

## Podcast One

The Guardian.

Hello, I'm Lila Mackey, welcome to the 'need to know' podcast. This podcast is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, well sort of. It's about applying for a job where you'll never be totally sure whose interviewing you, what you might be doing, or indeed where it might lead you. I'd tell you more but I can't, it's a secret.

Puzzled? I was. But that's exactly what life could be like if you become one of the people who work at GCHQ, Government Communications Headquarters. Along with Mi5 and Mi6, GCHQ forms part of the UK's intelligence and security services, and it specialises in monitoring and analysing signals intelligence, and in information assurance, which is all about keeping Government and Information systems safe.

The one thing most people know about GCHQ is that they used to be based at Bletchley Park, and were responsible for cracking the enigma code during the Second World War. So what's it really like to work at GCHQ? Rihap's been down in Cheltenham for a few years and she spent a day recording her thoughts.

"Hi, this is Rihap, its quarter to three on Saturday afternoon, I should have actually taken this out a lot sooner to record some information about what's been going on today but I have been so busy talking to the people that have been coming along to the open day, I haven't had an opportunity until about now. I have been on the Project Management stand all day, and it's been amazing the number of people that have been actually interested in Project Management and doing Project Management at GCHQ. I have been totally selling the fact that we have got the new Cruise Development Framework and the best thing of all is that a lot of people have been asking me what it's like and what happens, and where do you actually get to, and I have been using myself as an example that I came in as a Developer and didn't know anything about Project Management and now after about, what, two years down the line, I have got two technical work packages that I manage and a business process improvement work package, so it's real life experience to give them and not just reading things off a page for them, but actually showing them that you're a real example of where you can get to as a professional Project Manager, and the way GCHQ develop you you're able to manage any type of project, regardless of what that may be."

"One of the main questions people have been asking me today is what is needed as a Project Manager so I say to people I always think I have been project managing actually since I was at University but just in a different sense, always leading teams and organising things, and thinking about things that are advanced so for me it is like project management sort of runs in my veins, well I am not sure if that is such a good thing actually, but it certainly helps with the enthusiasm and the drive that you should have working in an organisation such as GCHQ."

As you can see, GCHQ has an important role to play in making Britain safer. To help in this work, GCHQ is always looking for Graduates to develop in key roles as Mathematicians, Intelligence Analysts, Information Scientists, Linguists and future Managers. One of the main recruiting needs is for Graduate Technologists to work in

helping develop, build and maintain the software and hardware that's used to collect digital and signals intelligence.

GCHQ is one of the most technologically advanced organisations on Earth. They use technology to help counter terrorism and major international crime, so the computers they use have to be more powerful and up-to-date than the computers used by hostile forces. In fact, much of its technology is so advanced that, yes you guessed it, it's covered by the Official Secrets Act. Having said that of course, there is one person who knows exactly what GCHQ gets up to on the Technology front and that's Paul who works in supply chain management. This is what he had to say when I went to visit him in Cheltenham.

"GCHQ has often been described as having the largest computer complex in Europe, and whether it's the largest or not I can certainly say that it is probably one of the most varied computer complexes in terms of the variety of infrastructure, whether its supercomputer, mainframes down to wide vector processing, down to thousands of desktops and applications applied upon those. In terms of what you're going to actually find yourself doing, you're going to find yourself applying your technical skills to the cutting edge of what the Government needs to know today in order to answer the problems that it has in areas of counter terrorisms, support to the military and foreign policy, and that's what makes it exciting for me."

"I can certainly say that GCHQ cares not only about doing the right thing, but doing it in the right way. We have to meet the demands of Government but we have to also make sure that what we deliver is engineered to a level that is going to withstand the rigours of time in some pretty challenging environments. So that means that you'll find there's applying things like capability maturity model and I-tel models, the way we go about doing it, you'll find us looking for continuous process maturity and improvement, you'll also find there's caring about your career and how that develops in a professional context so whenever you come and join GCHQ you'll find yourself joining an organisation of about a thousand Engineers, many of whom have Chartered status with something like the IET or a British Computer Society and if that's something you want to pursue, and we would certainly encourage that, you'll find that there is a rich variety of mentors who will help you take forward your career in that area."

"One of the things that makes GCHQ different, whenever you are joining us as a Graduate and why you might end up spending longer here than you would in some other organisations is the fact that we put so much emphasis on professionalisation and staff development, so we are spending something like £5million annually just on the Technologist area to ensure professionalisation and staff development, you are joining a community of about 1,000 Technologists within a larger community of about 5,000 staff generally, and what you'll find is that while you'll start off today as a Technologist you may find that interests develop that would cause you to move into another career stream, either within the Technical framework or in some completely separate framework and we'll support you as you do that and that would encourage you to stay working in the organisation longer than you would in some other areas."

One of the best ways to find out about what it's really like to work at GCHQ is to attend one of their open days, as I discovered.

“What appeals to me about GCHQ is it is a Civil Service job, there’s quite a good benefits package, socialising is meant to be quite good and I think it will really challenge me.”

“My degree was very technologically based, and I think GCHQ will be the best place to work in sort of really cutting edge technology and just doing something that I think is very important you know.”

“They are very keen on helping you develop your personal skills, not pushing you in at the deep end and that’s what really draws me to be honest.”

“I’m Dan and I’m a Project Manager for GCHQ, people just want to know what it really involves and what its like to work there, what my day jobs like, how I got into it and do I enjoy it.”

“I have known them for a while because I live locally, and I drive past the building and it looks impressive.”

“My names Katherine and I work at GCHQ. There is a variety of things we do, and yeah it has kept me busy for the last ten years.”

“Historically during the War trying to decipher things and it still is that but even more because of the advancements in technology.”

“I am a Senior Software Engineer responsible for a number of systems that we produce, and also personally as a Development Manager so looking after the careers and skills of people over the course of their career.”

“They have got a lot of opportunities here, with people with the right ability.”

“GCHQ is a unique area to work in.”

“There’s a very direct relationship between what we do and saving real lives, both within if you look at the recent events in London and around the world, we have a hand in many of those, protecting and looking after the UK and the UK Government.”

“I would think it is a very desirable place to work, and it would be at the edge of technology moving forward all the time.”

So, you think you have got the skills to join GCHQ, but what can you really expect once you get through the gate and sign the Official Secrets Act?

Mandeep is a Software Developer based at Head Office in Cheltenham and he’s been there for six years.

Q. Everyone knows about Mi5 and Mi6 but had you actually heard of GCHQ before you joined?

A. To be perfectly honest I hadn't heard of GCHQ before I joined, it was one of a number of IT companies that I had looked at. I chose it because it was a good job whereby I would get good job security and it was in Cheltenham so be a new place to live, and it was a competitive salary as well.

Q. You make it sound like a very straight forward choice, what about the whole kind of secret service part of it, were you interested in that? Did you think that the whole thing of helping national security was important?

A. Yeah I did quite enjoy the aspects of that as well, because it made it sound a bit more important I suppose to an extent and I've considered working for Mi5 and Mi6 in the past as well, and this was an alternative option that would certainly meet the needs I had for getting a job with the IT background I have. Certainly something that's a bit more interesting than just doing average coding for an application.

Q. Did you have any idea what it might be like?

A. To be perfectly honest not really, I thought it might be a bit more secretive and that you can't talk to people when you are down the pub or when you go home, certainly you work on very important projects.

Q. I mean that's the classic thing that if you work for GCHQ you can't talk to anyone at home, but are you actually allowed to say that you work for GCHQ?

A. You're not supposed to broadcast the fact but you can sort of tell your family and stuff I suppose yeah.

Q. So, once you got in the door, do you have to sign the Official Secrets Act straight away? How does it work on your first day?

A. My first day I think I did have to sign the Official Secrets Act, although it was some time ago but yes I did, they just sort of played it down really and said you have to sign this document and it wasn't an in-depth booklet or anything it was just an A4 sheet of paper really, its no different to any other organisation say Mi5 or Mi6.

Q. A lot of people talk about how GCHQ actually under sells itself because there is so much you can't talk about, was that actually your experience, so when you applied for the job and when you got through the door there was quite a lot more going on than you perhaps thought might be?

A. Yeah I suppose it was to be honest, when I first anticipated what I would be doing I figured I would just be part of a large team whereby you know you just concentrate on what you do and do your own job but there is a lot of techniques and methods put in place whereby you can appreciate what other people do in other parts of their job, certainly ensure with a lot of cross team communications.

Q. Is it cutting edge technology?

A. Yeah, definitely

Q. Things that you have never come across anywhere else?

A. I would say so; I mean we have to keep up with the latest technology so we have a lot of kit to keep up with all the latest things really yeah.

Q. I love the way you can't tell me anymore about that. (ha-ha) What are the best things about working for GCHQ?

A. Working with some of the state-of-the-art kit, work-life balance is pretty good, you don't have to work a lot of hours, like for example I've worked for an outside company and you are probably looking at a lot of hours when in comparison we are pretty good. Salaries competitive and we get to work with a lot of nice people and overall there is a lot of good training with the technologist background as well.

Q. Is there just one thing that you can let out of the bag and tell us about some of the exciting things that you do at GCHQ?

A. I don't think that will be possible to be perfectly honest, I'd be breaking the Official Secrets Act for one.

Q. Thank you very much for coming in.

A. Thank you very much.

Well that's your lot for today, but in our next podcast I'll be talking about why work-life balance is just as important for the intelligence services as it is for everyone else and I'll be looking at the working environments and working culture. I'll also be finding out what it's like to be a Linguist at GCHQ. Linguists are on the front line when it comes to receiving and interpreting information, providing language support on a wide range of intelligence targets, and although a formal qualification isn't essential, most Linguists speak at least two other languages, and many of them are busy learning a few more on the side. We'll be hearing the audio diary of a Linguist, talking about their work at GCHQ in Cheltenham and I'll have a Linguist in the studio trying to teach us some useful phrases in unusual languages.

If you want to find out more about careers at GCHQ, visit their website at [www.careersinbritishintelligence.co.uk](http://www.careersinbritishintelligence.co.uk)

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