

An Exciting Year for CyberFirst NI!



It's been a busy - but rewarding! - year for CyberFirst Northern Ireland.

As our schools and supporters ease into a break over the summer, we wanted to look back - and thank you all for your immense contributions to the success of the programme.

A huge amount took place this year, but here are just a few highlights!



OUR SOCIAL IMPACT

The CyberFirst Northern Ireland team are immensely proud of our contributions to the CyberFirst Social Value Report 2026.

In Northern Ireland, our work has generated some of the highest social value across the UK, delivering a Social Return on Investment of £26.89 for every £1 invested.

The collaboration between academia, industry and government has been central to the success of the programme – expanding access to cyber education, inspiring the next generation, and supporting the development of a diverse and inclusive cybersecurity talent pipeline.



Read the full report:
<https://bit.ly/4v6hMmY>

SCHOOLS RECOGNITION



This year, fifteen schools have been recognised for their achievement, with a number of new participants and renewals demonstrating continued commitment to the CyberFirst project. The total number of CyberFirst schools in NI is now 40!



The schools award process wouldn't be possible without our Industry supporters who volunteer their time to review schools' applications, and sit on award panels. Thank you to all who took part – your time and efforts are so appreciated by the team, and by the schools who benefit from recognition.

WORK EXPERIENCE

In partnership with Futures For All, CyberFirst ran a 3-day Remote Work Experience in March, supported by representatives from Allstate, CME Group, D-fine, Loquerion and SSE. Thank you to all who offered their time and skills!

This hands-on experience gave students the chance to explore core cybersecurity concepts, and the wide range of careers available in the digital world. 85% of young people were confident that they could achieve their career ambitions after taking part.

If you'd be interested in offering work experience opportunities for young people interested in computing or cybersecurity, we'd love to hear from you!

CISCO ROADSHOWS

In December, April and May, Cisco Roadshows came to South West College and Belfast Metropolitan College, bringing GCSE students a day of inspiration, hands-on cyber activities, and an exciting challenge to test their problem-solving skills. Thank you to Cisco for supporting the events!



EMPOWER GIRLS

In March, 700 Year 8 girls from 24 schools across Northern Ireland gathered at ICC Belfast for Empower Girls 2026, delivered in partnership with Aflac.



Empower is one of Northern Ireland's largest initiatives aimed at inspiring young women to pursue careers in cyber security and digital technology.

Throughout the day, students took part in interactive exhibits, live demonstrations and hands-on activities, exploring the world of cyber security, innovation and technology. They also heard from professionals working in cyber defence, AI, cloud computing, software engineering and digital forensics.

Now in its third year, Empower Girls has rapidly grown into a major STEM movement, bringing together more than 60 organisations from industry, academia and government. And the event is now award-winning - picking up Outstanding Project of the Year at the NI Cyber Community Awards!

Thank you to all our fantastic Industry volunteers who came to the event and shared their expertise and enthusiasm with students – you are helping to inspire the next generation of cybersecurity in Northern Ireland.



CYBERFIRST GIRLS COMPETITION

Across the UK, the Girls Competition saw almost 10,000 girls taking part, tackling challenges from cryptography to machine learning for the chance to be crowned cyber security champions.

A special congratulations to St Catherine's College Armagh, who took home multiple prizes including Highest Scoring Returning Team, Highest Collective Score for a CyberFirst School, Top School in NI, and School with the most team entries!

STORMONT HACKATHON

In October, we hosted our first Hackathon in Parliament Buildings at Stormont! In the challenge, students developed an app, website, or prototype to address a local challenge around the theme of sustainability

Thank you to our colleagues in the NI Assembly who hosted us for this event, our ambassadors who came along to support, and to Danske Bank, who sponsored prizes for the winning students.

Thank you to everyone who helped make the day such a success for the students taking part!



CYBERFIRST NI CHRISTMAS CTF

More than 400 students from across Northern Ireland took part in the online Christmas Capture the Flag (CTF) competition, supported by the Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre. Participants tackled challenges in web and network security, mobile security, cryptography, reverse engineering, and digital forensics, with top-scoring students receiving prizes for their outstanding performance.

UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

In December we were delighted to collaborate with ACE-CSE, Queen's University Belfast who hosted a Christmas event for 130 students from 5 CyberFirst schools. Students took part in interactive lab sessions, heard from university and industry speakers, and gained insight into future opportunities in cyber security and technology.

Ulster University Magee Campus has also welcomed CyberFirst Schools this year for talks and interactive sessions in their Timberquay labs and Intelligent Systems Research Centre. It was a brilliant opportunity for students to see cutting-edge research up close and learn more about future pathways in the field. Thank you for your support!



CYBERFIRST ADVANCED COURSE

In August, October and February, the CyberFirst Advanced Course took place at Belfast Metropolitan College, supported by the NI Cyber Security Centre. Aimed at 16 to 17 year olds, this course is designed to expand the knowledge of students already studying computer science or with an interest in computing.

Students worked with digital forensics, encryption technologies, open-source intelligence techniques and learned about pen testing methodology, utilising professional techniques to test system security. 93% of students who completed the course would consider a future career in Cyber.

Participants heard from academics, industry experts, and gained advanced skills in key areas of cyber security. Thank you to everyone who came along to support the students with their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm – the course opens doors for the young people who take part, and the opportunity to learn from industry supporters is a huge benefit.



The Advanced Course will be running again in the coming academic year. If you'd like to get involved, please get in touch!



Thanks for a great year! Now, looking ahead...

From September 2026, CyberFirst will be transitioning to TechFirst.

TechFirst will build on the success of CyberFirst, engaging young people in new areas of technology and growing our impact. CyberFirst already supports students interested in cyber security - and as TechFirst, this will grow to cover more areas of technology, helping students in schools and colleges to develop tech skills, get confident with AI, and gain insight into a range of potential tech careers.

We couldn't have run the CyberFirst programme so successfully over the last three years if not for the support of our community of industry partners – your commitment, expertise, and enthusiasm have been hugely beneficial to the students reached by the programme. You are helping to expand access to cyber education, and inspire the next generation of local cybersecurity talent.

There will be plenty of opportunities to get involved in TechFirst come September – please get in touch to find out more! We look forward to having you join us in this exciting next chapter.

Keep in touch with us:



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CyberFirst NI



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