Leaving Certificate Computer Science (CS) as a Leaving Certificate subject, CESI added the role of subject association for CS to its activities. Since the introduction of LCCS in September 2018, teachers throughout the country have been doing a fantastic job to ensure that the subject is available to all second-level students. Teachers have worked hard to combine the challenging and technical aspects of the subject with real-life examples to create engaging lessons. So, rather than just rote learning the facts about how to code, the students are practised in the classroom was emphasised, rather than the mere facts.

The overlap between Mission Space Lab and Leaving Cert Computer Science is substantial. The subject already has two six-week units and a Christmas project. Using GoPro, students can see the Earth from space, or insert their own photos and have them sent to the teacher in a zip file later on. Then they can sip tea safely on earth while analysing their data. Simple!

Agency (ESA) kindly organised a chat between the teachers and someone from the agency for 30 minutes. That was a chance for them to see what is possible to inspire them to extend their students beyond the formal curriculum. In this case, the space competition is not just about knowing how to code. The students have to learn to work as a team, design, and test their hypotheses. They have to work through all the stages of the process, but it is pretty cool nevertheless.

How did it work? There were 5 rounds of 10 multiple choice questions, 2 rounds of 10 code challenges that let them explore many unique coding experiences, and one round of a Space Challenge. The Space Challenge requires students to design their own experiment to test in space. They have to write up a report on the experiment that they submitted to the teacher. The competition is for the report that your students write up after you get their photos back from space. The agency actually does this in real life.

Since the launch of Mission Space Lab in 2014, more than 2,000 schools have taken part in a space competition. Students have submitted over 700 ideas for experiments to do in space. In 2018, 3 experiments went up on the International Space Station. The overlap between Mission Space Lab and CS is substantial.

CS is a broad term that covers many different aspects of computing. It includes both hardware (e.g., things you build, for example, a space hardware) and software (e.g., things you create, for example, a space station). It is about problem solving and using computers to make things happen.

As you can see, being a computer scientist involves having a mix of skills. It helps if you like puzzles and figuring things out. Many people have a mental image of a computer scientist as someone who spends all day sitting at a computer, looking at the screen. Computer scientists work on other tasks. A lot of the time, computer scientists operate on the computer, but they do not necessarily spend all their time at the computer. Many computer scientists work in teams, and they need to be able to communicate effectively.

Many people are interested in working in computer science. If you are interested in cryptography, then it helps if you like puzzles and figuring things out. If you are interested in software engineering, then it helps if you like working with others. If you are interested in hardware, then it helps if you like working with tools.

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