Drones, festivals, and coding competitions – an update on DVLA's STEM programme

Through our science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) volunteer programme, DVLA supports the next generation by encouraging interest in IT and STEM subjects in communities and schools across Wales.

STEM events

We've had a busy few years! Since the launch of our STEM programme, we've represented DVLA at many events, including Swansea Science Festival and the National Eisteddfod, and promoted STEM learning to children across Wales through our annual Code Challenge.

Last year, our Code Challenge event was a huge success with more than 300 students and teachers attending our live final, and even more joining through a live stream. It was also the first time we opened the challenge to colleges and sixth forms, and I'm pleased to say, we're doing it all again in December! But more on that later…

First, let's take a look at what we've been up to recently, including an update on our Digital Inclusion Scheme, and the events we're looking forward to in the coming months.

Donating laptops with our Digital Inclusion Scheme

Our Digital Inclusion scheme donates refurbished IT equipment to primary and secondary school students across Wales, providing important digital resources to the community and reducing IT waste.

So far, I'm proud to announce we've donated over 500 laptops to multiple schools in Swansea. We have another 900 laptops and 3,000 desktops ready to go to E-Cycle, who refurbish the equipment before it's donated.

We work closely with E-Cycle to fulfil the targets of our Greening Government Commitments and Greening Government ICT and Digital Services Strategy, aiming to reduce the amount of IT waste going to landfill to 0% and to achieve a yearly increase in the amount of IT that is reused and recycled.

On 2 June, we donated 20 laptops to Race Council Cymru (RCC), who promote race equality, integration and justice in Wales. RCC distributed the laptops to families who did not have access to IT for school or learning opportunities. It's so rewarding to see young people benefit from the resources they need, and I'm proud that DVLA will continue to support our communities in this way.

Coding at Wales’ biggest music festival

In May, I teamed up with our STEM ambassadors at the In It Together Festival, where we put on coding competitions for the children attending the festival.

It was brilliant to see the children having so much fun! We ran daily coding competitions where they had the chance to use SCRATCH software to code their own festival themed game, with the winners receiving some cool prizes, including a drone and some T-shirts!

We want to introduce young people to coding and spark an interest in the world of STEM, showing them the possibilities of a career in digital. We’ll also be running coding competitions at the upcoming Eisteddfod in August, where our STEM ambassadors will be promoting this year’s Code Challenge and encouraging students to take part. Make sure to come and check us out and you could win some tech gadgets!

Speaking of Code Challenge…

Save the date – it’s 5 December 2023!

I’m excited to announce that one of our favourite STEM events, the Code Challenge, is back in December, and the good news is, entries are open now!

So, if you know of any students that have an interest in coding and enjoy being challenged, then this is the competition for them! We’ve got a category for each age group, giving students across Wales a chance to show off their STEM talents and win some incredible tech prizes along the way.

Primary and secondary school students can show off their skills by coding a game that follows a theme set by our partners and sponsors, such as climate change, road safety, or healthcare heroes. The winners will win some amazing IT equipment for their school!

We’ll also be running the Commerce in Code challenge for 16 to 18 year olds. Students will get the chance to redesign our STEM website, putting their IT and business skills to the test. The winners will see their design on the official DVLA STEM website and they’ll also will win some fantastic IT equipment for their school or college.

There will be lots of other opportunities to win prizes at the event through a prize draw, including our highly anticipated annual game of ‘Beachball Bingo’! So enter today and join us at the Richard Ley Development Centre on Tuesday 5 December, where we’ll be streaming the event to schools across Wales and announcing all the winners.

The closing date for entries is 6 October 2023, so don’t miss out!

All information on DVLA's STEM programme, including our Code Challenge, can be found on our STEM website. Don't forget to follow our social media accounts for all the latest updates.

Adblock test (Why?)

Start your digital career with DVLA's development programmes

At DVLA, we aim to be a Centre of Digital Excellence and the best place to start a career in digital. We have several development programmes which provide a structured path into the digital profession. If you're looking to start or change your career, our programmes offer the latest training and professional certifications to build modern digital skills.

We train and prepare individuals to become cloud engineers, business analysts, software test engineers and more. Students can develop their cloud skills in our Cloud Academy, build a high degree of in demand skills as part of the Business Analysis programme, or gain software testing skills within the Software Development Engineer in Test programme.

Another example is our MSc programme, which allows students to study a master's degree in software engineering, while gaining work experience and on-the-job mentoring. We caught up with 2 of our recent students, Agnes Beviz and Nathan Morris, to learn how the programme helped them move into a digital career.

What attracted you to apply for the MSc Development Programme?

Agnes: I was inspired to apply for a role at DVLA after listening to the 'How to start a career in tech' podcast by the Government Digital Service. The chance to help provide a public facing, accessible digital service was interesting and motivating for me.

As I had decided to change career, finding a course with learning and development opportunities was important to me. When I discovered the MSc programme, I found that the learning opportunities were much better than other entry level software engineering roles. I also liked the idea of starting my first software engineering role as part of a cohort, so we would be able to support each other.

Nathan: I learned how to code about 6 months prior to applying for the programme. I intended on getting my skills to a level where I could apply for an entry level job. The MSc programme was a perfect fit for my career ambitions. Not only did it offer an MSc qualification, but it also provided valuable work experience.

After reviewing the programme information, I realised that DVLA is a leading government agency when it comes to technological innovation with a big focus on staff training and development. This was a huge plus for me.

What is your academic or professional background?

Agnes: I have a master's degree in physics from the University of Manchester. After university, I started working in energy research for a small community interest company in the environmental sector. I learned to code in my spare time and completed the Manchester Codes Software Engineering FastTrack programme before joining DVLA.

Nathan: I obtained a degree in accountancy and finance from Swansea University. After, I trained and qualified as a chartered certified accountant and worked in the industry for over a decade. Prior to joining DVLA, I was a finance manager but never felt fulfilled or challenged with my career choice, so I decided to change careers.

Have you always wanted to work in digital and technology?

Agnes: I've always had a passion for finding technical solutions to problems and have built websites for several community organisations. When I first came across programming as part of my degree, I was unsure about digital careers. However, seeing women and LGBTQIA+ people represented in digital gave me the confidence to make my career switch.

I think it's important that minority groups have a voice in technology. I push myself to speak at digital events and forums – it enables me to share my perspective and experience, while building my confidence and skills. Since starting my role at DVLA, I spoke at the Manchester Tech Festival and released a podcast episode with Queercore.

Nathan: I've always been interested in technology. When I realised I no longer wanted to work in finance, I decided to switch to the digital and technology sector. Technology is used everywhere and I wanted to be a part of an organisation where it is at the forefront of its strategy.

How have you found the programme so far?

Agnes: The MSc development programme has been a unique opportunity for me to learn whilst gaining practical experience in a software engineering team. I've found it very rewarding to apply my newfound knowledge within teams and working through the programme alongside a cohort has also added to the experience. The invaluable support we provide each other has been great and I'm looking forward to making greater contributions within my team and getting started on our thesis projects.

Nathan: The programme has been an extremely enjoyable experience, and I find myself learning more and more each day. The skills and knowledge I've gained at university seamlessly translate into my role on the squad and have proved vital in my growth as a Software Engineer. I have now settled into my squad, and enjoy working collaboratively to complete tasks during sprints. Completing real-life tasks and learning from other members of the squad has

been the most enjoyable part of the programme so far.

Learn more about our development programme

If you'd like to pursue a career in digital with us, find out more about DVLA digital professions and development programmes. We have a range of opportunities available including our Digital Academy – if this is something that interests you, read more and apply on Civil Service Jobs before 11:55pm on Monday 26 June 2023.

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5 myth-busting facts about taxing your vehicle

By law, you must tax your vehicle if you're using it or keeping it on a public road. If you're keeping the vehicle off the road, you must either tax it or register it as off the road by making a 'Statutory Off Road Notification' (SORN).

If you do not tax your vehicle, you could find your vehicle clamped or impounded. You could also face financial penalties or court action. So, remember to tax your vehicle on time – it's never been easier!

In this blog, we tackle several of the biggest myths about vehicle tax.

MYTH 1: I need to pay vehicle tax up front every year

Wrong! You can set up a Direct Debit when you tax your vehicle online (your vehicle must be insured and have a valid MOT in place if it needs one). By setting up a Direct Debit, you can spread the cost by paying your vehicle tax annually, 6 monthly or monthly – whatever works best for you!

Your Direct Debit will renew automatically when your vehicle tax is due to run out (providing you're shown as the registered keeper and the vehicle has a valid MOT and insurance). So, there's no need to worry! Find out more about setting up a Direct Debit for vehicle tax.

MYTH 2: I've just bought a car – I cannot tax my vehicle because I do not have a V5C registration

certificate (log book) in my name

If you're the new keeper, you can use the green 'new keeper' slip from the log book to tax your vehicle straight away.

MYTH 3: My vehicle is exempt from vehicle tax, so I do not need to do anything

In fact, you must still tax your vehicle even if you do not need to pay anything.

Some types of vehicles are 'exempt' from vehicle tax, which means you do not need to pay, but you still need to tax the vehicle. The quickest way to do this is using our online service.

If you're unsure if your vehicle is exempt from vehicle tax, read our guidance on GOV.UK. To tax your vehicle as exempt for the first time, for example as disabled, you need to change your vehicle's tax class.

MYTH 4: I cannot drive a vehicle registered off the road, sometimes called a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN), to an MOT test

Wrong. If you've pre-arranged an MOT test you can drive a SORN vehicle to its appointment.

MYTH 5: I've not received a V11 vehicle tax

reminder form so I cannot tax my vehicle

If you haven’t received your V11 vehicle tax reminder, you can use your V5C registration certificate (log book) instead. Your V5C will have a reference number which you can use to tax your vehicle.

If you’ve changed address, let us know by updating the address on your V5C. If your vehicle needs taxing in the next 4 weeks, you’ll need to tax your vehicle using your current V5C before changing your address.

Tax on time, tax online

Use GOV.UK to check if your vehicle is taxed. If you need to tax your vehicle, you can do so quickly and securely online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on GOV.UK.

Simply visit www.gov.uk/vehicle-tax and read the information on the page. Check you have everything you need and click ‘Start now’. Answer the questions on each page and complete the required information to tax your vehicle – sorted. So, tax it, don’t risk it!

In conversation with our digital apprentices, Donna and Tom

This week is National Apprenticeship Week – an annual celebration of apprentices around the country. To mark the occasion, Donna and Tom share their experience of completing a digital degree whilst working at DVLA.

Who are you and how long have you worked at DVLA?

Donna: My name is Donna and I'm a Lead Security Operations Centre (SOC) Specialist at DVLA. I've worked at the agency since I was 17, joining as a Contact Centre Advisor and progressing into cyber security in 2017.

Tom: My name is Tom and I'm a Senior SOC Specialist at DVLA. I've worked at DVLA for 7 years, with 5 of those on my current team within cyber security.

How did you begin your digital degree whilst working at DVLA?

Donna: When I found out that the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) was launching computing degrees in partnership with the Welsh Government, I was keen to learn more. The Computer Networks and Cyber Security degree perfectly complimented my role at DVLA.

As I had previously completed an apprenticeship, I understood that this would be a big commitment and would take a lot of work on my part.

We were the first cohort so it was a completely new experience. The apprenticeship required us to attend university one day a week, and we had access to training resources such as Udemy which allowed us to complete additional learning.

Tom: During my first year on the Cyber Security team, I became aware of an opportunity to join the Digital Degree Apprenticeship Scheme with UWTSD. I put in an expression of interest to my managers and was successful in gaining a place. I began my digital degree in September 2018, and it took me 4 years to complete.

I found it challenging to study alongside work, however DVLA allowed me one day a week to attend university lectures, which was a big help.

What have you learned throughout your degree?

Donna: The degree was a great opportunity to build on my existing knowledge and learn new disciplines. Whilst I had existing knowledge of cyber security, the course also included a number of computer networks modules which I thoroughly enjoyed.

A lot of work in the final year focused on device configuration. Due to restrictions, we were tasked with using simulated labs rather than real-life hardware. I embraced the change and really enjoyed the challenge of using simulated labs. This experience enabled me to learn even more skills, and the university provided us with additional resources to support us.

Tom: The flexibility of the degree allowed me to explore modules that I had a keen interest in. With the support of my managers, I was able to pursue areas that allowed me to build a strong skillset beneficial to myself and my team, whilst making my experience on the degree enjoyable.

Not only did I expand my knowledge in the field of cyber security, but I also enhanced my soft skills. I remained focused by keeping my eye on the final goal and made sure to plan my days efficiently, whilst still making time for my personal life. This is a technique I now use in my day-to-day life to self-motivate whenever faced with challenges.

How has the degree assisted your career progression?

Donna: The knowledge I've gained throughout the degree has assisted my overall understanding of the agency's network and has improved the advice and guidance I give. I'm able to identify training opportunities for team members to further enhance ways of working and strengthen our team capability.

Tom: Throughout the degree, I've been fortunate to achieve 2 promotions. The ability to discuss topics I've worked on throughout my course has given me an extra skillset that I'm able to bring forward in applications and interviews.

Due to the variety of topics covered, I've been able to explore many related areas of study alongside my main role and bring new ideas into my work.

What have you enjoyed most about your experience?

Donna: I enjoyed meeting new people from other companies with varying levels of experience in the topics we covered. It was great to share ideas and support each other throughout the 4 years.

Tom: I've enjoyed learning new skills that apply directly to my work as it has built my confidence and strengthened my abilities. On a personal level, overcoming competing demands in my life whilst still being able to succeed has given me a great sense of achievement.

What advice would you give to someone thinking of starting a digital degree?

Donna: Unlike traditional learning, a digital degree apprenticeship lets you use your skills in the real world as you're learning. You can develop at a faster pace and it gives you real context to what you've learned. The best advice I could give to anyone starting a digital degree apprenticeship is to make sure you manage your time between work, home life, and university.

Tom: I think a digital degree apprenticeship is a great option for those looking for a less traditional approach to study. By completing the course alongside work, you're able to support yourself whilst working towards your development and growing the abilities of your team with your new skillset.

Take a look at our apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a great way to develop and nurture new talent. Our Centre of Digital Excellence development programmes are based on this principle and combine learning opportunities alongside 'real world' work experience.

Explore what DVLA's development programmes have to offer and sign up to Civil Service Jobs for future opportunities.

Latest step of borehole sealing project a success

Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) has successfully sealed existing boreholes at Rosemanowes Quarry, Cornwall, as part of a vital research project for the safe and permanent disposal of higher activity radioactive waste.

In the search for a suitable site for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF), drilling and sealing boreholes will be key. The GDF developer, NWS, is

conducting a £5M+ project to investigate and demonstrate to regulators its approach for deep borehole sealing.

A GDF will make a major contribution to the environment by safely and finally disposing of waste which otherwise would have to be stored and maintained for thousands of years above ground.

The UK search for a suitable site is a nationwide process based on community consent and includes detailed investigations over a number of years. Community Partnerships, which have formed in Mid Copeland, South Copeland, and Allerdale in Cumbria, and Theddlethorpe in Lincolnshire, are engaging in a dialogue with local people to ensure they have access to information about what hosting a GDF might mean.

During the process of exploring if a site is suitable to host a GDF deep boreholes will be drilled to investigate the geology of the location. NWS will then need to seal these boreholes as part of the site restoration programme to minimise impact on the environment.

The initiative is part of the wide-ranging research and development (R&D) programme that will support construction of a safe and secure GDF deep underground.

Prof Simon Norris, Principal Research Manager at Nuclear Waste Services and project technical lead, said:

“The aim of this research project is to demonstrate the process we plan to use for sealing deep boreholes during future investigations into potential sites for a geological disposal facility.

“We want to show that we have the necessary toolkit of approaches, procedures, and equipment to seal any boreholes we may construct in the GDF siting process, and this research was a step closer to achieving this goal.”

The latest phase of this project was carried out at the Borehole Test Facility at Rosemanowes quarry in Cornwall. The site, formerly a working quarry, now offers access to one of the most comprehensively mapped well systems in the world.

Two pre-existing boreholes in granite, one 2km deep and the other 300m deep, were successfully sealed using an innovative technology called a Downhole Placement System (DPS) tool.

Bentonite clay was used as sealant because of its low permeability and swelling properties, with cement being used for seal support. Commonly found world-wide and used in international waste management programmes, bentonite will also be packed around some GDF waste packages as part of the engineered barrier system that will isolate and contain disposed waste in the UK Geological Disposal Facility.

The DPS tool is being tested in different locations with varying rock types and at varying borehole depths. The first successful test was in Sweden in 2018 in a 200m borehole, followed by a 300m borehole in clay in Harwell,

Oxfordshire.

The UK search for a suitable site is a nationwide process based on community consent and includes detailed investigations over a number of years to ensure a GDF can be constructed safely and securely.

Learn about geological disposal.