



Case study

Language and Culture Specialist

Name:	Tia
Age:	26
University:	Aberystwyth
Course:	Law
Current Job Title:	Language and Culture Specialist



it's an **interesting** world

What exactly is it that you do?

“As GCHQ gathers intelligence from a range of sources, some of the material received can be in a foreign language. My role, as a ‘Language and Culture Specialist’, is to translate materials and provide a gist, so that analytical teams can interpret the information. The role goes much further though than just a translation service, and I work alongside Intelligence Analysts as the point of contact for behavioural, cultural and regional references.”

Why did you decide to join GCHQ?

“Originally I considered a career in law, completing a law degree at Aberystwyth. However, after several years studying I became rather disillusioned with the prospects so started to investigate careers in the Civil Service. I applied to some other government departments, but then a family member highlighted GCHQ to me. Ironically I came from Gloucestershire, and although I knew of GCHQ, I never considered that I had any skills that would be of use. After reviewing the website I became aware of the need for language speakers and, as a native speaker of a particularly rare dialect, suddenly realised I had lots to offer.”

How did your friends and family react when they realised you were going to join GCHQ?

“Joining any new organisation can be a daunting experience. When you add in the fact that it is one of the UK’s intelligence agencies it becomes really intimidating! Fortunately my parents were really supportive, and are now really proud at having a daughter working for such a respected organisation. When it comes to telling other people about where I work then I am a bit more mindful (due to the sensitivity of the work), but most people tend not to ask much once I’ve explained I work for the Civil Service.”

Are there any challenges to being a British Asian in GCHQ?

“I did wonder what the working environment would be like, given that GCHQ has strict nationality and residency rules. However, I was really pleased when it became apparent that my ethnicity and gender would have no bearing on my career progression. In fact it’s rather ‘cool’ to be in such a specialised role where I am the main POC for cultural references.”

What’s the training like?

“As GCHQ’s work is so unique the majority of the training is on the job, although there are obviously lots of courses to go on in order to understand IT systems and to learn how to write intelligence reports. However, what soon becomes apparent is the support network in place to assist you – there is always someone you can turn to. And in the language arena there is also the possibility of retraining into another language.”

What do you like most about your job?

“The amount of input and the level of responsibility I have over the end result – the intelligence that is produced. Plus, I work with a fantastic mix of people – all from different backgrounds and cultures – which makes for a really interesting and enjoyable working experience.”

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of applying to GCHQ?

“Do it! It is well worth it – good colleagues, good benefits, not to mention the opportunity to do something of real value. Best advice for anyone thinking of applying is to fully review the vacancy information on the website. And if you do decide to apply, be patient – GCHQ’s application process is not like most others and it takes a long time (for good reason).”

www.careersinbritishintelligence.co.uk