

# Higher Apprenticeships at GCHQ

What's life like at GCHQ? We spoke to 'Steve' and 'Melanie', two second-year apprentices who came to Government Communications Head Quarters (GCHQ) straight from college.

## Why did they choose the apprenticeship over university?

'Lots of people finish university with a qualification but can't back it up with relevant experience,' says Steve. 'Another reason is that you earn a salary', adds Melanie, 'the fact we get a Degree from a reputable university without paying fees is a win-win situation'.

Crucially, they both wanted to develop the technical skills that are in such high demand from employers, and they liked the fact that the work isn't about making a profit. GCHQ's role is to help protect the UK against cyber attacks and terrorism.

## What's involved on the apprenticeship?

The academic component consists of a Foundation Degree and a Level 4 Diploma, with the option to convert to a BSc. Apprentices take the same classes you'd expect on any computer science course, from data structures and operating systems to telecommunications and cryptography.

Learning is put into practice on a number of work placements. 'It's great to be integrated with the people who do this kind of work full-time. We pull-together what we've learnt in the classroom and apply it to real problems,' says Steve.

## How much responsibility do you get?

Melanie was a Technical Analyst in her first placement, 'You find yourself working on projects with real-world significance. We're not just trying to gain marks at the end of a module'.

The success of her project meant she got to present it to a GCHQ Director. 'This opportunity is rare for someone just starting their career. It shows hard work really does get noticed here.'

Then there's the responsibility of being entrusted with access to top secret information at such a relatively young age, 'It was daunting at first, but you quickly get used to it', says Melanie.

## What's next?

Are their names actually Steve and Melanie? That's something we can neither confirm nor deny; but we can confirm that on completing their apprenticeships, Steve and Melanie could be interviewed for a promotion into a full-time position at GCHQ, MI5, MI6 or other government departments. To follow in their footsteps, go to the "vacancies" page of our website (link on the top right corner) and apply today. The next intake starts in September 2017.