Co-founder of new not-for-profit TechVets Mark Milton explains why veterans are uniquely qualified to develop the nation’s cyber security capabilities

Can veterans plug the digital skills gap?

The UK is facing a critical skills shortage in cyber security. According to a 2017 report by ESG and ISSA, -45 per cent of organisations claim to have a problematic shortage of cyber security skills, -70 per cent of cyber security professionals say the cyber security skills shortage has had an impact on their organisation, and -22 per cent said their cyber security team was not large enough for the size of their organisation.

Frost & Sullivan predict the number of unfilled cyber security positions could hit 1.8 million by 2022. A recent increase in the threat posed by state actors to our critical national infrastructure has meant organisations are often unable to fill these roles. This is particularly true for those looking to hire veterans.

We established TechVets as a not-for-profit to provide the bridge into cyber security. Our mission is to support service leavers and veterans who would like to build on their transferable skills and develop new ones to work in cyber-security. The UK government is committed to making the UK a secure and resilient digital nation, and TechVets supports this goal by recognising the unrealised human potential of our veteran community.

General Sir Richard Barrons K.C.B. C.B.E. has recently joined as our Ambassador. General Sir Richard served as Commander of Joint Forces Command, one of the six chiefs of staff leading the UK Armed Forces until April 2016. He agrees that “the transferable skills of the veteran community are a national resource and have a vital role to play in supporting the security and prosperity of the nation.”

In early March we held a launch which was hosted by Level 3 in Canary Wharf. The event provided an opportunity for the veteran community to hear from their former peers who have succeeded in cyber security and to network with industry leaders and recruiters.

First, we intend to expand the first cohort of 200, who have access to the Veteran Cyber Academy. We are keen to engage with industry partners who can use the academy as a technical vetting tool, as well as identify and develop their existing talent.

Second, we want to build on the success of the launch and continue to run networking events for the veteran community throughout the year. These events will serve to both inspire and help veterans discover the right career path for them and to make positive steps towards it. We will be working closely with CREST, IET and the BCS in this work.

Core to our principles is the avoidance of duplication, and we will continue to work closely with our supporters in industry (Amazon, Barclays, Deloitte, Google, IBM, Immersive Labs and Oracle); in academia (Information Security Group at Royal Holloway, and the Institute for Cyber Security Innovation); in government (MOD’s Career Transition Partnership, Defence Relationship Management, DCMS and the Cabinet Office); and in the military charities and not-for-profits (COBSEO’s employability cluster, the Royal British Legion, SSAFA, RFEA, and RBF).

The first cohort of 200 – the programme was oversubscribed five times – students began their training on the platform on the 4th April, and the feedback so far is overwhelmingly good. Looking forward, TechVets aims to do three things.

- Identifying, developing and measuring practical cyber security skills is the great challenge for all companies today. The Immersive Labs approach is the most exciting thing I’ve seen in this space: scalable, agile and appropriate to the way a new generation learns. It has the potential to disrupt and transform this crucial market.

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Veterans have unrivalled problem-solving skills

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