

Podcast Two

The Guardian.

Hello, I'm Lila Mackey and welcome to the second 'need to know' podcast. In our first podcast we were talking about the work of GCHQ and its cutting edge technology. But for those of you who don't know your LANS from your WANS or your real time systems from your elbows, don't worry.

GCHQ recruits Graduates from a wide range of backgrounds and degrees. Mathematicians for example are very sought after, as well as high calibre individuals for the Graduate Fast Stream Programme or to train as Intelligence Analysts. Add Librarians and you will see there's plenty of opportunity for Graduates.

In this Podcast, as well as looking at the working culture and locations, we are going to feature another key job within GCHQ, the Linguists.

First though, let's catch up with Graham. Graham has been with GCHQ for a few years and he recently recorded an audio diary. Let's hear what he had to say.

"It's about half past five in the evening, and I've just come home from work, and I'm just having a quick run through everything I am going to be doing tomorrow, because I'm being let out to play and I'm off to a local school. The brief I have been given so far is to talk to pretty much all of the years at the school, going through how I came into languages, why I followed languages and what it's been like to work with them and in particular to talk about what it's like at GCHQ. I thought I might just talk about when I first started languages, what drew me to them, start off first thing in the morning with I think it's year seven."

"Right well it's break time so that puts it just after eleven o'clock this morning and I've had a chance to talk to most of the lower part of the school. It's gone well so far, talking to the children and explaining my background, so I did languages at A-Level, went to university to do Spanish and Management and ended up actually graduating with Arabic. Went over GCHQ and what we do, how we work with other Government departments and trying to get across to them that when we talk about using a language it is very much how much can you understand as opposed to how much can you speak. Explaining to them that the Department is actually right there protecting the vital interests of the nation and certainly explaining to them that the team I manage work right there at the forefront, so we get to be involved in exciting things like military operations and law enforcement."

Where do you think you would find the pulsing heart of British Intelligence? Just around the corner from Downing Street? Close to the corridors of power in Whitehall? A stones throw from the Houses of Parliament? Well, no, not quite. You'll actually find GCHQ on the edge of the Cotswolds in a small quiet town, best known for its racecourse, yes you've got it, Cheltenham.

Here's Paul from GCHQ to tell us more.

“My name is Paul and I live in the town centre of Cheltenham. What drew me to Cheltenham, it was certainly GCHQ, I saw the advert and I thought it would be interesting to apply, I came down, was interviewed and not only did I like the job, but I liked the town as well.”

“What I like about Cheltenham, it’s a whole variety of things really, I live right in the centre of town so I love the social side of life, tonight Ill be meeting some friends in the Bath Road and we’ll have a few beers and probably catch a curry afterwards.”

“I do a lot of outdoor stuff as well, for me the fact that it’s real close to a whole bunch of rock climbing centres around nearby is good. I do a lot of Kayaking so its good for that, general mountaineering, I do a lot of biking, on road and off road, so it combines the ability to be in the town centre, bike to work on a daily basis, meet my friends in the evening and then go out at the weekends and do whatever we want to do in the outdoors.”

“I grew up in Glasgow and I still go up there on a regular basis. Cheltenham is right next to the M5, it’s on a mainline railway station and it’s got Bristol and Birmingham airports both within 45 minutes for Easyjet and Ryan air flights to wherever you want to go.”

“It’s certainly got something for everything, there’s a couple of main streets with all the main sort of retail outlets but there’s plenty of specialist stuff as well. For me it’s got a relevantly high percentage of restaurants of all sorts of kinds for a town of its size and whenever you go out of an evening you can certainly start that off in one of the many bars in town, go on to a great restaurant and then finish off in one of the clubs.”

“Sometimes I actually forget how nice the town actually looks and then friends or family will come down and visit and they’ll comment on you know the Georgian Architecture right around the centre of town which kind of reminds them of Bath and places like that but then there is also the high tech on the outside of town where a lot of the new businesses are starting up.”

“And I haven’t even had to mention Cheltenham racecourse.”

I’ve been joined in the studio by Tom, a Linguist at GCHQ who speaks seven languages. Tom joined GCHQ in 1972 as a Graduate, speaking German and Russian. Since then he’s learnt Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, and if that wasn’t enough, Turkish!

Lila: Hello Tom, does everyone speak as many languages as you?

Tom: Some do, there are some that speak 16 or more!

Lila: Do you not get confused?!

Tom: Depends on the language, I mean the Russian, Czech, Slovak, Polish are Slovic languages and you can get a little bit confused.

Lila: Any examples that spring to mind?

Tom: Well there's a word in Czech that means 'girl' but if you use it in Polish, the same word in Polish is quite rude...you wouldn't use it, it's an insult.

Lila: So you can quite easily get beaten up!

Tom: Well, a slap around the face probably, ha-ha.

Lila: How many languages do you have to have?

Tom: You're usually recruited for one or two, and then you can re-train afterwards.

Lila: Right, you're going to try and teach me something, which fills me with horror!

Tom: Yes, I'm going to start with Czech, or 'Czechina' as it's known to the locals. Here's a couple of useful phrases for you, especially if you're attending hen or stag parties in Prague – which I do not endorse! – it's a beautiful city full of culture you do not need to go along for hen and stag parties! But here goes, it's a bit of a tongue twister to start with, not that you're ever going to use it!

(Tom says a line in Czech)

Lila: Right..!

Tom: It means 'A Greek came up and asked me how many Greeks are in Greece?'

Lila: Right, I think I might have trouble with that in English!

Tom: One more though, which would be quite useful when you're in Prague.

(Tom says another line in Czech)

Lila: What does that mean?

Tom: Well, 'Hundred tower Prague, (as it's known as it's got all its medieval towers) how beautiful it is....where's my beer?'!!

Lila: Laughs.

Tom: And another language, quite a radical one, Hungarian or 'Modure' as it's known. Hungarian is fascinating in that it's not related to any other language in Europe – well apart from Finish and Estonian. Hungarian is known as a 'Finogookoo' language, originates from the 'Alto' region of the Asian 'Step' although also believed to come from 'Manturia' it's similar in such to Turkish in that it shares the same elements as Turkish such as vowel harmony, that's to say the vowels and the sound of them in the word must all be the same. Unless it's a compound noun such as 'boudopesh' they must all be broad or narrow vowels such as 'mera' which means measuring or repulagib Aircraft repula flying gib machine then harzbon means harz means house harzborn in the house then you've got berleme ben, so ben is actually

bon but it's a broad vowel so berleme becomes berleme ben in Berlin. Characteristic in Hungarian is the pronunciation of the letter A as in English but sounds OR as in modore unless its modified with a diacritic to make it a long R as in the word fark which is plural for trees for which is tree so it becomes fark and then to say under the trees is farkalot.

Lila: Laughs

Hungarian plurals end in K example is this becomes ezick these or oz which means that becomes ozock depending on vowel harmony. Hence (Tom says a line in Hungarian) (Tom says another line in Hungarian) Who are these people? These people aren't Hungarian. Or where are those weapons of mass destruction? There over there in a box, so that's rendered as (Tom says a line in Hungarian) (Tom says another line in Hungarian).

Lila: Laughs. Is that something you've heard recently?

Tom: Yeah, fairly recently.

Lila: Laughs. Thank you very much Tom.

Tom: You're welcome.

Remember Graham, here's part two of his audio diary.

Graham: "It's 4 o' clock now just about to head back home a couple of people came up to me after school today and just asked about how they should continue with their languages, really asking what GCHQ looking for when it comes to recruitment. Perfect opportunity really to explain to them that GCHQ if you're looking at doing European languages in the future really we're looking for a minimum of two European languages or if you do some of the rarer languages like Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Pashto, then umm it is the one language but we do ask for not necessarily a degree in the language but that sort of level of language. Might even be ones that people have just picked up on trips abroad or perhaps speak at home but have never really thought about using in a work environment before. That was quite interesting because a couple came up to me that were in that position, got asked the usual questions of how much do you actually get paid? And it's always a difficult one to ask when you've got sort of people aged between 11 and 17 because by the time they actually get round to applying it's going to have changed a lot because we have performance related pay and there's usually an annual pay award resulting from our appraisal, so I generally try and urge on the side of saying well it's enough that I can live the type of life I want without complaining too much that I never have enough money. I suppose it's kind of a diplomatic answer."

Lila: I haven't actually been allowed to visit GCHQ because of course its secret. And most people won't get to see where they might be working until quite late in the

applications process. So what's it really like, what kinds of facilities are there on site? And what about going out?

I'm joined in the studio by Nicky, she's worked at GCHQ for 19 years and has worked all over the organisation, she's going to tell me a little bit about work/life balance.

Nicky: It's very similar to most office environments however because we can't really go outside because of where we are and what we do, we tend to have most of our facilities inside the building, so we've got coffee shops, got cafes, we've got a gym, we've got reading rooms, we've got a quiet room, which is also next door to a prayer room, we've got a library, all sorts of facilities really.

Lila: There's quite a lot of stuff actually on site.

Nicky: Yeah.

Lila: And what about moving to Cheltenham, because it's quite a big deal to up sticks and move to the middle of the Cotswolds.

Nicky: The organisation is quite friendly, so when you first arrive you're quite likely to make friends with people who you started on the same day with. So you start quite quickly building up a social group and Cheltenham is quite a sociable place, there's lots going on, there's lots of events going on, there's lots of nightlife, there's theatres, all the usual things you would expect. Cheltenham I suppose is quite a cosmopolitan town, even if it is in the middle of the Cotswolds.

Lila: Let's not beat about the bush. It is a small place, so what about bumping into your boss in town. (Lila and Nicky laugh) Does it happen a lot, that's what I'd like to know?

Nicky: I have bumped into my boss on occasion in a bar maybe, but I haven't yet got into trouble for it.

Lila: Now GCHQ is really proud of its work/life balance and I know you have flexi time and paid overtime, but how does it work in reality? Do you really have a good work/life balance?

Nicky: Yes, we work flexible hours, for most of us that means that we come in, in the morning anytime between sort of 7 and 10, depending on what you've done the night before, or whether you're an early riser or not. And we finish anytime between sort of 4 and 6. You don't always get to leave at 4 in the afternoon because maybe there's something happening that means you've got to stay a bit later. For most of us it means that we can organise our lives, you know people have got domestic responsibilities or maybe social activities that they like to get involved in. We're encouraged to not work long hours and most of us don't work long hours and the one really good thing is because of the type of work we do, we can't take it home. So when you do finish at the end of the day, then you've finished for the day.

Lila: Thank you so much Nicky.

Nicky: Thank you.

Lila: Right, that's it from me. I've learnt how to polish up my Polish, and I'm almost convinced that Cheltenham is a happening place to be.

Throughout the year GCHQ will be looking for a large number of graduates to join the team as Linguists, Technologists, Mathematicians, Intelligence Analysts and Information Scientists to name just a few.

If you want to find out more about careers at GCHQ visit their website at www.careersinbritishintelligence.co.uk