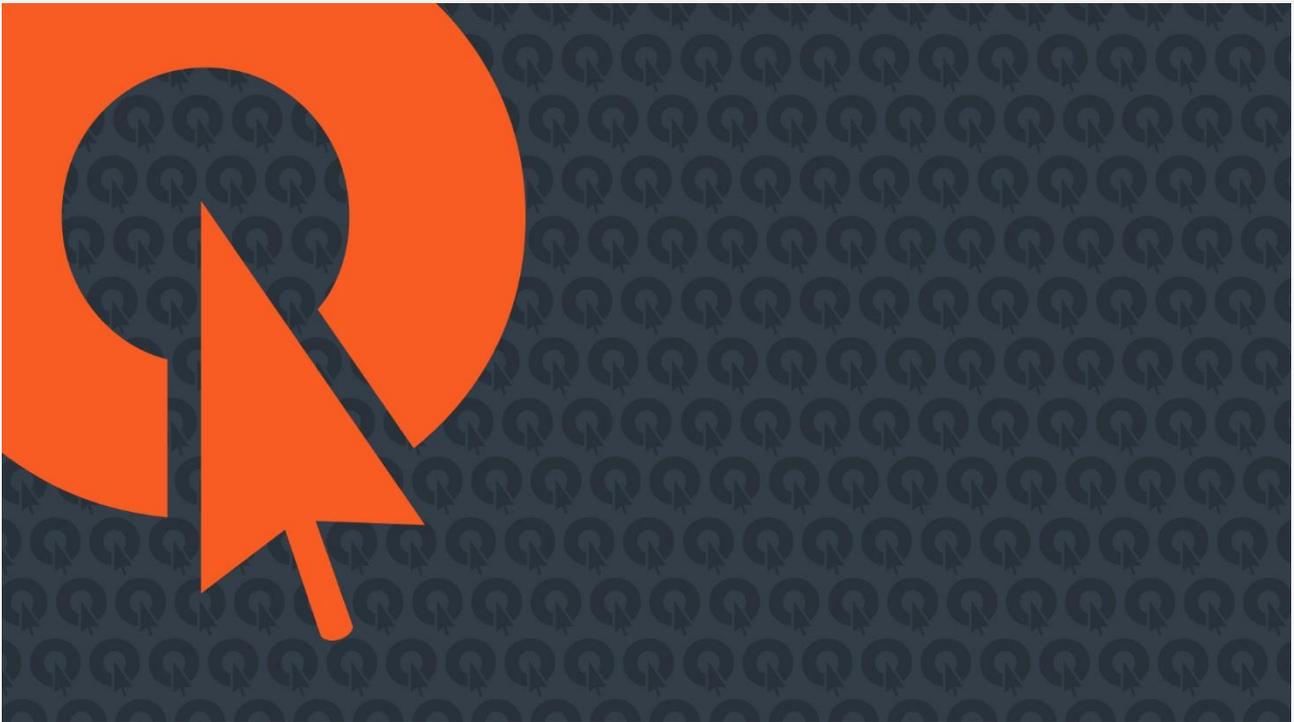


Discover Digital Programme with Universities

Summary



Discover Digital Programme

Introduction

The Discover Digital Programme supports higher education institutions (HEIs) with an ICT/STEM focus in engaging secondary school students through structured outreach, campus experiences, and digital communication, with the objective of increasing interest in digital studies and careers and strengthening pathways from school to higher education. The programme is positioned within Code4Europe project and EU Code Week, aligning with the ambition to expand digital skills engagement across Europe and contribute to addressing the ICT skills gap.

Programme Rationale and Intent

A key moment for intervention occurs in the senior years of secondary education, when students are making decisions about future study and career directions. At this stage, some students experience uncertainty due to the number of choices, while others may disengage because higher education appears distant or not personally relevant. The programme responds by providing structured guidance, realistic exposure to higher education environments, and experiences that connect STEM subjects to meaningful futures. It also includes family-oriented engagement, recognising that confidence and reassurance at home can support student decision-making. Flexibility is essential, as academic calendars, school systems, geographic realities, and resourcing differ across countries and institutions. Activities and timelines are indicative and require adaptation to local contexts.

Goals and Expected Outcomes

The programme aims to inspire secondary school students through school visits, interactive workshops, outreach events, and campus engagement such as campus visits and laboratory demonstrations; showcase HEI programmes, student life, and career potential in tech; reassure families by demonstrating support structures and pathways to employment; and build bridges between schools, HEIs, and the technology sector through authentic experiences such as mentors, open days, and hands-on projects. Teachers and guidance counsellors are treated as multipliers who influence awareness and participation, and their engagement is part of the intended impact. Inclusivity is a consistent priority, including attention to gender balance and reaching students who may have less exposure to STEM opportunities.

Target audiences are defined to align activities with student decision stages. Upper secondary students prior to the final year can be reached through school visits, interactive workshops, summer camps, outreach events, and inspiration from ambassadors and alumni. Final-year students require conversion-oriented actions connected to concrete choices, such as open days, student-life tasters (competitions, hackathons), in-school HEI showcases, and graduate success stories. Teachers and guidance counsellors are engaged through collaborations, workshops, and participation in HEI activities, enabling them to advise students with current information on ICT pathways. Families are engaged through reassurance about support services and future prospects, while industry partners support mentorship and real-world exposure.

Outcomes are treated as measurable and suitable for continuous improvement. Suggested outcome areas include reach and engagement (attendance and demographics), perception shifts (measured through pre/post surveys and changes in confidence, motivation, and belonging), conversion pathways (sign-ups for follow-on events and activities), strengthened teacher/counsellor involvement, and increased family confidence in supporting student choices. Indicators are intended to support benchmarking and iteration rather than definitive attribution.

Essential Preparation for Delivery

Effective delivery requires structured preparation, beginning with a reliable list of school-level decision-makers. Recommended practice starts with authoritative national sources to establish a base list of recognised schools. Role-specific contacts are then identified by reviewing school websites and public directories, focusing on positions such as principal, guidance/career counsellor, and STEM/ICT teachers, and where relevant, parent-representative bodies. If direct emails are not provided, general school addresses can be used, while clearly addressing the target role in the subject line. Contact datasets should be maintained internally with clear ownership and an update cadence, and maintenance can also be structured as a volunteer activity for students supporting communications and outreach work. National aggregators that curate opportunities can accelerate outreach, and professional social media/professional social networks can support contact identification where websites are incomplete, with an emphasis on tagging sources for traceability.

Outreach workflows can be implemented using internal institutional tools (templates, spreadsheets, and email distribution), or specialised mailing platforms that offer automation and analytics. In all cases where personal information is collected, compliance with EU and national General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements must be ensured. Compliance with GDPR is mandatory in all cases. Survey tools and data collection must be managed

locally by each HEI in accordance with EU regulations, national rules and institutional policies. The HEI acts as data controller and must process information transparently and for legitimate educational outreach. Emails should include a public-source disclaimer and an opt-out line. Organisations running structured outreach are expected to maintain records of processing activities under GDPR Article 30, capturing data categories, purpose, legal basis, retention, access controls, opt-out mechanisms, and security measures.

Delivery Model

Delivery is structured as two mirroring frameworks that can be used independently or combined into a coherent student journey: STEM On Tour and STEM In. STEM On Tour brings higher education into schools and community settings, reaching students in familiar environments to reduce barriers and support early guidance. STEM In brings students onto campus through open days, visits, and themed events, making higher education tangible and welcoming through direct contact with people, facilities, and learning spaces. Combining both approaches supports breadth (reach) and depth (experience), and provides sequential engagement that can strengthen confidence and belonging in STEM pathways.

STEM On Tour

STEM On Tour is a core component of the programme. For school visits, outreach begins by contacting designated school persons identified during preparation (principal, teacher, guidance counsellor, and/or parent representatives). Communication introduces the HEI, outlines the purpose of the visit, proposes potential dates, and confirms expected student numbers, focus themes, and curricular links. Logistics require early confirmation of date, arrival time, duration, presenters' group size, audio-visual requirements, and accessibility requirements. Clear coordination reduces uncertainty and allows both parties to prepare appropriately.

Materials preparation is a practical requirement. Typical assets include a slide presentation, brochures/flyers/programme guides, and QR codes linking to admissions, programmes, scholarships, and other relevant HEI resources. Where applicable, consent forms for photography, media use, and feedback collection should be prepared in accordance with GDPR, national regulations, and institutional policies. Feedback tools can be digital or paper based. Presentation templates should be prepared in advance and then selected and tailored according to time availability, student grade, and school profile. Key roles include a School Partnerships Lead who coordinates visits, manages logistics and communication, and acts as primary contact, supported by faculty, staff, alumni, and student ambassadors who deliver content and engagement.

An indicative implementation timeline supports structured delivery from several weeks before the event through to event day. Steps include confirming facilities and constraints, recruiting speakers and ambassadors, preparing and testing materials, briefing presenters, rehearsing, registering activities where relevant on the CodeWeek EU platform, finalising collateral and consent forms, and running a final check of technical setup. Event day delivery emphasises engagement through an icebreaker, accessible language, interactive components, Q&A, feedback collection, and informal opportunities for discussion. Beyond school visits, STEM On Tour also includes interactive sessions in external STEM-related events and participation in college fairs where students explore pathways and programme options.

STEM In

STEM In focuses on bringing secondary school students into the HEI environment through open days, campus visits, themed workshops, and events. Planning requires early coordination with internal services and space owners, including security, room booking, laboratory management, and student services, to ensure availability, safety, and coherent visitor flow. Engagement with schools and groups begins by aligning on purpose, format, dates, group size, year groups, and interests, including collaboration with youth and community organisations where relevant.

Campus logistics require confirmation of date and duration, arrival and departure times, meeting points, check-in processes, circulation plans and wayfinding, supervision requirements, accessibility needs, and audio-visual and laboratory requirements. Materials and resources include a mobile-friendly open day web area with speaker profiles and contact points, digitally available workshop guidelines and tailored slides, printed and digital programme guides, brochures and flyers, interactive maps, and QR codes to admissions, courses, scholarships, newsletters, and student support services. Where relevant, supports for neurodivergent visitors are included, such as simplified or sensory maps, step-by-step wayfinding guidance, and quiet sensory rooms. Consent forms, lab safety guidance, and feedback forms are part of the required preparation.

Roles in STEM In are designed for operational clarity and scaling through trained volunteers. A STEM Events Coordinator leads planning and delivery, supported by faculty, technical staff, alumni, and students delivering content and demonstrations. Front-of-house teams manage check-in and first-line support; campus guides support navigation; laboratory and workshop stewards manage safety protocols and capacity; inclusion support provides sensory-friendly guidance and assistance; operations assistants manage signage, equipment, and room turnover; and outreach officers support admissions and next steps.

Open days designed for individual students and families are also included as a STEM In format, recognising the need for varied entry points, repeated sessions, clear signage and wayfinding, and materials designed for review at home. Student ambassadors and accessible information formats are emphasised to support family engagement and reassurance.

Evaluation, Feedback, and Compliance

Evaluation is structured around pre- and post-event surveys that assess participation, motivations, perceptions, engagement, and improvement opportunities. Pre-event surveys capture baseline interest and demographics; post-event surveys measure relevance, accessibility, motivation shifts, and feedback on facilitation and logistics. Results support continuous iteration. Privacy and protections for minors are clearly defined: parental consent is required for participants under 16, while participants aged 16 and above are subject to the GDPR framework alongside national regulations. Data collection should be limited to necessary information, stored securely, retained only for a limited time, and anonymised. Regardless of the format of data collection, compliance with EU and national GDPR regulations must be ensured at all times.

Impact Scoreboard and Digital Outreach

A structured impact scoreboard supports consistent measurement across key categories, including change in students' interest, engagement levels, awareness of STEM pathways, confidence and community belonging, teacher/parent/coordinator feedback, inclusivity and reach, and future actions and follow-up.

Digital Outreach and Communication is framed as a journey that begins weeks before an event. A HEI landing page acts as the anchor, supported by sequenced emails to educators with a forwarding kit. Student-facing social media content is amplified by ambassadors and role models, supported by interactive tools such as quizzes and mini-challenges that connect back to the event page. QR codes link printed materials and school displays to digital assets, and messaging platforms can support family reach. Partner networks can cross-promote activities, while analytics support optimisation. Partnerships with third parties (industry, alumni, coding communities, and other stakeholders) support sustainability and enrich student experience through mentorship, exposure, and ecosystem collaboration.

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