

CyberCenturion

OPENING DOORS FOR STUDENTS: SHARON'S CYBERCENTURION EXPERIENCE

Expanding Participation and Building Skills

Sharon Corkery is Head of Computer Science at Sutton Grammar School, a selective state school for boys in Greater London. Sharon has been teaching at the school for 16 years. Around 10 years ago, Sharon discovered CyberCenturion.

"I was looking for some way for the students to be able to explore things that I don't teach. So [in our curriculum] we technically don't teach the skills that are learned in the CyberCenturion competition. We touch on network security, we touch on safety, but I don't have time in my curriculum to teach the in-depth knowledge that is covered in that competition."

The first year that boys from Sutton Grammar School took part, all of the GCSE Computer Science students joined the competition.

"I didn't know how it was going to work. So I just told everybody, we're going to give this a go and see how it works out. I think we had more than a dozen teams. We booked space in the school, we did it in the evenings. We all stayed late and from that core group of students, there were a few boys who fell in love with cybersecurity."

Sharon explains that how they run CyberCenturion has changed, "We don't do it in school anymore. I tell the students about it. I let them make their own teams, and they do work at home at the weekends for the competition." This resulted in a more sustainable model enabling staff to encourage and resource teams across multiple year groups.



Daniel's story

Daniel was a Sutton Grammar School student. He took part in the CyberCenturion competition for four years in a row, when he was in years 10-13

Sharon explains the impact of CyberCenturion on Daniel's further education choices: "When Daniel went to apply for university he looked at Southampton as it was the very first year they offered a cybersecurity degree. Because of his involvement in CyberCenturion, he was given an early unconditional offer."

Daniel has completed his cybersecurity degree at Southampton. "He's now working in industry, he comes back and speaks to our students" says Sharon, "He's an amazing inspiration."

Opening Doors for Students

Sharon has seen the impact on her students' destinations after they leave school.

"We've had so many students go through [CyberCenturion]. It's a wonderful thing to put on UCAS personal statements and talk about during an interview. One of my participants ended up going to Imperial College on a full bursary to study Computer Science with Cyber Security. One of the main things that was written in his UCAS personal statement was that he participated for four years in the CyberCenturion programme."

"For us, it's opening minds and it's opening doors, specifically for students. It's getting them University offers, with funding. It's something that the students feel passionately about, and they love it. We've had a team in the finals for the past two years. I'm hoping we'll get to go again this year!"

Sharon recognises it isn't all about the winning however: "I would still say, whether we win or lose, it's the fact that these students are being exposed to things that I can't give them in the classroom. That's what we like about it so much."

Career Opportunities

Sutton Grammar School has a large number of students choosing to study Computer Science.

"We're a very small school, but we're getting large numbers studying Computer Science. For example, in the current GCSE cohort, there are only 135 boys in the whole year group and 73 study Computer Science."

Sharon wants to show her students what is available to them if they choose the subject. "There's a career path here. You can become a programmer, you could work in AI, you could go down the math route, or you could go into cybersecurity. If I didn't have this particular competition, it would be very difficult to present it in such a worthwhile way."



Sustainable Participation

As a busy teacher, Sharon recognised that she had to find a sustainable way to encourage involvement in the competition for her students.

"We pride ourselves at the School in providing opportunities for the students...we are looking at inviting industry professionals in to further encourage the teams."

Sharon has found that the wider school are inspired by the results:

"Students are aware that we've made it to the finals twice. We came in third place in the country last year. And that was the thing that people are excited about."

