

New Chair for National HE STEM Programme

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Former Economic Secretary to the Treasury and Science Minister Ian Pearson has been appointed Chair of the National Higher Education STEM Programme Advisory Forum.

Across England and Wales the National Higher Education STEM Programme works in partnership with Higher Education Institutions, professional bodies and learned societies to build on existing achievements and encourage new approaches to recruiting students and delivering programmes of study within the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics disciplines. The programme also aims to make a significant contribution to meeting the skills needs of local economies. The three year £21 million programme is funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales and hosted by the University of Birmingham.

Commenting on his appointment Ian Pearson said:

"I am delighted to have this opportunity to contribute to driving forward this exciting programme that will bring long term benefits to individuals, our economy and society. We need to encourage more people from all backgrounds to take up STEM subjects to expand and improve skills here in the UK."

"The National HE STEM programme activities focus on schools, employers, people in the workforce and the development of the HE curriculum. It provides a major opportunity to ensure continued progress in this important area, equipping students with 21st century skills and contributing to a vibrant economy. The programme's activities will transform the aspirations of young people through the productive relationships between universities, schools and learned societies."

The University of Birmingham serves as the programme's hub, acting as co-ordinator and being responsible for the dissemination of good practice across the English regions and Wales whilst six regional 'spoke' universities will work collaboratively with other HEIs in their area to promote the programme. In addition to the universities the programme involves the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and a consortium of mathematical bodies, led by the Institute of Mathematics and Its Applications.

With the activities of the Programme underway across England and Wales, the high-level Advisory Forum will help it develop and maintain a high profile within the UK, ensure it is fully informed of changes to the STEM policy and help it develop new opportunities to further strengthen the programme. Further appointments to the advisory forum will be made shortly.

Ian Pearson was Economic Secretary to the Treasury from 2008 to 2010 and prior to this he held the post of Minister of State for Science and Innovation in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007-2008). Ian has also served as Minister of State for Climate Change and Environment in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2006-2007), Minister of State (Minister for Trade), Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Trade and Industry (2005-2006) and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, The Northern Ireland Office (2002-2005). Ian stood down as a Member of Parliament at the last election having served as MP for Dudley South (previously Dudley West) for over 15 years.

Notes for Editors:

1. The National Higher Education STEM Programme aims to generate interest in STEM subjects among young people, enhance higher level skills in the workplace and increase accessibility of HE courses in these subjects by developing 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.

The programme builds on the success of a network of partnerships across the England and Wales.

2. Though focused around science, technology, engineering and mathematics, it will primarily support chemistry, engineering, mathematics and physics - STEM subjects that have been considered strategically important to the economy and society but vulnerable due to low student demand. Full details can be found at www.hestem.ac.uk It is also responsive, as appropriate, to the policies and agendas of the Welsh Assembly Government where these matters are being taken forward under its new Higher Education Strategy: For our Future.

3. The regional 'spoke' universities taking part in the programme are Bath, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester Metropolitan, Southampton and Swansea. They act as focus for regional activities to engage local workforces in higher education learning.

4. The post of Chair of the National Higher Education STEM Programme Advisory Forum is unpaid.

5. Before being elected to Parliament, Ian worked at WMEB Group (1989-1994), a West Midlands-based economic development company, becoming joint chief executive and was Deputy Director of the Urban Trust (1987-88).

6. For further details about the National HE STEM Programme, please contact either Professor Nigel Weatherill, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, University of Birmingham 0121 414 9029 or Michael Grove, Director of the Programme at the University of Birmingham on 0121 414 8518.

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