



UK Cyber Leaders Challenge Eligibility Criteria

Coaches

Each team should recruit a coach to support them during the competition. The coach is not an active competitor in the competition but plays an important role in supporting the team's learning & skill development.

Coaches:

- can be anyone but most coaches will be university lecturers. Coaches do not need to be affiliated to the same Higher Education Institution or employer as the team members.
- can coach multiple teams.
- should, but are not required to, have cyber, national security or politics knowledge or experience to be able to best support their team.
- should support their team by asking questions, helping students to learn independently & providing feedback, rather than prescribing a specific method to approach the competition & scenario.
- are encouraged, but not required, to attend their team's Regional Qualifiers and the National Finals, should the teams progress in the competition.
 - Coaches may observe their team's Briefing Round and make notes but may not actively contribute.
- There is no prescribed time commitment for coaches. However, as a minimum we would advise that coaches are prepared to spend 3 hours supporting their team before the Regional Qualifiers.

If a coach is not affiliated with any team members' UK Higher Education Institution (HEI) or employer, the team must a HEI or employer Point of Contact for safeguarding purposes.

If your team is struggling to find a coach, please email info@cyberleaderschallenge.com before applying to request support.

Student Competitors

We strongly encourage you to read the eligibility before forming your team and get in touch early if you have any questions.

All teams should meet the following criteria to be eligible for the competition:

- Teams should consist of four members. Teams of three will be considered at the discretion of the Competition Director.
- Each team member should be 18 years of age or older at the time of the Regional Qualifiers in February 2026.
- Each team member must be currently studying on a [Level 4 or above](#) (Level 7 or above in Scotland) course or apprenticeship at a UK organisation. This includes students on Foundation, Undergraduate, Year in Industry, Postgraduate, Apprenticeship, Study Abroad, Exchange, PhD or other programmes.

- Each team member must not have substantial professional experience in any industry that gives them a significant advantage in the competition (details below*).
- Each team member must not have substantial professional experience in responding to a cyber incident or briefing C-Suite / senior management (details below*).

*What we mean by professional experience.

The spirit of the competition is to support students who are at the beginning of their cyber career and who do not have significant professional cyber experience.

We do not consider Internships, Apprenticeships or Year in Industry placements to be significant experience, unless a core part of your role involved responding to cyber crises or briefing senior management.

Here are a few example personas, who are all studying on a Level 4 or above programme in the UK but have prior professional experience which may affect their eligibility.

Eligible	Get in Touch	Not Eligible
4-years working part-time in a retail store or supermarket	Director of a not-for-profit initiative or small business	4-years in a role briefing senior management
Completed an 8-week internship as a policy analyst	1-year full-time employment as a policy analyst	2-years full time employment as a policy analyst
5 years full-time employment as a software developer	1-year full-time employment in a policy role outside the UK	
Completed a year-in-industry in threat intelligence	Experience through compulsory military service	
	2-years experience working with Think Tanks or public bodies	

Everyone's level of experience is unique, so it's important that you are proactive in checking your eligibility with us if you are unsure.

If any of the following statements apply to you, please email info@cyberleaderschallenge.com outlining the details of your experience why you believe it does not give you an unfair advantage in the competition **before submitting your application**.

- You are unsure about your eligibility to compete.
- You have limited experience in responding to cyber crises or briefing senior management.
- You have over 1 year of professional experience in any industry.

If your eligibility is queried by our organising team after you have submitted your application, it may lead to your team not being allocated to your preferred Regional Qualifier or team disqualification.

You should also be aware that:

- Multidisciplinary teams are encouraged but not required.
 - For example, a team comprising of a mix of politics, law, economics and computer science students may have an advantage over a team of only computer scientists.
- Team members can be in any year of study.
 - In 2025, several first-year teams made it to the National Finals - outperforming teams in later years of their degree.
- Teams can be comprised of team members from multiple organisations.
 - In 2025, we had a team of University of Exeter & University of Edinburgh students. The Third-Place team had students from the University of Birmingham & Aston University.
- An organisation, such as a university or apprenticeship employer, can be represented by multiple teams and there is no limit.
 - For example, there could be three separate teams with team members studying at the University of Manchester.

Eligibility Verification

The UK Cyber Leaders Challenge team will review each individual's eligibility on a rolling basis as students complete their profile on the application platform.

We will use your CV, LinkedIn and other sources of information to verify your eligibility for the competition.

If we have any queries or believe that you are ineligible to compete, we will contact you using the email address you provided when signing up to the application platform.