

Students 'meet' impressive NASA engineer during inspiring Brighton College webinar



At Durrington High the computer science department offer a huge range of opportunities for students to enhance their learning and get an insight into the plentiful opportunities the subject can lead to in later life. With trips and clubs severely limited due to COVID-19 restrictions the department has still managed to provide enrichment opportunities for students by teaming up with Brighton College.

A sixth form student and member of the Brighton College Robotics Club recently hosted a webinar entitled 'Women in STEM' and a selection of students from years 9 to 11 were invited to join in. The webinar's main speaker was Heather Justice, a Mars Exploration Rover Driver for NASA and currently working as a software engineer at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California. She was the lead driver for the Opportunity Rover, which travelled over 45 km and was active on Mars from 2004 to 2018. Heather was inspirational to listen to as she spoke about the challenges that she overcame when working on this incredible project and also what it is like to be a woman in the industry.

After her speech participants had the opportunity to ask questions and our Durrington students made the most of this asking eloquent and interesting questions. They were delighted to discover that Heather coded in Python (coding software used in school) and that she loved computer science having studied in at college before doing a robotics degree. Year 10 student Jasmine enthused about the experience saying, 'It was really interesting to speak to someone high up in the industry that had actually been involved in a real project. It was fascinating to learn about it first hand and was really inspiring.'

Claire Taylor, Head of Computer Science at Durrington High said, 'This was a fantastic opportunity for our students to be inspired by where computer science can take them. They really made the most of the webinar and we are very proud of the way in which they engaged. It is so important for them to still access enrichment activities, even if we are having to do things a little differently. We are also delighted to be developing a strong partnership with Brighton College Robotics Team, as this will enable us to offer even more opportunities to our students.'