

Career Catapult

Bridging the North East Digital Skills Gap through Industry-Government Collaboration



Summary

Career Catapult, led by CGI with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and two North East colleges, is an innovative initiative helping to bridge the digital skills gap and prepare students for digital careers. Through hands-on learning, mentorship and collaboration, the programme strengthens employability and supports the UK's digital economy.

Building a regional talent pipeline

Career Catapult is one of CGI's social value initiatives, created to give young people in the North East a launchpad into digital careers close to home.

As Jaime Reid, Director Consulting Services at CGI, explains: 'We want to support young people into work – and not just into work, but into a really great, rewarding career. It's easy for young people to feel they have to move away to find work, so we wanted to make them aware of the opportunities right on their doorstep.'

Developed with Newcastle College and Gateshead College, the programme connects education with real-world experience. Research from Education and Employers shows that "young adults who have multiple encounters with employers at school are 86 per cent less likely to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) than those undertaking none." Career Catapult brings that principle to life by linking employers and students directly.

The one-day bootcamp: where learning meets industry

At the heart of Career Catapult is a high-energy, one-day bootcamp hosted at Newcastle and Gateshead Colleges. With guidance from CGI consultants and government mentors, 120 students explored agile culture, user-centred design, business transformation and storytelling.

Esther Uzokwe, CGI Business Consultant, said:

'Seeing students collaborate with industry professionals changed how they saw themselves. They began to understand that digital careers are real, achievable paths. It's that moment when a student thinks, "wow, I could do this too".'

Sally Oliver, also a CGI Business Consultant, added: 'What makes Career Catapult unique is the people. Our volunteers share their journeys, the wins, the challenges and the lessons. That connection sparks something powerful, because students realise transformation isn't just about technology, it's about people working together.'



Career Catapult

- Innovative partnership bridging the UK digital skills gap
- Regional talent pipeline supporting North East youth careers
- Hands-on learning links education with real-world experience
- One-day bootcamp connecting students with industry mentors
- Empowering young people to pursue rewarding digital careers
- Collaboration builds employability and strengthens digital economy

The bootcamp concluded with student teams pitching digital service ideas to improve young people's lives online.

The competition: applying skills to real-world challenges

A week later, students reunited at CGI's Newcastle office for the final competition, judged by CGI, DWP and Defra on the theme 'Bridging the digital gap: create a service that supports young people online'.

Jaime Reid recalled: 'We had government judges in the room, listening to every presentation and giving feedback. The standard was phenomenal. We even had two runners-up, not just one, because the quality was so high.'

For students, it was an authentic experience of how digital transformation happens in practice, while for employers it provided early access to new regional talent.

The industry connection: strengthening the UK's digital economy

Career Catapult is more than an education project – it's a model for how collaboration strengthens the UK's digital economy.

Esther said: 'It was amazing to see the energy transform from quiet introductions to a room buzzing with ideas, debates and live digital mock-ups. Within hours, students were thinking like professionals.'

Sally reflected: 'Students started shy and uncertain, but by the end they were confident, articulate and full of ideas. They weren't just learning digital skills, they were finding belief in themselves.'

For employers, the collaboration builds a pipeline of graduates skilled in agile delivery, user-centred design and teamwork – the foundations of digital innovation.

The college perspective

Julie Kelly, Head of Business at Newcastle College, explained: 'What makes this programme truly unique is how closely the project activities are mapped to the curriculum. Activities are embedded throughout the academic year, reinforcing key learning outcomes across modules. Career Catapult isn't just a programme – it's a partnership. It empowers students to lead and educators to innovate.'

Looking ahead

Career Catapult will also offer work experience within government and CGI projects, helping students apply learning in real delivery environments.

'Every young person we inspire today could be designing the citizen-facing services of tomorrow,' said Jaime. The initiative aims to reach wider groups – including people with disabilities, veterans, carers and returners to work – broadening access to digital careers and strengthening the UK's inclusive digital economy.

Career Catapult shows that when industry, education and government work together, they don't just teach skills – they transform lives.

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Esther Uzokwe, Business Consultant - CGI

About CGI

Founded in 1976, CGI is among the largest IT and business consulting services firms in the world. We are insights driven and outcomes based to help accelerate returns on your investments. Across hundreds of locations worldwide, we provide comprehensive, scalable and sustainable IT and business consulting services that are informed globally and delivered locally.

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