Women in technology: a GCHQ programmer shares her story

October 9th is Ada Lovelace Day, which seeks to raise the profile of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)

Alice, one of our programmers, talks about her experiences at GCHQ.

A few years ago, I was part-way through my second year of study for an Engineering degree at a university, and considering my options for the future. I hadn't signed up to do an industrial year but I wanted real world experience, so I started looking for placements or internships in engineering and technology companies. I saw an advert to apply to work at GCHQ as a Summer Student Technologist. I remember laughing and thinking how outrageous it would be to apply – I'd never get in of course. However, I did apply, for a laugh, just to see how far I'd get.

That summer I worked on a coding project with another student technologist within a team in GCHQ. I brought my coding knowledge, which wasn't much then, and it was certainly developed. I worked with a great team of people; people that inspired me to apply to come back to GCHQ after graduation. I had my first taste of keeping Britain safe with code, and I wanted more!

Today I am a technical specialist in software development. I have a core specialism, but I have developed a blend of skills in computing areas, such as computer architecture, cryptography and security, that means my work is never dull! GCHQ is a fantastic employer for computing – its work is unique, and our mission is what motivates me to do my best.

Women in technology are currently a minority so, especially on Ada Lovelace Day, I would encourage any women to consider this rewarding career. Whatever you chose, computing, technology, and cyber, all boil down to problem-solving. Solving tough problems is fun and even exhilarating – especially when you can keep Britain safe.

PUBLISHED

9 October 2018

REVIEWED

25 January 2019