

I grew up in Plymouth where I went to my local comprehensive. That was where I developed a passion for languages which led me to take a degree in Arabic.

This was quite a big deal, because I was the first in my family to go to university. I loved the course, particularly because I spent one year of it studying in the Middle East. I was able to travel across the region for my research and I learned a huge amount about the politics and culture of the area.

After graduating I got a job as a researcher in a university. I really enjoyed the research and writing, but got frustrated with the endless fundraising. So when I saw an SIS advert for Intelligence Officers, it offered the chance to do work of real importance and use my languages and overseas experience.

My first role was as a Reports Officer – or R Officer – covering the Middle East. That involved meeting agent runners to discuss the intelligence they'd gathered from their agents, checking the context, and corroborating their reports. Fairly soon I found myself briefing a senior Cabinet Minister.

After numerous overseas trips and the chance to maintain and use my languages, I took a senior R Officer role looking at Counter-Terrorism in the Middle East. And now I'm preparing for a posting to the Middle East.

I thought everybody here would be from a middle class background and Oxbridge-educated. So it was a relief to meet people from a diverse range of backgrounds. It's unlike any other job I've done. I'm working at the heart of government on issues critical to British national security and making a real impact on government policy. That's very rewarding