

Software Hut and GO Wales Snowdon Mountain Railway and Mad Sound and Lighting

Before Hafod Eryri, the exciting new visitor centre, opened at the top of Wales' highest peak, the Stationmaster would announce the departure of the train by blowing his whistle. This did not quite seem in keeping with the new 21st century development so Snowdon Mountain Railway (SMR) turned to Bangor University for assistance.

The result has been the installation of a brand-new fully-automated announcement system for Hafod Eryri, which is now fully operational and has quickly become an essential for the day to day running of the summit terminus.

The announcement system ensures that people booked on particular trains are alerted when the train is about to depart. The system has pre-recorded announcements which can be set at the touch of a button at the beginning of each day, depending on which timetable the trains are running to.

The changeable weather conditions in the mountains often mean that trains are delayed or even cancelled so a manual override system was also added to the system to take this into account.

This project began life as part of a Software Hut, a second year Computer Science Module designed to give students experience of working as part of a team to deliver a project for a client. The School matches students with local companies who need software to enhance their business. This project was given to students, Chris West and Steven Postlethwaite.

The Software Hut project was so well received that SMR wanted to continue its development beyond the module. Through the "GO Wales", a scheme to engage students with employers, Chris took on a 10 week paid work placement over the summer. By the end of the placement, the final product had been installed, training given to staff and the system tested. The hardware and wiring was installed by MAD Sound and Lighting who had to work closely with Chris, Arwel Hughes from MAD sound and lighting explained: "Due to the location and weather conditions at the top of Snowdon we had to source specialist equipment for this project. Chris' technical ability made it easy for us to work together to get the job done and we are proud of what we have achieved for Snowdon Mountain Railway, given the challenging conditions."

Chris West explained: "Working on a professional project like this has been the best experience in programming that I have ever had. Being able to adapt your academic skills to an industrial environment is something all students should do during their studies, it was an amazing feeling to actually be able to deliver exactly what the client needed and I am very proud to have been part of this project. During the summer the summit station was hit by lightning which blew out all the hardware. I gained more experience than I bargained for as I then had to write all the software to accompany the new hardware."

“We’re delighted with our new announcement system and the way that the School of Computer Science and GO Wales have worked with us to deliver this project. The expertise of the Computer Science students is impressive, Chris not only handled the programming part of the project well he was also able to explain the system to the users in a way that was easy for us to understand, said *** of SMR”

“As an equipment installer, MAD Sound and Lighting, were thrilled to be asked to work along side the team at the railway and Chris from the university. We installed an amplifier, desk mic and OHM CL1 and CL3 ceiling speakers in the washrooms, corridors and main Cafe area. The job was interesting due to the awkwardness of the location and the specification we had to deliver.

Chris West spent time in the Army with the 7th Royal Horse Artillery and travelled all over the world he then worked for Allied Carpets for 7 years before deciding to change his career entirely and come to Bangor to study Computer Science.

Elinor Churchill, GO Wales explained: “Through the GO Wales placement scheme Chris has been able to bring in a fresh approach and new skills to put innovative ideas into practice. Chris’s achievements highlight the valuable input of students and graduates in the workplace, as well as the benefits to businesses of working together.”

GO Wales

GO Wales offers up to £7,500 in funding to help local business to recruit, retain and develop graduate staff. For more info on the GO Wales scheme contact your local office in Bangor on 01248 383586 / gowales@bangor.ac.uk.