

# IT consultancy Gavurin showcases the broad range of exciting jobs in the tech industry to the next generation

## Background

Gavurin is an IT consultancy based in Newcastle upon Tyne. They are the creators of 'Glass', a software platform used by Global Business Intelligence providers to automate the creation, management and publication of their data analysis.

Jonathan Graham is Gavurin's Managing Director, and Ian Appleby is their Technology Director. Here, they discuss their experiences of the STEM Ambassador programme and what motivates them to volunteer.

## The STEM Ambassador journey

**Jonathan:** "Here at Gavurin, we try to play an active part in the communities we engage in – both locally and in the tech community. Being a business located in the north-east of England, we understand the challenges that young people face when it comes to finding fulfilling jobs compared with elsewhere in the UK, and we are also conscious of the real skills gap in the north-east, nationally and beyond. **Our team has a broad set of skills and lots of experience in how fulfilling a career in tech can be, so we wanted to give something back.**

A former employee of ours suggested the STEM Ambassador programme to us as it was a passion of his, so we researched it for ourselves and reached out to our closest STEM Ambassador Hub to find out how we could get involved. We then gave the programme a real push internally and asked colleagues if they would be happy to give up some of their time to volunteer as a STEM Ambassador. We are a very small organisation of nine employees, and our number of Ambassadors has fluctuated over the years, but despite that, we've given a lot of hours to the programme."

**Ian:** "I've been a STEM Ambassador for about four or five years now. **I signed up because it's always been important to me to help other people along.** The programme allows me to do something locally – it's important to try and narrow the gap for the north-east in terms of skills and technology, so this seemed to me to be a positive way to contribute.

**At the start, it was a principled thing, to volunteer so I was doing something good, but as I've gone on, I realise that I can learn so much from the kids that helps me do my job better.** Kids are really interesting: they have fewer preconceptions about how things should work, so if they don't understand something it's not for a vested reason, and it's interesting to see how they perceive things – it helps me to improve what I do at work. As an adult, you expect things to work a certain way because of what you already know, but kids who haven't seen stuff before – if they don't get it, it's a much better test of whether something is going to work or not!"



**Jonathan:** "Being a STEM Ambassador is something we fully encourage and support as an employer, but we don't push people into it. It's something we include in our onboarding for new joiners though. When someone decides that they want to become a STEM Ambassador, we support them to find volunteering opportunities that will play to their strengths. We help our staff to find out what engages them in their role – the things they enjoy the most – and we encourage them to emphasise those things and to be passionate about them only because they love what they do, and not because they feel like they should, so they can be authentic when they speak to students."

We also try and think about things from the perspective of young people too: what gets them out of bed in the morning? What things do they like to do? How do they like to work – alone, or in a team? What makes the time fly for them? Once we understand these things, they can start to align with potential careers in our sector.

We don't mandate the amount of time a staff member spends volunteering as a STEM Ambassador. Broadly it's about once a month, though Ian probably does more than that! As a small company, we try to maintain a balance with the impact on the business, but we have never had to hold people back from doing STEM Ambassador activities.

Our staff have done a real range of things – classroom-based activities, code clubs, interview practice, CV writing advice, help with personal statements, mock interviews and mentoring – all sorts!"



**Ian:** "In non-COVID years, I achieved my 25 hours of volunteering badge one year and my 15 hours badge the year before. The pandemic did mean that there has been a lot less going on recently though."

Despite that, I've done all sorts of activities as a STEM Ambassador. I've done lots of career development days in schools, helping students to look at potential jobs, how they get into our industry and what they need to study – I've also helped them to overcome lots of very interesting preconceptions about this too! **Young people often have an overly narrow view of how to get into tech-based jobs, so I reassure them that there are lots of potential routes in and lots of possibilities – it's not a make-or-break type of thing!**

I was in the process of setting up a code club for primary pupils – Years 5 and 6 – before the pandemic. We've not quite revived that yet, but I'm working on it. For the younger kids it's all about trying to excite them.

We've built a game for young people to try out, and we bring it to careers events. It centres around getting them to organise a festival and draws on what we work on – data analytics. We give students a budget and various datasets – about the local population, demand for the event, business concerns etc – and they get to try out different statistical techniques to plan the event. They need to consider costs of venues against their appeal, for example, and they need to make the event as profitable as possible. We've had some really good teacher feedback and we've got a leaderboard of all those who've had a go so far. Schools are asking if they can use this now too!"





# Making an impact

**Jonathan:** "Where we've seen the best impact, it's been where we've worked with someone for an extended length of time. We've supported one individual for more than a year through our mentoring work, running regular activities with them and providing them with important continuity.

We've also built some important relationships with schools locally – we've been quite opportunistic, volunteering for activities that are in our area so we can maximise our impact.

**We get such a lot out of the programme too. Yes, we give our time, and our employees give their time and effort, but in return there are so many benefits.** Individually, staff develop their skills and their ability to communicate, and there's always a two-way knowledge transfer. **The programme enables us to get some really interesting insights which bring our business closer to younger people and which help to inform our recruitment process.** The STEM Ambassador programme has given us good exposure with lots of audiences."



**Ian:** "I see the impact of STEM Ambassadors on young people most when I see that they are feeling more confident about their decisions and their future as a result of engaging with us. I like being able to give them a nudge, helping them to choose the path that they're going to go down, adding a reference point for their future, and ultimately making it easier for them to enter our profession. And for the younger learners, it's when I hear them say, "I've heard of that, ah, that's what it is!", and they leave us motivated to go and pursue something we've talked about with them for themselves.

For me, I just really enjoy being a STEM Ambassador. For Gavurin, I think it's part of our organisational culture, and giving up our time like this reflects positively on the company. **It helps people make rapid decisions about what we are like and what we stand for, and it's something we proudly tell new clients about if we're bidding for new work."**

**Jonathan:** "We want people to know more about organisations like ours. If people have a better sense of what it's like to sit in a job like this day to day, it's more likely to lead to something for them.

I talk about STEM Ambassadors a lot. There's so much to get out of it. If you do it well, you're helping young people, but you can get so much out of it too. **Giving up your time like this helps you to develop important human skills. And if ultimately it means that the north-east has more skills available and it allows us to champion the tech sector up here – these are all good reasons to take part. It's a win-win thing!"**

## How to get involved

If you have been inspired by how Gavurin supports the learning and development of young people across the UK and you'd like to know more, please contact us at [employer@stem.org.uk](mailto:employer@stem.org.uk) or visit [stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors/partner-info](https://stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors/partner-info)

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