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News

Lack of staff stops army cyber-security team

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The Defence Forces have stood down an internal cyber-security team because of lack of resources and qualified staff. It was responsible for monitoring the security of the military's IT networks to safeguard them from attacks by hostile states or hackers, writes John Mooney.

Military sources say the Defence Forces are also no longer in a position to provide staff to the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), a branch of the Department of Communications. The NCSC is responsible for protecting government departments from cyber-attacks.

Last year a report by the comptroller and auditor general highlighted several issues at the NCSC, which is based in University College Dublin (UCD). These included the lack of a strategic plan and the fact that an oversight body set up to monitor its performance had not met since 2015.

The paper also outlined the threat posed to the state and private industry by cyber-attacks and cited several examples, including the WannaCry2 worm in 2017, which spread to an HSE facility in Wexford.

WannaCry2 targeted computers using Microsoft systems and made ransom demands to users. The intelligence services believe the malware might have originated in North Korea.

Jack Chambers, the Fianna Fail spokesman on defence, claimed the military was being "hollowed out" by the government. "If the Defence Forces are not monitoring its internal networks on a 24-hour basis, we are vulnerable," he said. "The minister for defence is in a state of denial about this. I have raised this matter in the Dail but [defence minister] Paul Kehoe refuses to answer questions on the grounds it might affect national security.

"Cyber-attacks represent a major threat to countries across Europe, yet the government is not allocating enough resources to protect ourselves. We could be subjected to an attack and there's no one there to even monitor it. Cyber-security should be of paramount importance, given the IT companies located in Ireland, but it's not."

The Defence Forces said yesterday that military authorities examined all options with the aim of maximising the effectiveness of cybersecurity carried out by Oglai na hEireann.

"For operational security reasons, we do not disclose the disposition of personnel within Oglai na hEireann. At present, there are no Defence Forces members seconded to the National Cyber Security Centre. Oglai na hEireann prioritises its outputs to meet defence, security and other roles assigned by government," it said.

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