

Cyber switch up – a cybercrime skills competition

An annual digital and cyber skills competition for students aged 11-18 years in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Diversion Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Cybercrime including fraud Digital
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Region	North East

Key details

Partners	Police Business and commerce Community safety partnership Education Government department Local authority Private sector Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2023
Scale of initiative	Regional
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

Cyber switch up aims to:

- promote Cyber Choices messaging
- encourage positive and lawful cyber behaviours in young people
- educate young people about the Computer Misuse Act 1990
- showcase the digital and cyber skills and talent of young people across the region
- promote digital and cyber pathways for higher and further education available to young people
- raise awareness and inform others about the diverse digital and cyber career pathways available to young people

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of cyber switch up are to:

- increase the number of young people engaged in cyber security and technology in a safe manner
- reduce the number of young victims of cyber crime
- reduce the number of young people who are cybercrime offenders
- increase the number of young people who are aware of future pathways to be involved in cyber security and technology

Description

Yorkshire and Humber Regional Cyber Crime Unit (ROCU) recognised that for several years there had been little innovation in the delivery of cybercrime prevention and protection education. This resulted in a lack of community engagement, causing a reduction in deviation, deterrence and knowledge around types of cybercrimes. To tackle this issue, ROCU developed the Cyber Switch Up competition, which seeks to engage young people in cyber security, thinking about their own behaviours and online safety, along with increasing their awareness of further education and career opportunities in the field. The inspiration for this came from previous iterations of existing competitions within the Yorkshire and Humberside region, with Cyber Switch Up aiming to expand upon them. Members of the force also attended successful external events delivered by the technology industry involving young people, to understand how improvements can be made.

Cyber switch up format

Cyber switch up is an annual digital skills and cyber knowledge competition, which started in 2023. All 11–18-year-olds (Key Stage three, four and five) are invited to participate by using promotional and marketing materials in schools and colleges across the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Participation is free but students must have permission from a responsible adult to enter.

The competition consists of two parts:

- online qualifiers
- in-person finals

Online qualifiers

The online qualifiers are open for two weeks. Participants complete a digital knowledge test, with questions ranging from producing Python code, to identifying computer components. The top 20 performers in each Key Stage (60 young people in total), will be invited to compete in the in-person

finals.

In-person final

The in-person final is held at a regional university and lasts one day. The final aims to be a celebration of the talent and hard work shown by all the finalists. Each finalist is given the opportunity to display their individual skill and compete against one another. At the end of the day, an overall winner and runner-up for each Key Stage is announced and are awarded prizes, along with a special prize for their school/college. Each finalist will also receive a bag of merchandise and a framed certificate of participation.

The final competition is heavily supported by partner organisations from private and public sectors, such as Amazon Web Services, Google, BAE Systems, and WorkWise. Approximately 20 partners attend the final competition, providing talks, competition exercises, and running exhibition stands and demonstrations on cyber and digital safety. For example, a reformed hacker held a talk at the 2024 final, where they discussed what they had learned from their past and turned into a successful business, using their skills for good. This allows young people to get involved and engaged in technology in the correct way. They are also given the opportunity to learn about further education and future career path opportunities.

Funding

Cyber Switch Up is funded chiefly by external partner sponsorship and in part by cyber grants facilitated through the Home Office's National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) Cyber Crime Programme. The competition costs approximately £10,000 to run (not including staff costs). In 2025, Cyber switch up have received £8,000 from sponsorship funding and the remaining £2,000 will be drawn from the Cyber grant (if required).

Staffing the competition

Recruiting staff to run Cyber switch up is drawn from ROCU officers and Force Cyber Teams from across the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

Evaluation

An evaluation has been completed and was led by the Yorkshire and Humber business development team.

The evaluation consisted of three methods:

Surveys

- participants, staff and schools are asked to fill out a survey at the end of the qualifier and at the end of the final (if they were involved)
- surveys ask how those involved found each stage, if they enjoyed it, and what could be improved

Focus groups

- using reflective practice/methodology with all staff involved
- the focus groups so far have been very informal, but structured, e.g. centred on a topic and then draw out people's views and opinions
- informs what is/isn't involved in the following years' competition

Debrief exercises

- staff involved in the organisation of the competition
- all components and stages of the competition are discussed, including promotion/marketing, online qualifier, partnership engagement, venue and logistics of finals event

Evaluation results

Results were positive, with some highlights including:

- participants gave an average enjoyment rating of 9.1 out of 10
- 83% of participants stated they would attend another cyber switch up in future
- 71% of participants said they were more aware of careers and further education options available to them

Overall impact

In 2023, 2,100 young people participated in the online qualifier and in 2024 the figure increased to 4,878, indicating the growth and popularity of the competition across the region in just 12 months.

Cyber Switch Up has delivered a positive impact including:

- positive engagement from young people
- increased participation
- raised awareness of cyber security

Learning

Challenges

A key challenge to date has been around promotion and marketing the competition due to a limited number of internal resources available within the ROCU. However the brand is strong, as popularity and awareness continue to grow and the organisation team increase their understanding of what works well, this is becoming less of a challenge.

Force recommendations

If other organisations would like to incorporate this practice, the force recommends that they:

- learn how a ‘competition model’ can facilitate engagement with young people (13-18 years - risk group) around cyber prevent (choices) education, with a specific focus on the Computer Misuse Act 1990 – deviate and deter from offending and placing on a positive pathway
- learn how policing can use a ‘competition model’ as a platform in which to effectively collaborate with wider public sector, academia, and industry to deliver a programme of education and engagement for young people around cyber security, along with identifying talented young people and onboarding them with intern, apprenticeship, education and career pathway programmes

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