



Case study

GCHQ Leadership Development Scheme

Name:	Ben
University:	York
Course:	History/Politics
Age:	23
Current Job Title:	Customer Account Manager

Tell me more about what your job involves.

"I'm on the GCHQ Leadership Development Scheme, which is a six year scheme that will provide me with a series of challenging placements in each of the main areas of GCHQ. During this time I will develop the competencies, skills and experience necessary to perform in a managerial/leadership role. My day usually starts with a coffee. Without that I'm no use to anyone! Then I get on to my voicemails. This morning I had a customer who wanted to know about a policy change that might affect their product base. I need to find the information from our experts and then call our customer to talk them through it. I then had a presentation about a new IT system that is being rolled out and learned how it will affect the area I'm currently working in. After lunch I caught up with a colleague also on the Leadership Development Scheme, who is working on workforce strategy for Intelligence operations. Fascinating. Last, but by no means least, I went to an assessment centre to talk to some of the new intake and give a completely honest view of the organisation – from the inside. So as you can see the role includes a lot of variety and no one day is ever the same, but that's part of the appeal of the scheme."

What skills are necessary to perform well in the role?

"Good communication skills are vital as you can find yourself moving from an office environment (where the tone can be very conversational) through to discussing strategic issues at a senior management level or attending a cross-government meeting. Equally important is the ability to manage others and lead by example. Also, the scheme gives you exposure to several areas of the Department via 6-12 month placements so you need to be flexible and able to adapt to new surroundings and people very quickly."

What are the best bits about your role?

"Personal training, mentoring and shadowing – you hear a good deal about that when you start looking for a graduate job. But some of my friends have had a very different experience to me when they start. I've had nothing but support here."

I also love the fact that my mates always talk about the 'secret squirrel' stuff. While we do undertake some very serious work, the thought of monitoring all their text messages would not only be time-consuming, it would also be very dull! We are in the business of signals intelligence, but we are not interested in the new pizza topping you just tried."

How have you found life living in Cheltenham?

"When I first applied, I must admit I wasn't entirely sure where Cheltenham was. But even though I was brought up in a city, there's no shortage of things to do in the local area. Most weekends, a group of us meet up for a curry or as much pizza as we can eat. Last week a group of us went paint-balling. I still have the bruises to prove it..."

What are the organisational benefits like?

"Honestly, they are fantastic. Lots of organisations claim to be flexible, but at GCHQ we have proper flexi-time and the holiday entitlement is generous too. I was also really surprised to discover how much GCHQ supports the local community – I've just helped out at one of the local schools by providing mock interviews to students just about to enter the workplace, which was really rewarding. Plus, when you talk about 'opportunities to learn' – well – the scheme challenges me on a daily basis so I'm developing and honing my skills all the time. There's also an array of more formal classroom based opportunities too. Lastly, I'm getting exposure to some fascinating technology and contributing to vital work which safeguards UK interests. I just wouldn't get this kind of experience and learning anywhere else."