

Birmingham computer scientists take part in national cyber security challenge

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The University of Birmingham's School of Computer Science, along with 3 other leading university computer science departments in the UK, is taking part in a unique code-breaking competition as part of this year's Cyber Security Challenge UK.

All departments have accepted the challenge to develop their own cipher, a puzzle based on encrypted messages that will be released to other participating universities and Challenge candidates to break.



A new cipher will be released each week during the challenge. They will be designed to inspire students who are particularly interested in entering cyber security careers and practising their skills. It will also act as a proof of concept for a series of university-on-university competitions that the Cyber Security Challenge is looking to run in the future.

The Cyber Security Challenge UK began in 2010 as three competitions run by a small group of supporters from industry, government and academia to address a skills gap in the cyber security profession. Now in its third year the Challenge has grown its range of competitions to better represent the variety of skills currently demanded within the profession. Today the Challenge is backed by around 50 sponsors and also acts as a source of guidance for those keen to enter the industry.

The University Cipher Challenge is being coordinated by the Cyber Security Challenge UK and PwC as part of their strategy to engage with the education community and highlight and develop talent in the UK's student population. A scoring system has been developed by cyber security professionals at PwC and each university will be marked in three categories: ingenuity of cipher design; successful completion of another university's cipher; and least number of "cracks" by other Challenge candidates.

Participating universities also include Edinburgh Napier University, University of Bristol and University College London.

Dr Tom Chothia from the University of Birmingham's School of Computer Science who will lead Birmingham's challenge said: *'Our online bank accounts, mobile phone voice mails and personal information are all under threat from cyber attacks. The Cyber Security Challenge will help us inspire and train the next generation of cyber security experts, who will be our best defense against these kinds of attacks.'*

Stephanie Daman, CEO, Cyber Security Challenge UK said: *'The University Cipher Challenge is something completely new. This is the first time that universities have been asked to develop their own cipher, putting the skills of their students in competition with those from a rival. The UK has a world-class academic base in cyber security and this tournament represents a great opportunity for existing Challenge candidates and new players to test the hard, code breaking skills and out-the-box thinking that the cyber security profession requires. We are running this as a pilot with the ambition to encourage more university departments to take part in 2013/14 as we embark on a dedicated education programme featuring university based cyber camps and a set of competitions specifically designed for students.'*

Andrew Miller, Government & Public Sector Cyber Security Director, PwC said: *'As the largest professional services firm, we advise many organisations on the growing number of cyber security issues on a daily basis. The cyber security landscape is constantly developing and the research conducted at world-leading universities is important to us in maintaining an advantage. We were keen to support the Challenge's collaboration with the academic sector by judging entries for the University Cipher Challenge. The tournament is a fantastic way to identify and develop the cyber security professionals and leaders of the future who will be integral to securing the success of UK PLC.'*

Anyone wishing to take part in the Challenge can register here. <https://cybersecuritychallenge.org.uk/universitycipherchallenge.php> (<https://cybersecuritychallenge.org.uk/universitycipherchallenge.php>) The Birmingham Challenge starts on Monday 28th January.

Ends

Notes to editors

Cyber Security Challenge UK (www.cybersecuritychallenge.org.uk (<http://www.cybersecuritychallenge.org.uk>)) runs a series of national inspirational competitions aimed at attracting talented people into the profession and informing them about cyber security careers and learning opportunities. Now in its third year it is running an ambitious programme of competitions and activities designed to spread the word about why cyber security is such a fulfilling and varied career and help talented people get their first cyber security jobs., it is sponsored by some of the UK's most prestigious public, private and academic organisations and is making a notable difference to the career prospects of those with the talents and aptitude to become cyber security professionals. The following organisations are helping in various ways to deliver the Cyber Security Challenge UK and make it a success: Cabinet Office, Office for Information Assurance and Cyber Security, HP, PwC, BT, Cassidian, GCHQ, QinetiQ, SANS Institute, Sophos, 2E2, 7Safe, CompTIA, Dtex Systems, Goscomb, HMGCC, Infosec Skills, IRM, (ISC)2, Metropolitan Police Central e-crime Unit (PCeU), Raytheon UK, KPMG, Royal Holloway, University of London, Lancaster University, DC3, Royal Mail Group, Ultimate Communications, DISA, Field FisherWaterhouse LLP, Ultra Electronics, Information Assurance Advisory Council (IAAC), Invigia, Level 3, Lockheed Martin, MEMSET, Northrop Grumman, The Open University, RSA, Symantec, Trusted Management Ltd, Unisys, Vodafone, AFCEA, BCS, Council of Registered Ethical Security Testers (CREST), e-Skills UK, Get Safe Online, Institute of Information Security Professionals (ISSP), The Information Security Awareness Forum (ISAF), Information System Security Association (ISSA), US Cyber Challenge.

For further information

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