Government calls on academia to train tomorrow's cyber security experts

July 20 2012

Universities are today being invited by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), via a call on its website, to apply for grants to run two new dedicated Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), that will train postgraduates to maintain the UK's security in the face of growing cyber threats.

The centres will enhance the nation's academic capability across all aspects of the field and are part of the response to the UK Government's National Cyber Security Programme, which aims to create a stable, secure and open cyber environment in which the UK's interests and businesses can operate and be preserved.

The call for bids is part of a joint approach to the National Cyber Security programme between the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), EPSRC, GCHQ and the Office of Cyber Security and Information Assurance (OCSIA).

David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Skills said: 'If the UK is to achieve its growth ambitions and maintain its reputation for world class capability in cyber security, it is vital that we look to discover, develop and nurture the UK's next generation of doctoral-level cyber security experts. The Centres for Doctoral Training are a key component of achieving the skills blend the UK needs and I would like to encourage novel responses to the call that reflect well on the innovation of the discipline as a whole'.

Cyber security research encompasses a range of challenges to which many academic disciplines can contribute. To ensure the key issues are covered adequately by the CDTs in combination, EPSRC wants proposals for the Centres to focus all or most of their effort on one of two research Domains. These are set out in the call document, while technological issues feature heavily, adequate consideration of 'the human element' of cyber security – behaviour, people and processes – will be essential for success.

Minister for Cyber Security Francis Maude said: 'In the National Cyber Security Strategy, the Government emphasised the importance of expanding the UK's cyber skills base to take advantage of the opportunities cyber space presents and protect our interests where required. Academia has a vital role to play in fostering our future cyber security talent, and we have therefore committed significant investment to deliver the first two Centres of Doctoral Training in Cyber Security. We believe these centres will make an important contribution to further enhancing our world-class cyber security academic and research community here in the UK.'

David Delpy EPSRC's Chief Executive said: 'The centres will be required to address the broad range of issues involved in cyber security, from the technical to sociological. They will have to call on a wide range of expertise and deliver the multidisciplinary training we need to underpin the work of the UK's next generation cyber security experts.'

The CDTs will be expected to graduate at least eight students from each of three successive annual cohorts, giving a minimum of 24 students produced by each CDT over its lifetime. Efficient use of the sponsors' funding and/or contributions from other sources may augment this number.

The students' doctoral training will last for four years. It will comprise a

mixture of masters-level education in a range of subjects addressing key areas of relevance to cyber security and a related challenging and original research project. The first cohort of students in each CDT is expected to start around October/November 2013.

Funding for the CDTs could reach £8 million over seven years and will come from a variety of sources, including the National Cyber Security Programme. EPSRC will oversee the management of the Centres.

Today's announcement builds on an earlier decision in April this year by GCHQ, in partnership with the Research Councils' (RCUK) Global Uncertainties Programme and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), to award "Academic Centre of Excellence in Cyber Security Research" status to eight UK universities conducting world class research in the field of cyber security.

Provided by Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council