Causeway Technologies supports Computer Science Masterclasses

Thanks to a £500,000 endowment and industry support from Causeway Technologies, the global supplier of software solutions for the built environment, the Royal Institution (Ri) has launched a five-year computer science expansion of its national programme of Ri Masterclasses for young people.

By 2019, more than 10,000 of the country's brightest young people aged nine to 18 and their teachers will benefit from new extra-curricular Computer Science Masterclasses running in more than 70 locations UK-wide starting in September 2014.

Causeway CEO Phil Brown said: "The UK should be a leader rather than a follower in the digital technology age. Nurturing an air of excitement in computer science from an early age is therefore essential if we are to create a generation of innovative young people capable of benefiting from the enormous possibilities and opportunities that it presents.

"Together with The Ri, our ambition is to create a UK-wide 'movement' that connects young people with the subject, and enables small and medium technology companies in every town and city to play a role."

To deliver this programme, the Royal Institution is now looking for an expert Computer Scientist with a strong track record in public engagement and a passion for education to join its London-based team as the Causeway Computer Science Associate.

Chris Rofe, Ri CEO, said: "We are delighted that the generous support of the Causeway Technologies Limited will help us open the eyes of so many more young people to the excitement, beauty and value of computer science.

"All Ri Masterclasses are led by dedicated volunteers who are experts from industry or academia. With the help of these positive role models, our aim is to highlight the huge range of fascinating and worthwhile careers computer science can lead to, and to inspire the students to explore the subject and its applications further at school, in further education and, later on, in the workplace."

The development of the Computer Science Masterclasses coincides with the introduction of the subject to the national secondary school curriculum from September 2014.

Dr Diane Crann, Ri Masterclass Programme Manager, explained why these Computer Science Masterclasses are an essential extra-curricular addition: "We fully support the government's decision to introduce computer science into the curriculum but it is important to remember that it will be another decade until computer science has filtered down through every school year allowing young people to leave school with a solid grounding in the subject.

She added: "Despite its growing importance to our society, there are still many misconceptions about what computer science is. Computer science is not simply a case of learning how to code or being more aware of how the hardware of a computer is put together; it involves learning highly transferable logic and mathematically based skills, understanding complex algorithms and their applications, and data manipulation and representation.

"We view computer science as having the potential, if it is delivered in an inspiring and engaging way, to encourage young people to be more creative, practical, innovative and hands-on in their approach to problem-solving. These are essential talents that can be applied across all areas of learning and so

we are delighted to make computer science a core element of the Ri Masterclass programme."

The positive impact of Ri Masterclasses is not only restricted to young people; volunteer speakers and teachers report that the exposure to new ideas and different ways of approaching their core subject has made them more motivated and creative in their own careers.

Victoria Martin, a senior structural engineer at Expedition and a volunteer Ri Masterclass speaker for over five years, said: "Working with the students as part of the Ri Masterclass programme has forced me to look at my career in engineering in a new light; reflecting on why I do what I do and constantly renewing my passion for my job.

"There's nothing more inspiring than seeing the look on a student's face as the penny drops and a concept all of a sudden makes sense. I'm delighted that professional computer scientists now have the same fulfilling volunteering opportunity available to them."

A national recruitment drive to build a network of local volunteers with expertise and experience in computer science will launch in early autumn 2014, with training and pilot workshops to follow.

For more information visit www.causeway.com or www.rigb.org/education/masterclasses

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