Homegrown talent: How DVLA is developing the next generation of digital experts

In 2018, we launched the Centre of Digital Excellence (CoDE) development programme to attract people to work and develop their digital skills at DVLA. The programme is part of our long term strategy to train people in the digital capabilities we need most.

Several years later, CoDE has delivered significant results, with more than 200 people joining the programme since it began. Many of our engineers and analysts are graduates from the programme, with some teams now comprising up to 50% CoDE graduates!

In this blog, I want to answer some of the questions you may have and offer practical advice for future CoDE students.

Talking to past and present students at Code Connect 2025.

Are all CoDE apprentices school leavers?

Not always. While we welcome school leavers, we also recruit people seeking a career change. They often bring valuable life and work experience.

We run a range of different programmes each year – master's, graduate schemes, and apprenticeships – with varying qualification requirements. Some

go to university, while others prefer not to. We want to offer opportunities to the right people, regardless of the route they've taken.

Can you train people from non-IT backgrounds?

Absolutely! For example, our Master's in Software Engineering programme accepts applicants with any degree in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

We've maintained a 50/50 split between non-IT and technology degree participants, with non-IT graduates showing a slightly higher success rate in securing permanent roles.

Can you only succeed with a degree?

No. Many of our apprentices have progressed to become senior engineers. We focus on what applicants do in their own time to develop their skills, which can be a stronger indicator of future success and lead to excellent outcomes.

What advice would you give to future cohorts?

1. Say yes to opportunities and don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone.

Whether it's a task for your team, a speaking opportunity, or writing your own blog, every opportunity you take builds your skills, network and experience. These experiences will set you apart.

2. Never turn down small opportunities.

If someone asks if you want to see code they've written, look at a new testing process, or help with a ticket, try to prioritise it. These small gestures show people want to share their knowledge with you.

3. Be proactive and ask questions.

Write down anything you can't ask immediately and follow up afterwards. There are no stupid questions, and curiosity shows engagement!

4. Take advantage of your unique environment.

You're likely working with other current students or previous graduates. Since we run annual programmes, you're never alone in this experience. Ask them what helped them succeed and make notes of what works for you to share with future cohorts.

5. Keep learning.

We probably hired you because you told us you enjoy learning about new technology or building things in your spare time. Don't stop now. Nothing demonstrates your commitment like showing you've been reading up on topics discussed and want to get more involved.

Looking ahead

With the right support, people from all backgrounds can build successful digital careers. Each new group brings fresh perspectives that strengthen our teams and enhance our capabilities.

We're committed to continuing this programme's development, learning from every year, and expanding opportunities for future students. As we celebrate the arrival of the 2025 CoDE cohort, we're already laying the groundwork for 2026.

Keen to find out more? Check out our development programmes and sign up to Civil Service Jobs to be the first to hear about future opportunities.

Follow DVLA on X, follow us on Facebook and connect with us on LinkedIn. You can also subscribe to the DVLA digital services blog.

From placement to professional: my DVLA software engineering journey

DVLA has several Centre of Digital Excellence (CoDE) programmes to support career development in the digital profession.

If you're looking to start a digital career, or simply improve your digital skills, DVLA is a great place to work. I started at DVLA as a Year in Industry student before joining the master's degree programme and becoming a Junior Software Engineer.

This is my journey.

Becoming a CoDE student at DVLA

I applied for DVLA's Year in Industry scheme as I saw it as a great opportunity to improve my programming skills and gain valuable industry experience in a supportive environment.

During the placement, I worked as a Software Development Engineer in Test (SDET), which gave me a great insight into the world of testing. This hands-on experience also gave me a significant advantage when I returned to university, as I was already familiar with concepts that were being introduced in my studies.

My main responsibility was writing functional tests, which involved learning and working with languages and frameworks such as Ruby, Cucumber, and Gherkin. I also really enjoyed working in an Agile environment by participating in biweekly sprints, daily stand ups, sprint reviews and retrospectives.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to attend careers events to help promote the Year in Industry scheme, which allowed me to develop my communication and networking skills.

I received plenty of support throughout my placement. The SDET community is very close-knit, and they're always there to offer guidance when needed. My squad were incredibly welcoming and patient, allowing me to develop my skills at my own pace, which made my experience enjoyable as a new starter.

Returning on the Software Engineering MSc programme

After my Year in Industry, I was eager to return to DVLA. I really enjoyed the work environment – both the pace of work and the people were great! I had a consistent workload to keep me engaged without the pressure of stressful deadlines, which made for a balanced and enjoyable experience.

I applied for the MSc programme, which I'm still working on. It's given me the opportunity to continue progressing my career at DVLA, while allowing me to earn a master's qualification. It almost felt too good to be true! As part of the programme, we have a university day every Friday, which allows us time to focus on our studies without it interfering with our work at DVLA.

During my Year in Industry placement, I primarily focused on testing, but now I'm working as a developer. This shift has allowed me to expand my knowledge of software engineering from a developer's perspective, learning new languages and frameworks along the way.

The MSc programme has been really helpful for my development. Not only has it helped me improve my practical coding skills but, through my university studies, it's also allowed me to dive into the theory behind it. This mix of hands-on experience and deeper knowledge means I can take what I'm learning and apply it to different roles in software engineering, carrying that knowledge with me wherever I go.

Working at DVLA

It's a lot of fun! I've really enjoyed getting to know everyone and the squads have been very supportive. They're always happy to offer their time and provide feedback on my work, which has really helped me grow as a developer. There are a few former master's degree students in my squad, who I've become good friends with, and they've been especially understanding whenever I've needed advice.

With the way technology is evolving, it's an exciting time to be part of DVLA, and I can't wait to see what's next! Once I complete the MSc programme, I hope to have the opportunity to continue my career here as a software engineer. And who knows, maybe one day I'll work my way up to Senior Software Engineer!

There are so many things that make DVLA a great place to work. The people, career opportunities, technology, and support all contribute to a great experience. If you'd like to pursue a career in digital with us, find out more about DVLA digital professions and development programmes and visit Civil Service Jobs for all the latest career opportunities.

Gone in 60 seconds: On the road with our vehicle tax evasion enforcement team

We recently joined DVLA's wheel-clamping partner, NSL, to find out how they're tackling vehicle tax evasion in the Liverpool and Midlands regions.

Our visit was part of a wider campaign targeting locations of the UK where vehicle tax evasion is highest. In 2024, we took enforcement action – which includes fines and clamping – on more than 120,000 vehicles in the Liverpool and West Midlands areas.

NSL operate across the UK and work closely with local authorities and police forces who are able to use devolved powers to remove untaxed vehicles from our roads.

So, what does a typical day on the road with NSL look like? Our team travelled to DVLA's Widnes and West Brom vehicle pounds to find out…

First stop: Widnes pound

We arrived at the pound where Enforcement Manager, Paul Davies, gave us a guided tour of the facility and the low down on the new fleet of state-of-the-art Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) vehicles.

After learning about how the team operate, we were taken to the vehicle storage facility which featured a remarkable collection of vehicles of all shapes and sizes. Some of the more unusual ones included a 1984 mobile library that had been converted into a camper van, a Subaru Impreza from the 90s complete with rally stickers, as well as various newer luxurious brands such as Mercedes, BMW and Audi – all impounded for having no tax.

Park and hide

We hit the road with the enforcement team on one of their daily patrols where we received reports of an untaxed van that had been attempting to park and hide down a side street. Our campaign slogan felt appropriate here: 'hard to hide, easy to tax'. The van was clamped within 60 seconds and the owner had to tax the van and pay a release fee – a cost that could have been avoided if the vehicle keeper had kept their vehicle taxed.

Next, we recruited the work of NSL's low loader lorry for some heavy lifting to pick up and impound an untaxed MINI in Warrington. This 20-year-old car had been abandoned on a residential street and the lift drew a small crowd of intrigued residents who were all too happy to see it gone. The car was in great condition for its age (except for its vehicle tax status), and so off it went on a MINI adventure to the pound.

Lights, ANPR cameras, action

Day 2 saw us on patrol again, but this time in West Bromwich and in one of the ANPR vehicles. Fitted with cameras on the roof, these vehicles can rapidly read vehicle registration plates and detect an untaxed vehicle instantly.

As we made our way around the Midlands market town, it appeared that all vehicles were taxed as they should be – good work West Brom! We also noticed countless personalised registration plates featuring the letters WBA, what better way to pay tribute to the local football team West Bromwich Albion FC!?

However, there was no added extra time for this next vehicle. As we drove into a local industrial estate, thoughts of a fully taxed town were dashed when the ANPR camera detected an untaxed pick-up truck outside a mechanic's workshop.

The team got to work immediately adding a new eye-catching accessory to the vehicle – a bright yellow DVLA clamp. As we were about to leave, the owner emerged from the yard with no one to blame but himself. As he paid his tax online on the spot plus a release fee, it was clear that he'd be taxing it, rather than risking it in the future!

The debrief

After an eventful 2 days, it was time to leave West Brom and head back to Swansea, but not before a debrief back at the pound. The visit gave us a real appreciation of the essential and sometimes difficult work undertaken by the enforcement team to crack down on vehicle tax evasion.

While more than 98% of vehicles on UK roads are taxed correctly, a small minority continue to break the law which costs HM Treasury millions of pounds every year – vital funds which would otherwise go towards public services.

It's never been easier for motorists to tax their vehicles and there are a number of ways to do so from using our 24/7 online service to spreading the cost with Direct Debit options.

So remember, it's important to make sure you tax your vehicle before using it on the road. It's quick, easy and guarantees your vehicle avoids any yellow accessories or vehicle pound adventures! Tax it, don't risk it.

How I became a Trainee Software Engineer in just 4 steps!

Before becoming a Trainee Software Engineer, I had worked in various enjoyable roles within DVLA. However, digital had always been my passion and it was a discipline I really wanted to pursue.

So in 2023, with a view to beginning a new career, I joined DVLA's digital advocacy group, Digital Voices, which promotes digital careers and opportunities within DVLA. This provided the initial spark to help me take the first step to becoming a Trainee Software Engineer.

In this blog, I want to share with you the 4 steps that helped me get my dream digital role!

1. Becoming a digital advocate

My first step was to find out how to get involved in all things digital at

DVLA. Joining Digital Voices gave me the chance to meet new people and build my confidence speaking to senior colleagues. I really appreciate the inclusivity of the community; the group is open and welcoming to anyone, regardless of their role within the agency.

It’s an amazing opportunity to network with colleagues who you might not normally work with. I still try to attend as many activities as possible to learn more about digital careers and skills. Now that I’ve started my digital career, I hope to continue advocating for others who want to follow a similar path.

2. Finding a mentor

Through the new connections I made, I learned about DVLA’s mentorship programme. I joined the programme and was paired with an Agile Delivery Manager in the agency’s Information and Technology Services directorate. My mentor gave me advice on digital careers and shared relevant skills like Agile methodologies, project management and service delivery. By observing her work, her squad, and seeking her advice, I gained a deeper understanding of the skills needed to succeed in a digital career.

Her mentorship helped to build my confidence and navigate challenges with support and practical advice. For example, my mentor worked with me on improving my interview skills, particularly in tailoring my responses to specific job requirements.

I aspire to become a mentor myself and help others navigate their career paths. Mentorship has been crucial to my development, and I’d love to give back in the same way.

3. Attending ethical hacking workshops

Last year, I joined an 8-week ethical hacking programme, which taught me how to find weaknesses in IT systems and protect them from threats. The workshops were a fantastic experience. They not only equipped me with new technical skills but also provided me with a deeper understanding of the importance of ethical hacking.

Hearing directly from the ethical hacking team was a highlight. Their passion for protecting systems was inspiring, and I left with a greater appreciation for how ethical hacking supports organisational security.

My positive experience inspired me to apply for the Software Engineer Apprenticeship, a 2-year programme focusing on Microsoft Dynamics, a suite of cloud-based business applications that we use at DVLA.

4. Applying for the Software Engineer Apprenticeship

I took the plunge and applied for the Software Engineer Apprenticeship in October 2024. The programme offers staff with an interest in software

engineering a chance to develop the skills they need to become a Software Engineer. It was a proud moment when I was told that my application was successful and I could start my role as Trainee Software Engineer, learning skills on the job.

The first few weeks of the programme were a whirlwind! At first, I felt self-doubt as the only woman in my group, but I soon gained confidence. It was exciting to meet so many talented developers. I've already successfully passed the Power Platform Fundamentals exam and I'm now focused on preparing for the next certification. My goal is to apply my knowledge to practical projects which will help improve the user experience of DVLA systems and services.

As I reflect on my career journey so far, every experience has helped me grow. The challenges I've faced have made me more resilient, and the successes I've achieved have boosted my confidence. I'm excited to continue my career in digital and encourage others to take the first step towards theirs.

Start your digital career!

If you're thinking about starting a career in digital at DVLA, go for it! There are lots of opportunities for growth and development and you'll be fully supported in your role.

If you're considering a career in digital, make sure you:

- stay curious and explore new technologies
- build relationships across teams and seek mentorship
- volunteer for projects and show enthusiasm for your work
- take advantage of training and development opportunities
- see setbacks as learning opportunities

View our current vacancies and our upcoming development programmes at Civil Service Jobs. Good luck!

Celebrating 10 years of DVLA's STEM programme

For a decade, DVLA's STEM programme has supported learners across Wales get into science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Our STEM ambassadors, Mark Jones and Karen Pitt, have been at the forefront of this voluntary initiative over the past 10 years. Ahead of this year's

annual Code Challenge, they discuss what it's taken to keep the programme thriving.


Attendees taking part in 'Beachball Bingo' at the Code Challenge.

Why did you decide to start the STEM volunteer programme?

Mark: I've always had a passion for encouraging young people to get into digital, and I know first-hand the importance of STEM subjects when building the foundational skills of our next generation.

The volunteer STEM programme was built with a single purpose – to encourage grassroots learning and provide digital skills in a fun and engaging way. That single purpose has flourished into a number of exciting initiatives that have paved the way for young people to get into digital.

Code clubs are a big feature of the STEM programme – what are they?

Karen: As part of the programme, our volunteers set up code clubs across several local schools. The clubs provide pupils and teachers with the digital skills needed to begin their digital journey. Since 2014, with the support of volunteers from across DVLA, the programme has hosted several after-school clubs, as well as reaching out to the community to provide digital upskilling to a wide range of people.

Mark: After a year of teaching children in after-school clubs, the first ever STEM school hosting event was launched, which raised awareness of STEM

learning to other primary and secondary schools, as well as the wider business community. I still remember the first event; we were all full of anticipation and excitement.

Over the course of a day, we guided school children through interactive coding activities, which showcased the talent that the children had, increased their confidence, and encouraged businesses to start their own STEM programmes. Ten new code clubs started in the region as a direct result of this first code event.

Mark Jones on stage at the Code Challenge.

It’s great looking back and appreciating how far we’ve come but also how many children have enjoyed the code clubs and associated events. It’s a real privilege to have been able to witness the development of their digital skills. Each year, we’re astounded with what our future digital innovators can achieve.

Karen: From the very first code club, DVLA’s STEM programme has continued to develop and mature, leading to new events and opportunities to help the next generation.

We’ve also supported education and curriculum improvements across Wales, including donating IT equipment that DVLA no longer needs to primary and secondary schools as part of our Digital Inclusion Scheme. By using our experience as a digital employer, combined with our commitment to support the next generation, we’ve been able to illustrate the fundamental importance that digital skills have at a young age.

DVLA’s annual Code Challenge is coming up in December – tell us more.

Karen: Code Challenge was launched in 2017, and now runs annually. It challenges learners across Wales to create games using coding in the hope of winning some exciting prizes for their school or college. It’s a privilege to support school children across Wales, and our annual Code Challenge is a great celebration of this.

Using coding and other digital skills, children are encouraged to use their imagination and team work to build exciting games, create a video and, if they get through to the final, present these on stage in front of a live audience. It’s much more than just a game, with the creations often tackling real-world problems such as sustainability and humanitarian aid. Every year, I’m blown away by the calibre of nominations and the sheer determination to push the envelope that much further.

Karen Pitt (right) and her colleague promoting the Code Challenge at the Eisteddfod.

The event, which has previously been presented by Sian Lloyd at the Richard Ley Development Centre in Swansea, enables school children from the ages of 7 to 16 to get involved. It also includes the Commerce in Code Challenge, which encourages students aged 16 to 18 to submit a tender to redesign the Code Challenge website. The process includes design briefs, specifications, requirements and a commercial scoring matrix, giving students the feel of

business and IT in a real-world situation.

What other events have you supported and what's next?

Karen: Aside from Code Challenge and the code clubs, the volunteer programme has also had a big part to play in other events happening across Wales. It's always challenging finding the time to make everything happen, but through the efforts of our amazing volunteers, we do.

We've attended the Eisteddfod in previous years and are regulars at the Swansea Science Festival, where we encourage parents and children to learn all about coding and other digital skills, together.

Mark: After a decade of giving back to the next generation and ahead of the next annual Code Challenge taking place on 3 December, I'd like to thank everyone that has made this journey possible.

The legacy of the STEM programme wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for our important sponsors and volunteers. Every year, they come on board and provide us with much-needed investment and input into their various sectors. To all our volunteers and sponsors, past and present, thank you for everything.

There's still a long way to go and we know there's much that needs to be done to promote digital in our community, but by working together, we do make a difference. We're looking forward to the upcoming Code Challenge and supporting our community in the years ahead.

If you're interested in finding out about DVLA's STEM volunteer programme or the annual Code Challenge, please visit our website (also available in Welsh).