Embedding standards and pathways across the cyber profession by 2025 - BCS Briefing

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This document: This is a BCS briefing on the UK government’s consultation on embedding standards and pathways across the cyber profession by 2025 (the Consultation). This briefing does not exhaustively cover all of the Consultation, rather it provides a summary of key issues, findings and actions that are likely to be of interest to professionals working in information technology.

Executive Summary

For the first time ever the UK government is considering the use of legislation to regulate the professional standards of practice and competency that are developed and adopted by information technology professionals working in a particular specialism, in this case cyber security.

It is clear to the government that its previous approach, set out in the 2016 Cyber Security Regulation and Incentives Review, is not delivering the requisite change at sufficient pace and scale. As a result in 2018 DCMS funded the creation of the UK Cyber Security Council, which launched in March 2021.

Government intends the UK Cyber Security Council to provide an authoritative viewpoint of the specialisms that exist and the bodies that can collate and quality assure the practitioners working within these fields. In December 2021 the UK Cyber Security Council was granted a Royal Charter that will support its ambition to award a bespoke chartered status recognising cyber security professional expertise and excellence throughout the workforce, building on and aligning with existing professional qualifications and certifications. BCS is an organisational member of the Council.

- The consultation is seeking views on the most effective means of empowering the UK Cyber Security Council to be the voice of the profession by 2025.
- The consultation presents proposals around the role of legislation to underpin the role and reach of the UK Cyber Security Council.
- Other non-legislative proposals are also included in the Consultation on how government can lead by example, such as requirements around procurement and broader alignment on recruitment across government and wider public sector cyber roles.

Significant proposals being considered

The Consultation sets out proposals that are being considered to achieve the objectives in the Executive Summary. The most significant of these with relation to information technology professionals are:

- The UK Cyber Security Council is formally recognised via legislation as the standard setting body for the cyber security profession with a view to it overseeing the regulation of the profession under a legislative scheme.

There should be statutory regulation of cyber security professional titles to ensure that roles have coherence that can be assessed more easily by prospective entrants to the profession, existing practitioners and employers.

Individuals will have to meet competency standards, set by the UK Cyber Security Council, before they can utilise a legally protected professional job title across the range of specialisms in cyber security. However, this would not result in individuals being prohibited from undertaking activities under a job title if they chose (i.e. individuals could perform a role but not use the protected title for that role).

A Register of Practitioners, similar to what exists in the medical and legal professions. This would set out practitioners who have met the eligibility requirements to be recognised as a suitably-qualified and ethical senior practitioner under a designated title award. This may include periodic reviews stipulated by the UK Cyber Security Council to ensure practitioners continue to meet competence and ethical requirements. Employers would not be legally required to employ practitioners whose title has been recognised through the UK Cyber Security Council, but encouraged to do so.

The above proposals are intended to complement and align with legislative ambitions around products and organisations. This includes legislation being developed that looks to mandate important cyber security measures for connected products, to protect the consumer; and the work of the Network and Information Systems Regulations to ensure that appropriate organisations are taking the necessary steps to ensure the resilience of essential services to the economy. See the current consultation on a proposal for legislation to improve the UK’s cyber resilience.

Annex 1. Context and rationale for intervention

The Consultation states

- It is specifically focused on how to more readily recognise expert practitioners and embed a clear understanding of what practitioners need to know and be able to demonstrate.
- There is a need for the Cyber Security profession to be better defined to support employers and there is also additional emphasis on cyber professionals to influence behaviour and culture within their organisations.
- The objective is for the UK to have the right professional standards and mechanisms in place to recognise individuals who are competent and sufficiently expert.

These conclusions are based on the Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2021, which found that

- 77% of businesses and 68% of charities consider cyber security a high priority
- Skills within this area were poorly understood and undervalued amongst both management boards and IT teams.
Annex 2. Full list of consultation questions

The full list of questions in the consultation can be found here. Those questions ask respondents to give their views on the following statements (numbered as they appear in the consultation):

1. the market is best placed to define and embed professional standards
2. government intervention is required to support this approach
   [to ensure the market does embed professional standards]
3. the UK Cyber Security Council should be formally recognised (via legislation) as the standard setting body for the cyber profession with a view to it overseeing the regulation of the profession under a legislative scheme
4. regulating by [professional] activity should be explored in future plans
5. under-qualified professionals should be prohibited from carrying out activities related to a specialism until they are qualified to do so
6. role definitions across cyber security functions are inconsistently defined and require consolidation
7. the proposed measures to regulate professional job titles do not provide unnecessary barriers to entry for candidates entering or wishing to progress in a cyber security career
8. the profession should regulate the use of professional job titles
9. individuals should have to meet particular competency standards set by the UK Cyber Security Council in order to utilise a specific job title
10. statutory regulation on the use of title will not significantly exacerbate the existing skills shortage across cyber security roles in the UK
11. you would prioritise recruitment of professionals with a job title recognised by the UK Cyber Security Council
12. your recruitment practice would be improved by having a clear, competence framework underpinned by legislation for cyber professionals to adhere to
13. you would support staff with their continuous professional development to achieve a job title recognised by the UK Cyber Security Council
14. would you apply to obtain qualifications towards a professional job title recognised by the UK Cyber Security Council
15. it would be beneficial to have a professional job title that is recognised by the UK Cyber Security Council
16. would you be willing to pay more (in terms of wage) for someone who has an assessed competency based on a regulated professional title
17. How much more may you be willing to pay in terms of annual wage for someone who has an assessed competency based on a regulated professional title
18. would you pay more (in terms of training and professional development) for someone who has an assessed competency based on a professional title awarded by the UK Cyber Security Council
19. how much more may you be willing to pay in terms of training and development for someone who has an assessed competency based on a professional title
20. there should be a centrally-held Register of Practitioners for the cyber profession
21. the Register of Practitioners should include a periodic review to ensure practitioners continue to meet competence and ethical requirements

22. employers should not be legally required to employ practitioners whose titles have been recognised through the UK Cyber Security Council [follow up secondary question to give free text explanation of views]

23. Do you consider there to be any perceived risks or overlaps with existing legislative arrangements, particularly in devolved nations?

24. explore introducing public procurement routes to embed competency requirements for the market, as it relates to cyber professionals

25. government departments and relevant public sector bodies should align recruitment and professional development standards to those developed by the UK Cyber Security Council

26. Should the government and/or the UK Cyber Security Council continue to explore the creation of a further voluntary certification scheme that is aligned to existing programmes?

27. Cyber Essentials and CCP to align their requirements with any future professional standards that may be set by the UK Cyber Security Council

28. what more could be done to further support cyber security professionals and the policy ambition to embed standards and pathways within the profession

29. Do you consider there to be additional considerations required to ensure that these proposed measures will not provide unnecessary additional barriers to entry for candidates to enter and progress a career in cyber security?

Annex 3. Who we are

BCS is the UK’s Chartered Institute for IT. The purpose of BCS as defined by its Royal Charter is to promote and advance the education and practice of computing for the benefit of the public.

We bring together industry, academics, practitioners and government to share knowledge, promote new thinking, inform the design of new curricula, shape public policy and inform the public.

As the professional membership and accreditation body for IT, we serve around 60,000 members including practitioners, businesses, academics and students, in the UK and internationally.

We also accredit the computing degree courses in over ninety universities around the UK. As a leading IT qualification body, we offer a range of widely recognised professional and end-user qualifications.