

National HE STEM Programme Universities Announced

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Six universities will work as part of a major initiative to promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) throughout England and Wales.

The six partner universities will develop and initiate activities in their regions as part of the Higher Education STEM Programme, a £21 million initiative funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales.

The Universities of Bath, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester Metropolitan, Southampton and Swansea will act as focus for regional activities to engage local workforces in higher education learning. They will also enhance the undergraduate student experience in the STEM disciplines by helping students develop the skills required by employers, engage young people in STEM disciplines and widen participation in these subjects among school students.

The National Higher Education STEM Programme is a three-year initiative aiming to generate interest in STEM subjects among young people, enhance higher level skills in the workplace and increase accessibility of higher education courses in these subjects. Though focused around science, technology, engineering and mathematics, it will primarily support chemistry, engineering, mathematics and physics - STEM subjects that have been deemed strategically important and vulnerable. In addition to the universities the programme will involve the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and a consortium of mathematical bodies, building on their work in the earlier pilot stage (see note 2).

The National Higher Education STEM programme will work to support higher education institutions (HEIs) and encourage them to explore new approaches to recruiting students and delivering programmes of study within the STEM disciplines. It will facilitate the transfer of best practice across STEM subjects and encourage innovation. The programme will focus on sustainable activities with the potential to achieve long-term impact rather than ones that provide short-term gains. It will work with a range of other partners including the National STEM Centre, STEMNET and others (see notes 4 and 5).

The six regional 'spoke' universities will work collaboratively with other HEIs in their region, while the University of Birmingham will serve as the 'hub' of the programme, acting as co-ordinator and being responsible for the dissemination of good practice across the regions. Regional events will be held throughout November and December to bring together HEIs and discuss priorities for regional activities.

David Lammy, Minister of State for Higher Education, said: "We need to encourage more people from all backgrounds to take up STEM subjects to expand and improve skills here in the UK, so it's great to see our universities stepping up to the mark.

"We understand how important it is to have specialists in these subjects, which is why we opened up 10,000 extra student places this year to for students from every walk of life to pursue their ambitions.

"It is right for this country that we continue to invest in the new industries and new jobs of the future. The £21 million provided today will ensure that STEM subjects remain a prominent part of higher education and that more and more students are attracted to study them, recognising their value to employers and the potential rewards in their own careers."

Michael Grove, the Programme director at the University of Birmingham, said: 'I am really excited to be leading this programme. The emphasis on transferring and embedding tried and tested activities alongside encouraging further innovation in the design and delivery of HE STEM education will make a real difference to the way in which universities work with both schools and employers. The programme's aim is to facilitate sustainable developments within HE STEM which will bring long term benefits to individuals, the economy and society.'

Sir Alan Langlands, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, said: 'The National HE STEM programme with its activities focusing on schools, employers, people in the workforce and the development of the HE curriculum provides universities and colleges with a major opportunity to ensure continued progress in this important area, equipping students with 21st century skills and contributing to a vibrant economy'.

'The core regional partners will be able to ensure that the activities the programme delivers fit with the economic and social priorities in different localities. The three strands of activities will enable institutions to maximise opportunities for young people, adults and employers to access the high level STEM education that best meets their needs.'

Wales Education Minister Jane Hutt said, "I am delighted to add my support to the involvement of our Welsh universities in this crucially important programme. Improvements in the teaching and delivery of STEM subjects to better match industry's needs, to enthuse pupils and students across our education system, and especially those who might not normally have considered higher education, are much needed. In Wales we well know that a stronger and enhanced supply of STEM graduates is crucial to our attempts to build a knowledge economy, and will be key to building a more prosperous Wales."

Professor John Holman, National STEM Director and Director of the National Science Learning Centre, said: 'The UK needs more STEM graduates if we are to be a leader in the knowledge economy. The HE STEM Programme will complement the work already being done by the many supporters of STEM education in industry, government, foundations and academia: one of its key roles will be to create a 'pull' effect on students by showing them the interesting, exciting and rewarding experiences they will have if they make the choice to study STEM subjects at university. I look forward to working closely with Michael Grove and his team.'

For further details about the National HE STEM Programme, please contact Michael Grove at the University of Birmingham on 0121 414 4800.

Ends

Notes to editors

1. The national Higher Education STEM Programme is hosted by the University of Birmingham. Michael Grove will shortly take up the post of National Higher Education STEM Programme Director at the university.
2. This is the second stage of a six year programme which began in 2006. The first stage involved pilot projects developed by the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Institute of Physics, Royal Academy of Engineering and a consortium of mathematical bodies to generate interest in chemistry, physics, mathematics and engineering among young people, and to enhance the accessibility of HE courses in these subjects. The national programme will roll out across the regions activities and lessons learnt from the four discipline-based pilot projects.
3. The programme will take forward activities in three related strands:
 - a. Activities to widen participation within and across the STEM disciplines at HE level working with schools.
 - b. HE curriculum developments focusing on course delivery and design, student support, and knowledge and skills.
 - c. Activities to encourage those currently within the workforce and society without a Level 4 qualification to engage in further study to develop enhanced knowledge and skills.
4. The higher education activities to widen participation amongst young people in schools and colleges will complement those of the Department for Children, Schools and

Families funded STEM Cohesion Programme. It will also complement work undertaken by the National STEM Centre, STEMNET and other STEM enhancement programmes.

5. The National Science Learning Centre provides inspirational and innovative professional development for science teachers, technicians, lecturers and teaching assistants from across the UK. Funded by the Wellcome Trust, the £11 million purpose built Centre, situated at the University of York, features the highest specification teaching laboratories, a Resource Centre which carries the country's largest collection of science teaching and learning resources, multiple teaching rooms and a 300 seat auditorium.

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