The future of tech is also female

St George's school for girls' Women in Computing initiative is inspiring more women to consider the technology sector

To encourage more females to consider a career in computing and technology, St George's School invited girls from 12 state and private schools across Edinburgh to a Women in Computing event.

The event, held last December, was opened by Jenny Gilruth MSP, the Scottish cabinet secretary for education and skills.

There were keynote speeches, live panel discussions, Q&A sessions, and interactive workshops, with students immersing themselves in cutting-edge technologies, including robotics, programming, afrtificial intelligence, virtual reality, and cybersecurity.

The mission of the event was to enthuse and empower girls, and highlight the range of careers available in technology, from leading innovating to coding. It featured successful women in the field, demonstrating to students that "if you can see it, you can be it."

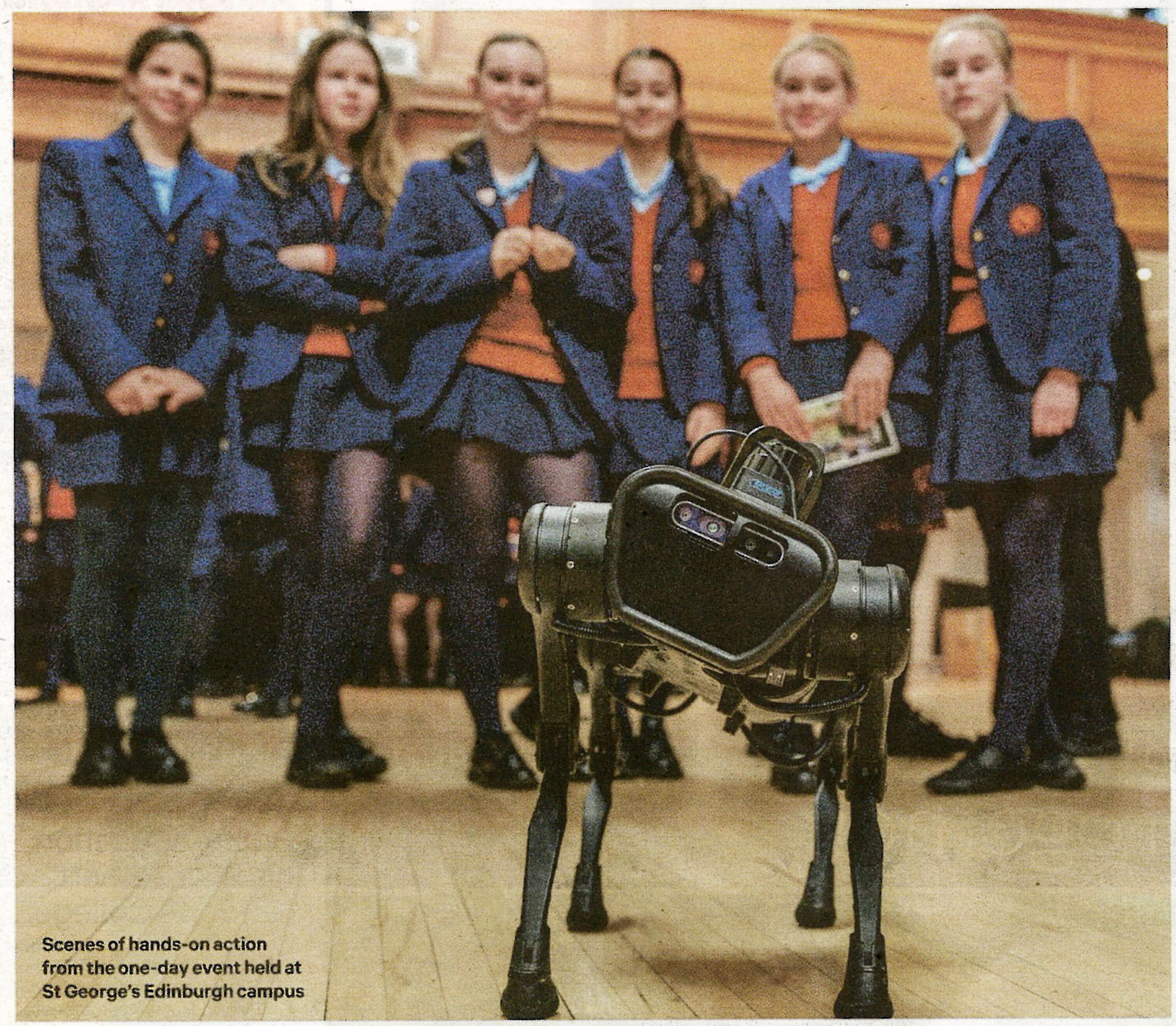
Attendees met and interacted with leaders shaping the future of tech, from such companies as i-confidential, AND Digital, Storm ID, Smart Data Foundry, Global Logic, MoneyMatiX, Free Agent, Skyscanner, and Turing Fest.

There were innovative demonstrations and interactive games with real robots from the Robotics Lab at the University of Edinburgh, the National Robotarium, APRIL Hub, and FCLabs. And dedicated coding sessions were offered by Rewriting the Code, Amazon and dressCode.

Gilruth said: "We want all young people to be enthused by the wonder of STEM, and initiatives like Women in Computing help inspire girls and young women to consider the advantages of studying or pursuing a career in tech, which has been traditionally dominated by boys and young men."

She added that positive role models can be extremely powerful in helping guide young people in their subject choices, which is why the Scottish Government is funding Scottish Teachers Advancing Computing Science to support learning staff in engaging, nurturing and inspiring the next generation of talent in their classroom.

"Women in Computing provides girls and young women from Edinburgh schools with a valuable opportunity to gain hands-on experience of what computing can offer them, and I was excited to meet pupils, teachers and exhibitors," Gilruth concluded.



Scenes of hands-on action from the one-day event held at St George's Edinburgh campus

> ***Women in Computing provides girls with a valuable opportunity to gain hands-on experience***

Events like this can help tackle what has been described as an ongoing crisis in computing science education across the country. A recent report by Reform Scotland revealed that 66 secondary schools lack a dedicated teacher and only one in five girls take up higher computing science.

Carol Chandler-Thompson, head of St George's, said: "It was important for us to open up our Women in Computing event to other girls in Edinburgh. As well as there being a significant gender gap in computing, there is sadly also a lack of access to computing education in many schools.

"Over 32,000 students in Scottish secondary schools have no access to a qualified computing science teacher, and we know the issue is worse in areas with higher levels of deprivation.

"All of us at St George's want to make a difference and play a role in reversing these trends by creating an environment that fosters girls' interest in – and access to – technology. We were delighted to welcome brilliant speakers, exhibitors and pupils from across Edinburgh to our school."

Data from dressCode, a Scottish charity which aspires to make a dent in the computing science gender gap, underscores the gravity of the situation. It found that there has been a 25 per cent decline in computing science teachers over the past 15 years. Some 50 per cent of girls said they would consider studying computing science if they had more role models and encouragement.

Toni Scullion, founder of dressCode and Computing Science Scotland, said: "Compared to other traditional STEM subjects, computing science has the largest gender gap and faces many challenges – a situation that has persisted for over a decade and unfortunately still does. While there has been some progress in overall uptake, including an increase in female participation, the progress is minimal. While this progress should be recognised, it is crucial that we avoid becoming complacent."

Rebecca, from St George's P6, said: "I've learned new things about robotics and areas of technology that I've never thought about before. It was also a great opportunity to meet other schools, make friends, and hear about the exciting robots."

Charlotte, a P7 pupil from state school Blackhall Primary, enthused: "The entire audience was girls! It was great to learn more about science today, and the robots were so fun and cool. It was inspiring to see female role models and women doing these roles."