BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO PLANNING A COMPUTING SCHOOL TRIP

A successful Computing trip can go a long way to engage and inspire your students as well as influence their future study and career choices. In this practical guide, **Alan O'Donohoe** (Computing At School Master Teacher and leader of exa.foundation) suggests suitable trips, activities and venues, and considers how to get the best value from your venture

What's your reason for a trip?

It's fundamental that you establish your prime motivation for planning any school trip long before you start to explore potential dates, venues and other details. With all of the necessary logistics planning, home-school communications, adherence to school procedures and permissions, safeguarding procedures and risk assessments required, even a short trip out of school can quickly escalate into a major undertaking that will make you question why you ever embarked upon the idea in the first place. If you find the whole process daunting or off-putting, it might be better to plan a small trip in the first instance to build up your confidence.

Since there's such a bewildering abundance of trips, activities and venues available, by being clear and absolutely focused right from the start about your intended outcomes as well as your target group, you'll find it easier to make the right choices during the decision-making process.

Suggested motives for a Computing trip

It's possible that you have more than one motive for planning your trip. Sometimes, the motive can be external or forced, such as when you receive an instruction from a line manager to organise a school trip. Here are some typical reasons:

- To widen the appeal of Computing to a particular group of pupils who typically don't select GCSE Computer Science or A Level Computing
- To increase accessibility for all to Computing, boosting opportunities available to pupil-premium groups
- To reward a group of Key Stage 2 digital leaders for their efforts
- To add meaning and context to a particular programme of study, such as cryptography.

Planning for success

Anyone who has ever planned a family holiday will know that with any trip there's a delicate balance to strike between the quality of the experience and the quantity of participants. Planning a successful Computing trip for 14 pupils is a much easier feat to pull off than planning a trip for 180 pupils. If those 14 pupils have previously expressed enthusiasm and excitement in Computing, it's likely to be a more enjoyable experience for all concerned. The problem you run into with a larger group is the increasing likelihood that the presence of unwilling participants will have a detrimental effect on the enjoyment of others. Inevitably, you'll

Vintage adding machine

The National Videogame Arcade, Nottingham

end up planning a trip that's much broader in appeal but doesn't specifically address the needs and interests of everyone attending.

When I was asked by the Assistant Head at my school to plan a Computing trip for 180 Year 8 pupils, I spent a long time exploring the various alternatives. In the end, we planned two different experiences and asked the pupils to select the one that appealed most to them. We offered either a trip out of school (in school uniform) to take part in Computer Science-related workshops limited to the first 80 pupils, or a more general creative, ICT-related, school-based activity day in non-uniform for the remaining 100 pupils. Allowing pupils a degree of choice guaranteed higher levels of success and enjoyment.

Must it take place on a school day?

If you're planning your trip to take place on a regular school day, it might prove to be very popular, purely because you're offering pupils a legitimate opportunity to avoid a lesson they dread. At the same time, you might struggle to attract the pupils you want because they don't want to miss a particular subject they love. Organising a trip during a school break or on a weekend ensures you'll recruit participants with a genuine interest, and the planning can be less stressful since it has relatively little impact on other school activities and doesn't require staff cover.

I've found that the trips I've led outside school times are much more enjoyable and far less stressful. These can also serve as very informative reconnaissance missions for future trips, especially if you're not feeling particularly confident about organising trips for larger groups.

Tunny Gallery, The National Museum of Computing

Choosing the best location to visit

This requires lots of careful thought and consideration, guided by your original motivation for organising the trip. I'd suggest that there's no such thing as a 'wrong location' for a Computing trip, but some venues are inevitably going to suit your needs better than others. It seems incredibly risky to plan a school trip to a venue that you've never visited yourself. So, if possible, I'd

Colossus Gallery, The National Museum of Computing

recommend you organise an initial visit by yourself, possibly accompanied by friends/colleagues or with some younger family members to judge their thoughts and reactions.

Many of the most popular locations, such as the Science Museum (London), Bletchley (Milton Keynes), The Centre for Computing History (Cambridge), The National Videogame Arcade (Nottingham) have dedicated education teams willing to provide advice and guidance. If you give them plenty of advance notice, it's possible they may be able to provide some additional activities or arrange for some guides or volunteers, especially if you're willing to be flexible about your dates.

Planning your journey

When I've spoken to groups of pupils after trips I've organised, they frequently cite the journey there and back as being one of the highlights of the trip. They always seem to appreciate the opportunity to spend some time with friends new and old, sharing fresh experiences together. Where possible, I've tended to plan trips around public transport for long journeys and a minibus from a local taxi firm for shorter journeys. Rail journeys become more affordable with Family & Friends Railcards, and some rail operators offer group travel options; you also have the added option of meeting at a railway station if this is more convenient.

CASE STUDY

In 2013, to help increase the proportion of females choosing to study GCSE Computer Science at our school, I invited a handful of our Key Stage 3 girls to a Stemettes event taking place on a Saturday afternoon in central London. I identified a small group of girls who I thought would benefit from the trip and asked them if they'd like to invite a friend along for company.

After our early morning train arrived in London from Preston, we took a pleasant morning stroll through Hyde Park on our way to the Science Museum to explore exhibits related to Computing. A couple of hours later, following a brief stop-off at Harrods for souvenirs, we headed to the Stemettes event, where our girls had the opportunity to meet a panel of women working in STEM-related careers. We managed to pack quite a lot into one day.

Years later, looking at photos of my exam groups, I realised that almost all the girls who attended our trip chose to study GCSE Computer Science. Some girls forged new friendships on the trip that transgressed age and year group, and later many volunteered as ambassadors for Computing in our school.

FURTHER READING

- I wrote a blog post a few years ago with links to further resources and suggestions: **helloworld.cc/2JHgjgg**
- In the Computing At School community forums, there are regular discussions about the best locations for trips. If you'd like to suggest recommendations, why not contribute to one of these?
- **helloworld.cc/2HHkaO2**
- **helloworld.cc/2KvNvJd**
- **helloworld.cc/2rgqsd6**
- **helloworld.cc/2rdJWyW**
- Miles Berry has created a list of recommendations: **helloworld.cc/2HKT3NZ**

Enjoying the exhibits at Bletchley

Activities on location

Many of the locations teachers recommend are essentially museums with permanent exhibits and collections. While these may be suitable for more mature pupils, the best strategy is to plan an itinerary of activities for your group. Treasure hunts and quiz activities can be planned that require pupils to visit key artefacts and exhibits to extract particular clues or pieces of information, in effect steering them to visit areas of highest relevance and importance. The most successful groups can be rewarded with treats or prizes on the trip home.

By planning for a fairly broad variety of additional experiences during a visit – such as some time for shopping, watching a film related to the topic, or visiting a popular food outlet – you'll be ensuring higher levels of satisfaction and enjoyment.

EDSAC Replica Project, The National Museum of Computing

RECOMMENDED VENUES

- **Science Museum, London**
- **The National Museum of Computing, Bletchley**
- **The Centre for Computing History, Cambridge**
- **Bletchley Park, Bletchley**
- **The National Videogame Arcade, Nottingham**
- **The National Science & Media Museum, Bradford**
- **The Museum of Science & Industry, Manchester**

Collaborate with colleagues

If you can persuade colleagues from another curriculum area in your school to plan a combined trip, this may help reduce some of the legislative and logistic burden for you. I've known schools organise joint Maths and Computing trips to the Science Museum, London and joint Computing and History trips to Bletchley.

Can you help?

If you've led a successful Computing trip, why not add your suggestion to one of the discussions listed above or write an article for a future issue of *Hello World*?

#CASWalkabout

On the last Wednesday of every month, excluding December, a group of Computing teachers meet up at the Science Museum, London for an evening of STEM and Computing-related activity. If you'd like to know more or attend a future event, search for the next #CASWalkabout event promoted online. (HW)