Tender insight · Rob Atkins

What the government's FTSE 350 cyber letter means for UK manufacturers

A letter to the UK's biggest boards could reach you through your customers.

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On 13 October 2025, senior ministers and the heads of the National Cyber Security Centre and the National Crime Agency wrote to the chief executives and chairs of every FTSE 100 and FTSE 250 company, and a number of other leading UK firms, with three requests. The third was to require Cyber Essentials in their supply chains. If you supply one of those companies, or supply someone who does, that request could reach you as a condition of doing business, even if you never bid for public work. It's a request and not a law, and every customer will move at its own speed. But it's better to be ready before they ask than to find out when they do. Here's what the letter says and what I'd do about it.

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What the letter asks boards to do

1. Make cyber risk a Board-level priority

Use the government's Cyber Governance Code of Practice, and complete the free training that goes with it. The letter also asks boards to plan and rehearse how they'd keep operating and rebuild after a destructive attack.

2. Sign up to NCSC Early Warning

This free service tells you about potential cyber attacks on your network. The letter strongly advises companies and their suppliers to register, so this one is meant for you too.

3. Require Cyber Essentials in the supply chain

The letter calls Cyber Essentials the minimum standard businesses should seek. It says government already requires most of its suppliers to meet it, and asks the country's largest businesses to embed the same requirements in their own supply chains.

Who signed it

Liz Kendall, Rachel Reeves, Peter Kyle and Dan Jarvis signed for the government, alongside Dr Richard Horne, CEO of the National Cyber Security Centre, and Graeme Biggar, Director General of the National Crime Agency. Read the letter on GOV.UK

What it means for your business

Your customers may start asking

The letter says just 14% of UK businesses assess the cyber risks posed by their immediate suppliers. The government's voluntary Cyber Resilience Pledge now asks signatories to take a risk-based approach to requiring Cyber Essentials, which may include requiring it from all suppliers.

It can reach you outside a tender

You don't have to bid for public work to feel this. A large customer can make Cyber Essentials part of its supplier checks or contract terms, and that can pass down from one tier to the next. Do I need Cyber Essentials?

There's a balance sheet argument too

The letter says organisations with Cyber Essentials are 92% less likely to make a claim on their cyber insurance. For a manufacturer, that's a good reason to look at it, even before a customer asks.

What the letter doesn't say

It doesn't make Cyber Essentials a legal requirement, it doesn't set a deadline for suppliers, and it doesn't mention Cyber Essentials Plus. Some buyers ask for Plus anyway, so check what yours expects.

Why waiting for your customer to ask doesn't work

A customer's supplier review won't necessarily fit around your diary. Getting a manufacturer ready for Cyber Essentials typically takes four to eight weeks, because of the work on patching, logins, admin rights and firewalls before you apply.

If a request lands with a short deadline, or a contract renewal is close, that's a tough position to be in with a customer you can't afford to lose.

What I'd do this month

Sign up to NCSC Early Warning, because it's free. Ask your biggest customers whether they plan to require Cyber Essentials from suppliers. Then find out where you stand with the free Bid & Tender Readiness Screening.

If there are gaps, I'll bring in a vetted cyber specialist from the Cure Alliance. YBSL is a CyberSmart Registered Partner for Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus. **One relationship. Every specialist. Ready before the question arrives.**

Common questions about the letter

Does the letter make Cyber Essentials a legal requirement?

No. It's a request from government to the boards of leading companies. It becomes binding on you if a customer writes it into its supplier terms or contract, or if a tender makes it a condition.

My business isn't in the FTSE 350. Does this affect me?

It can, if you supply a company that acts on the letter or supply someone who does. Whether it reaches you, and when, depends on what your customers decide to do.

What is Cyber Essentials?

A government-backed scheme that certifies you have key protections in place against common cyber attacks. It covers firewalls, secure configuration, security update management, user access control and malware protection.

What is the Cyber Resilience Pledge?

A voluntary government pledge for major organisations. Signatories commit to board responsibility for cyber risk, signing up to Early Warning and a risk-based approach to requiring Cyber Essentials across their supply chains.

Would you be ready if your biggest customer asked tomorrow?

The free Bid & Tender Readiness Screening takes two minutes and shows you where you stand on cyber and the other areas buyers check. Is that okay?

Take the free Screening

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Sources

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Written 3 November 2026. This is guidance, not legal advice. Your Best Solution Limited isn't connected with the government or the signatories of the letter.