

Students show creativity through hackathon challenge

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Students show creativity through hackathon challenge

We set Teesside University computing students a hackathon challenge to use artificial intelligence in a positive way.

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The second year BSc (Hons) Artificial Intelligence and Computer Science students from the University's School of Computing, Engineering and Digital Technologies, were invited to choose a topic and create a solution using AI.

Students taking part in the challenge, which was titled Unleashing the Power of Ethical Generative Artificial Intelligence, were able to present their projects with £1,000 awarded by Waterstones to the winning team.

We set the challenge as a way of honouring and remembering former employee and Teesside graduate Richard Begg, who passed away in 2022.

The students worked in teams to pitch their ideas and took part in workshops with Waterstones. They also came along to our offices in Durham to work on their projects.

The challenge culminated with a presentation at Teesside University, where the finalists presented their projects, before the winning team was announced and the £1,000 prize awarded.

The winning team was Rian Harper, Abdulrahman Al Hariri and Ehsan Shuib, who created an AI chatbot tool to help students find answers and solutions when completing modules as part of their coursework. The AI-driven feedback tool utilises a chatbot capable of providing personalised feedback while searching through relevant learning materials based on the student's question.

Ehsan said: "We're beyond excited to win the hackathon with our innovative project, an AI-powered tutor. Users simply ask a question, and our application does the rest, extracting key points, and explaining them in a clear, concise format. This is particularly useful for students who often go through many assignments.

"What made this project special was not just the technological achievement, but the collaboration and teamwork within our team. Working together under pressure, we learned a great deal about the realities of software development, especially in AI-driven projects. We're grateful for this opportunity and experience it gave us."

Dr Alessandro Di Stefano, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science, said: "Our students have showcased their ingenuity by developing an AI-driven feedback tool utilising OpenAI's custom assistants API.

"The students wholeheartedly embraced the Hackathon AI challenge. They conceptualized and proposed a sophisticated AI-driven solution in a remarkably short period.

"Observing their creativity and technical prowess was a pleasure, as they collaborated seamlessly, showcasing a strong sense of duty and exceptional technical and teamwork skills. The experience not only highlighted their ability to identify and address problems, but also showcased their proactive approach in conceiving and implementing cutting-edge solutions."

Leanne Cullen, our Operations Director, said: "We set the students the challenge of identifying a something which they can find a solution to. We asked them for ideas and looked for common themes, before choosing two projects as the finalists. We were really impressed to see the final projects presented to us, before choosing the eventual winner, with the winning team receiving £1,000."

Leanne added: "We were keen to work with the University to set the students a challenge in memory of Richard Begg, in tribute and as a legacy for his innovation and passion for nurturing people."

Richard joined Waterstons in 2013 as an executive software consultant, specialising in integration and software architecture, after graduating from Teesside University with a computer science degree. He went on to be promoted to Head of Bespoke Software. Sadly he unexpectedly died aged 45 in January 2022.

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