year 9 in England and Wales, Year 10 in Northern Ireland, and S2 in Scotland – pre-GCSE and N5 options.

Where? Online from their classrooms (e.g. at lunchtime under teacher supervision) or at home.

Why? To encourage a passion for language learning and highlight the many transferrable skills learning a language can develop.

FAQs

What is GCHQ?

GCHQ is one of the three UK Intelligence and Security Agencies, along with MI5 and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).

GCHQ protects the UK and its citizens from individuals, groups and countries who wish to do us harm, or damage us financially. GCHQ intelligence keeps our deployed forces safe and helps law enforcement agencies to prevent terrorist activity and serious and organised crime.

What is the National Language Competition?

GCHQ's National Language Competition is aimed at students in Year 9 in England and Wales, Year 10 in Northern Ireland, and S2 in Scotland. It involves a variety of fun, immersive, language-themed challenges of varying difficulty levels hosted on a virtual platform. Our aim is for students to enjoy using their languages to solve the challenges, and to be inspired to continue with their language learning at GCSE and N5 level. All students, including home educated children, will be able to take part. No prior knowledge is required, only a keenness for languages!

The NLC 2026 will be a week-long event taking place from 16-20 November. Schools (or adult representatives on behalf of home educated children) will be able to sign up to the event beforehand and enter teams of up to four students to take part. They will be able to submit as many teams of four as they wish. Teams will then be able to log in to the platform during competition week (at lunchtimes under teacher supervision or in their own time in the evening) to have a go at the challenges on the platform. They will tackle a range of language-related challenges, ranging from easy to extreme, including European languages and others from around the world, and even made-up languages! Over a period of five days, they will compete to earn points on their language journey which will total up at the end of the week and affect their ranking on a national leaderboard. Teachers can also configure the leaderboard to show only their teams, to create an in-school element to the competition. The team with the most points at the end of the week wins!

Those who have expressed interest will be invited to register teams for the NLC in late September and, during the competition itself, will be able to see how their teams are doing via a leaderboard on the platform. The winning team and regional winners will be announced shortly after the competition. The overall winning team will be invited to GCHQ in Cheltenham, to receive their trophy.

How do I get involved?

We would like support in publicising the National Language Competition as widely as possible via schools and third parties to ensure good uptake across all regions of the UK and in as wide a range as possible of schools, particularly in areas with challenging socioeconomic conditions or that have a high number of heritage

speaker students. We would also appreciate support in publicising the opportunity to the home educated community.

To support our project, it would be helpful if you could pass on our messaging about the NLC via your contacts in education, and via newsletters, bulletins, or social media. You are also welcome to share this toolkit with your networks.

If you are a teacher and are interested in your school taking part in the competition, or you would like to represent home educated children, please contact the NLC mailbox: nlc@gchq.gov.uk and we will add you to our mailing list, ensuring that you receive all the information about the competition and instructions for how to sign up to the competition in due course.

Example promotional content

Suggested newsletter copy:

GCHQ, one of the UK's intelligence agencies, is running its annual National Language Competition (NLC) in November 2026. All Year 9 (England and Wales) / S2 (Scotland) / Year 10 (N. Ireland) students are welcome to take part, including home educated children.

Schools/groups can enter multiple teams of up to four. Over the course of five days, teams will compete to score points by tackling a variety of fun, immersive, language-themed challenges of varying difficulty levels hosted on a virtual platform. No prior knowledge is required, only a keenness for languages. The winning team with the most points at the end of the competition will be invited to GCHQ's Headquarters in Cheltenham, to be presented with their trophy!

Teachers, or adult representatives (for home educated children), email nlc@gchq.gov.uk to register your interest. You will then be added to the GCHQ NLC mailing list, ensuring that you receive all updates about the competition going forward!

Suggested social media copy:

@GCHQ is running its annual National Language Competition (NLC) in November this year for Year 9 (England and Wales) / S2 (Scotland) / Year 10 (N. Ireland) students across the country, including home educated children. For more information on the #NLC2026 and to be added to the GCHQ NLC mailing list, please email nlc@gchq.gov.uk!

- Facebook
- X
- Instagram
- LinkedIn

Suggested advertisement poster

The GCHQ National Language Competition

16-20 November 2026



Calling all Year 9 students

Assemble your team (up to 4 students per team) and
ask your teacher to email us to register your school's
interest

Registration opens 21/10/2026

nlc@gchq.gov.uk



#NLC2026