THIS IS A CYBERFIRST WORLD

LET'S OPEN IT UP

University Bursary Programme

Cyber First

GCHQ

National Cyber Security Centre
a part of GCHQ

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Welcome to your guide to our bursary programme

CONTENTS

WHAT IS CYBERFIRST?

CyberFirst is a programme designed to prepare the next generation of young people from all backgrounds for a career in cyber security and wider tech. While we're still primarily focused on cyber security, CyberFirst also now encompasses AI, quantum computing, semiconductors and advanced connectivity – the technologies that will be crucial as the UK aims to become a global tech leader by 2035.

Our goal is simple: to open up the world of emerging tech to young minds from all over the UK. We want to inspire and equip the new generation with all the tools, experience and confidence they need to become tech specialists.

> " **WITH ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES AT THE NCSC AND GCHQ, THERE'S LOADS OF WORK YOU CAN DO – AND WITH A WHOLE LOT OF INDUSTRY MEMBERS TOO."**

WHO RUNS CYBERFIRST?

CyberFirst is led by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) – part of GCHQ, the UK's intelligence and cyber security agency.

You might have heard of the NCSC and GCHQ before, but here's a run down:

GCHQ is the UK's world-leading intelligence and cyber security agency with a mission to help keep the UK safe. The agency uses cutting-edge technology and technical ingenuity to identify, analyse, and disrupt threats in an increasingly digital world. They work closely with MI5, MI6, law enforcement, the military, and international partners to counter real-world and online threats from both large groups and individuals.

As part of GCHQ, the NCSC is the UK's authority on cyber security. Since 2016, it's been helping to make the UK the safest place to live and do business online. The NCSC offers unrivalled real-time threat analysis, defence against national cyber attacks, and tailored advice to victims of cyber intrusions. The NCSC has access to some of the most sophisticated capabilities available to government, and its ground-breaking approach to cyber security is improving the UK's resilience to cyber threats.

WHO CAN JOIN THE PROGRAMME?

Our bursary programme is designed for curious, motivated students who are ready to explore the world of cyber security or tech.

We're looking for people with a passion for problem-solving, a willingness to learn and the desire to support our mission.

The subject you're studying doesn't matter – if you've got the right attitude and the aptitude to grow, you'll find a place – and a community – here.

The bursary is open to students from all backgrounds, all degree paths and all parts of the UK. The main thing we all have in common is our desire to make an impact, shape the future of technology and help protect our digital world.

" **I KNOW LOTS OF PEOPLE ON THE SCHEME WHO STUDIED SUBJECTS LIKE HISTORY, POLITICS, AND PSYCHOLOGY, LIKE ME, AND IT'S NOT HELD THEM BACK AT ALL."**

> **" NOW MORE THAN EVER, CYBER SECURITY IS CRUCIAL. WE'VE GONE ONLINE FOR EVERYTHING AND IT MEANS WE'RE LEAVING MORE DATA OUT FOR PEOPLE TO GET."**

WHY IS TECH SO IMPORTANT NOW?

Technology is embedded into our daily lives. From the phones in our pockets to the smart devices in our houses, to the systems that power our hospitals, transport and communication – everything we do relies on technology.

As the world becomes even more digital, the systems we rely on are becoming even more complex. From AI transforming healthcare and education, to quantum computing revolutionising science and security, to semiconductors powering everything from smartphones to satellites – tech is evolving fast.

Cyber security is the foundation that keeps all these systems safe. As tech evolves, so do the threats, making cyber security more essential than ever.

And with the UK's ambition to become a global tech leader by 2035, we need to evolve as well. The demand for skilled, adaptable people has never been greater.

Whether it's defending against cyber threats, designing ethical AI or building next-gen connectivity, tech careers are no longer niche – they're essential.

UNIVERSITY BURSARY

We're here to help young people find a career in cyber security or tech that matters.

Our bursary programme is designed to support curious, driven students from all backgrounds. You don't need to know how to code or be a tech expert – we'll teach you what you need.

STUDY

If you're starting university – or have at least two years of full-time study remaining in September 2026 – we'll give you a tax-free £4,000 bursary per year to support your course.

GRADUATE

Once you've completed your degree, we'll help place you in a graduate-level role in tech, either in government or industry.

DEVELOP

Each summer, you'll take part in either training at a CyberFirst Academy or an eight-week placement with the NCSC, or one of over 100 industry partners. You'll get at least £2,000 for your summer work, plus a discretionary contribution to your living costs too.

WHO CAN APPLY?

- You're applying for university to start in September 2026 or, you'll have at least 2 full years of study remaining (excluding industry year) from September 2026

- You've achieved, or are predicted to achieve, BBB at A Level in any subject (or equivalent to at least 120 UCAS points in any equivalent qualification)

- If you're already in a degree course, you're on track for at least a 2:1 equivalent at the end of your degree

- You're a British citizen

An 'industry year' or 'placement year' is where undergraduates spend a year working in their chosen industry. It's typically taken in the third year of their degree.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A CYBERFIRST BURSARY STUDENT IN INDUSTRY?

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"I had no tech experience, had never studied computing, and I was quite worried when I applied. But now, in my summer placement, I'm learning how to programme. We use mostly C++ and a bit of Python, and because I'm not the most experienced programmer yet, I test existing code and make notes of any errors I find. It's experience that helps me fill in the gaps in my university course. It's even helped me pick which modules to choose in my second year, because it gives me context on which areas will be important for me. I understand now the skills I need that aren't covered in an academic setting, and what I need to set out to learn."

Current CyberFirst bursary student

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"I found the bursary particularly attractive in that it allowed me to go to university. I was thinking of applying after my A Levels, but I knew that, with my circumstances, I wouldn't be able to get by on my student loan alone. The financial support has been really helpful, in that sense. I'm learning so much too, on a practical level. Right now, in my summer placement, I'm working on a research project on active hacker groups. It's about building awareness of existing threats. Then, when the business talks to customers about the risks in their sector, we can give them bite-sized, concise information on active hacker groups in their specific industry. It's really interesting work."

Current CyberFirst bursary student

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A CYBERFIRST BURSARY STUDENT IN GOVERNMENT?
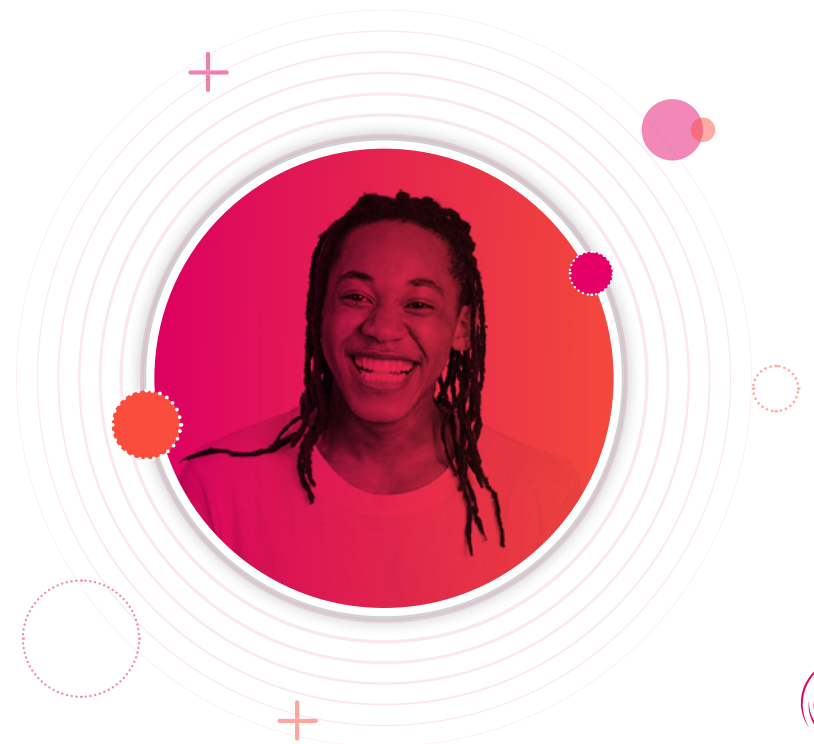

"You're joining a really tight community. Whenever I come across someone else on the bursary scheme, we've always got so much to talk about. It's always good to be among friendly faces, and I've met a wide network of people that I know will keep popping up as our career journeys go on. Your professional learning and development opportunities really are boundless too. I've been able to attend conferences, inspire younger students, improve diversity, and access amazing opportunities that simply can't be found elsewhere."

Current CyberFirst bursary student

"You're surrounded by people who are experts in security. So if you don't feel 100% confident in the area, then I'd definitely say you'll feel more knowledgeable even after just one summer placement. Your academy instructors or your placement colleagues will be so good at explaining things to you. I've discovered that the roles available in both the public and the private sector are far reaching, and there really is something for everyone. There are paths from penetration testing to secure development, incident response to risk management, then there are sales, project management and recruitment roles. And that's just to name a few. It's just opened my eyes to a huge industry."

Current CyberFirst bursary student
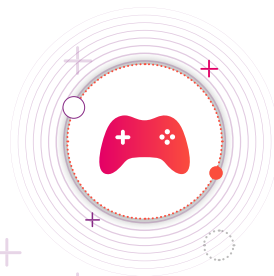
WHERE COULD TECH LEAD YOU?

Cyber security

From defending national infrastructure to protecting personal data, cyber security covers everything – including all of the sectors below.

Aerospace

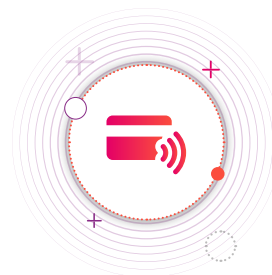From securing flight data to enabling AI-assisted navigation, tech keeps aircraft systems safe, smart and connected.

Gaming

From immersive world-building to protecting gamers, tech drives innovation and safety in the gaming industry.

Streaming and digital media

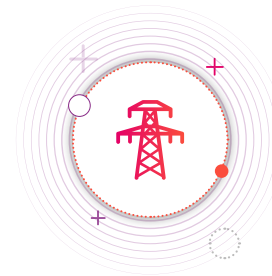Tech keeps platforms running seamlessly, protects people's data and ensures content is delivered at lightning speed.

Commerce and banking

AI, data science and cyber security protect transactions, detect fraud and keep digital banking and online shopping safe.
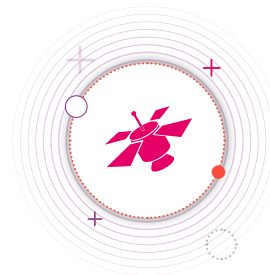
Healthcare and education

Tech is transforming how we learn and care – from AI-powered diagnostics to secure digital classrooms – while keeping sensitive data secure.
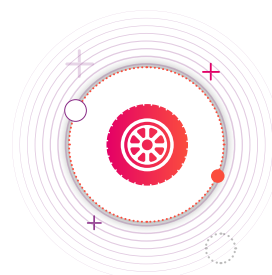
Energy and connectivity

From smart grids to 5G networks, tech keeps the systems that power our homes and connect our devices running smoothly.

Space and satellites

Whether it's GPS, climate monitoring or space exploration, satellites rely on advanced tech to stay secure and accurate.

Transport

From real-time train timetables to smart motorways to driverless vehicles, tech keeps the UK moving – safely and efficiently.

Working in tech is about being curious, adaptable and willing to learn. Whether you're solving complex problems, designing ethical systems or protecting digital infrastructure, your mindset matters just as much as your knowledge. Lateral thinking, creativity and being calm under pressure are all key.

You'll be part of a fast-paced sector that's critical to the UK's economy and everyday life. But you won't be alone. You'll be joining a collaborative, supportive community that welcomes and celebrates people from all walks of life.

To help you get a better idea of what our application process involves, we've outlined the main structure below, giving you a good basis for what it takes to join our programme. And of course, we'll support you throughout the process – keeping in regular contact to guide you through.

Here's how it'll work:

1. Visit our website: **cyberfirstcareers.co.uk**
2. Check the eligibility criteria
3. Fill in the online application form
4. Complete the online assessment
5. Attend the assessment centre
6. Receive a conditional offer
7. Vetting begins (if necessary)
8. Fill in the online vetting questionnaire (if necessary)
9. Offer and start date

For more on the application process and what's involved in every step visit our **website**.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO WORK IN TECH?

MORE USEFUL RESOURCES

To help give you the best chance of success in your application, here are some useful resources.

Having the right skills

We look for people with a particular skillset: teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills are most important. To find out more about the kinds of skills and competencies we look for, and what we mean by skills and competencies, take a look here:

· Total Jobs

· jobs.ac.uk

· Cyber Security Skills Council

Acing your application

We want your application to be the best it can be. That's why we've put together some useful links, where you'll find tips on how to make yours really shine:

• **Researching and preparing:**
  · TargetJobs

• **Online test practice:**
  · Immersive Labs
  · TargetJobs
  · TryHackMe

• **Interview preparation:**
  The Star Framework

A taste of how we think

If you fancy stepping into the shoes of our team, then why not test your skills with some of these challenges:

· Cyber Games UK

Please note that these are general challenges and not specific to the two CyberFirst schemes we're recruiting for, so don't worry if you find them difficult or they don't cover your areas of interest.

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM OUR TEAM

To help you find your way in our world, we asked current bursary students their recommendations: ways to boost your skills and help you on your way to joining the next generation of tech specialists, even if you're a total beginner right now.

"
Try to keep yourself up to date with the latest developments in cyber security if you can. The threat landscape is changing 24/7, so the things we know about the industry today may not be applicable tomorrow."

"
Just know that if you believe in yourself and work hard, it's possible for you to do this, no matter your background. I know people with English degrees. Biology. Economics. The typical route is Computer Science – but it's not the only route. There are loads of resources out there too to support you to get started. I'd recommend Immersive Labs, Hack the Box, and Future Learn's introduction to cyber security as great places that could really help."

"
I think it's important to understand the cruciality of balancing academic learning with practical experience. If you're aiming to get on in cyber security, any real world experience you get is looked on very favourably – and CyberFirst is the place not just to get that experience, but to get it from some of the best organisations in the industry."

"
Try Codecademy: it's a free website to learn programming languages. I've used it for every single language I know and I can't fault it at all."

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READY TO OPEN UP THE WORLD OF TECH?

Find out more about our bursary programme, learn about the key concepts of tech, and even listen to our podcasts at:

cyberfirstcareers.co.uk

#cyberfirst

Cyber First