

UK's schoolgirl cyber security champions joined by undeclared war star at prestigious awards night

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- Wymondham High Academy in Norfolk took home the crown of 'Top Scoring State Newcomer' while Highgate School in London won the award for 'Top Scoring School', presented by special guest and star of Channel 4's *The Undeclared War*, Hannah Khalique-Brown.
- More than 8,700 girls from across the UK's four regions took part in the 2023 competition aimed at inspiring more girls to pursue cyber and technology in their education and later careers.

Schoolgirls from across the UK received awards at a prestigious prize-giving ceremony in Belfast on Saturday (11 March) after becoming regional champions in the UK's flagship cyber security competition.

The [CyberFirst Girls Competition](#), which is now in its seventh year, saw 589 teams of girls from all four nations compete in 13 regional finals across the UK, where they tackled in cyber security challenges ranging from cryptography and logic to artificial intelligence and networking.

The winning teams were recognised for their achievement at an awards dinner at The Titanic Hotel in Belfast on Saturday. The 13 winners were awarded their prizes by NCSC CEO Lindy Cameron OBE, along with special guest Hannah Khalique-Brown, star of Channel 4's *The Undeclared War*.

Taking home the prize for highest overall score, the team from Highgate school in London successfully saw off competition from more than 8,700 students to be crowned cyber security champions.

Meanwhile, picking up the prize for highest scoring state newcomer, Norfolk school Wymondham High Academy were awarded £15,000 – courtesy of Tesco – to be put towards kitting the school out with new cyber facilities.

Lindy Cameron CEO National Cyber Security Centre, said:

"Congratulations to all 13 teams for winning their respective regional finals – and to all those schools who deservedly took home a prize at our awards dinner.

"It's a pleasure hosting you all in Belfast, and I'd like to extend my congratulations and admiration to the teachers who have encouraged and supported their students to take part in the Competition – this would not have been possible without you.

"The UK's cyber security industry needs more female representation, and I hope for many of the girls this will be just the start of their interest in technology."

Addressing the students at the awards ceremony, Hannah Khalique-Brown, star of Channel 4's *The Undeclared War*, said:

"Each and every one of you in this room is utterly unique, and whatever careers you decide to follow, you have something singularly special to offer by virtue of you being your brilliant selves.

"I'd like to remind you all that you're capable of doing remarkable things. Whatever it is you love, whether it's cyber or something else, I encourage you to grab it with both hands and see where it takes you.

"It has been amazing to share this experience with so many talented individuals and I hope to see many of you again at future competitions."

The awards dinner marks the end of the 2023 competition, which aims to encourage girls aged 12-13 to consider pursuing an interest in technology and introduce them the idea of a career in cyber.

Currently, the representation of women in the industry is just 22%, a figure that drops to 13% in senior roles. By encouraging girls to pursue this interest at a pre-GCSE age, the CyberFirst Girls Competition aims to change the future of representation in the industry.

Kay Southgate, Computer Science and ICT teacher at Wymondham Academy High, said:

“This was my first year running CyberFirst competition, and I didn't know what to expect. I was delighted with the quality of the activities and how easy it was to run. The girls really enjoyed working in teams and having the freedom to choose the challenges for themselves.

“It was great to see their self-confidence grow which was definitely enhanced by having an all-girls environment in which to thrive. I have seen this impact on their programming skills: they have developed a can-do problem-solving attitude. A number of girls have now opted for Computer Science GCSE who previously would not have thought it was for them.”

The CyberFirst Girls Competition opens annually to girls in Year 8 in England and Wales, S2 in Scotland, and Year 9 in Northern Ireland, and since 2017, more than 65,000 girls have taken part.

This year, more than 8,700 girls from more than 580 schools entered as the contest went fully virtual for the first time. The 2023 finalists came from all corners of the UK, with schools from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and 10 English regions.

The categories and award winners from the event are:

- Most team entries (State School) – Eden Girls School Waltham Forest
- Most team entries (State Selective School) – Nonsuch High School for Girls
- Top scoring team (Qualifier Round) – Tonbridge Grammar School
- Top scoring team (Final) – Highgate School
- Top scoring CyberFirst School – St Augustine's Catholic College
- Top scoring returning school – The Tiffin Girls' School
- Second top scoring state newcomer – Woodbrook Vale School
- Top scoring state newcomer – Wymondham High Academy, Norfolk

The CyberFirst programme offers a range of free opportunities to help school-aged children learn more about cyber security and support their interest in the field.

This includes [free courses for boys and girls](#), which aim to introduce pupils aged 14-17 to the cyber threat landscape and to develop their digital and problem-solving skills.

More information about CyberFirst opportunities can be found on the [NCSC website](#). View the [full list of winners](#).

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