



Case study

Higher Apprenticeship for IT, Software, Internet and Telecoms Professionals

Name:	Sam
Age:	19
Currently in:	1st year of apprenticeship

What qualifications did you gain prior to starting the apprenticeship?

“12 GCSEs, 3 A-Levels, grades A-C (including maths and computing).”

How did you find out about GCHQ’s apprenticeship scheme?

“As I’m from the local area I was aware of GCHQ, so was always keeping an eye on the careers website for vacancies. I received an email alert to tip me off to the scheme and when I read the detail around the role I realised it was exactly the sort of field I wanted to work in.”

What attracted you to the GCHQ apprenticeship?

“After completing my A Levels I wanted to gain some practical experience but also continue to study. An apprenticeship seemed the best option as I could get paid whilst learning to gain a foundation degree. The fact that it was GCHQ seemed really good and I also liked the structure of the scheme where I had access to formal training but also proper on the job experience, potentially where I could make a real difference.”

Did your previous studies or experience help you to secure a place on the scheme?

“I feel my previous studies in computing helped, as they led to a keen interest in how computers work and I often help to solve problems at home on the family computer. My experiences also helped as I did a lot of work with cars on the electrical side of things –tinkering with both my own and family members’ vehicles.”

What are the people like whom you work with (i.e. fellow students/tutors/GCHQ personnel)?

“I get on really well with the other apprentices on the course. We’re really supportive of one another’s studies and are always looking to share our knowledge. We also get to work together as a team a great deal, working on larger projects for the most part. This is great for broader development (such as improving interpersonal skills and communication), which will play an important part when we are actually based in GCHQ.

Our GCHQ manager is really good at keeping us up-to-date, even if it is only a quick email. This contact is reassuring and makes you feel part of GCHQ, even though you aren’t based on the actual site. Recently we were approached to support GCHQ as a STEM ambassador – promoting careers in ‘Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths’ in local schools. I’ve done one session so far which was really rewarding – I got to attend with a member of GCHQ’s technology community (so made a new contact) and I just got so much positive energy from the students who really engaged with the task we set them.”

What do you enjoy most about your apprenticeship?

“I really enjoy the pace of the course, it covers a range of subjects so is always interesting and challenging; unlike some courses I’ve done it’s never dull! I’m able to work quickly, as part of a team or independently whenever is necessary; I really feel that I’m treated as an adult and expected to manage my own time to deliver my work. I also really like the contact I get with GCHQ, particularly the opportunities to meet with and talk to some of the staff.”

What skills are necessary to perform well in the role?

“You need good practical skills: a basic understanding of computing and electronics will help but isn’t necessary. You do need good interpersonal skills as you do a fair amount of work in groups. You also have to be organised and have good time management skills in order to plan your studies and deliver assignments on time.”

Apart from work and study, does the apprenticeship scheme give you time to pursue outside interests and hobbies?

“The set hours of the course means that there is lots of personal time to still participate in hobbies. I’m keen on fitness and was concerned when I entered the workplace that I might not have the time to still make the training sessions, so I was really relieved that starting with GCHQ didn’t affect my ability to do this in any way.”

Finally, what advice do you have for other people/students who would like to get onto the apprenticeship?

“I’d recommend the scheme to anyone who wants to acquire a broad range of skills with the opportunity to use these in a real working environment. Plus, GCHQ is such a unique organisation: where else would you learn a technique and then apply it in an environment that could help prevent a terrorist or cyber attack on the UK?! I feel very fortunate to be part of the scheme and make a contribution; if this sounds interesting to you (and why wouldn’t it) then you really should apply.”