



# Behind the Keys:

Women Who Secure the Future

(In)Securities Special Edition: Day 3  
Featuring:

**Sarah Jane Mellor**

*Celebrating International Women in Tech Day*

# Sarah Jane Mellor

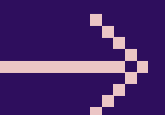


## Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Consultant- Cyber Security Focused



Based in Amsterdam, Sarah Jane is a consultant in public affairs and strategic communications, with laser focus on cybersecurity and tech-driven public-private partnerships (PPPs). A few months ago, Sarah Jane was honoured as one of the winners of the 2024 European Cyber Woman Excellence Awards, as presented by CEFCCYS in Paris. She is the architect behind the rapprochement between two prime European cybersecurity conferences, the Forum InCyber Europe (FIC) and the ONE Conference (NL).

She has dealt with Internet governance and cyber matters for over a decade, mainly on initiatives in the fight against the most aggravated forms of cybercrime (since 2013), as well as on accelerating cyber resilience (since 2018), facilitating dialogue and rapprochement between cybersecurity ecosystems, CISO/ CIO communities and on core issues, e.g. strategic autonomy, cyber resilience, the trusted cloud, threat detection / incident response, high-potential start-ups/ scale-ups.





## 1. What inspired you to pursue a career in technology/cybersecurity, and how did you get started?

My early childhood in Paris coincided with the launch of the landmark 'Computing for All' initiative ('Plan Informatique pour Tous'), which introduced computers to 11 million pupils. Alongside my love of books, I also learned to read on a Goupil computer. Time capsule: it was also the golden age of the Minitel. During holidays in the UK, as pictured here, I was always happily playing on a Commodore 64. I vividly remember my father first owning a Sinclair ZX80, then a Spectrum, a QL (for Quantum Leap), and finally a second-hand IBM computer at home.

Growing up, I was drawn to the intersection of philosophy, logic, and science, fascinated by how these disciplines converge in problem-solving and discovery. I admired minds that reshaped our understanding of the world—pioneers such as Émilie du Châtelet and Ada Lovelace.



Coming from a Franco-British background, I was also acutely aware of the living legacy of Bletchley Park, the 'nerve centre' of wartime intelligence, and the immense debt of gratitude owed to all the remarkable men and women there, including Alan Turing and Joan Clarke.

Fast forward to 2018, I made the switch from working on the most aggravated forms of cybercrime, particularly in the fight against child sexual abuse material, to cybersecurity.



## 2. Can you describe a defining moment in your cybersecurity career that made you realise this was the right path for you?

One defining moment was when I studied Professor Creese's taxonomy of cyber harms—defining the impacts of cyberattacks and understanding how they propagate (*Journal of Cybersecurity*, 2018).

Another was witnessing first-hand how cyber incidents impact daily life. One Easter weekend, I went to the local supermarket only to find that there was no cheese left—not just there, but in any supermarket. And this was in the Netherlands, of all places—the other land of cheese. It turned out a logistics provider in the supply chain had been hit by a ransomware attack.

The sheer ubiquity of cyberattacks and their cascading effects on everyday life crystallised for me that enhancing resilience isn't just about technology—it requires an overarching governance and strategic lens. Add geopolitics and the multifaceted nature of ever-evolving hybrid threats to the mix, and that's when I knew I had found my path.

Of course, joining CyAN, a like-**minded community with a refreshing multidisciplinary approach at its core**, and thriving hubs connecting Paris to Sydney, further strengthened my resolve.

## 3. Can you share some of the key challenges you faced as a woman in this field, and how you overcame them?

When I first started in Paris two decades ago, it felt like an entirely different era. As a young woman advising the Senator-Mayor on sports policy, I encountered overt misogyny from some stakeholders. I'd hear remarks like, "You're smart for a Mademoiselle" or be asked if I was interested in a different kind of troisième mi-temps. It feels like proto-history now.

In retrospect, things are much smoother today. Now living in the Netherlands, I was fortunate to return from maternity leave to an incredibly supportive environment.

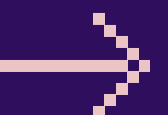
That said, working in cyber, I've often wondered why the prevalence of 'manels' (all-male panels) is so frequently overlooked—especially when **we're trying to bring more women into the talent pool.**

## 4. Who has been your biggest influence or mentor throughout your career, and what specific lessons or turning points have you experienced because of them?

I have been fortunate to learn from remarkable figures—household names in the industry—such as Anne Souvira, General Marc Watin-Augouard, and Hans de Vries.

But beyond individual mentors, living and launching my consultancy in the Netherlands profoundly influenced my approach. The Dutch are pragmatists through and through, with highly efficient public-private partnerships (PPPs). The polder model, where consensus-building and collaboration are central, is woven into the country's DNA.

This mindset was critical during incidents like Log4J, where, thanks to the NCSC NL, rapid collective action across sectors took place, and a GitHub repository was created. **This proves that resilience isn't just about technology—it's about ecosystems, agility, and sustained dialogue.**



## **5. What are the biggest challenges women face in the technology/cybersecurity industry today? Can you share specific examples from your own experiences?**

The “prove it again” bias is a well-documented phenomenon. Research shows that women are required to repeatedly demonstrate their competence in ways that their male counterparts are not. Representation at senior levels remains disproportionately low, while networking and informal influence often resemble old boys' clubs.

## **6. How has the industry evolved for women since you started your career? Have you noticed any significant shifts, and can you share a personal story that illustrates these changes?**

It's fascinating how the conversation has evolved. While the glass ceiling metaphor still resonates, the broken rung concept has gained traction, highlighting the specific challenges women face early in their careers. That first promotion—or lack of it—sets the tone for future advancement.

That said, there are reasons to be optimistic. Women now account for over a quarter of the global cyber workforce—an upward trend from the mere 13% when I started.





## 7. What role do diversity and inclusion play in fostering innovation in tech/ cybersecurity? Can you share a personal example or case study where diversity directly led to innovation within your team or project?

Simply put, diversity is a force multiplier, and a lack of it is a security risk. I mentioned Bletchley Park earlier—women were its backbone during World War II. At its peak in January 1945, women made up 75% of its workforce.

In cybersecurity, diverse teams are better equipped to identify social engineering tactics that exploit cultural biases, recognise threats across regions, and develop security solutions that work for a broader range of users.

Cybersecurity also greatly benefits from neurodiversity—lateral thinking, pattern recognition, and deep focus are invaluable in threat detection and problem-solving.

Without diversity, organisations risk blind spots—making them more vulnerable to emerging threats.

## 8. What are the most exciting trends or developments in the industry right now that you're passionate about?

Securing the future through **post-quantum cryptography migration**, **advancing deepfake detection**, and protecting subsea cables—vital components of our global Internet infrastructure—are some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

Equally crucial is connecting innovators and investors at this critical juncture for Europe, with the cyber/defence nexus in mind.

Last but not least, I am truly inspired by the Franco-Dutch Young Talents Cybersecurity 2025 initiative, which offers a refreshing glimpse into the next generation of cybersecurity leaders.



## **9. What advice would you give to young women considering a career in technology or cybersecurity?**

Step forward with audacity. Find your entry point—whether it's technical, legal, governance, PR... Don't forget that cybersecurity needs soft skills.

Seek out mentorship programs—surround yourself with people who challenge and support you.

Above all, stay perpetually curious. Tech and cyber evolve rapidly, so cultivating curiosity will allow you to adapt and grow. Most importantly, learn and shape your expertise.

## **10. Can you share examples of initiatives or programs that have made a real difference in promoting women in our field?**

Yes, numerous initiatives are making a real impact. Programs such as ITU's Girls in ICT Day, Equals, Women4Cyber, CEFCYS in France, and Girls Who Code are creating pathways for greater inclusion and leadership.

A special mention goes to Sistech and Sahar Habib, who won the Jury's Choice at the CEFCYS Awards—her remarkable journey is a lesson in resilience.

## **11. If you could envision the ideal future for women in cybersecurity, what would it look like? What key changes would have been made?**

A future where women are not seen as outliers in the field.

**"Let us choose for ourselves our path in life, and let us try to strew that path with flowers." – Émilie du Châtelet**