

The Professional Experience

Intro music

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.

This is what it's like to work there.

0 min 32 seconds: Gareth, GCHQ:

"I think you'd be hard pressed to find an organisation that's got the 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."

0 min 44 seconds: 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."

1 min 05 seconds: Neil, GCHQ

"I think there is often quite a bit of misconception in terms of the range of roles we have at GCHQ, some think it's all just Mathematicians and people who speak foreign languages and I think that it's quite a battle on our behalf to make people aware that we're like most other organisations."

1 min 19 seconds: Gareth, GCHQ

"We have to still respect true specialisms and we need people with some unbelievably advanced skills in their particular bits of the business."

1 min 25 seconds: Nikki, GCHQ

"The great thing about the organisation is that GCHQ recognises that it needs a balance, it needs to have those technical experts but it also needs people perhaps with some of those softer skills."

1 min 35 seconds: Neil, GCHQ

Although I'm not working at the front line, producing intelligence, what I do in terms of the support that I offer can really make an impact longer term on how that is delivered."

Working culture...

1 min 46 seconds: Helen, GCHQ

"We're dealing with national security, and it's a privilege to work in an organisation that's contributing towards the nation's security. So integrity is terribly important to ourselves. We're also very inclusive and I think the way the building is constructed is seeking to emulate that"

inclusiveness so you may overhear things which is very sensitive information and be privy to a lot of sensitive and secret information on a day to day basis."

Work-life balance...

2 min 17 seconds: Nikki, GCHQ

"When I first joined GCHQ I was working full time, I was single. I've since been married and have two young children and GCHQ has been a very supportive employer in that respect. GCHQ operates a flexi working system so I'm able to do my hours around school time and make up the hours when I can."

2 min 34 seconds: Gareth, GCHQ

"There are times when the organisation, if the country for example is going through a particular difficult crisis situation, then it's right and reasonable that we expect certainly at least parts of the Department to respond - and that can mean long hours, hard work, hard deadlines."

2 min 53 seconds: Helen, GCHQ

"We do trust our staff to deliver what they say they will deliver and they do that when clearly they can. If there are family issues, we recognise that people work to live, they don't live to work."

3 min 06 seconds: Gareth, GCHQ

"Work life balance is crucial, we can't have people so exhausted that they don't do a good job or they make mistakes so we try very hard to encourage it."

Handling sensitive material...

3min 17 seconds: Neil, GCHQ

"I guess some people are a little concerned about handling sensitive material, if it's something completely new to them, they might feel a bit concerned about what they can and can't say, particularly when they leave GCHQ. But in a sense that's one of the benefits that you can't take the work home with you, you have to leave it here, so it's almost becomes the norm that when you leave those gates at the end of the day – that's it. And if you do have any concerns there is a really good network of people internally – you've obviously got your immediate colleagues who are in exactly the same boat as you, then your respective line management team as well."

3 min 55 seconds: 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've all got vulnerabilities but the important thing is that we think those vulnerabilities can be managed."

Cheltenham HQ

4 min 32 seconds: Helen, GCHQ

"I would say to people that they should give Cheltenham a chance, Cheltenham is a very, very dynamic place to live and work"

4 min 40 seconds: 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 which we work in. So it's essentially an open plan office, very, very modern, it's called a donut for reasons that are obvious – 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 the department, quite a lot of moving around desks, teams being able to move around at short notice for a particular reason, operational reason, we can move people around much more easily than what we ever used to be able to do. And I guess the only big thing is the way we do business on a day to day basis, you sit down much more easily and natter with people even in a coffee shop in the building and get on with the trade of GCHQ – it's something that ten years ago would have been completely alien to the organisation".

Career development

5 min 34 seconds: Neil, GCHQ

Part of the appeal of GCHQ is the sheer range of jobs available on offer. You can join a department in a very specialist type role and if you want to go down that route you can just continue to learn and develop and become an expert in that field or equally, do a set period of time in that area and then consider something else

5 min 58 seconds: Gareth, GCHQ

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

6 min, 15 seconds: Nikki, GCHQ

"I started in GCHQ in the 80s and the first role that I had, I came in and I was working with a number of mathematicians in quite a specialised area. I enjoyed the role but I quickly recognised that it wasn't something I would want to stay in for my whole career. And actually it was then when I moved out of my role, in to a completely different area, I began to understand that actually you could have a very varied career at GCHQ".

Applying to GCHQ...

6 min, 43 seconds: Neil, GCHQ

"Yes, 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. We're really sort of driving home the different roles we have there. There's a full spectrum from sort of engineering type roles to the support roles that I've mentioned previously, and also service management as well"

7 min, 03 seconds; Nikki, GCHQ

"Don't necessarily consider that it's not a place for you if you don't have a technical specialism. There is such a variety of roles here that almost anyone with any kind of skills and background would fit in".

7 min, 16 seconds: 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 to send you an email then when we launch the next campaign suiting your skills or the area that you're interested in".

Don't forget why GCHQ exists

7 min, 57 seconds; 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 imagined 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".

8 min, 27 seconds; 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".

8 min, 41 seconds: Helen, GCHQ

"They want people to make impact but what walking through the portals of GCHQ I thin in itself has tremendous impact".

8 min, 48 second: 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"

8 min, 54 seconds: Gareth, GCHQ

"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".