



## Case study

### Information Specialist

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Jackie</b>
<b>Age:</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>University:</b>	<b>York, Loughborough and St Andrews</b>
<b>University degree:</b>	<b>MA History (St Andrews)</b>
<b>Postgraduate degrees:</b>	<b>MA Medieval Studies (York) MSc Information and Library Management (Loughborough)</b>
<b>Current job title:</b>	<b>Information Specialist</b>



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### **How did you get your current job – what were the steps you took from graduation?**

“During my year as an MA student in York, I applied for and was successful in securing a job as a graduate trainee librarian at the University of Oxford. I worked in a big reference library for a year, undertaking duties in all the major departments including reader services, cataloguing, and rare books. Oxford has a great many libraries and a well-established trainee scheme for potential librarians. I benefited from a number of training courses and enjoyed being part of a close-knit community of librarians. There were aspects of the traineeship that I loved, and some bits I didn't enjoy so much. The experience helped me learn what kind of information work might suit me long-term.

After the trainee year I spent 12 months working as a secretary to raise enough money to fund myself through a CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) approved Master's year at Loughborough. I wanted to ensure that I could afford to do the course even if I didn't secure AHRC funding.

I had a marvellous time at Loughborough and really enjoyed the course. I worked part-time in the University library throughout the year, and this gave me a great opportunity to put into practice the skills which were taught on the course. I think this helped me when I applied for the job at GCHQ.”

### **How relevant was your subject of study in securing your current job?**

“All Information Specialist posts at GCHQ require the applicant to have a CILIP (Chartered Institute of Information & Library Professionals) approved information qualification.

Since joining GCHQ I have achieved Chartered status with CILIP.”

### **Describe a typical working day in your current job.**

“At the moment I am on secondment to another department based in London. I have been here for a year and will shortly return to GCHQ to a similar post.

I work in an open source unit where we provide research and current awareness services to staff throughout the organisation.

I start my day at 08:30 by checking my e-mail and flagging up anything urgent that has come in overnight. I then scan the electronic press cuttings for news stories of note. I put together two daily current awareness bulletins to update particular staff on breaking news issues of relevance to their work. I try to issue these alerts by 09:15.

The pattern for the rest of the day is dictated by the research requests the team has received from staff. These are enormously varied and can range from 10-minute checks in a reference book, to two or three week projects researching a particular issue. We have a meeting every Monday morning where we distribute the research requests around the team, trying to ensure a bit of variety for everyone whilst managing the workload. I usually spend most of my day undertaking research, and writing up summaries for the customer. I often meet with the customer to discuss their requirements and ensure that I am not going off on a tangent. I also consult colleagues when I get a bit stuck, or want some advice on a particularly thorny issue.

If I have time, I try to do a little cataloguing each afternoon as we are currently reclassifying our book collection. However this is progressing quite slowly as research requests take precedence as they are usually connected to an intelligence operation.”

### **How has your role developed and what are your career ambitions?**

“I'm still quite newly qualified so I am keen to continue to develop my own skills and experience lots of different work within the Information Specialist community. We move jobs quite regularly within GCHQ, so I am sure I will have ample opportunity to learn new things.”



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### **What do you enjoy about your job?**

"I love the 'treasure hunt' nature of open source research. I never know what I'll be asked next, or how I'll have to stretch my skills and knowledge to track down the answer!"

### **What are the most challenging parts of your job?**

"It can be very very frustrating if you can't find the answer to the research question! Sometimes the things you are asked to research are quite technical, and occasionally very boring.

Sometimes we have to undertake research under very tight timescales and under great pressure. Those are the times you really want to be certain you have checked every possible source of information. They are also the times when you appreciate being part of such a great team of knowledgeable and supportive professionals. The work is very satisfying, but it is not without stress."

### **What are the best things about working in this sector?**

"A wide variety of organisations employ information scientists, librarians, information specialists, records managers, and knowledge managers. It is possible to have a very varied and satisfying career within the sector."

### **Finally, what advice would you have for other students and graduates who would like to get into this career?**

"Get as much experience as possible in as many different information services as possible (either paid work, or as a volunteer). You will find that a public library is very different from a law library, or a university, for example. Work experience will help you decide whether the work really is for you. It'll also help you decide which postgraduate course you want to apply for. Do your homework and research the courses available. The modules offered by each university are quite different, and this may influence your future career path.

The CILIP website has an excellent directory of graduate training opportunities, and a list of approved qualifications in Information and Library Management."

**[www.careersinbritishintelligence.co.uk](http://www.careersinbritishintelligence.co.uk)**