

# Upskilling staff for cybersecurity functions: two birds with one stone

UK forces employment charity the RFEA and TechVets have partnered to train and create opportunities for service veterans and leavers within the cybersecurity and technology sector. The partnership will provide mentoring, networking and training via the TechVets Academy.

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Underemployed and unemployed veterans are estimated to cost the UK economy £1.5B over five years; however, their training and skills make them ideal for working in security and the pressurised and fast-moving situations that cybersecurity can present, said James Murphy from TechVets.

## Why does it matter?

The idea of retraining workforces to fulfil cybersecurity functions is gaining momentum, particularly as cybersecurity itself is a top priority for many businesses digitising their operations.

In November, Zurich UK announced it would retrain 3,000 employees in robotics, data science and cyber after identifying that these roles could go unoccupied by 2024 if preparations weren't made. Furthermore, amid

widespread job losses in the oil and gas sector, energy major Shell has begun retraining certain employees through a partnership with online course provider Udacity. The pilot programme provides petroleum engineers, chemists and geophysicists with AI training – which could allow the company to deploy AI solutions for cyber protection.

The issue of cybersecurity talent shortages has persisted for several years with non-profit cyber training and certification firm (ISC)<sup>2</sup> previously highlighting that 2.93 million cybersecurity positions remained unfulfilled in 2019, potentially costing companies millions. Furthermore, the number of cyberattacks has recently increased during the Covid-19 pandemic amid a shift towards remote working. Against this backdrop, and with many people falling victim to pandemic-related redundancies, governments and corporates could have an opportunity to retrain staff to assist in combating the threat.

Recent job cuts and uncertainties could explain why 55% of non-tech workers are considering a career move, according to a report by CWJobs. There does seem to be evidence some are considering gravitating to cybersecurity – for the first time, the global skills shortage in this sector fell from 4.07 million last year to 3.12 million at the end of 2020.

## Lateral thought from Curation

Cybersecurity, like technology more broadly, is a sector lacking in diversity, with women and minorities significantly underrepresented within the space. There is perhaps a chance to address this with retraining programmes particularly if they are accompanied by campaigns making these roles more attractive.

This may be a harder task than it appears. Most US and UK workers are currently not interested in pursuing a career in cyber. Furthermore, the UK government recently deployed a marketing campaign to promote the switch to cybersecurity, however, the approach was soon withdrawn following mocking criticism.

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