



CYBERSECURITY: INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION



Jenny Beechener talks to the organizer of the International Cyber Security Summer School Cybersecurity Challenge, **Mira van Benthem**, to reveal the benefits of the 2023 Challenge and find out how this week-long event inspires future cybersecurity leaders from all walks of life and academic disciplines

A cyberattack is much more than a technical breach. It impacts the ability of an organization to function and interact with external partners, which presents reputational damage and takes a lot of time and expense to recover. Developing cybersecurity talent to combat these attacks is vital. The International Cyber Security Summer School (ICSSS) provides students with an opportunity to broaden their knowledge in this field and develop skills to counter such attacks. In this week-long programme, high-level cybersecurity experts provide challenges, workshops, lectures and games. Training future talent is the purpose of the ICSSS, established by The NATO Communications and Information Agency, Europol, Leiden University and Security Delta (HSD). The annual event, hosted on the HSD campus every August, has grown from fewer than 40 participants in 2015 to more than 60 in 2023.

“Cybersecurity is an evolving threat,” says Mira van Benthem, organizer of the ICSSS and Innovation Liaison at HSD. “We take an integrated view of cybersecurity that looks at consequences as well as technical aspects. You need more than just a

technological solution to stay ahead of the next threat when designing strategies for countering malicious attacks and understanding the requirements for strong crisis management.”

ICSSS participants are PhD students, students in the final year of their master’s degrees or young professionals. They are carefully selected from different fields and backgrounds and work in multidisciplinary teams to learn about the approaches, tools and techniques prevalent in cybersecurity. At the beginning of the week, the students are presented with a challenge set by HSD partners from the private, public domain and knowledge institutes that puts their knowledge into practice. At the end of the week the groups present their solution to the provided challenges based on real-life cases. “Our 60 students came from 18 separate countries this year; including Canada, the United States, Spain, Germany, Italy and elsewhere,” says van Benthem. “They get to know each other and develop strong bonds they can draw on in the future. The result is a community of cybersecurity experts

who understand cybersecurity threats and opportunities more profoundly from a multidisciplinary point of view, allowing them to deliver more effective cybersecurity measures.”

The theme of collaboration is central to HSD, the Dutch security cluster that brings together more than 275 companies, governmental organizations and knowledge institutions to collaborate on innovative security solutions, and sharing their knowledge can make a significant contribution to a more secure world and strong Dutch economy. The non-profit organization provides access to knowledge on cybersecurity and resilience, smart secure societies, data and artificial intelligence.

BUILDING A STRONG TALENT POOL

To be eligible to attend the summer school, applicants must come from an EU member state, a NATO member state or a member state of NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme. They need to be a PhD student, in the final year of a master’s or a young professional with a technical, policy, social or law-related background. After finishing the summer school, some of the participants find employment with one of the participating partners, such as the NCI Agency or specialist companies such as EclecticIQ and Fox-IT. In some cases, alumni return to the Summer school as lecturers employed in the cybersecurity field. They are keen to share their experiences with new students. “It is about fostering the next generation of cybersecurity experts and having them interact with leaders in these different organizations and gain insight into each other’s fields.”

The summer school features lectures from HSD partners who share first-hand experience of cyber trends, and a few prominent international and domestic security organizations provide practical challenges for the students who are divided in smaller teams. Collaborative experiences included a wargame on insider threat by Booz Allen Hamilton, and a KPMG Nederland workshop on operational technology security.

The number of cyberattacks is on the rise and cybercriminals are looking for any open digital doors. It’s not a question of whether you will be hacked, but when. Attacks, incidents and security breaches are increasing. There is a growing need for cybersecurity to be treated as a strategic priority on an individual, organizational and governmental level. The ICSSS contributes by setting this knowledge, capabilities and skills within the broader context of cybersecurity, combining young talent across technical, legal, social and strategic domains in a multidisciplinary approach. The result is a better understanding of cybersecurity, greater resilience and wider skill sets capable of responding to future threats in a more secure and safe manner.

The ninth edition of the ICSSS is due to take place 18-23 August 2024, Security Delta (HSD) Campus, The Hague. Pre-register here to stay up to date on the programme. ■

ICSSS participants are carefully selected from different fields and backgrounds (PHOTO: ICSSS)

