

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN EVALUATOR

“I’m a gamekeeper. My job is to try and make sure that enemies can’t break into and exploit government systems. It probably sounds melodramatic and overblown but it’s very real.

This isn’t a job for everyone. You need to know a lot about a lot – cryptography, network security, threat modelling, hacking tools and techniques, software engineering – the list goes on. You also need to be able to think like an attacker, and weigh security against business needs.

You need to have good attention to detail; some of the threats are subtle and can require lengthy and painstaking analysis – but you can learn huge amounts doing that.

I’ve been doing this job for a couple of years now, and I still don’t think I know it all – there’s always something new to grasp.

I’ve mainly been working on mobile security – a lot of government customers now want to work with classified data on the move and at home. Enabling that requires a big technology stack – everything from disk encryption to server configuration. I’ve not done *everything* – but I’ve looked at products from network and disk encrypters to Blackberry®.

It’s important that you enjoy learning – I’ve had to contribute to projects where I didn’t have a lot of knowledge prior to joining – like police radios and e-passports. So it’s not just a narrow technology role – you have to understand what your customers are trying to accomplish, and find the best way to enable them to achieve that. That often means thinking on your feet – and sometimes having the courage to admit you don’t know all the answers.

I had around three months formal training on joining CESG, and I’ve done around six weeks so far this year. That doesn’t count the on the job training with more experienced folk. The trainings broad too – I’ve done programming, network and operating systems courses, plus things like windows internals and reverse engineering.

Downsides? Yes, there are some – CESG is part of a big government organisation, and therefore not always as nimble as I’d like. The job itself is very stretching – and it’s hard to prove how well you’re doing – the bad guys don’t advertise their failures. I could certainly earn more money elsewhere – but I like being able to work flexible, limited hours and the people are great. I’ve been to the US twice, and went to a hacker conference in Berlin last Christmas.

Its also given me a lot of skills I don’t think I’d acquire elsewhere. It certainly opens up a lot of options within the department - gamekeepers also make good poachers! “