Industry-Academia Network
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

As part of the Commission's concerted efforts to close the cybersecurity skills and talent gap in the European Union, the Commission is calling for interested Higher education institutions (HEIs), European Universities alliances and vocational education and training (VET) providers to express their interest in participating in the formation of a Network between Industry and Academia under the umbrella of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy[1].

The Cybersecurity Skills Academy, a policy initiative launched on 18 April 2023, relies on four pillars of action:

- foster knowledge generation through education and training by working on a common language on cybersecurity role profiles and associated skills, enhancing the European education and training offer to meet the needs, building career pathways and providing visibility and clarity over cybersecurity trainings and certifications to enhance the supply side of the labour.
- ensure a better channelling and visibility over available funding opportunities for skills-related activities to maximise their impact.
- define indicators to monitor the evolution of the market and to address better the needs on one hand, and on the other, the offer of trainings, as well as to better direct funds towards the needs.
- call stakeholders to take action by making concrete cybersecurity pledges and integrating cybersecurity skills in their national strategies.

Responding to the call for action under the "stakeholders" pillar, some organisations have taken free-of-charge commitments to bridge the cybersecurity talent gap in the European Union, such as offering free cybersecurity courses or offering mentorship opportunities for junior- and mid-level positions for women working in or entering the cybersecurity field. Organisations having made

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[1] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Closing the cybersecurity talent gap to boost the EU's competitiveness, growth and resilience ('The Cybersecurity Skills Academy'), COM/2023/207 final, EUR-Lex - 52023DC0207 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

such commitments are referred to as the Cybersecurity Skills Academy pledgers[2]. Their pledges are accessible on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform[3].

Building on the experience gained during the year following the launch of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy and following a high-level meeting with pledgers, the Commission underlined the need to strengthen the links between industry and academia and to create synergies between the demand and supply sides of the market and called upon the creation of an Industry-Academia Network ("the Network").

The following FAQ should help interested entities to define their eligibility and the conditions to participate to the Network.

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[2] Pledges | Digital Skills and Jobs Platform
[3] Cyber Skills Academy | Digital Skills and Jobs Platform

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I. The Industry-Academia Network ("the Network")

1. What it the objective of the Network?

The participation of interested stakeholders to the Network will contribute to closing the cybersecurity skills and talent gap in the European Union and delivering concrete outputs between on the one hand, **"academia", understood as higher education institutions (HEIs), European Universities alliances and vocational education and training (VET) providers** and, on the other hand, "industry", understood as pledgers of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy.

2. Where will the Network be hosted?

The Network will be hosted on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (DSJP) as part of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy. The DSJP, managed by the Commission (Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, DG CONNECT), aims more broadly at boosting digital competencies of European society and workforce and creating a community for digital skills and jobs.

3. What is the focus of the Network?

Under the umbrella of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy, the Network will focus on development of cybersecurity skills and hence narrow the present or future cybersecurity talent gap in the European Union and making use of European instruments such as the European Cybersecurity Skills Framework or microcredentials.

Whereas the Network may touch upon related topics such as artificial intelligence (AI), such topics should necessarily be discussed through the angle of cybersecurity skills and talents.

4. What format will collaboration within the network take? What types of commitments are expected?

The Network will facilitate cooperations between industry and academia by offering a forum where concrete partnerships between academia and industry will be formed. This collaboration may take various form, based on mutual interest amongst the members of the Network, with the objective of delivering concrete outputs, such as:

- develop jointly cybersecurity curricula,
- update existing cybersecurity curricula,
- develop partnerships to access training material (e.g. cyber ranges),
- develop micro-credentials in cybersecurity,
- develop cybersecurity apprenticeship or traineeships programmes,
- produce joint foresight or forecast skills or cybersecurity role profiles analysis,

- develop mentorship programmes for learners or specific groups of learners (e.g. underrepresented groups),
- develop partnerships to train learners for cybersecurity certifications,
- develop partnerships for learners to access specific resources held by industry (e.g. cyber ranges),
- develop partnerships to train learners for cybersecurity certifications
- develop partnerships for learners to access specific resources held by industry (e.g. cyber ranges)
- organise career fairs.

It will also be a place of exchange for best practices and allow the industry to have a focal point with the academic sector across Europe.

II. "Industry"

1. Who are the pledgers on the industry side?

"Industry" participating in the Network are organisations who already submitted a pledge on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform under the Cybersecurity Skills Academy ("the pledgers"). Pledgers willing to develop their connections and concrete projects with "academia" may decide to take an active role in the Network.

All pledgers will automatically be considered members of the Industry-Academia Network. They may decide at any point to take an active role in the Network.

2. Can companies ("industry") be members of the Network?

Should a company or firm be willing to join the Network, it may only do so by making a pledge on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform.[4]

3. My company is not yet a pledger, how can I join the Network?

To join the Network on the industry side, a private company should first submit a pledge on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform. Submitting a pledge requires several steps detailed in the Cyber Skills Academy Pledgers' Guide[5].

Once a private company is recognised as a pledger and its pledge is published on the platform, they will automatically be considered members of the Industry-Academia Network.

4. I represent a small or medium enterprise (SME). Can I still submit a pledge?

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[4] Actions can range from direct skills provision, such as training or placements, commitment to recruit underrepresented target groups, alignment on the European Cybersecurity Skills Framework…

[5] Digital Skills and Jobs Platform - Cybersecurity Skills Academy Pledgers' Guide (digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu).

Yes. Pledges must reply to the conditions laid down in the Cyber Skills Academy Pledgers' guide. Should a company or firm be willing to submit a pledge for the sole purpose of joining the Network, it may do so in line with this specific objective. **There is no minimum with regards to the target figures in the pledge.**

In this regard, companies or firms such as EU small or medium enterprises (SME) may not have the same targets as larger, international companies. To support potential SME pledgers, an example of pledge (general commitment to be displayed at the top of the pledger's plage) may be:

"[Name of company or firm] is committed to closing the cybersecurity skills and talent gap in the European Union. We pledge to [type of commitment, e.g. partner with one higher education institution] by the end of 2026 [objective with figure: to train one cybersecurity apprentice] [facultative: with the objective of, ultimately, employing them]."

III.   "Academia"

1. Expectations

Members of the Network, on the "academia" side, are expected to provide a concrete outcome in the form of a cooperation with the industry or with another academia member. Moreover, the focus of the expected cooperation must be cybersecurity.

They must therefore:
– be willing to create concrete synergies amongst them, i.e., amongst or between academia and industry,
– to the benefit of the actual or potential EU cyber workforce addressing current or upcoming EU market needs,
– use existing EU tools to the maximum extent possible (e.g. European Cybersecurity Skills Framework).

2. Eligibility

2.1 Is it required for "academia" to take a joint commitment in the framework of the Network?

Yes. Interested organisations on the "academia" side must take a commitment with at least one other member of the Network, delivering concrete output and contributing to closing the cybersecurity skills and talent gap in the EU workforce.

Members may for example be willing to:
– develop jointly cybersecurity curricula,
– update existing cybersecurity curricula,
– develop partnerships to access training material (e.g. cyber ranges),
– develop micro-credentials in cybersecurity,

- develop cybersecurity apprenticeship or traineeships programmes,
- produce joint foresight or forecast skills or cybersecurity role profiles analysis,
- develop mentorship programmes for learners or specific groups of learners (e.g. underrepresented groups),
- develop partnerships to train learners for cybersecurity certifications,
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- organise career fairs.

2.2 Is it mandatory to register the commitments on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform?

Yes. Once members of the Network have agreed on a commitment, they must report it on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform. A dedicated reporting section will be created on the Platform.

Commitments by members will be visible on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, which will host the Network.

2.3 Is it mandatory to report on the implementation of the commitment every 6 months?

Yes. In order to track progress on the commitments taken by members of the Network, "academia" members of the Network are asked to report on the implementation of the commitments every 6 months with as much information as possible on the implementation thereof. While data can only be provided by members of the Network, the Digital Skills and Job Platform team may provide support with the reporting process and expectations,

Progress on the implementation of their commitments by members will be visible on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform.

2.4 Can entities established outside the EU be members of the Network?

The Network is open to entities established in the EU and entities established in Participating Countries to Specific Objective 4 of the Digital Europe Programme[6].

2.5 Can any higher education institution be a member of the Network?

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[6] European Commission, List of Participating Countries in the Digital Europe Programme list-3rd-country-participation_digital_en.pdf (22/11/2024)

Amongst HEIs, only those holding an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) 2021-2027[7] may be members of the Network. This includes research universities, university colleges, universities of applied sciences, higher vocational education and training institutions, and higher arts institutions.

Furthermore, the establishment criteria apply.

2.6 My higher education institution cannot hold an ECHE, can I still join?

All HEIs must hold the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education except those established in Ukraine and Moldova.

Whereas Ukraine and Moldova are Participating Countries to Digital Europe Programme Strategic Objective 4 (DEP SO4), Ukrainian and Moldovan entities cannot currently be awarded the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. HEIs located in Ukraine and Moldova will therefore not be required to hold the ECHE. All other conditions apply.

2.7 Can vocational education and training (VET) providers be members of the Network?

Yes. VET providers are organisations (schools, colleges or training institutions or companies providing vocational training) focusing on teaching practical skills for the workforce and providing nationally recognised qualifications.

Furthermore, the establishment and control criteria apply.

2.8 Can any VET provider be member of the Network?

Interested VET providers shall not be subject to control by individuals or legal entities from a non-EU country or a non-DEP SO4 Participant Country.

"Control" should be understood as whether the VET provider is financially or by any other means dependent on individuals or legal entities from a non-EU country or non-DEP SO4 Participant Country in a way that could allow them to influence substantially the work conducted in the Network, for example an individual or legal entity financing or making important donations or providing critical financial support to your entity; an individual with a capacity to influence strongly the development of partnerships between Network members to the benefit of non-EU nor potential EU workforce, etc.

2.9 Can European Universities alliances be members of the Network?

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[7] Erasmus+ Programme - Higher education institutions holding an ECHE - 2021-2027 (erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu).

Yes. European Universities alliances are eligible and can apply to join the Network.

2.10 Can VET providers' associations and learners' organisations, chambers or equivalent entities be members of the Network?

No, only individual HEIs, European Universities alliances and individual VET providers are eligible to take part to the Industry-Academia Network

2.11 Can an individual be a member of the Network?

Whereas individuals represent the entities, only legal entities may be members of the Network.

2.12 Can EU-funded projects be members of the Network?

No. However, they may be invited to attend meetings should the Network decide so.

2.13 Can EU institutions, bodies or agencies be members of the Network?

Institutions services, bodies and agencies may be invited to participate to the work of the Network should it decide so.

3. Application: How can my entity apply to become a member of the Network?

Interested entities on the academia side need to fill out the online dedicated application form available the Cybersecurity Skills Academy's "Getting involved" page on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform[8].

This call for expression of interest will remain continuously open. Stakeholders willing to be in the launching group of the Network should reply before 5 January 2024.

Academia eager to join on a later stage will still be able to apply after the deadline, their applications will be reviewed at the end of Q2 2025.

4. What are the next steps of the selection process?

Regarding the selection procedure, the candidates will be informed of the outcome of their application to the Network at the end of January 2025.

5. Where can I find support in case of questions?

Should neither the call for expression of interest nor the FAQ address your question, applicants to the Network may contact communications@digitalskillsjobs.eu.

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[8] CyberSkills Academy: Stakeholder involvement | Digital Skills and Jobs Platform