Free career resource · For parents and carers

A cyber security careers guide for parents and carers

Cyber security is a broad, well-paid field with jobs in almost every industry, and there are routes in at 18, after university, and later in life. If your child is curious about computers, the most useful things you can do are encourage legal practice, point them to free programmes, and help them weigh up the choices: apprenticeships, degrees, and starting out in IT.

By the Cyberend team · Published and updated 22 November 2026

THE SHORT ANSWER

- **Well paid:** full-time cyber security professionals in the UK earn a median of £55,373 a year, across all levels of experience ONS ASHE 2026.
- **No single route:** paid apprenticeships, NCSC-certified degrees and starting out in IT support all lead to cyber jobs.
- **Free support exists:** the NCSC's CyberFirst programme, now part of the government's TechFirst programme, works with secondary school and university students NCSC.
- **Keep it legal:** hacking into accounts, games or networks without permission is a crime, even as a prank Cyber Choices.

What cyber security people do

Cyber security is about protecting computers, networks and data from criminals and mistakes. It isn't one job: the UK Cyber Security Council describes 15 specialisms UK Cyber Security Council. Some people monitor systems for attacks, some test defences by trying to break in (with permission), some write policies and check that organisations follow the law, and some investigate what happened after an attack.

Banks, hospitals, retailers, councils, the armed forces and technology firms all employ security staff. Our **career paths guide** explains the main jobs in plain English, and is a good

thing to read together.

Pay and prospects

Full-time cyber security professionals in the UK had a median salary of £55,373 in 2026, compared with £40,911 for all full-time employees ONS ASHE 2026. That figure covers everyone from new starters to experienced staff, so first jobs pay less. Our **UK salary guide** breaks it down by role and experience.

It's rewarding, but not a shortcut

Getting a first cyber security job takes effort. Many first roles ask for some experience, so young people often start through an apprenticeship, a graduate scheme or an IT support job. Be wary of any course that promises a guaranteed job.

Routes in after school

ROUTE 1

Level 4 apprenticeship

Paid, about 2 years, after A levels or equivalent

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ROUTE 2

Degree apprenticeship

Paid, about 4 years, a degree with no tuition debt

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ROUTE 3

University degree

Ideally NCSC-certified, or a related subject

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ROUTE 4

Start in IT

IT support or a service desk, then move across

Apprenticeships pay a wage, with training funded by the government and employer. You can start one in England from 16, and the main cyber options are a Level 4 apprenticeship of typically 24 months Skills England and a degree apprenticeship of about 48 months Skills England. Our **apprenticeships guide** has the details.

Degrees: the National Cyber Security Centre certifies cyber security degrees at universities across the UK and publishes the list. If a degree isn't on it, it doesn't have NCSC certification NCSC. A computing degree with good security options can also lead to cyber roles.

Free programmes and practice

CyberFirst and TechFirst

The NCSC's programme for secondary school and university students, now the cyber pathway of the government's wider TechFirst programme NCSC.

Visit the NCSC →

TechFirst scholarships

A government scholarship for undergraduates starting in September 2027, covering cyber security among six technology areas GOV.UK.

Read about the scholarship →

picoCTF

Free, beginner-friendly security puzzles from Carnegie Mellon University, designed with school students in mind.

Try picoCTF →

A free Open University course

Introduction to cyber security: stay safe online is free, about 24 hours long, and a good test of whether the subject really interests them.

Go to OpenLearn →

For more free learning, see our guide to **free cyber security courses**.

GCSEs, A levels and subjects

No single subject is required. Maths and computer science help, and many apprenticeship employers ask for GCSEs in maths and English. Clear writing matters more than people expect, because a lot of security work involves explaining problems to people who aren't technical.

If your child doesn't enjoy coding, that's not a barrier. Roles in risk, compliance, investigation and security awareness value organisation, curiosity and communication as much as technical skill.

Keeping it legal

Some young people drift into illegal activity without realising it, often through gaming. The National Crime Agency's Cyber Choices programme exists to explain where the line is Cyber Choices. Under the Computer Misuse Act 1990, these are all offences legislation.gov.uk:

THINGS THAT ARE ILLEGAL, EVEN AS A JOKE

- Logging in to someone else's account without permission, even a friend's
- Using a 'booter' tool to knock another player offline in a game
- Downloading tools to get into someone else's device or account
- Scanning or testing a school, employer or website's systems without permission

The good news

The same curiosity can be used legally. Practice sites, capture-the-flag competitions and home labs are built for exactly this, and they're what employers want to hear about. Cyber Choices also promotes legal opportunities to use these skills Cyber Choices.

How you can help

Show an interest

Ask them to show you what they're working on. Explaining it to you is great practice for interviews.

Find real experience

Work experience in any IT team, local tech meetups and free security events all help them see what the jobs are really like.

Talk about the law

A calm conversation about what's legal now can prevent a serious mistake later, and it protects their future career.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Curiosity is the most important ingredient. Steer it towards legal practice and real qualifications, and there's a clear path from a bedroom interest to a well-paid career.

Common questions

Does my child need to go to university?

No. Apprenticeships lead to cyber jobs too, and a degree apprenticeship gives you a degree while being paid Skills England. University suits some people well, especially on an NCSC-certified course NCSC.

My child spends hours gaming. Is that useful?

It can be a starting point: many people get into computers through games. The useful part is curiosity about how things work. Encourage them to try security puzzles and build things, and make sure they know where the legal line is Cyber Choices.

Are cyber security jobs only for people who are brilliant at maths?

No. Some specialist areas use a lot of maths, but most roles rely more on problem-solving, persistence and clear communication.

Will a criminal record affect their chances?

It can, especially for roles that need security clearance. That's one more reason to keep practice legal. If you're worried about something that has already happened, Cyber Choices teams in regional police units help young people make informed, legal choices Cyber Choices.

Sources and method

Pay figures are from the Office for National Statistics' Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2026 (provisional). Information on apprenticeships, certified degrees, government programmes and the law comes from GOV.UK, Skills England, the National Cyber Security Centre and the National Crime Agency.

Cyberend doesn't sell courses or take referral fees from any of the programmes mentioned.

Office for National Statistics: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2026 (provisional), Table 14.7a

What people earn

Gross annual pay of full-time employees in the occupation 'Cyber security professionals' (SOC 2020 code 2135), April 2026, UK. About 42,000 jobs.

Skills England: Cyber security technologist (2021), Level 4 apprenticeship standard ST1021

Official guidance

The current Level 4 cyber apprenticeship in England: options, typical duration and job titles.

Skills England: Cyber security technical professional (integrated degree), Level 6 apprenticeship standard ST0409

Official guidance

The degree apprenticeship in cyber security in England: duration and typical job titles.

GOV.UK: Become an apprentice: how apprenticeships work Official guidance

Who can start an apprenticeship in England, apprenticeship levels, length, and the minimum 20% of working time for training.

National Cyber Security Centre: NCSC-certified degrees

Official guidance

The official list of UK degree apprenticeships, bachelor's and master's degrees certified by the NCSC.

National Cyber Security Centre: CyberFirst

Official guidance

The NCSC's cyber skills programme for secondary school and university students, now the cyber pathway of the government's TechFirst programme.

GOV.UK: TechFirst Undergraduate Scholarship

Official guidance

The government scholarship for undergraduates starting in September 2027, which covers cyber security among six technology areas.

National Crime Agency: Cyber Choices

Official guidance

The national programme that helps young people use cyber skills legally, and explains the Computer Misuse Act with examples.

legislation.gov.uk: Computer Misuse Act 1990

Official guidance

The UK law that makes accessing or testing computer systems without permission a criminal offence.

UK Cyber Security Council: Cyber Career Framework

Professional or certifying body

The profession's 15 recognised specialisms, such as Incident Response, Security Testing and Governance and Risk Management, with typical tasks, skills and routes in from other careers.

Every figure and link in this guide was checked against its source on 22 November 2026. Live job listings update every few hours.

This is a PDF copy of a free Cyberend guide. Read it online, with today's live UK cyber security jobs, at cyberend.io/resources/cyber-security-careers-guide-for-parents.