

Ministers thank U.S. Special Envoy Joe Kennedy III

The First Minister and deputy First Minister today met with U.S. Special Envoy to Northern Ireland for Economic Affairs Joe Kennedy III to thank him for his contribution to furthering our economic links with the U.S.

Green reaction to government's 81% emissions reduction target

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Reacting to Keir Starmer's public address at COP29 where he announced a new climate target for the UK to [reduce the country's emissions by 81% by 2035](#) against 1990 levels, Green MP Ellie Chowns said:

"The announcement of an 81% cut in emissions by 2035 is welcome – we need to remove fossil fuels from our economy as rapidly as possible.

"However, the transition to clean energy needs to be matched by moves on energy reduction. We need a mass home insulation programme and large-scale investment in public transport and active travel. Instead, we have seen Labour downgrade the retrofitting of homes, fail to make solar panels on new builds mandatory, hike bus fares by 50% and offer only loose change for walking and cycling.

"Keir Starmer says he will not tell people how to live their lives, but he can put in place policies to support us to make changes that reduce emissions, cut bills and improve our health and wellbeing. This must involve every government department being laser focused on achieving our climate targets."

12 November 2024 / 12 November 2024 by [Andrew Bell](#)

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Celebrating 10 years of DVLA's STEM programme

For a decade, DVLA's STEM programme has supported learners across Wales get into science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Our STEM ambassadors, Mark Jones and Karen Pitt, have been at the forefront of this voluntary initiative over the past 10 years. Ahead of this year's annual Code Challenge, they discuss what it's taken to keep the programme thriving.



Attendees taking part in 'Beachball Bingo' at the Code Challenge.

Why did you decide to start the STEM volunteer programme?

Mark: I've always had a passion for encouraging young people to get into digital, and I know first-hand the importance of STEM subjects when building the foundational skills of our next generation.

The volunteer STEM programme was built with a single purpose – to encourage grassroots learning and provide digital skills in a fun and engaging way. That single purpose has flourished into a number of exciting initiatives that have paved the way for young people to get into digital.

Code clubs are a big feature of the STEM programme – what are they?

Karen: As part of the programme, our volunteers set up code clubs across several local schools. The clubs provide pupils and teachers with the digital skills needed to begin their digital journey. Since 2014, with the support of volunteers from across DVLA, the programme has hosted several after-school clubs, as well as reaching out to the community to provide digital upskilling to a wide range of people.

Mark: After a year of teaching children in after-school clubs, the first ever STEM school hosting event was launched, which raised awareness of STEM learning to other primary and secondary schools, as well as the wider business community. I still remember the first event; we were all full of anticipation and excitement.

Over the course of a day, we guided school children through interactive coding activities, which showcased the talent that the children had, increased their confidence, and encouraged businesses to start their own STEM programmes. Ten new code clubs started in the region as a direct result of this first code event.



Mark Jones on stage at the Code Challenge.

It's great looking back and appreciating how far we've come but also how many children have enjoyed the code clubs and associated events. It's a real privilege to have been able to witness the development of their digital skills. Each year, we're astounded with what our future digital innovators can achieve.

Karen: From the very first code club, DVLA's STEM programme has continued to develop and mature, leading to new events and opportunities to help the next generation.

We've also supported education and curriculum improvements across Wales, including donating IT equipment that DVLA no longer needs to primary and secondary schools as part of our Digital Inclusion Scheme. By using our experience as a digital employer, combined with our commitment to support the next generation, we've been able to illustrate the fundamental importance that digital skills have at a young age.

DVLA's annual Code Challenge is coming up in December – tell us more.

Karen: Code Challenge was launched in 2017, and now runs annually. It challenges learners across Wales to create games using coding in the hope of winning some exciting prizes for their school or college. It's a privilege to support school children across Wales, and our annual Code Challenge is a great celebration of this.

Using coding and other digital skills, children are encouraged to use their imagination and team work to build exciting games, create a video and, if they get through to the final, present these on stage in front of a live audience. It's much more than just a game, with the creations often tackling real-world problems such as sustainability and humanitarian aid. Every year, I'm blown away by the calibre of nominations and the sheer determination to push the envelope that much further.



Karen Pitt (right) and her colleague promoting the Code Challenge at the Eisteddfod.

The event, which has previously been presented by Sian Lloyd at the Richard Ley Development Centre in Swansea, enables school children from the ages of 7 to 16 to get involved. It also includes the Commerce in Code Challenge, which encourages students aged 16 to 18 to submit a tender to redesign the Code Challenge website. The process includes design briefs, specifications, requirements and a commercial scoring matrix, giving students the feel of business and IT in a real-world situation.

What other events have you supported and what's next?

Karen: Aside from Code Challenge and the code clubs, the volunteer programme has also had a big part to play in other events happening across Wales. It's always challenging finding the time to make everything happen, but through the efforts of our amazing volunteers, we do.

We've attended the Eisteddfod in previous years and are regulars at the Swansea Science Festival, where we encourage parents and children to learn all about coding and other digital skills, together.

Mark: After a decade of giving back to the next generation and ahead of the next annual Code Challenge taking place on 3 December, I'd like to thank everyone that has made this journey possible.

The legacy of the STEM programme wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for our important sponsors and volunteers. Every year, they come on board and provide us with much-needed investment and input into their various sectors. To all our volunteers and sponsors, past and present, thank you for everything.

There's still a long way to go and we know there's much that needs to be done to promote digital in our community, but by working together, we do make a difference. We're looking forward to the upcoming Code Challenge and supporting our community in the years ahead.

If you're interested in finding out about DVLA's STEM volunteer programme or the annual Code Challenge, please [visit our website](#) (also [available in Welsh](#)).

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[Prisoners' Poppy wreath unveiled at Prison Service memorial ceremony](#)

A commemorative ceramic Poppy Wreath made by prisoners in Maghaberry Prison was unveiled today by Justice Minister Naomi Long at the Northern Ireland Prison Service annual remembrance ceremony.

[Greens call on Starmer to lead international action at COP29](#)

Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer MP urged world leaders to attend COP29 next week to underline its critical importance:

"COP29 has set itself the goal of "deep, rapid and sustained emission reductions now to keep temperatures under control and stay below 1.5°C, while leaving no one behind".

"But it won't achieve that without the international leadership needed from Heads of State, Presidents and Prime Ministers.

"I welcome the fact that Sir Keir Starmer will attend. The UK has the opportunity and responsibility as the first industrial nation on Earth to provide the leadership for a just transition.

"We need the Prime Minister to show leadership on the world stage, by ensuring COP29 commits to:

- Urgently transition away from fossil fuels
- Provide the equitable and just finance promised for adaptation and mitigation, and to fund the loss and damage many are already experiencing as a result of climate impacts

"Unfinanced is unprepared and we are both.

"Of course, these are incredibly difficult times internationally, with the European Union stalling on its actions and President-elect Trump, a climate crisis denier, once again stalking the world stage.

"But that is why it is so important that the UK steps forward to remind the world what is at stake if co-ordinated international action does not take place now.

"New scientific evidence shows global average temperatures are on track this year to end up more than 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, making 2024 the first calendar year to breach this crucial target. (1)

"We need international leadership now more than ever to tackle the climate crisis. We are getting leadership from the scientists, but too many of the world's political leaders are ducking their responsibility."

Among national leaders not attending the UN conference in Baku, Azerbaijan from 11- 22 November are those from the US, China, France, Brazil, South Africa, Japan and Australia, and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

NOTES TO EDITORS

(1) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cldpnxnv2go>

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