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RONAN BLAKE

THE HONEST GUIDE SERIES

# The UK Cybersecurity Career Logbook

Decide, build, apply, interview, land.

One year, five phases, and the pages to work through each of them.

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Free companion to The Honest Guide to Breaking Into UK Cybersecurity  
and The Honest Guide to UK Cybersecurity Interviews

[ronanblake.co.uk](https://ronanblake.co.uk)

# How to use this logbook

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Five phases, twelve months, and roughly forty pages. Print it, punch it, put it in a ring binder and work through it.

This is not a book to read. It is a book to fill in. Some pages you complete once — the honest check, the path decision, your story bank. Others are marked to be printed repeatedly: one application worksheet per role, one interview sheet per interview, one monthly log per month. Those repeatable pages are where the value compounds, because by application eleven you will not remember what you told the second one.

The five parts follow the actual sequence of a career change rather than the structure of a book. If you are already applying, start at Part 2. If you already have an offer, go straight to Part 4 — and come back to Part 3 in a year, because you will need it again.

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- 1**     **Decide**  
Whether this suits you, which path, what it costs, and the year that gets you there.

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- 2**     **Apply**  
A campaign you can run for months without losing track of it.

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- 3**     **Interview**  
The method, the machinery, your stories, and the page you take into the room.

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- 4**     **Land**  
Making the first ninety days count, and turning them into a record you can use.

Everything here is drawn from *The Honest Guide to Breaking Into UK Cybersecurity* and *The Honest Guide to UK Cybersecurity Interviews*. The 275-question bank that accompanies both is free and searchable at [ronanblake.co.uk/questionbank](https://ronanblake.co.uk/questionbank).

## PART 1

# Decide

Before you spend anything

Everything in this part is done once. Get it wrong and the next eleven months are spent on the wrong certification for the wrong path — which is an expensive way to discover something an afternoon with these pages would have told you.

## Career planning workbook

A decision you can defend, a costed route to it, and a twelve-month plan that survives contact with a full-time job.

Most people choose a path by accident and a certification by advertisement. This works the other way round: constraints first, then the path that fits them, then what it costs and how long it takes at the hours you actually have. Fill it in before you spend anything.

### 1 · THE HONEST CHECK

Before the planning. Tick what is true — and be as willing to tick the right-hand column as the left.

#### SIGNS THIS SUITS YOU

- ☐ **You enjoy solving puzzles**  
Hunting vulnerabilities, investigating an incident, working out why an alert fired — the core activity is analytical problem solving. If that energises you rather than drains you, that is a meaningful signal.
- ☐ **You are comfortable with ambiguity**  
You will regularly face situations where the right answer is not clear and you have to make a judgement call under pressure.
- ☐ **You are naturally curious about how things work**  
A persistent habit of asking why does this work this way, and what happens if I do this instead. That curiosity drives the self-directed learning the field demands.
- ☐ **You can communicate clearly**  
Explaining a technical risk to a non-technical audience, without condescension and with appropriate urgency, is one of the most valuable and surprisingly rare skills in the industry.
- ☐ **You are in it for the long term**  
Attackers evolve, technologies change, regulations shift. Lasting careers here accept ongoing learning as a permanent feature, not a temporary inconvenience.

#### WORTH THINKING CAREFULLY ABOUT

- ☐ **You are primarily motivated by salary**  
The salaries are real. But if money is the only driver, the grind of breaking in will feel harder than it needs to.
- ☐ **You expect a clear, linear path**  
There is no single defined route in. The variety is a strength, but it is overwhelming if you need a rigid roadmap.
- ☐ **You are not prepared to build anything yourself**  
Getting hired without prior experience means demonstrating skill, not claiming it. If evenings on this for six to twelve months is genuinely impossible right now, factor that in.
- ☐ **You are hoping to avoid working with people**  
Almost every role involves collaboration. Even the most technical penetration tester writes reports and manages client relationships.

Ticks on the right are not disqualifying — three of the four are solvable with a different plan rather than a different career. But if you cannot tick any of the five on the left, stop here and think again. That is a cheaper conclusion to reach now than after £1,500 of exam fees.

## 2 · WHERE YOU ARE STARTING FROM

Facts, not intentions. This is the baseline you will measure against.

CURRENT ROLE AND LENGTH OF TIME IN IT

GEOGRAPHY (LONDON, REGIONAL UK, REMOTE-ONLY)

EXISTING CERTIFICATIONS

BUDGET, NEXT 12 MONTHS (£)

EXISTING DEGREE (IF ANY)

REALISTIC STUDY HOURS PER WEEK

TARGET CYBERSECURITY ROLE

TARGET DATE FOR FIRST ROLE

TARGET SECTOR

BIGGEST CONSTRAINT

## 3 · SCORE THE FOUR PATHS

One to five in each box, against your own answers above — not against which sounds most impressive. Total them.

|                                                         | A · SOC | B · Pen test | C · GRC | D · Arch |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------|---------|----------|
| Interest — would I still want this in three years?      |         |              |         |          |
| Existing head start — what do I already bring to it?    |         |              |         |          |
| Entry-level roles I can actually see advertised near me |         |              |         |          |
| Cost to reach a credible first application              |         |              |         |          |
| Time to reach it at my realistic study hours            |         |              |         |          |
| Tolerance for shift work, on-call, or travel it demands |         |              |         |          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                            |         |              |         |          |

A high total is a signal, not a verdict. If the winner is a path you have no interest in, you have learned something about your constraints rather than about the path.

## 4 · WHAT IT COSTS, AND HOW LONG

Approximate UK exam fees. Verify with the provider before booking — these move.

| Path                                                   | Foundation                              | Mid-level                                         | Advanced                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>A</b><br>SOC and defensive operations               | CompTIA Security+ (£330–420)            | Microsoft SC-200 (£165) or CompTIA CySA+ (£280)   | GIAC GCIH (£2,500+) or CISSP at senior level |
| <b>B</b><br>Penetration testing and offensive security | Security+ (£330–420) or PenTest+ (£330) | TryHackMe and HackTheBox practice, or CREST CPISA | OSCP (£1,500+) or CREST CRT                  |

|                               |                                          |                                            |                          |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| C<br>GRC, risk and compliance | BCS CISMP (£192) or ISO 27001 Foundation | ISO 27001 Lead Implementer or Lead Auditor | CISM (£455–600) or CISSP |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------|

|                            |                                                                          |                                         |                       |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| D<br>Security architecture | Security+, or a cloud foundation such as AZ-900 / AWS Cloud Practitioner | CCSP, or Azure / AWS Security Specialty | CISSP, SABSA or TOGAF |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|

MY FIRST CERTIFICATION, AND ITS COST

WEEKS NEEDED AT MY STUDY HOURS

EXAM BOOKED FOR (DATE)

TOTAL SPEND PLANNED THIS YEAR

## 5 • THE TWELVE-MONTH PLAN

Three milestones per quarter is plenty. A plan you keep beats a plan that impresses.

### MONTHS 1-3

Foundation. One certification started, one lab environment running.

### MONTHS 4-6

Evidence. Something written up publicly that a stranger could read.

### MONTHS 7-9

Exposure. Applications going out, and conversations happening.

### MONTHS 10-12

Conversion. Interviews, feedback, and the next certification chosen.

## 6 • THE EVIDENCE PLAN

Certifications get you past a filter. Evidence gets you the interview. Five things to have by the time you apply.

| What                                  | Why it counts                                                           | Proof I will have                                                              | Done by |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| A home lab that runs                  | Something built, broken and rebuilt. Free tooling is fine.              | Screenshots and a short write-up of what you set up and what went wrong        |         |
| A completed platform path             | TryHackMe SOC Level 1, Blue Team Labs, or the equivalent for your path. | A profile a stranger can look at, with a date on it                            |         |
| Three write-ups a stranger could read | Not tutorials. What you tried, what failed, what you learned.           | GitHub, a blog, or LinkedIn articles — the venue matters less than the writing |         |

|                                    |                                                                                     |                                                                 |  |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| One CTF attempted                  | You do not need to place. You need to be able to talk about a challenge you solved. | The name, the date, and one problem you can describe end to end |  |
| One piece of community involvement | BSides volunteering, an OWASP chapter, a local cluster meet.                        | Somebody who has met you and would recognise your name          |  |

## 7 · THE DECISION

Write it down. A choice you have written down is a choice.

PATH CHOSEN, AND THE HONEST REASON WHY

WHAT I WILL BE ABLE TO SHOW A HIRING MANAGER IN SIX MONTHS

The four paths, explained properly.

Who each one suits, how accessible it is from a career change, and what the junior job market actually looks like for each.

[ronanblake.co.uk/career-paths](https://ronanblake.co.uk/career-paths)

From The Honest Guide to Breaking Into UK Cybersecurity, chapters two and three. Certification costs approximate at time of writing.

## PART 2

# Apply

A campaign, not an event

Eleven applications, four live processes, one interview on Thursday. This part is the tracker and the per-role worksheet that stop a search going quiet, plus the CV rewrites that decide whether a career changer gets read at all.

## Applications workbook

A campaign tracker, a worksheet to run per role, and the CV rewrites that separate a career changer who gets read from one who does not.

A job search is a campaign, not an event. Eleven applications, four live processes, one interview on Thursday — and no memory of what you told the second one about your salary expectations. Print the tracker once and the worksheet as often as you need.

### 1 · THE CAMPAIGN TRACKER

One line per application. Fill in Next action every time something happens — an empty Next action column is how a live process goes quiet.

| ORGANISATION AND ROLE | APPLIED | STAGE | NEXT ACTION | BY |
|-----------------------|---------|-------|-------------|----|
|                       |         |       |             |    |
|                       |         |       |             |    |
|                       |         |       |             |    |
|                       |         |       |             |    |
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|                       |         |       |             |    |
|                       |         |       |             |    |
|                       |         |       |             |    |

The weekly rhythm. Fifteen minutes, same time each week: chase anything where Next action is overdue, add two new applications, and re-read the debrief from your most recent interview. Consistency beats intensity — five applications a week for two months outperforms forty in one weekend and nothing afterwards.

## 2 · THE APPLICATION WORKSHEET

PRINT ONE OF THESE PER ROLE YOU APPLY FOR

Fifteen minutes here is worth more than an hour of rewriting your CV in the abstract. Work from their words, not yours.

ORGANISATION

ROLE TITLE

SOURCE AND DATE SEEN

CLOSING DATE

THEIR TOP FIVE REQUIREMENTS, IN THEIR WORDS — AND MY EVIDENCE FOR EACH

| REQUIREMENT | MY EVIDENCE |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1           |             |
| 2           |             |
| 3           |             |
| 4           |             |
| 5           |             |

THE REQUIREMENT I AM WEAKEST AGAINST

WHAT I WILL SAY ABOUT IT IF ASKED

THREE CV BULLETS I WILL CHANGE FOR THIS ROLE

SALARY: MY NUMBER

SALARY: MY FLOOR

## 3 · THE BULLETS THAT DECIDE IT

The same four years of work, written two ways. Only one of them gets read twice.

BEFORE

Responsible for user account administration

AFTER

Ran joiner-mover-leaver for 400 users; cut orphaned accounts from 60 to zero in six months

The first says what you were given. The second says what changed because you were there.

BEFORE

Assisted with patching and updates

AFTER

Owned monthly patch cycle across 180 endpoints, raising compliance from 71% to 98%

‘Assisted with’ is the weakest phrase in CV writing. Own something, even something small.

## BEFORE

Dealt with phishing emails reported by staff

## AFTER

First responder for phishing reports, triaging ~15/month; wrote the triage steps the team now uses

Triage is security work. Name it as security work, and mention anything you left behind you.

## BEFORE

Good knowledge of SIEM tools

## AFTER

Built and tuned detections in Security Onion in a home lab; six write-ups published on GitHub

‘Good knowledge of’ is unfalsifiable and every reader knows it. Evidence is falsifiable, which is why it counts.

## BEFORE

Studying towards Security+

## AFTER

CompTIA Security+ — exam booked 14 March 2026

A booked date is a commitment. ‘Studying towards’ could mean you opened a PDF in January.

## 4 • VERB BANK

Reach for the left-hand columns. Never the last one.

|               |                                                                                |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ownership     | Owned, ran, led, managed, introduced, rebuilt, established                     |
| Change        | Reduced, raised, cut, eliminated, accelerated, automated, consolidated         |
| Investigation | Triaged, investigated, traced, identified, escalated, contained                |
| Building      | Built, configured, tuned, scripted, deployed, documented, tested               |
| Avoid         | Assisted with, involved in, exposed to, familiar with, responsible for, helped |

## 5 • THE CV ITSELF

Five sections, in this order. The order is the point.

For a career changer the strongest material is rarely employment history — it is the certifications, labs and self-directed work that prove you are serious. So security evidence goes above employment history, in the top third of page one, where a recruiter spends their first fifteen seconds. Almost every career-changer CV gets this the wrong way round.

- 1 Header  
Name, town and county, phone, email, LinkedIn. No photograph, no date of birth, no marital status, no full postal address.
- 2 Professional statement  
Three lines. What you are now, what you are moving toward, and the strongest single piece of evidence for it.
- 3 Security evidence  
Certifications with dates, practical work with links, community involvement. This section is why you get the interview.

4

## Employment history

Role, organisation, dates, then three or four bullets written the way section three shows. Numbers wherever they exist.

5

## Education and training

Short, most recent first. A non-technical degree is not a problem and does not need explaining.

## 6 · BEFORE YOU SEND IT

Five checks that catch most of what goes wrong.

- ☐ Two pages, and the second page is not half empty
- ☐ Every claim on page one can be evidenced if asked about it in the room
- ☐ Their words from the job specification appear naturally, not stuffed
- ☐ Sent as PDF, named Firstname-Surname-CV.pdf
- ☐ Read aloud once, and read by one other person

## 7 · THE HALF OF THE MARKET YOU CANNOT SEE

A substantial share of UK security roles are never advertised — filled through internal moves, referrals, and specialist recruiters.

This is not a conspiracy, it is efficiency: hiring is expensive, and a manager who can fill a role through a trusted referral will. The implication for a career changer is that visibility is not optional networking advice — it is access to a market that is otherwise invisible to you.

- ☐ Approach two specialist cybersecurity recruiters — firms that do security, not general IT. Email beats a LinkedIn message for a first approach
- ☐ Attend one event this quarter — BSides, an OWASP chapter, an ISACA UK chapter meet, or a regional cyber cluster. You do not need to speak, only to turn up
- ☐ Tell four people in your existing network exactly what you are looking for, specifically enough that they would recognise it if they saw it
- ☐ Follow up every conversation within 48 hours while they still remember you

## RECRUITERS I HAVE CONTACTED, AND WHEN

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## NEXT EVENT, AND THE DATE

## WHO I WILL TELL THIS MONTH

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## 8 · LINKEDIN, IN TWENTY MINUTES

Recruiters search it before they read your CV. Most career-changer profiles are still describing the job they are leaving.

- ☐ Headline names the destination, not just the origin — 'IT Support Engineer moving into Security Operations | Security+' beats 'IT Support Engineer'
  - ☐ About section is the same three lines as your CV professional statement
  - ☐ Certifications listed with dates, including the one that is booked
  - ☐ Featured section links your write-ups, GitHub or lab documentation
  - ☐ Open to work set for the specific role titles you are targeting, not 'any'
  - ☐ You have posted or commented at least once in the last month — a recruiter checking an empty profile learns nothing about you
- 

Then comes the interview.

275 UK interview questions free and searchable, and a six-page preparation workbook alongside them.

[ronanblake.co.uk/downloads](https://ronanblake.co.uk/downloads)

From The Honest Guide to Breaking Into UK Cybersecurity, chapter five, and Appendix B of The Honest Guide to UK Cybersecurity Interviews.

## PART 3

# Interview

Saying is the skill

Reading is not the skill. This part covers the two-room rehearsal method, the four stages of a UK process and what each one assesses, the six stories you will be asked for, and the single page you take into the room.

## Interview preparation workbook

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The method, the machinery, and the six stories you will be asked for — with space to build them. Print it and write in it.

Reading is not the skill. Saying is the skill. Everything here is designed to get answers out of your mouth before the day, because the distance between knowing what a good answer contains and being able to produce one under pressure is exactly where interviews are lost.

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### THE METHOD

Two rooms. Almost nobody does the second one.

- 1** The empty room — say it out loud, alone  
Wherever you are: a kitchen, a car, a walk. Take a question and answer it aloud, in your own words, without looking at the page after the first go. It will come out wrong the first time — you will waffle, lose the thread, reach for a word that is not there. That is the point. The empty room is where you find out that the answer you understood perfectly falls apart the moment it has to leave your mouth, and where you fix it for free with nobody watching.
- 2** The second room — say it to a person  
Get a friend, a colleague, an ex-manager, anyone, and have them ask you the questions. It does not matter that they are not a security expert; most interviewers are not experts in your specific answer either. What matters is that a human is now across from you — someone who might interrupt, follow up, pull a face, ask what you mean. Ask them to be a little difficult, and to tell you afterwards not whether the answer was right, but whether you sounded like someone they would want to work with.

Say it alone until it is smooth. Say it to someone until it survives contact.

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### THE MACHINERY

Four stages, four different assessments. Never give the same interview twice in one process.

**Recruiter screen** In-house talent team, or an external specialist.

Assessing: Basic fit, salary alignment, and whether you are broadly who the CV claims.

Pitch: A filter, not an assessment. Pass it without underselling yourself on money.

**Hiring manager** The person who will actually manage you.

Assessing: Whether you can do the job, and whether they want you in their team.

Pitch: Competency and motivation questions cluster here. This is where your stories earn their keep.

**Technical stage** A panel, a live exercise, a take-home task, or a combination.

Assessing: Domain depth, and how you reason when you reach the edge of what you know.

Pitch: Depth beats breadth. One question answered to root cause outperforms ten recited.

**Final stage** A stakeholder, a skip-level manager, or a wider panel.

Assessing: Judgement, culture, and how you would represent the function.

Pitch: Common for senior or regulated roles. Pitch upward: outcomes, not tooling.

WHICH STAGE IS NEXT FOR ME

DATE AND FORMAT

## YOUR STORY BANK

Six stories cover most of what a UK panel asks. Draft them once, use them for years. Specific beats impressive.

### 1 Working under pressure

An incident, a deadline, or a queue that would not stop. What you did when it mattered.

Interviewers are checking you stay methodical rather than heroic, and that you know when to escalate.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

### 2 Escalating well

A time you raised something upward — and ideally one where you were ignored and had to persist.

This separates people who own outcomes from people who own tasks. Escalating is not passing the buck.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

---

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

---

### 3 Explaining something technical to a non-technical audience

A board, a client, a manager, a colleague in finance. What you changed about how you said it.

Almost every UK security role is judged on this, and almost nobody prepares an example for it.

SITUATION AND TASK

---

WHAT YOU DID

---

---

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

---

### 4 Being wrong, and what you did about it

A judgement call that turned out badly, or a finding you got wrong.

The tell is whether you name the mistake plainly. Defensive answers fail here; so do fake ones.

SITUATION AND TASK

---

WHAT YOU DID

---

---

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

---

### 5 Disagreeing with someone senior

An auditor, an architect, a manager. How you made the case and what happened.

They are testing whether you can hold a position without making it personal.

SITUATION AND TASK

---

WHAT YOU DID

---

---

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

---

### 6 Learning something quickly

A tool, a domain, a system you had to be useful in fast.

For career changers this is the single most valuable story you own. Make it specific and recent.

SITUATION AND TASK

---

WHAT YOU DID

---

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

---

#### WHAT YOU ASK THEM

Your due diligence, and the part most candidates waste. Tick three to five, and know why you are asking each.

#### ABOUT THE ROLE ITSELF

- ☐ What does a typical week look like for whoever is in this role?
- ☐ What would a successful first six months look like to you?
- ☐ Why is the role open — growth, backfill, or a new function?
- ☐ Which part of this job do people find hardest?

#### ABOUT THE TEAM AND THE WORK

- ☐ How is the security function structured, and where does this role sit in it?
- ☐ How much of the work is reactive versus planned, roughly?
- ☐ Who does this role work with most outside the security team?
- ☐ What is the on-call or shift pattern, honestly?

#### ABOUT MATURITY AND REALITY

- ☐ Where would you say the security programme is most mature, and least?
- ☐ What happened at the last significant incident, and what changed afterwards?
- ☐ How are security decisions escalated when the business disagrees?
- ☐ What tooling is in place, and what is on the roadmap to replace?

#### ABOUT YOU, IN IT

- ☐ What does progression from this role usually look like?
- ☐ Is there budget and time for certifications and training?
- ☐ What would make you regret hiring someone into this role?
- ☐ Is there anything in my background you would want reassurance on?

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#### THE CHECKLIST

Once the work above is done, this is what is left.

#### THE WEEK BEFORE

Groundwork. Most of the value is here, not on the day.

- ☐ Research the organisation properly: what it does, how it makes money, any recent security or regulatory news
- ☐ Find the people you will meet on LinkedIn and understand their backgrounds

- ☐ Re-read the job specification and map your evidence to its first three requirements
  - ☐ Work the relevant technical section of the bank, plus the adjacent one — real interviews cross boundaries
  - ☐ Prepare and rehearse aloud four or five competency examples, structured, with outcomes and numbers
  - ☐ If it is a Success Profiles interview, identify the named behaviours and prepare an evidenced example for each
  - ☐ Prepare one current vulnerability or development you can discuss a level below the headline
  - ☐ Choose three to five questions to ask them, and know why you are asking each
- 

#### THE DAY BEFORE

Confirmation and rest. Resist the urge to cram.

- ☐ Confirm the time, the format, and whether it is in person or remote
  - ☐ Test the technology if it is remote: camera, microphone, the platform itself
  - ☐ Re-read your own CV and be ready to speak to every line on it
  - ☐ Re-read your strongest two or three prepared examples — do not attempt to memorise them word for word
  - ☐ Plan the journey, or the room you will sit in, and give yourself margin
  - ☐ Stop preparing at a sensible hour. Tired outperforms over-prepared.
- 

#### THE HOUR BEFORE

Logistics and settling. Nothing new goes in now.

- ☐ Arrive or log in early enough that you are not rushing
  - ☐ Have water, your CV, the job specification and your questions in front of you
  - ☐ Remind yourself of the four or five stories you intend to land, not the whole bank
  - ☐ Remember the two habits that carry every technical answer: think out loud, and mark clearly where your certainty ends
- 

#### IN THE ROOM

Habits, not facts. These are what interviewers actually score.

- ☐ Listen to the whole question before answering, and ask for clarification where it is genuinely ambiguous
  - ☐ Narrate your reasoning rather than delivering conclusions from silence
  - ☐ When you reach the edge of what you know, say so plainly and reason from there — never bluff, particularly on cryptography
  - ☐ Give specific examples with outcomes, not general claims about how you always work
  - ☐ Ask your questions, and listen to the answers as your own due diligence
  - ☐ If an earlier answer landed badly, use the closing moments to put it right — one sentence is allowed, expected, and occasionally decisive
- 

#### AFTERWARDS

Ten minutes now saves an hour before the next one.

- ☐ Write down the questions you were asked while they are fresh — they are the best preparation material you will ever get
-

- ☐ Note anything you answered poorly and work out what the better answer was
  - ☐ Send a brief thank-you note if it feels natural; keep it short and specific
  - ☐ Whatever the outcome, the notes make the next interview better. Most people skip this step, which is precisely why it compounds.
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## THE ONE-PAGER

PRINT ONE OF THESE PER INTERVIEW — THIS IS THE SHEET YOU TAKE IN

Everything above is preparation. This is the single page you have in front of you on the day, and the only page you should be looking at. Fill it in the night before, when you have stopped preparing.

ORGANISATION

ROLE

DATE, TIME, FORMAT

STAGE — AND WHAT IT ASSESSES

WHO IS IN THE ROOM, AND THEIR BACKGROUND

WHAT THEY DO, AND HOW THEY MAKE MONEY

THE THREE STORIES I WILL LEAD WITH, AND WHICH REQUIREMENT EACH ONE ANSWERS

1

2

3

THE WEAK SPOT I EXPECT TO BE PROBED ON, AND MY ONE HONEST LINE ABOUT IT

MY SALARY NUMBER

MY FLOOR, AND WHAT I TRADE FOR IT

THE FIVE QUESTIONS I AM ASKING THEM

NOTES DURING — QUESTIONS ASKED, NAMES, ANYTHING TO FOLLOW UP

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## DEBRIEF

Fill this in within an hour of walking out, every time.

ROLE AND ORGANISATION

DATE AND STAGE

---

QUESTIONS I WAS ASKED THAT I HAD NOT PREPARED FOR

---

THE ANSWER I WAS LEAST HAPPY WITH, AND WHAT THE BETTER ANSWER IS

---

WHAT I WILL DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME

---

The questions themselves are free too.

275 real UK cybersecurity interview questions, searchable by domain and level, each with what the panel is actually assessing.

[ronanblake.co.uk/questionbank](https://ronanblake.co.uk/questionbank)

Drawn from The Honest Guide to UK Cybersecurity Interviews, Sections 1, 2 and 5, and Appendix C.

## PART 4

# Land

## The first ninety days

The role is the reward for everything else. This part is the conversation to have in week one, the people to map, and the running note that becomes your appraisal evidence and your next set of interview answers.

## Your first ninety days

The role is the reward for everything else. This is how you make the first three months count, and how you turn them into a record you can use.

Nobody expects you to contribute meaningfully in month one. They do expect you to learn deliberately, ask good questions, and write things down. Almost everything that makes the first ninety days go badly comes from waiting to be told rather than going and finding out.

### 1 · THE CONVERSATION TO HAVE IN WEEK ONE

Most people never explicitly ask what success looks like. Then they are surprised at their probation review.

Book thirty minutes with your manager in the first week and ask these. Write the answers down in their words, and re-read them at day 60.

- ☐ What does good look like in this role, in your words?
- ☐ What is the thing most likely to go wrong in my first three months?
- ☐ Who should I meet that I would not think to ask for?
- ☐ What is the team's biggest frustration right now?
- ☐ Where do you want me spending my time by month three?
- ☐ What is not written down that I need to know?

### WHAT MY MANAGER SAID GOOD LOOKS LIKE, IN THEIR WORDS

### 2 · STAKEHOLDER MAP

Security is a function that only works through other people. Map them early, before you need anything from them.

| Who               | Name | What they need from security | Met on |
|-------------------|------|------------------------------|--------|
| Your line manager |      |                              |        |

|                                    |  |  |  |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Your manager's manager             |  |  |  |
| IT operations lead                 |  |  |  |
| The busiest engineering team       |  |  |  |
| Whoever owns risk or compliance    |  |  |  |
| Service desk lead                  |  |  |  |
| A peer who joined in the last year |  |  |  |

### 3 · THE NINETY DAYS

Tick as you go. The target dates matter more than the order.

#### DAYS 1-30

Orientation. Read, ask, and resist the urge to fix anything yet.

TARGET DATE

- ☐ Read all team policies, standards, and process documentation

Done when: Summary notes produced for key documents

- ☐ Understand the current threat landscape and team priorities

Done when: Can describe the top three team priorities without prompting

- ☐ Identify key stakeholders outside the team

Done when: Stakeholder map drafted with names, roles, and relationships

- ☐ Meet key contacts in IT operations and relevant business units

Done when: At least five cross-functional relationships established

- ☐ Understand how security decisions are made and risk is accepted

Done when: Can describe the governance process and key decision-makers

- ☐ Complete organisation-specific onboarding and access setup

Done when: All systems access in place; compliance training complete

#### DAYS 31-60

Contribution. Take ownership of something small and finish it.

TARGET DATE

- ☐ Take ownership of first specific work task or project

Done when: Deliverable completed, reviewed, and submitted

- ☐ Produce first written output (report, risk assessment, or briefing)

Done when: Document reviewed by manager before circulation

- ☐ Attend and actively contribute to team meetings and governance processes

Done when: Have spoken in at least one meeting with something substantive

- ☐ Complete security-tool-specific training for team's primary toolset

Done when: Proficient in the team's core tools without assistance

- ☐ Build working relationship with IT operations team

Done when: Have had at least two substantive conversations with IT ops contacts

- ☐
- Identify one quick-win contribution aligned to team priorities

Done when: Quick win identified, proposed to manager, and in progress

## DAYS 61-90

Direction. Work out where you add most value, and say so.

TARGET DATE

- ☐
- Book 30-60-90 day review meeting with manager

Done when: Meeting scheduled; prepared discussion points

- ☐
- Operating independently on primary day-to-day responsibilities

Done when: Completing core work without requiring guidance on routine tasks

- ☐
- Established working relationships with all key stakeholders

Done when: Can describe each stakeholder's priorities and communication preferences

- ☐
- Clear view of the team's security roadmap and my contribution to it

Done when: Can articulate the next six months of team priorities unprompted

## 4 · KEEP A RUNNING NOTE

Five things worth writing down as they happen. This is the single habit that separates a good first year from an average one.

- ☐
- Anything you had to ask twice — it is missing documentation
- 
- ☐
- The steps you worked out for a task nobody had written down
- 
- ☐
- Names, roles and what each person actually needs from security
- 
- ☐
- Every acronym and system name that was not explained to you
- 
- ☐
- Decisions you saw made, and the reasoning behind them

Why it matters. Everything you write down here becomes three things later: documentation the team did not have, evidence for your probation and appraisal, and — when you next interview — the specific, dated examples that competency questions are asking for. The version of you sitting in an interview in two years will not remember any of this unless you wrote it down now.

## 5 · NINETY-DAY REFLECTION

Answer honestly and keep the sheet. It is the raw material for your next appraisal and your next interview.

How has my understanding of this role changed since I started?

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Which two or three skills do I most need to develop in the next six months?

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What does success look like for me at the twelve-month mark?

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What would I tell someone starting this role after me?

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THE ONE THING I WILL DO DIFFERENTLY IN MONTHS FOUR TO SIX

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## Already thinking about the next move?

The question bank covers every domain, and the interview workbook is free alongside it — including a story worksheet you can start filling in now, while the examples are fresh.

[ronanblake.co.uk/downloads](https://ronanblake.co.uk/downloads)

From The Honest Guide to Breaking Into UK Cybersecurity, chapter six.