

CyberCenturion

INSPIRING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY: INTRODUCING CYBERCENTURION

Expanding Participation and Building Skills

Harriet Page, the head of computer science at Bishop's Stortford High School in Hertfordshire, has played a pivotal role in integrating the CyberCenturion competition into her curriculum. Harriet has dedicated herself to expanding the computer science department, focusing on both A-level and GCSE students while ensuring the subject is accessible across all key stages.

The school's journey with CyberCenturion began amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the initial small group of students, the competition provided a unique opportunity to develop skills not covered in the standard curriculum, particularly in areas like Linux, which are vital for cybersecurity but often overlooked in traditional educational settings.

Since then, the CyberCenturion program at Bishop's Stortford High School has seen remarkable growth. The program now has a wide array of participants across various year groups. "Now we have more like 15 teams, rather than 15 students," Harriet notes, indicating a significant increase in student interest and involvement.

This expansion reflects not only the growing popularity of the competition but also the value students place on the hands-on, practical skills it offers. By taking students off the timetable for full-day sessions and providing lunchtime practices, Harriet has created a flexible and supportive environment for students to engage deeply with the competition's challenges.



The impact on participants

The programme has had a profound impact on participants, particularly in fostering a sense of community and improving interpersonal skills. Harriet shares a touching example of a student who, through participation in CyberCenturion, found a voice and a sense of belonging within their team.

"There was a student who barely spoke to anybody at school. But as soon as they were in this competition, they were in a team, they were talking away and they were part of it. It brought them out of their shell because they had something to say and had something to contribute. Being part of that little community of students just helps them so much to develop skills for outside of school."

Encouragement for Other Educators

Harriet offers valuable advice for other educators considering introducing CyberCenturion to their students. She highlights the importance of not being deterred by a lack of technical expertise, she encourages educators to allow students the freedom to explore and learn independently. "The competition provides instructions and guidelines that you need to follow... but really, there's nothing that your basic computer can't handle," Harriet advises that educators don't need to have all the answers, CyberCenturion provides students with learning opportunities in exploration and problem-solving.

Harriet's approach shows the value of embracing new learning opportunities, advocating for a hands-off teaching style that empowers students to take the lead, explore complex systems like Linux, and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

Challenges and Learning Strategies

The growth of CyberCenturion at Bishop's Stortford High School shows the powerful role extracurricular programmes can play in enhancing education. By providing space to learn new technical skills, build confidence, and create a supportive community, the programme has become an integral part of the school's offer to students.

Providing a special CyberCenturion day for students away from their regular timetable has ensured that participants can immerse themselves in the challenges.

Harriet also cultivated a flexible and inclusive environment through the provision of lunchtime practices for the CyberCenturion competition. This arrangement caters to the diverse schedules of students, ensuring that all interested individuals have the opportunity to participate, practice, and hone their skills.



Inspiring the school community

Harriet has found that the wider school community have benefitted from the excitement around CyberCenturion, leading to more students participating in computing-based activities, such as the school's code club.

"When they see other students taking part, there's this overwhelming team spirit going on. There's just a lot of positive atmosphere...and I think the way it's impacted other activities like coding club as well. The students have seen our teams that have taken part and thought "actually, I want to be part of that as well". I think that's how it's become so popular now."

