

## Birmingham to Host Programme to Encourage UK Students to Study Science

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The University of Birmingham has been chosen to host the National Higher Education Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Programme, a Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) funded initiative to increase the number of graduates with skills in these disciplines to fulfil the needs of employers and boost the UK economy.

The STEM Programme will raise aspirations among young people to entice them to study science subjects at university level. It will aim to deliver significant and sustainable increases in the supply of graduates and trained staff equipped with the skills needed by employers to the benefit of the national economy. To address the government's high-level skills agenda, it will develop innovative and transferable programmes and initiatives for increasing and widening participation in the STEM subjects in higher education.

The University's recently created College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, that co-ordinated the bid, combines the Schools of Chemical Engineering, Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Metallurgy and Materials Engineering, Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy, Chemistry and Computer Science and is one of the largest integrated STEM teams in the United Kingdom. Professor Nigel Weatherill, Head of the College and leading on the STEM programme, says, 'Graduates in these disciplines play an important role in creating a culture of innovation and progress in the workplace. It is crucial that we encourage the next generation of scientists, engineers and mathematicians to study at university level so that higher education institutions can produce graduates with the skills which are key to a competitive national economy that is able to compete on a global scale. To do this we must listen to employers and find out what they want from our students so that we can gear them up for the demands of the workplace.'

Professor Michael Sterling, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, says, 'The University of Birmingham, for over a hundred years, has played a major part in the success of the city, region and the world and has contributed to the advancement of knowledge and its application. We are proud of our heritage in science, engineering and mathematics and have continued to invest and support the STEM subjects. The University is totally committed to ensuring that its combined resources, both physical and human, are used to make the National STEM Programme a success. Its presence here at the University of Birmingham is also good news for the region and reinforces Birmingham's Science City status.'

Ian Austin, MP, Regional Minister for the West Midlands, said: 'This is a marvellous boost not just for Birmingham but for the West Midlands region as a whole.'

'It shows that we can attract world-class investment in science and cutting-edge innovation upon which the region's future prosperity will depend.'

David Sweeney, Director of Research, Innovation and Skills, HEFCE, said: 'We are delighted to announce the University of Birmingham as the host HEI for the National HE STEM programme. Having invested in four excellent pilot projects, Chemistry for our Future, Stimulating Physics, London Engineering Project and More Maths Grads, we were keen to ensure that the activity, experience and expertise developed within those projects could be effectively built upon for the National HE STEM programme. We were confident that the University of Birmingham, with its existing strengths in the STEM disciplines and its experience of working with sector bodies and employers, will work closely and effectively with the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the consortia of mathematics societies to develop and deliver a high quality national programme.'

HEFCE have already run four pilot projects in chemistry, physics, engineering and mathematics - the latter has been hosted by the University of Birmingham - to raise demand for HE provision. The initial development phase of the new national STEM programme will include a wide consultation beginning in January 2009 to identify existing and new initiatives that may contribute to delivering the aims and objectives of the programme. The University will receive approximately £20 million to carry out the delivery phase of the project.

Ends

Notes to Editors

The University of Birmingham will host the Programme for a period of three years from 2009 – 2012.

For further information

Kate Chapple, Press Officer, University of Birmingham, tel 0121 414 2772 or 07789 921164, email: k.h.chapple@bham.ac.uk

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