EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS, CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Digital Society, Trust and Cybersecurity
Cybersecurity Technology and Capacity Building

Call for Expression of Interest
Applications to join the Industry-Academia Network of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy

1. **Introduction: What is the aim of this call for expression of interest?**

The aim of this call for expression of interest is to inform interested stakeholders about the establishment of the Industry-Academia Network ("the Network") for cybersecurity skills and to invite them to apply to the Network.

Their participation to the Network will contribute to closing the cybersecurity skills and talent gap in the European Union and to creating greater synergies 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[1].**

This call for expression of interest aims at providing in particular <u>Academia</u> with all the necessary information required to make an informed decision about their potential application and eligibility as well as to guide them into submitting their application.

<u>Companies or firms</u> interested in joining the Network must be pledgers of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy and to this end, submit a pledge on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform. Companies or firms, **regardless of their size**, are invited to make such a pledge **in line with their capacities and needs** (see section 5.1).

2. **Background: What is the Industry-Academia Network?**

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 HEIs, European Universities alliances and 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[2].**

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.

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[1] Pledges | Digital Skills and Jobs Platform
[2] 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)

- **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 such commitments are referred to as the **Cybersecurity Skills Academy pledgers**. 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 Network will be hosted on the **Digital Skills and Jobs Platform**[4] (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. Aim: What are the objectives of the Industry-Academia Network?

The Network will connect academia and industry to create synergies, allowing to align the needs of the market with the educational and training offers. It will further facilitate cooperations between industry and academia by offering a forum where concrete partnerships between academia and industry will be formed, in line with the expressed needs of the members. In this regard, the Network will **benefit both industry, regardless of the size of the pledging company or firm**, and **higher education institutions and VET providers**.

This **collaboration may take various form**, based on mutual interest amongst the members of the Network, with the objective of delivering concrete outputs (see section 4.2.1).

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.

4. Operation: How will the Network operate?

In practice, the Network will meet on regular occasions on concrete topics, as decided by its secretariat and based on its members' inputs. For day-to-day exchange, a dedicated section on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform will allow members to connect.

Initially, the Commission will ensure the secretariat of the Network.

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

Depending on the number of applicants and in order to maintain an effective network, the Commission reserves the right to limit the number of members admitted to the Network.

5. Eligibility: What are the eligibility conditions to join the Industry-Academia Network?

The Network will consist of two types of entities:

- Industry: organisations having made a pledge under the Cybersecurity Skills Academy
- Academia: HEIs, European Universities alliances and VET providers

Whereas both industry and academia must take concrete commitments in line with the objective of closing the cybersecurity skills and talent gap in the European Union, the eligibility conditions to join the Network differ.

5.1. Industry

5.1.1. Eligible companies or firms

Only **pledgers of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy**, i.e. organisations having already taken the commitment to perform a free-of-charge action to bridge the cybersecurity talent gap in the EU on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform[5] may be member of the Network[6].

Organisations which are already pledgers of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy will automatically be considered members of the Industry-Academia Network and do not need to apply.

Organisations interested in joining the Network as "industry" first need to submit a pledge on the platform. Submitting a pledge requires several steps detailed in the Cyber Skills Academy Pledgers' Guide[7].

Once an organisation is recognised as a pledger and its pledge is published on the platform, it will automatically be enrolled in the Industry-Academia Network without further application process.

5.1.2. Pledges: nature and size of the commitments

Pledges must reply to the conditions laid down in the above-mentioned Cyber Skills Academy Pledgers' guide (see section 5.1.1). 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.**

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[5] Pledges | Digital Skills and Jobs Platform
[6] 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…
[7] Cybersecurity Skills Academy pledgers' guide.

5.2. Academia

5.2.1. Horizontal conditions applicable to HEIs, European Universities alliances and VET providers

<u>Concrete outputs</u>: Applicants must commit to delivering concrete outputs to the benefit of the actual or potential EU workforce and to address current or upcoming market needs. This can take various forms 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)
- integrate certification in curricula
- run a career fair
- develop training programmes for teachers

Reporting: Applicants must **report their commitments** on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform dedicated section and commit to **providing an update on their implementation every 6 months**, providing as much information as possible in this regard.

<u>Location</u>: Only applicants **established in the EU** or in **Participating Countries to Specific Objective 4 of the Digital Europe Programme**[8] **(DEP SO4)** are eligible to join the Network.

<u>Scope of action</u>: Applicants must commit to work to the benefit of the actual or potential EU cyber workforce, addressing current or upcoming EU market needs, focusing on cybersecurity, and using existing EU tools to the maximum extent possible,

When assessing the applications, the Commission will take into due consideration whether the main target audience of the current or upcoming cybersecurity courses/trainings is the EU or DEP SO4 Participating Countries.

5.2.2. Specific condition for HEIs

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[8] European Commission, List of Participating Countries in the Digital Europe Programme list-3rd-country-participation_digital_en.pdf (15/10/2024)

Amongst HEIs, only those **holding an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education[9] (ECHE) 2021-2027 are eligible to join the Network**.

Only HEIs established in Ukraine and Moldova are not required to hold the ECHE. Whereas Ukraine and Moldova are Participating Countries DEP SO4, Ukrainian and Moldovan entities cannot legally be awarded the ECHE. Therefore, Ukrainian and Moldovan HEIs do not have to fulfil this condition.

5.2.3. Specific condition for VET providers

When assessing the applications, the Commission will take into due consideration whether VET providers are **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 supporting 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.

6. Application: How to submit an application to join the Industry-Academia Network?

Interested companies and firms on the industry side should follow the steps indicated in the Cyber Skills Academy Pledgers' Guide. Once they are pledgers of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy, they will automatically be considered a member of the Industry-Academia 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: [CyberSkills Academy: Stakeholder involvement | Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#)[10].

Whereas this call for expression of interest will remain continuously open, s**takeholders willing to be in the launching group of the Network should submit their application online before 5 January 2024**. Applications submitted after this deadline will be reviewed in batches, next batch review being planned for end of Q2 2025.

7. Roadmap: What are the next steps of the Industry-Academia Network?

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application to the Network at the **end of January 2025**.

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[9] [Erasmus+ Programme - Higher education institutions holding an ECHE - 2021-2027 (erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu).](#)
[10] [CyberSkills Academy: Stakeholder involvement | Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#)

The official launch of the Network is foreseen in June 2025, with the signing of concrete partnerships and adoption of commitments. At least one preparatory meeting will be organised beforehand, foreseen in Q1 2025.

The Industry-Academia Network will remain permanently open to new members, from the industry or the academia side, willing to commit to support the development of cybersecurity skills in the European Union.

8. Support to applicants

For answers to frequently asked questions and further support, visit the Cybersecurity Skills Academy's "Getting involved" page on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform[11].

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