

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.

The recent increase in the threat posed by state actors to our critical national infrastructure only serves to amplify this shortage.

It is clear that security leaders need to find a solution to this issue which means finding new sources of untapped talent with relevant, transferable skills.

In the past 12 months, there have been 15,000 military service leavers joining the 908,000 working-age

veterans in the UK, of whom 220,000 are unemployed and inactive. Only 4 per cent of veterans work in ICT, a figure that is 20 per cent lower than their civilian counterparts. For female veterans that rises to an astonishing 50 per cent.

Veterans possess unrivalled leadership, crisis management and problem-solving skills. They are adaptable team players, comfortable with working in security environments.

In exploring new sources of talent for the industry, the veteran community presents a significant opportunity. When given transition support, veterans have the potential to make a massive contribution to UK cyber security.

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 39 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 from the National Cyber Security Centre, Amazon, IBM, Google, Oracle, Google Deepmind, the Institute for Cyber-Security Innovation, Hut Zero and RAND Europe.

On 5th April, in collaboration with our industry partner Immersive Labs, we launched the Veteran Cyber Academy

(VCA). The VCA provides free cyber security training and employment opportunities for TechVets.

Robert Hannigan, former Director of GCHQ, says of the platform:

“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.”

Veterans have unrivalled problem-solving skills

SHUTTERSTOCK/RICH CAREY

The first cohort of 200 – the programme was oversubscribed five times – students began their training on the platform on the 5th April, and the feedback so far is overwhelmingly good.

Looking forward, TechVets aims to do three things.

First, we intend to expand the first cohort of 200, who have access to the Veterans Cyber Academy. We are keen to engage with industry partners who can use the academy as a technical vetting recruitment 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 build networks in the industry. We will also be working with our peer organisations in the US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand to hold an annual summit, which will enable us to share knowledge, build relationships, and create international opportunities for our respective veteran communities.

Thirdly, we are going to develop a

resource for the veteran community which allows exploration of all the job roles and career paths in cyber security and technology. The site will provide information relating to the latest opportunities, professional development and academic courses to 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).