

Schoolgirls across UK prepare to vie for crown of cyber security champion

Girls prepare to go head-to-head at the finals of the 2023 CyberFirst Girls Competition, run by GCHQ's National Cyber Security Centre.

- Teams will tackle cyber security challenges at the in-person finals for the chance to be crowned champions of their area
- More than 8,700 girls took part – many for the first time – in a contest which seeks to inspire young women to pursue cyber careers and create lasting change in a typically underrepresented industry

Schoolgirls across the UK are preparing to put their tech skills to the test this week in a bid to be crowned cybersecurity champions by GCHQ's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC).

The CyberFirst Girls Competition finals will take place simultaneously at 13 venues across the UK on Saturday, with the top-scoring team in each home nation or region being named local champion.

The finalists, aged 12 to 13, will work in teams to crack cyber-related puzzles on everything from artificial intelligence to cryptography and logic in a bid to score the most points.

More than 8,700 girls entered this year's competition, overtaking last year's total by 24% and bringing the total to 65,000 girls who have entered since it began in 2017.

By holding finals throughout the UK, the NCSC aims to encourage more young people from more regions to participate. The 2023 competition saw entries from 209 schools who had never taken part before.

Now in its seventh year, the CyberFirst Girls Competition aims to inspire girls to consider pursuing careers in cyber security and change the future of the industry for the better. Currently, female representation in the sector is unacceptably low, with women accounting for just 22% of the UK's cyber workforce.

Chris Ensor, NCSC Deputy Director for Cyber Growth, said:

"This week girls across the UK are preparing to compete in the finals of the CyberFirst Girls Competition. To have reached this stage is an amazing achievement and we wish all of them the best of luck.

"The UK's cyber industry is growing rapidly, but it needs better female representation – that's why we're committed to uncovering cyber talent and improving opportunities.

"I hope that for many of the girls, this is just the start of their journey into cyber security."

Charlene Hunter MBE, CEO and Founder of Coding Black Females, said:

"The CyberFirst Girls Competition has already impacted so many girls, and I'm excited to see the 22% increase to a much higher number with opportunities like this.

"Competitions like this are vitally important to ensure that girls and young women are exposed to technology from an early age.

"I've had the privilege of having parents in tech and involvement in the industry has been a large part of my upbringing, this enabled me to see fewer barriers when I started my career as a software engineer and so much of that has had an impact on the creation and development of Coding Black Females."

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, said:

"We are committed to developing the next generation of cyber leaders who can ensure the UK remains at the cutting edge of this important sector, and continuing to tackle female under-representation is vital to uncovering this talent.

"Our CyberFirst competition is a fantastic initiative; inspiring thousands of girls right across the country to get involved in cyberspace and kick-starting their aspirations of working in the industry. I wish the girls every success in the finals!"

The CyberFirst Girls Competition is the NCSC's flagship cyber security contest for schools, which opens annually to girls in Year 8 in England and Wales, S2 in Scotland, and Year 9 in Northern Ireland.

The finalists are the highest scoring teams from the first round that took place in November, and finals are being held for each of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and English regions.

The winners will be announced via the [NCSC’s social media](#) at around 15:00 for each final. They will receive laptops as part of their prize, along with an invitation to a celebration event later in the year.

The CyberFirst programme offers a range of free opportunities aimed at offering young people the skills, opportunities and exposure they need to thrive in cyber security.

More information about CyberFirst opportunities can be found on [the NCSC website](#).

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