Fusion robot at the ready for Blackbird Leys Festival

A futuristic robot called Ned will be deployed at this year's Blackbird Leys Festival to drum-up interest in robotics and engineering as an exciting career path for young people in Oxford.

A team from UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) and advanced manufacturing training centre, Oxfordshire Advanced Skills (OAS), will be showcasing the latest technology involved in making fusion energy an environmentally responsible part of the world's future energy supply.

Visitors to the free festival on Saturday 10 September at Blackbird Leys Community Centre (10am – 2pm) will be able to experience a plasma ball, robotic arm and 3D model simulator, to name just a few of the activities on offer.

The festival builds on a summer series of robotics classes that took place at the community centre, where children learned how to program robots to navigate a slalom through to undertaking robot duels.

Laura Bristow, Charity Manager, Blackbird Leys Community Centre, said: "We are looking forward to welcoming even more people to the centre this weekend at our fantastic Blackbird Leys Festival.

"It has been a real asset to our summer project to have the team from UKAEA run the robotics workshops. It is something new and different and really engaging, offering the chance for young people to learn and develop these skills."

Robotics is a key area of making fusion – based on the same processes that power the sun and stars – a safe, low carbon and sustainable part of the world's future energy mix.

Rashad Hussain, Group Leader at UKAEA and founding member of community interest company, IbnSina Mindcrafters, delivered the workshops on behalf of UKAEA and training centre, OAS. He said:

"The classes covered the basics of robotics including movement, decision making, looping and sensor feedback. The children were amazed at what they achieved and enjoyed a STEM experience that has hopefully inspired them to consider a career in robotics, fusion or engineering.

"IbnSina Mindcrafters' mission is to allow all children the opportunity to experience the thrill of creating code to overcome challenges."

The classes were organised as a part of an access and awareness initiative between UKAEA, OAS and MTC Training, which aims to ensure minority communities are exposed to apprenticeship career options in STEM.

New apprenticeship programmes in space, robotics, data science, energy storage, power engineering and cyber security will be launched by OAS, based at Culham Science Centre, later this year.

OAS is a partnership between UKAEA and the Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC). The two organisations have a history of apprentice training in science and engineering stretching back more than 70 years.

To find out more about OAS and the training courses it offers, including apprenticeships, visit: oas.ukaea.uk. For the latest fusion energy news and opportunities, visit: ccfe.ukaea.uk.