



Philippa Hammond

Degrees: BA in French and Spanish at Cardiff University, and MA in Translation and Linguistics at Westminster University.
Job: Freelance translator

What do you actually do? I speak three foreign languages: French, Spanish and Portuguese. My job involves translating a range of documents including press releases, brochures, website copy and legal contracts written in these languages into clear, well-written English. The ultimate aim is to make the translated texts read as if they were a document originally written (well) in English, rather than as a translation.

Why did you decide to go into this sector? I have a love of words, in any language, and a love of other cultures. I also really enjoy writing, and translation allows me to do that. I started my career in-house but was really attracted by the buzz of being my own boss so decided to make the move to work for myself. Now that I'm freelance, I find it gives me flexibility and freedom that can't be matched by an office job.

Would you undertake further training to forward your career? I already do a lot of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) courses, and feel it's important to continue to take part in that throughout my career. For a professional translator, a formal postgraduate qualification such as an MA is a real bonus.

What skills do you need to succeed? For translation generally: good writing skills and an eye for detail. For freelancing: drive and determination – being prepared to put a lot into your freelance translation business in its early stages. More generally, having a basic understanding of how to run a small business is a must.

What advice would you give other graduates coming into this sector? The translation profession is very diverse, with opportunities in all shapes, sizes and locations, but it is a very good idea to join a professional body such as the Institute of Translation and Interpreting for guidance and accreditation.

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Tia

Degree: Law, Aberystwyth
Job: Language & Cultural Specialist

What exactly is it that you do? As GCHQ gathers intelligence from a range of sources, some of the material received can be in a foreign language. My role, as a ‘language and cultural specialist’, is to translate materials and provide a gist, so that analytical teams can interpret the information. The role goes much further though, than providing just a translation service. I am also the point of contact for behavioural, cultural and regional references. Consequently, I work alongside Intelligence Analysts to ensure information is not misinterpreted. By doing this I get a real understanding of their requirements, which allows me to continually re-evaluate what it is I deliver to them.

Why did you decide to join GCHQ? Originally I was considering a career in law, but after several years studying became rather disillusioned with the prospects, so started to investigate careers in the Civil Service. I applied to some other government departments, but then a family member highlighted GCHQ to me. Ironically I came from Gloucestershire, and although I knew of GCHQ, never considered that I had any skills that would be of use. However, after reviewing the website I became aware of their need for language speakers and, as a native speaker of a particularly rare dialect, suddenly realised I had lots to offer.

What's the training like? As GCHQ's work is so unique the majority of the training is on the job, although there are obviously lots of courses to go on in order to understand IT systems and to learn how to write intelligence reports. However, what soon



becomes apparent is the support network in place to assist you – there is always someone you can turn to. And in the language arena there is also the possibility of retraining in another language.

What do you like most about your job? I love the amount of input and the level of responsibility I have over the end result – which is the intelligence that is produced. Plus, I work with a fantastic mix of people – all from different backgrounds and cultures – which makes for a really interesting and enjoyable working experience.

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What skills are necessary to perform well in the role? Obviously language ability (not to mention good English skills) is vital. As is IT proficiency. However, just as important are softer skills, such as the ability to work in a team (and take the lead when necessary), and a willingness to continue to learn, develop and update skills – the nature of the work is always evolving so it is crucial to keep up to date.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of applying to GCHQ? Do it! It is well worth it – good colleagues, good benefits, job security, not to mention the opportunity to do something of real value. Best advice for anyone thinking of applying is to fully review the vacancy information on the website. And if you do decide to apply, be patient – GCHQ's application process is not like most others and it takes a long time (for good reason). ■