THE NCSC AND PLEXAL CALL FOR STARTUPS TO PROTECT THE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

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- **NCSC identifies operational technology environments such as energy, food and advanced manufacturing as new priorities for cyber innovation**

- **Companies offered chance to develop ideas further with leading cyber security experts to protect SMEs and individuals**

- **Through the NCSC For Startups programme – run by the National Cyber Security Centre and Plexal – companies can develop, adapt and pilot their products**

The National Cyber Security Centre, which is part of GCHQ, and innovation company Plexal, which was founded by Delancey, are today calling on startups to apply to work with the UK's leading cyber security experts on challenges facing operational technology, SMEs and digital citizens.

Startups can apply to take part in NCSC For Startups: a unique initiative that sees startups work with experts from within the NCSC to develop, adapt or pilot technology to meet the biggest cyber security challenges facing the UK.

<u>Operational technology</u>

Highly available operational technology environments are particularly important to protect – especially in scenarios where internet-controlled systems are introduced to legacy operational technology and operational staff aren't trained in cyber security best practice.

This affects sectors such as energy, agriculture, food manufacturing and advanced manufacturing. Food companies are particularly at risk from digital sabotage, food adulteration, theft of intellectual property and corporate espionage.

The NCSC is looking for businesses that can unlock the benefits of Industry 4.0 without increasing the risk profile.

<u>Small businesses and individuals</u>

A proliferation of cyber attacks against small organisations is coming at the worst time following a rise in energy costs, soaring inflation and understaffing making businesses and individuals particularly vulnerable. That's why the NCSC has identified the below challenges as being ripe for innovation:

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Empowering SMEs and citizens and making cyber accessible for all: It's essential that cyber security protects the whole of society, including SMEs and people who are increasingly reliant on the internet. The NCSC wants to work with startups that can offer new and unique ways of helping people and SMEs effectively implement cyber hygiene best practices like two-factor authentication, updating devices or creating backups or identify online fraud.

Incident response for SMEs and individuals: The NCSC wants to work with startups that can help SMEs and individuals respond effectively to incidents when they occur and build in resilience. For example, this could include being able to automate response actions across user devices using machine learning.

Better cyber security training and behaviour change: The NCSC wants to work with startups that have innovative and novel ways of getting people and businesses to learn about and engage with cyber security to create a positive security culture.

About NCSC For Startups and how to apply

Startups can take part in a three-month intensive programme or a 12-month programme that involves committing at least two days a month, based in the NCSC's innovation HQ in Cheltenham.

Previous cohort members include unicorn company Rebellion Defence, which used NCSC For Startups to achieve a closer product-market fit and gain unique insights from inside the UK's defence sector.

Startups get support with areas like investment, marketing, connections to private sector opportunities and product development support. They also work with experts within the NCSC who have insights into the UK's emerging cyber security needs and challenges.

Startups can apply on the NCSC website:

https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/ncsc-for-startups/overview

Chris Ensor, Deputy Director for Cyber Growth at the NCSC, said: *"The NCSC's mission is to make the UK the safest place to live and do business online, which means providing support and expertise across a whole range of areas. Startups have a big role to play in this, and I'd strongly encourage those with ideas for protecting operational technology, SMEs and digital citizens to apply to NCSC for Startups and benefit from leading experts in cyber security."*

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NCSC For Startups provides a unique platform for mission-orientated innovators to address these needs and unlock numerous market opportunities.

**Saj Huq,
CCO and Head of Innovation,
Plexal**

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Saj Huq, CCO and head of innovation at Plexal, said: *"Increasing cyber risks, together with the insecure adoption of emerging technologies across society, could diminish economic growth, threaten online safety and erode public trust. The UK's future prosperity hinges on the need to build cyber resilience across all sections of our economy, within all layers of our supply chains and across all aspects of our critical infrastructure. NCSC For Startups provides a unique platform for mission-orientated innovators to address these needs and unlock numerous market opportunities."*

NCSC For Startups is the successor to the NCSC Cyber Accelerator, which helped more than 40 tech companies raise over £100m in external investment. Nine companies completed the relaunched initiative in 2021.

References:

*Malwarebytes

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Notes to Editors

About Plexal

Plexal is the innovation company that supercharges collaboration.

It combines open, collaborative innovation with a community of fast-growth startups to help enterprises and the government unlock the potential of technology.

Plexal works with some of the most influential government departments and global tech companies to deliver innovation projects. These include the Mission Technology Integrator, which is helping IBM build new technology with SMEs to address critical challenges.

Plexal's cyber innovation team is also building the UK's most connected cyber security ecosystem. Plexal delivered the LORCA accelerator, is the National Cyber Security Centre's partner for NCSC For Startups and supported 167 innovators through the Cyber Runway accelerator. Over the last three years, Plexal has helped cyber startups raise over £270m and earn over £68m in revenue through LORCA alone.

Its workspace in London is home to over 800 innovators who are breaking new ground in cybersecurity, mobility, inclusive design, healthtech, AI and more. Members get access to community events, connections and 1:1 support designed to help them scale and Plexal regularly partners with members to pilot their solutions, bid for business together and enable them to build solutions with large organisations. The community includes Fiit, the online fitness startup, Quantum technology company M Squared and youth-led charity My Life My Say.

Plexal was founded in 2017 by clients of specialist real estate investment advisory company Delancey.

For more information visit: plexal.com

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