Free career resource · Landing a job

How to get your first cyber security job in the UK

Getting a first cyber security job in the UK usually takes months of focused effort, not a quick course. The routes that work are graduate schemes, apprenticeships, free Skills Bootcamps, starting in IT support, and junior SOC or analyst roles. In every case, what gets you hired is evidence: a clear direction, the fundamentals, a few practical projects you can talk about, and applications tailored to each role.

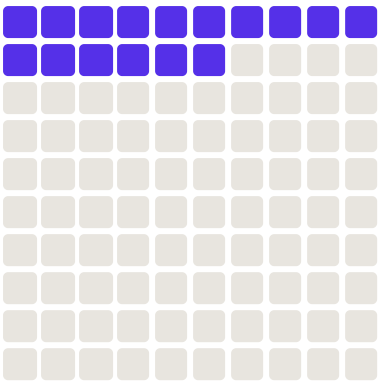
By the Cyberend team · Published and updated 22 November 2026

THE SHORT ANSWER

- **It's competitive:** only 16% of UK cyber adverts in 2025 were open to people with under a year's experience DSIT 2026.
- **But there are real routes:** graduate schemes, apprenticeships, free Skills Bootcamps in England, IT support first, and junior SOC or analyst roles.
- **Evidence beats certificates:** a clear direction and two or three practical projects you can explain will do more than a stack of course certificates.
- **Check clearance early:** many UK government and defence roles need security vetting, which normally requires years of UK residence Home Office Careers.

What the entry-level market really looks like

It helps to start with honest numbers. Most UK cyber security adverts are written for people with experience, and many ask for a degree DSIT 2026.



16%

of UK cyber security job adverts in 2025 were open to people with under a year's experience

Out of 34,932 adverts analysed for the government DSIT 2026. The rest asked for more experience.

Advertised pay

Adverts asking for at least a degree

77%

Many employers still accept equivalent experience

Advertised pay

Cyber apprenticeship starts, England

About 500

2024/25 academic year

Official guidance

Service desk analyst, middle advertised pay

£30,000

A common first step into IT, then security

Advertised pay

That's not a reason to give up, but it does shape the strategy:

Much junior hiring happens outside ordinary adverts

Graduate schemes and apprenticeships recruit in batches, and plenty of people move into security from an IT job inside the same employer.

Adverts are wish lists

Employers regularly hire people who meet most, not all, of the requirements.

Tailored applications stand out

So many applicants send the same generic CV that a tailored application with real evidence gets noticed.

The main routes into a first cyber security job

There's no single right route. Pick the one that fits your situation, and it's fine to pursue two at once.

Graduate scheme

SUITS

Final-year students and recent graduates. Some schemes accept any degree subject.

WHAT IT INVOLVES

Usually a degree, often a 2:1. Applications open around a year before the start date.

WHERE TO LOOK

Banks, consultancies, defence firms and the Civil Service Cyber Security Fast Stream (£31,554 starting salary) **Civil Service Careers**

Apprenticeship

SUITS

School and college leavers, and adults of any age who want to earn while they train.

WHAT IT INVOLVES

Varies by employer. In England, the Level 4 apprenticeship lasts about two years **Skills England** and the Level 6 degree apprenticeship about four **Skills England**.

WHERE TO LOOK

Find an apprenticeship in England **GOV.UK**, apprenticeships.scot **apprenticeships.scot**, Careers Wales **Careers Wales** and nidirect **nidirect**

IT support or networking first

SUITS

Career changers and anyone without a degree who wants a steadier first step.

WHAT IT INVOLVES

Customer service, basic IT knowledge and a willingness to learn. Often no degree.

WHERE TO LOOK

Service desk and IT support roles, with middle advertised pay of £30,000 and £31,500 **IT Jobs Watch**. Move into security after a year or two.

Junior SOC or analyst role

SUITS

People who have learned the basics and can show it with practical work.

WHAT IT INVOLVES

Networking and operating system basics, some SIEM practice, often shift work and clearance.

WHERE TO LOOK

Cyberend's entry-level jobs list, employer careers sites and recruiters

Free Skills Bootcamp (England)

SUITS

Adults aged 19 or over, including people who are unemployed or changing career.

WHAT IT INVOLVES

Courses of up to 16 weeks, free for eligible learners, ending with a guaranteed job interview **Skills for Careers**. Eligibility depends on where you live.

WHERE TO LOOK

The National Careers Service course search, then apply through the provider

Move within your current employer

SUITS

Anyone already working somewhere with an IT or security team.

WHAT IT INVOLVES

A conversation with that team, and evidence you've been learning in your own time.

WHERE TO LOOK

Internal vacancies, shadowing, or volunteering for security tasks such as phishing awareness or access reviews

Published starting salaries give a sense of the range:

Thales Level 4 apprenticeship, 2027	Civil Service Cyber Security Fast Stream	BAE Systems graduate security consultant
£24,000	**£31,554**	**£34,000**
Thales	Civil Service Careers	BAE Systems
Published by the employer	Published by the employer	Published by the employer

The **entry-level jobs guide** covers job titles and pay in more detail.

If you're unemployed

Free Skills Bootcamps in England are open to unemployed adults aged 19 or over, as well as people in work **Skills for Careers**. If you claim benefits, speak to your Jobcentre work coach before starting any course, so you know how it fits with your claim. Public libraries usually offer free computer and internet access if you don't have a reliable machine at home.

A step-by-step plan

This is the order we'd suggest. Steps two to four overlap, and how long each takes depends on your starting point and how much time you have each week.

1 DECIDE
Pick a direction

2 LEARN
Learn the fundamentals

3 BUILD
Build evidence you can show

4 BUILD
Add a certification if it fits

5 CONNECT
Meet people in the industry

6 APPLY
Apply well, not just widely

7 APPLY
Prepare for interviews

8 ADJUST
Keep going, and adjust

1

DECIDE

Pick a direction

Choose one path to aim at first, such as SOC analyst or GRC analyst. It makes every later step easier: what to learn, which projects to build and which jobs to apply for. Our **career paths guide** explains the options.

2

LEARN

Learn the fundamentals

Every path builds on the same basics, and you can learn all of them for free:

- >_ How networks work: IP addresses, DNS, ports, firewalls
- >_ How Windows and Linux work
- >_ How accounts and permissions work
- >_ The common ways attacks happen

The **free Cyberend beginner roadmap** sets out what to learn in order, with the free resources we'd use. Practice platforms such as TryHackMe and Hack The Box have free beginner content too.

3

BUILD

Build evidence you can show

Two or three small, finished projects that match your chosen path are worth more than a long list of courses. For example:

SOC
A home lab that collects logs from a virtual machine, with a write-up of an attack you simulated and detected

GRC
A sample risk assessment or Cyber Essentials gap analysis for a made-up small business

Engineering
A script that checks a system for common misconfigurations, shared on GitHub

Write each one up in plain English: what you set out to do, what you did and what you learned. Link them from your CV and LinkedIn.

4

BUILD

Add a certification if it fits

A recognised entry-level certification can help you get past CV screening, especially for SOC roles. Choose one that matches your direction and the adverts you're reading, and don't pay for expensive bundles before you know which path you want. See **which certifications are worth it** below.

5

CONNECT

Meet people in the industry

Many first jobs come through people. Free local events such as BSides conferences and OWASP chapter meetups **OWASP** welcome beginners. Go to listen, ask questions and follow up afterwards.

On LinkedIn, share your project write-ups and ask people in roles you want for a short chat about their work, not for a job. Most people are happy to help someone who has clearly done some homework.

6

APPLY

Apply well, not just widely

Tailor your CV to each role: mirror the advert's wording where it's true for you, and put your projects near the top. Our **CV guide and free template** shows how.

- Apply early to graduate schemes and apprenticeships, which can close before the advertised date
- Read the eligibility section first, especially any clearance or right-to-work requirement
- Keep a simple spreadsheet of where you applied, when, and what happened
- Public sector roles, advertised on Civil Service Jobs **Civil Service Jobs**, often ask for written examples rather than a CV, so follow the instructions exactly

7

APPLY

Prepare for interviews

Expect three kinds of question:

About you
Why you, and why this path.

About the past
How you handled situations. Answer with a specific example, what you did and the result.

Technical basics
Such as “what happens when you type a web address into a browser?” or “how would you check whether an email is phishing?”

Talking through one of your projects in detail is often the strongest thing a beginner can do. It's fine to say you don't know something and explain how you'd find out.

8

ADJUST

Keep going, and adjust

Rejections are normal, even for strong candidates. Use what happens to decide what to change:

No interviews?
The CV or the roles you're targeting usually need changing.

Interviews but no offers?
Ask for feedback and practise explaining your projects.

A job in IT support while you keep learning is a sensible step, not a failure.

Skills you already have

Career changers often undersell themselves. Cyber security teams need people who communicate well, follow procedures and stay calm, and those skills come from many jobs. Make the link explicit on your CV and in interviews.

IF YOU'VE WORKED IN

Customer service, retail or hospitality

→ Calm under pressure, explaining problems clearly, spotting fraud or odd behaviour, following procedures

IF YOU'VE WORKED IN

Admin, finance or audit

→ Accuracy, record-keeping, controls and evidence, which are the core of GRC work

IF YOU'VE WORKED IN

Teaching or training

→ Explaining technical ideas to non-experts, writing guidance, running security awareness sessions

IF YOU'VE WORKED IN

Armed forces or police

→ Security mindset, working to procedures, discretion, and often existing vetting or clearance

IF YOU'VE WORKED IN

IT support, networking or development

→ Directly relevant technical skills: the shortest bridge into SOC, engineering or testing

IF YOU'VE WORKED IN

Legal, compliance or data protection

→ Regulation, policy writing and data protection law, all valued in GRC and privacy roles

Which certifications are worth it

Certifications show you've covered a body of knowledge, and some adverts filter on them. They don't prove you can do the job, and no certification guarantees employment. Start with one that matches your direction:

Early on · SOC and analyst roles

CompTIA Security+ CompTIA

Vendor-neutral and the certification most often named in UK SOC adverts, at 15% of them IT Jobs Watch. A sensible first choice for SOC and general analyst roles. It's a paid exam.

Early on · Foundations

ISC2 Certified in Cybersecurity (CC) ISC2

A foundational certification. ISC2's free course and exam offer closed to new applicants on 20 May 2026, so it's now a paid exam unless you already hold an unexpired free code, which must be used by 31 December 2026.

Early on · Microsoft-heavy roles

Microsoft SC-900 Microsoft Learn

An introduction to Microsoft's security, identity and compliance tools, with free online learning paths. Useful if the roles you want mention Microsoft Sentinel, Defender or Entra ID.

Later · Penetration testing

CREST CPSA, then CRT CREST

The UK route for penetration testers. CRT is the minimum standard for CHECK team members on government tests. These are for later, once you have solid technical foundations.

Before you pay for any course

Check what the exam itself costs from the certifying body, and compare it with the course price. Be wary of providers that charge large fees and promise a job at the end, or that advertise their courses as “trainee” jobs. Free Skills Bootcamps in England and free practice platforms cover a lot of the same ground.

Security clearance, explained

Many UK government, defence and critical national infrastructure roles need national security vetting GOV.UK. The levels you will see most in adverts are:

BPSS

Baseline Personnel Security Standard

Pre-employment checks of identity, right to work, employment history and criminal record. Not a formal clearance.

SC

Security Check

For regular access to SECRET material. You'd normally need to have lived in the UK for the last five years Home Office Careers.

Normal UK residence: **last 5 years**

DV

Developed Vetting

The most thorough level, for frequent access to TOP SECRET material. Normally ten years' UK residence Home Office Careers.

Normal UK residence: **10 years**

HOW CLEARANCE WORKS

You can't apply for clearance yourself: an employer sponsors you once they offer you a job. A shortfall in UK residence isn't automatically a bar, but if an advert says clearance is required, check the residency and nationality rules before applying. If you can get clearance, say so on your CV, because it makes you easier to hire for these roles.

Traps to avoid

⚠ Paid courses that promise a job

Some providers advertise training as “trainee” or “junior” jobs. A real employer doesn't charge you to work for them.

⚠ Unpaid “internships” for people who aren't students

If you're doing real work as a worker, you're usually entitled to at least the minimum wage GOV.UK.

⚠ Practising on systems without permission

It's a criminal offence under the Computer Misuse Act 1990 legislation.gov.uk, and it can end a security career before it starts. Use your own lab and legal practice platforms.

⚠ Collecting certificates instead of skills

If you can't explain what you learned, a certificate won't carry you through an interview.

⚠ Waiting until you feel ready

Apply when you meet most of the requirements, not all of them.

Want a plan to follow?

The free Cyberend beginner roadmap turns this guide into a week-by-week plan: the fundamentals to learn first, practical projects, and the CV and interview questions to prepare for.

Get the free roadmap

Live entry-level cyber security jobs in the UK

The newest graduate, apprentice and entry-level roles on Cyberend's UK jobs board, checked every few hours:

Live roles change every few hours, so they aren't included in this PDF. See today's at cyberend.io/jobs/categories/graduate-and-entry-level.

Common questions

How long does it take to get a first cyber security job?

There's no reliable figure, and it varies a lot with your starting point, the time you can put in and the route you choose. Plan in months rather than weeks, and treat a job in IT support as a valid step along the way.

Can I get into cyber security without a degree?

Yes. 77% of UK cyber adverts ask for a degree DSIT 2026, but apprenticeships don't, Skills Bootcamps don't, and many employers accept equivalent experience. Starting in IT support is a common route without a degree.

Am I too old to start a career in cyber security?

No. Apprenticeships and Skills Bootcamps are open to adults of any age, and career changers bring experience employers value, from handling pressure to understanding how a business works.

Do I need a certification to get a cyber security job?

Not always. For SOC roles, CompTIA Security+ is the certification most often named in adverts, but practical projects and the fundamentals matter as much. No certification guarantees a job.

Is a cyber security bootcamp worth it?

It can be, if it's free or low cost and includes practical work. Government-funded Skills Bootcamps in England are free for eligible adults and end with a guaranteed interview **Skills for Careers**. Be cautious about expensive private courses that promise a job.

Sources and method

Figures on experience and degree requirements come from the government's 2026 cyber skills report, which analysed 34,932 UK cyber job adverts from 2025. What SOC adverts ask for and advertised pay for IT support roles come from IT Jobs Watch (UK permanent adverts, six months to 13 November 2026). Apprenticeship, bootcamp, certification and vetting details come from the official bodies that run them, linked below.

Live roles come from Cyberend's UK jobs board. Nothing on this page is sponsored, and we don't sell courses or take referral fees.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Cyber security skills in the UK labour market 2026

Advertised pay

Research by Ipsos and Perspective Economics, published 29 September 2026. Pay figures come from 34,932 UK core cyber job adverts in 2025 (Lightcast), of which 8,481 stated a salary.

IT Jobs Watch: UK permanent job title salary statistics Advertised pay

Salaries quoted in UK permanent IT job adverts in the six months to 13 November 2026, by job title. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Civil Service Careers: Cyber Security Fast Stream Published by the employer

Entry requirements, duration and pay for the Civil Service Cyber Security Fast Stream, 2027 entry.

Thales UK: 2027 Level 4 Cyber Security Engineer Apprenticeship, Crawley

Published by the employer

A live 2027 cyber apprenticeship advert with its published salary and closing date.

BAE Systems: Graduate Digital Intelligence Security Consultant (2027 start)

Published by the employer

BAE Systems' 2027 graduate security consultant advert: salary, degree requirement and start date. The 2027 round has closed.

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: Find an apprenticeship

Official guidance

The official search for apprenticeship vacancies in England.

Skills Development Scotland: Apprenticeships in Scotland

Official guidance

Modern, Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships and vacancies in Scotland.

Careers Wales: Apprenticeships

Official guidance

How apprenticeships work in Wales and where to find vacancies.

nidirect: Apprenticeships

Official guidance

ApprenticeshipsNI and Higher Level Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland.

Department for Education: Skills Bootcamps

Official guidance

Free government-funded courses of up to 16 weeks for adults aged 19 or over in England, ending with a guaranteed job interview.

CompTIA: CompTIA Security+

Professional or certifying body

The vendor-neutral entry-level security certification: what it covers and how the exam works.

ISC2: One Million Certified in Cybersecurity has concluded

Professional or certifying body

ISC2 stopped taking new people on its free Certified in Cybersecurity course and exam on 20 May 2026. Unexpired free exam codes can be used until 31 December 2026; after that the exam is paid.

Microsoft: Microsoft Certified: Security, Compliance, and Identity Fundamentals (SC-900)

Professional or certifying body

Microsoft's introductory security certification, with free self-paced learning paths.

CREST: CREST Registered Penetration Tester (CRT): FAQs

Professional or certifying body

The CRT exam, its CPSA prerequisite, its three-year validity and its role as the minimum standard for CHECK team members.

Cabinet Office: National security vetting: clearance levels

Official guidance

What BPSS, SC and DV clearance involve and which posts need them.

Home Office: Security checks

Published by the employer

UK residency normally expected before clearance: 3 years for CTC, 5 for SC and 10 for DV, though a shortfall is not automatically a bar.

OWASP Foundation: OWASP chapters

Professional or certifying body

Free local meetups run by volunteers, including chapters in UK cities.

Civil Service Jobs: Civil Service Jobs

Official guidance

Where UK government departments advertise vacancies, including security roles and apprenticeships.

GOV.UK: Employment rights and pay for interns

Official guidance

When interns count as workers and are entitled to the National Minimum Wage.

legislation.gov.uk: Computer Misuse Act 1990

Official guidance

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

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/how-to-get-a-cyber-security-job-uk.