



Alumnus Subject Graduated Place of Work Position
Michael Cheesman
Physics
2010
QinetiQ
Acoustic Signature Analyst



QinetiQ solve some of the world's most important problems in defence, aerospace, security and related markets. It is the UK's largest research and technology organisation, and more than 85% of their people carry high-level national security clearances. Michael joined its graduate scheme and works within the Maritime division to ensure that the Royal Navy's fleet of ships and submarines are safe from detection by mines and passive sonar.

Great minds *go on to* great places

Did you apply to other universities, and what were your reasons for choosing Royal Holloway?

I applied to a number of other University physics departments all over the country, but ultimately chose Royal Holloway for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it has an excellent record in the subject and is frequently placed as one of the top departments in the country. The second reason was its locality: the proximity to London is brilliant and I spent a lot of weekends visiting friends, but with it being a campus university you benefit from having everything (including all of your friends) right on your doorstep.

What were your favourite aspects of the course?

What made my course pretty unique was that in my final year I was able to pick and choose courses from all the physics departments in the University of London. This meant that the variety of courses was almost limitless and allowed me to design my degree to be exactly how I wanted it.

What would you say to someone thinking of studying here?

I would start by saying that Royal Holloway has something for everyone: it has world class facilities; top research departments; a great mix of people from different backgrounds studying a huge variety

of different subjects; it has some of the best funded and successful sports teams around London; it's only 40 minutes away from central London, but set against the backdrop of beautiful grounds, Windsor Great Park and Saville Gardens; and it has possibly the most gorgeous university building in the country. I would also say that you will have a fantastic time at Royal Holloway and will never regret choosing to study here.

Do you think your studies have helped you in your career?

My degree has been vital in both being offered my job and for the skills I use on a daily basis. As an acoustic engineer, the knowledge I gained from my degree is used every day. Added to that, Royal Holloway's Physics Department is part of SEPnet – a group of physics departments across the South East – and each year they organise a large number of funded internships with different companies and research departments. I was fortunate enough to be accepted on to an eight week internship with QinetiQ, which gave me fantastic industry experience and was ultimately very important in helping me get on QinetiQ's graduate scheme.

What do you wish you had been told whilst you were a student?

Probably the most important thing to know as a student is that job seeking starts long before you

graduate. Company graduate schemes often use their internships as eight week interviews and fill up a lot of their vacancies using them. It's so important that you're ready to apply for internships in your penultimate year so look for any way to expand your CV: get on committees at clubs or societies, or get involved with the union. Most importantly, get yourself to the careers centre because they are AMAZING!

What has been your career path since graduating?

I'm currently on QinetiQ's graduate scheme so as well as doing my day job I'm often going on courses and learning a lot of skills to help me in my career. The courses have covered different aspects of working life, from personal awareness to business knowledge. In a few months I'll have finished the graduate scheme, but my learning hasn't ended. As well as developing my experience in acoustics I've just been accepted on to a twelve month series of courses on management and business operations, which I'm really looking forward to.

And how did you come to work for QinetiQ?

QinetiQ was a company I had long been aware of but it was when I was accepted onto an internship in my penultimate year that I really decided that this was the company I wanted to work for. QinetiQ is a





people with passion

“Royal Holloway gave me a great degree, a brilliant job and a determination to succeed.”



brilliant company and is involved in so many different areas of technology, defence and security that there's something to keep any scientist interested.

Tell us about your current role.

I ensure the Royal Navy's fleet of ships and submarines are safe from detection by passive sonar. We regularly test the vessels, making sure they are quiet and have no issues that might endanger them.

How did you find out about this role?

I have to say that my current role is something that I hadn't considered before. After I went through the assessment centre I was placed in a pool of successful applicants and waited to be contacted by departments interested in me. For graduates joining QinetiQ now, they get the opportunity to work in all sorts of different technical areas on placements over their first two years. Also, the graduates get to decide exactly how they want to do this – they can either work on lots of short placements or a couple of long ones. This means they could be working in our world class cyber security team, developing simulated training for the RAF, helping the MOD decide on procurement options, upgrading our fleet of Merlin helicopters, working in thermal imaging, and many more areas all in just a couple of years, so you can easily find out what suits you perfectly

What skills do you use from your degree in your current role?

My degree has set me up perfectly for my current role and my future career. And it's not just the technical skills I learnt during lectures, but also the transferable skills that I wasn't always necessarily aware of. A lot of the things I find myself doing regularly, which are vital to my role, were learnt during my degree, such as: writing technical reports to a professional standard, giving presentations to both expert and non expert audiences, conducting practical experiments (although Royal Holloway's facilities didn't quite stretch to submarines), leading project teams, acoustics, materials science, a fair bit of maths, some signal processing and a pinch of computer programming. I could probably go on.

What are your favourite aspects of the job?

One of the best things about the job is that I feel like I'm doing something important. The Royal Navy go to some extremely dangerous places and it's my job to make them as safe as possible. Added to that, I work within an extremely friendly team and my work is extremely varied. One day I might be analysing data, another day I could be briefing a vessel, out at sea on a trial, working on internal communications or meeting with other graduates and learning about business operations.

What do you feel your time at Royal Holloway has given you?

Where do I start? A wife, a great degree, a brilliant job, determination to succeed, leadership experience from captaining sports teams, a love of gardening (don't ask), loads of physics knowledge, a really good CV, great friends and amazing memories. So, thank you, Royal Holloway.

What does it mean to you to be an alumnus of Royal Holloway?

I feel very proud to be an alumnus of Royal Holloway. I had a fantastic time at the college and I'm always very interested in what's going on – I love getting the Higher magazine and reading about the news from the college. In fact; the College is great at keeping its alumni connected: there's the annual alumni sports day, where old teams get together and compete against current students (and show them how it's done!); each department also regularly run their own events, as well as college-wide reunions; they also organise meet-ups in the city and even overseas if you find yourself in another country after graduating. The events can really help your career and are a great way to meet people. It really proves that the college is committed to helping you succeed in your career even after you've graduated.



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