

Graduates Experience

November 1919

In recognition of the need for a peace-time code breaking agency, the Cabinet Secret Service Committee formed the Government Code & Cypher School (GC &CS).

In 1939, the GC&CS was established at Bletchley Park. Set up to help crack Nazi codes, it was home to two of the earliest 'super' computers.

The development of this technology helped change the course of the war and lay the foundations for today's GCHQ.

00.18

Nalayini Thambar

Careers Service, Leeds University

"It's the type of organisation where if people have an opinion, it's more likely to be slightly skewed, either to be extremely glamorous or actually not doing the work the opportunities and the working environment justice"

00.51

Student Focus Group

Bristol University

Focus group modulator

"What type of person do you think could work at GCHQ? What do you visualise? Is there a typical person you can see there?"

GCHQ works alongside MI5 and MI6 providing critical intelligence for national security, the military and law enforcement.

It also helps to protect the Government's communication and information systems from hackers, interference and disruption.

01.32

Language Student Bristol University

"You kind of get the impression that they're very quiet, secretive people who don't like to talk about themselves. But then when you actually read about what people say about their work, you get a completely different view."

01.42

Gareth, GCHQ

"I think you'd be hard pressed to find an organisation that's got a range of challenge, the range of opportunities and the range of skills that we employ, set against such an important piece of work that we do".

01.53

Neil, GCHQ

Throughout the organisation we try to ram home that it doesn't really matter what role you have, you are contributing to the bigger picture.

02.00

Engineering and Management Student, Exeter University

I think it would be a very interesting career path because obviously there they're dealing with really cutting edge stuff. And it's not the mundane sitting at a desk, filling out spreadsheets or anything like that. It's real stuff that applies to the here and now. Especially with the world the way it is.

02.17

Gareth, GCHQ

We need people now who are able to open their minds to working with others in all sorts of different ways. We have to still respect true specialisms and we need people with some unbelievably advanced skills in their particular bit of the business.

02.29

**Mark Armitage
Careers Service, Exeter University**

It is offering something sort of quite unique that you can't do with any other employer. There's only one GCHQ.

Graduate Recruitment

02.40

IT Student

Bristol University

With most technological jobs you expect proper kind of geeks but that's not what I imagine at GCHQ. They're probably intelligent people with, I don't know, 'quirks'.

02.51

Language Student Bristol University

I actually found it quite intimidating as well because it said something like we value linguist and some of our linguists know more than ten languages and I immediately felt I was useless. I've got two but it's actually quite intimidating. And then there's a section about 'can you understand these languages?' I could understand the first one as Spanish and then nothing.

03.10

Neil, GCHQ

Some roles do require a very specialist ability. If you take mathematicians and some of the language and culture specialists, they do have to be particularly good in those fields. But again, a lot of people think that you've got to be the highest calibre graduate to apply to GCHQ and that's not strictly true 'cos it's not just the academic elements, it's about you as an individual, where you fit in to the organisation, do you have the right sort of people skills for example, how do you relate to others that work here already in order to deliver the work.

03.42

Mark Armitage Careers Advisor, Exeter University

A lot of students will look to GCHQ, maybe as an outlet for their language and specialist skills. But also it's well known as a recruiter of mathematicians and IT specialists. So again, some of our students will be very interested in those programmes, as well as some of the more generalist and analyst programmes which I believe are open to graduates of any discipline.

04.06

Neil, GCHQ

Yeah, we do have our mathematicians, we do have our linguists and our language speakers but obviously one of the key areas for us is technology and we're really sort of driving home the different roles we have there. There's a full spectrum from engineering type roles to the support roles that I've mentioned previously, and also service management as well.

Training and Development

04.30

Engineering and Management Student Exeter University

Like I said, it would be a very interesting career; I think they give career progression throughout your time.

04.38

Gareth, GCHQ

A bit like I've been able to do over my time at GCHQ, there's a hugely supportive framework now to allow people to move forward in their careers, to go across the organisation, to get involved in all sorts of areas of work that you'd never dreamed of getting involved with, whichever route you first came in through.

04.54

Language Student Bristol University

They said that they offer training for further languages which is obviously very attractive. I personally, I did French degree level. I did German A level and I'd very much like to take up another language perhaps, as part of my ongoing personal development.

05.15

Neil, GCHQ

I guess one of the roles that people are often surprised about at GCHQ in the linguists or the language and cultural specialists. Firstly in the terms of the range of languages we cover; I think it's something in the region of 102, 107 languages spoken. And often our linguists may come in with sort of one language but will do re-training in to others. I know one of the individuals has something like 15 languages under their belt now and they've just got an absolute passion and that's what they want to do and that's where their career takes them.

05.44

Language Student Leeds University

This seems to be the only company that's offering something different that I can apply with my languages so I'm really, really grateful for that.

The Working Environment

05.57

Gareth, GCHQ

The whole idea was to link alongside the kind of mindset issues of breaking down old barriers into a physical entity which is the accommodation in which we work in. So it's essentially an open plan office that's very, very modern. It's called the donut for reasons that it's shaped like a ring donut so it's called the donut. People are used now to working in all sorts of different parts of that department; there's quite a lot of moving around desks., teams being able to move around at short notice for a particular reason, an operational reason, we can move people around much more easily then we ever used to be able to do. And I guess the other big thing is the way you do business on a day to day basis. You sit down much more easily and natter to people even round the coffee shop or anything like that in the building and get on with the trade of GCHQ. It's something that I think ten years ago would have been completely alien to the organisation.

Applying to GCHQ

06.51

Neil, GCHQ

"In terms of applying, the main route is via our website because that's where we actually advertise all our vacancies. Now some roles we do advertise all the time for, for example linguists and language and culture specialists. We're always looking for people with rare languages for example. Some of the roles have certain periods when they're open or closed so you kind of need to make sure that you're quite familiar with the website, that you have regular bookmarks. What you can also do is search our current vacancies and if there isn't anything that's suitable for you, you can actually register email and by doing that, what we'll do, is we'll send you an email then when we launch the next campaign suiting your skills or the area that you're interested in"

Vetting

07.35

Gareth, GCHQ

"Everyone working at GCHQ as an employee has to be cleared to high security levels – it's called the Developed Vetting Clearance – the DV clearance – and for four years I headed up the Personnel Security team. It's an area that critical to GCHQ, the work we do is of national security importance – and that means we do have to be sure that people who work here are not being put into an uncomfortable situation, either in terms of their own personal circumstances or because of family contacts they may have. We must be sure; we've all got vulnerabilities but the important thing is that we think those vulnerabilities can be managed."

Careers at GCHQ

08.16

Gareth, GCHQ

The work is fabulous, hugely variable, the scope as I said for taking your career in all sorts of different ways, back to that fundamental about the mission we do, the work we do, and why we do it.

08.26

Neil, GCHQ

For me, I think my career at GCHQ has been challenging more than anything. And often putting me in situations that I wouldn't naturally go towards so it's made me come out of my comfort zone and try different things. I was never one for doing presentations for example, but now that's part and parcel of my job to go and deliver presentations and it's just delivering and honing those skills. And obviously tied in with that is the job satisfaction of what I do – I wouldn't do the role if I didn't enjoy it and it's different every day, there's always a new challenge, there's something new coming up to get your teeth in to. That aspect counts for a lot I think.

09.05

Nikki, GCHQ

"GCHQ has changed so much in the years that I've been here. There are fresh challenges, technology moves ahead and GCHQ needs to move with it; it needs to face up to those challenges and I work actually I'm quite proud to say - that I work with some of the most intelligent people in the country, tackling some of the most difficult technical problems that are out there."

09.27

Gareth, GCHQ

"What it's given me is, well, 30 odd years of a job I love, a variety of jobs that I've loved, as I said, the things that I would never have expected in a million years that I would have been doing. It's given me security, it's given me the chance to earn a pretty decent wage and support my family, it's given me increasingly a work/life balance that I strive so ... fascinating work, great challenge all the time and literally you do not know from one day to the next what you're going to be faced with. So that's a personal reflection and that's what I would expect to

carry on for my remaining years with the organisation. And I think for someone joining the organisation it's that kind of wow moment of, you know, some people may stay for 30 years, some people may stay for five years. Whatever it is you're going to be faced with some enormously important work. Don't forget why GCHQ exists."