

How SANS and the UK Cyber Team Helped Emily Dennison Reignite Her Passion for Cybersecurity and Connect with a Community of Future Cyber Leaders

A first-hand look at how SANS Institute and the UK Cyber Team initiative unlocks talent, builds confidence, and supports career growth in cybersecurity.

Developed in partnership with SANS Institute and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), the UK Cyber Team initiative was a three-round national competition designed to identify and cultivate the UK's next generation of cybersecurity leaders. Starting with an online qualifying round, then an advanced capture the flag (CTF) event, and culminating in a live final round in Birmingham, 30 top cybersecurity practitioners were selected to represent the UK and compete in international CTFs. This case study highlights Emily Dennison's journey, from reengaging with competitions for the first time in years to rediscovering her love for cybersecurity and gaining confidence to pursue it as a career.

Rebuilding Confidence Through Challenge

For Emily, Round 1 was an opportunity to ease back into the world of CTFs. Having discovered the competition through her university's cybersecurity society and Instagram, she saw it as both a personal challenge and a chance to reconnect with the community. The leaderboard format added a fun, competitive edge, and although she found the challenges manageable, they helped her pinpoint areas she wanted to strengthen.

"It was fun to compete on a leaderboard again, especially one with a reward," Emily said. She appreciated the chance



to revisit core topics and regain momentum. "I got a better understanding of my weaknesses," she noted, using the experience to guide her preparation for the next round.

Round 2 shifted the focus away from pressure and toward performance. Without a live leaderboard, Emily found herself more relaxed and able to enjoy the experience. "I found Round 2 easier than Round 1," she explained. "I learned not to overthink things, which is a good lesson." This round reinforced her technical foundation and boosted her readiness for the final.

Rediscovering Purpose in the Final Round

The Live Final in Birmingham proved to be the most rewarding part of Emily's journey. Competing in a room full of more than 200 cybersecurity enthusiasts, she found herself inspired and energized by the environment. "The live final was so much fun," she recalled. "Playing a CTF with a team is great and I want to do more."

She described the final as one of the best CTFs she's ever participated in, from the quality of the technical challenges to the team camaraderie and atmosphere. "Socialising with 200 other CTF players was amazing," she added. "Being selected for the UK Cyber Team was a proud moment, but more importantly, the experience gave her a renewed sense of direction. "It really encouraged me to continue my career in security and keep learning," she said.

Favorite Moment

The live final stood out as the highlight of the entire program. From the thrill of the competition to being chosen for the team, Emily came away feeling inspired, connected, and ready to pursue cybersecurity more seriously.

Career Impact

“The competition has reignited my love of technical cybersecurity,” Emily shared. “Networking with other people who will likely be my future colleagues is great. Being on the UK Cyber Team opens lots of doors for future jobs too.”

She also appreciated the emphasis on student wellbeing throughout the program. One initiative, the Walk into Wellbeing challenge, encouraged her to prioritize self-care even during a busy academic term. “It encouraged me to get outside and take breaks while dealing with challenges and my degree,” she said.

Why Sponsor?

Emily's experience shows why the UK Cyber Team program matters:

- ▶ **Skill Development:** Participants build hands-on technical knowledge through realistic, team-based challenges.
- ▶ **Confidence Building:** Emily rediscovered her love of cybersecurity and built momentum for the next stage of her journey.
- ▶ **Career Pathways:** Direct access to peers, mentors, and industry sponsors helps students explore career options.
- ▶ **Community Impact:** The competition fosters inclusion, collaboration, and professional networking among the UK's most promising cyber talent.

“It really encouraged me to continue in security and keep learning.”

Discover What's Next for the UK Cyber Team

Stay up to date with the latest milestones, training highlights, and competition updates from the UK Cyber Team.

Visit ukcyberteam.sans.org to follow their journey as they develop into the UK's next generation of elite cyber talent.

