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March 2024

Achieving organisational diversity and workforce resilience through schools outreach

Social mobility as the solution to both skills gaps and team diversity

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology estimates the digital skills gap costs the UK as much as £63bn a year¹ and research

by Oxera and The Times Education Commission found that increasing UK social mobility even modestly could increase annual GDP by £45bn².

“Talent – for math, science, music, sports, finance, you name it – is evenly distributed around the world, even at its most rarefied levels. Opportunity, however, is not. This leaves a significant space to engage underutilized talent if we can make opportunity portable and match it with talent in ways that are less random.”

World Economic Forum, 2019

Looking to underemployed populations and young people in social mobility cold spots is a compelling option for delivering economic and social value, solving our skills shortages and supporting increased diversity. Data from the Tech Talent Charter (TTC) **annual report** shows that only 9% of tech employees are reported to be from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This compares to 39% of the UK population.

TTC also has data that shows that where organisations have focused their interventions on social mobility, their diversity levels were higher across protected characteristics. For example, in companies with interventions for social mobility the average proportion of ethnic minority tech employees was 6% higher compared to the UK tech workforce as a whole.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-strategy-to-make-uk-a-global-tech-superpower>

² [Hidden talent: the economic benefits of social mobility - Oxera](#)

The business case for engaging young people



A key source of talent is young people. What we are often missing are the systematic and structured approaches in our organisations to reaching that talent and building a sustainable and resilient pipeline.



“The research team observed that most of the young people who became first in their family to access higher education had benefited from ‘luck’ that opened up opportunities that they could use to achieve socially mobile outcomes. The analyses challenge popular views that attribute social mobility to meritocracy and individual agency, talent or ‘grit’.”

Faculty of Education and Society – University College London

Connecting with young people can be achieved through effective school and college engagement programmes.

Over 360 employers have used the Careers Enterprise Company (CEC) **employer engagement standards**. Sixty-six per cent are large and medium-sized employers, and 34% are small and micro-sized employers (collectively they employ over a million people).

- ✔ 83% say their work in schools and colleges is helping them develop new talent pipelines.
- ✔ 86% say their work is supporting more young people to take up careers in their industry.
- ✔ 72% say it improves the effectiveness of early years recruitment.

CEC schools' engagement insight, November 2023

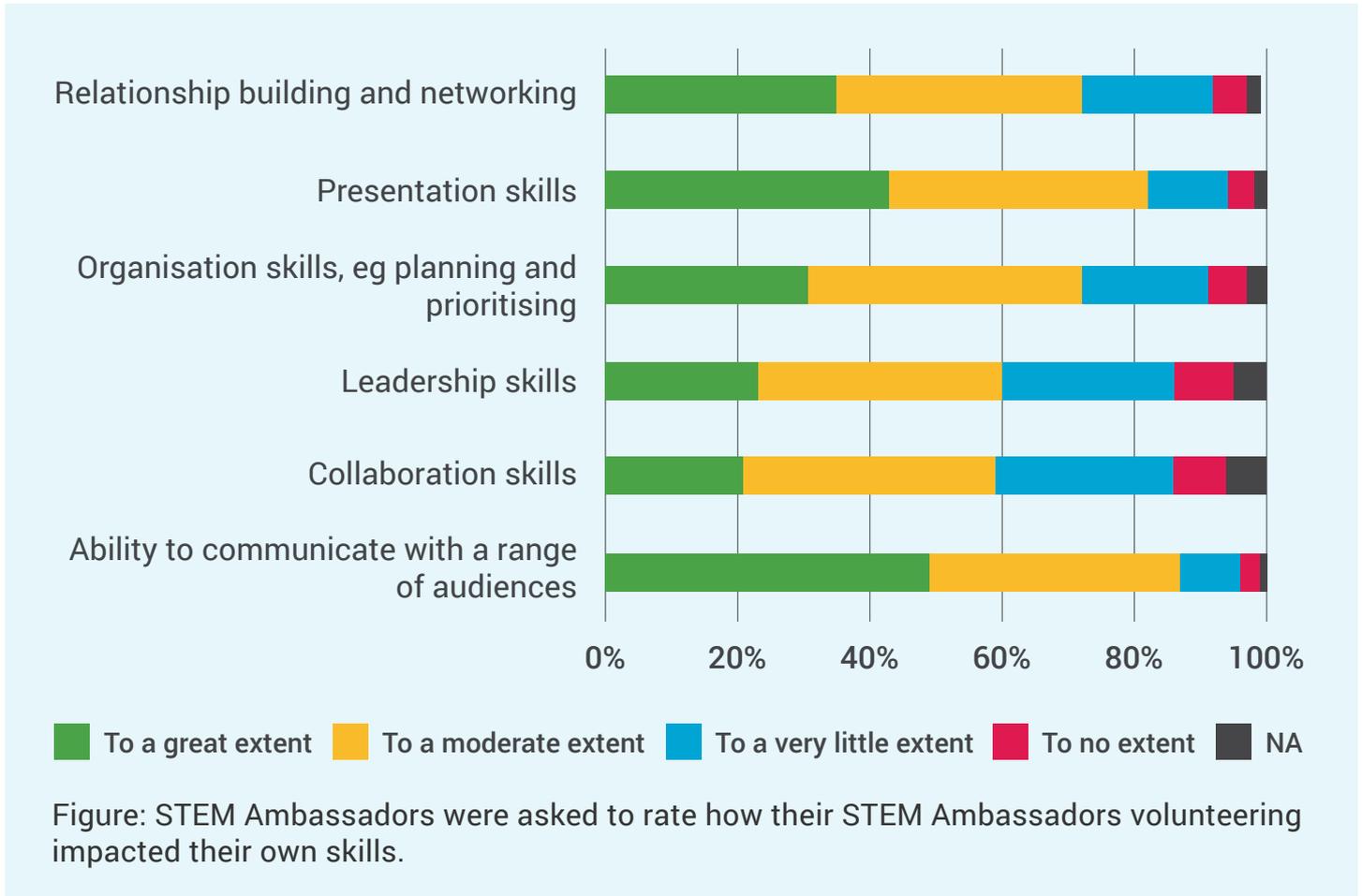
So, engaging with young people and schools doesn't just help your business talent pipeline, it also helps your employees, young people and teachers.

STEM Ambassadors volunteering in schools impact report:

- ✔ **90%** of volunteers say it increases their sense of satisfaction with their work.
- ✔ **90%** of young people said engaging with volunteers increased their understanding of why STEM subjects are important, particularly in the workplace.

STEM Ambassadors volunteering: Volunteer insights:

- ✔ **96%** of volunteers said their experiences enhanced their ability to communicate with a range of audiences.
- ✔ **Over 90%** stated improvements in presentation skills and relationship building and networking.



STEM Ambassadors volunteering: Educators' insights:

- ✔ **90%** of educators said engaging with STEM Ambassadors improved their own knowledge of STEM careers.
- ✔ **86%** of educators said engaging had improved their enthusiasm for teaching STEM subjects.
- ✔ **94%** said it improved students' enthusiasm for STEM.



Getting started with your school engagement

Whilst putting in place a school engagement programme can seem daunting, if you partner with organisations like **STEM Learning UK**, and use the Tech Talent Charter Open Playbook and **CEC standards** to shape your programme, you can get started very easily.

Begin with an inclusive culture inside your organisation

Use the **TTC Open Playbook** on social mobility to guide you and begin to normalise the social mobility conversation internally. The following two actions will help create momentum and make engaging with schools easier by creating shared messages and confidence.

1. Create a shared narrative with your colleagues about why social mobility and diversity is important for you.
2. Build organisational and individual confidence by regularly sharing personal lived experiences.

Build school engagement into your volunteering programme using expert partners

Whilst this might seem an expensive option in terms of 'staff time', as shown above, the return on investment is large, not least in employee engagement and social value delivery.

1. Identify clear outcomes you want to achieve: Increased employee engagement, increased employee skills and resilience, social value delivery, local impact/national impact, increased brand awareness, increased talent pipeline, increased team diversity, community engagement, engagement of a particular age group or demographic of students etc.

2. Identify your budget: Once you have identified your outcomes, the next step is to work out your budget. Be creative when considering where your budget could come from:

- ✓ Attrition and recruitment cost reduction
- ✓ Employee learning and development
- ✓ Employee value proposition
- ✓ Marketing, brand awareness
- ✓ ESG social value delivery

3. Create a volunteering policy that allows your employees to take time out of their working day to volunteer.

- ✔ Decide whether you will support paid volunteering. Paid volunteering signposts organisational commitment as well as trust in your employees.
- ✔ Decide how much time you will support. This could start with as little as 3.5 hours (half day). Some organisations even support up to 2 days' paid volunteering per month.
- ✔ Factor in the percentage of staff who you believe will take up the offer to identify the potential 'opportunity cost'.
- ✔ Be clear about how the policy will be implemented:

- Will you reimburse colleagues' expenses?
- Will you match funding with volunteering time, eg for volunteering done outside of working hours?
- Can you track the hours/days within your HR and payroll system?
- Will you allow colleagues to choose their own activities or expect them to take part in centrally arranged ones?
- How often will you want to track progress and impact?

4. Find platforms and partners that can support you with what you want to achieve.

- ✔ For schools and community engagement the **STEM Ambassadors programme** has been in place for 22 years, works with nearly 8,000 businesses and organisations, 30,000 volunteers, and is **free to use** through generous funding from UK Research & Innovation.



- There are regular virtual support sessions which can be booked through **Eventbrite**. These are particularly useful for individual volunteers and organisations at the start of their volunteering journey, providing ideas and advice around engagement with young people and teachers.
- All STEM Ambassadors receive training in safeguarding, a background check via the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) or PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups scheme) and are insured to undertake STEM Ambassadors activity.
- Volunteers from all over the UK can share and learn from each other through peer-to-peer exchanges on the **STEM Ambassadors Community**, including joining regional or sector and industry groups.
- The STEM Ambassadors Platform connects volunteers directly with educators in and out of the classroom who are looking for support via the submission of activity requests to help with illustrating the curriculum, career fairs, etc.
- STEM Ambassadors can also work with other student engagement programmes such as TechSheCan and online mentoring.



- The programme runs **regular training and support sessions** (such as ‘how to explain your job to an 8 year old’) to help STEM Ambassadors to develop both their professional and volunteering skills. To access these sessions the STEM Ambassadors must be registered and a member of the digital STEM Ambassadors Community.
- STEM Learning can provide access to volunteering data for organisations who mobilise 25 or more STEM Ambassadors. This is done through Partnership Reporting on the STEM Ambassadors Platform via a data sharing agreement. Detailed information available includes types of activities, schools engaged and social value created by an organisation’s STEM Ambassadors.

✔ Is there a sector-wide approach you can join or invest in to accelerate your journey and amplify your impact? You can engage STEM Learning to work with you to create and administer sector-wide approaches. For example:

- **Computing Ambassadors**, supporting the National Centre for Computing Education

- **Climate Change Educational Partnership**, including the **Climate Ambassadors scheme**
- **Quantum Ambassadors**, supported by the UK National Quantum Technology Programme
- **ESERO-UK**: Using the context of space to inspire and engage young people
- **Generation Logistics education initiative with STEM Learning UK (Logistics UK)**
- **Minerals Matter partnership with STEM Learning UK (Abmec)**

5. Build a meaningful programme of activities that can be delivered simply and easily by your employees year after year using the **CEC standards, employers’ guide to supporting STEM careers education in England** and **Guide to volunteering for new and experienced STEM Ambassadors**.

- ✔ Showcase your role models, help young people see themselves.
- ✔ Create re-usable resources such as videos.
- ✔ Raise awareness of pathways into work, both in your organisation and in your sector.
- ✔ Explain the relevance of specific knowledge, skills and school subjects to your organisation.
- ✔ Actively challenge stereotypes and preconceptions.
- ✔ Prepare young people for the application process, help with CVs and application forms, assessment preparation and interview preparation.
- ✔ Be inclusive and accommodating, adjustments may be needed to account for specific local needs (the school may not have great technology in place), or for those with disabilities or special educational needs.

✔ Leverage your internal diversity networks and encourage them to be part of your programme. This will demonstrate additional commitment and help create a self-managing internal group to help ensure you can deliver repeated engagements into the same schools over multiple years.

✔ Consider whether you could bring young people (or teachers for professional development/CPD sessions) into your offices and other work locations.

✔ STEM Learning and the STEM Ambassadors Programme also have free to use, quality-controlled **resources** that are 'ready to go' to engage children aged 5 to 19. You can also edit the resources, just be sure to understand any copyright associated with the resources.

- If you'd like to invest in more tailored activities, then these can be created for you by STEM Learning, or other organisations who also specialise in creating engaging and inspirational activities for young people.

6. Try to work with schools that are not already oversubscribed with volunteers and careers advice.

✔ Consider hybrid solutions, both in person and virtual, to help reach more young people, eg in rural or coastal communities.

✔ There is often hidden deprivation in many wealthy areas.

✔ The STEM Ambassador Platform's regional **delivery partner network** can help you identify the schools and young people that would benefit the most from systematic, structured and sustained engagement with your employees.

7. Partner with others from your ecosystem:

Engage your supply chain to be part of your volunteering programme. This will strengthen connections between your organisations and support greater workforce resilience within your supply chain. We also recommend looking for opportunities to identify key customers or clients who would value being part of purposeful collaborative action. This will increase the 'stickiness' of the relationship as you co-create multi-year engagements with local schools.

8. Be prepared to track, adapt and innovate:

Ensure that you move with the times and don't endlessly repeat a once successful model. Honestly evaluate after each engagement and reflect on where improvements can be made. What worked one year may not work as well the next year. The children will be different (even if they are the same children!) and your volunteers will be different (even if they are the same volunteers!). Most importantly, have fun! Try something different and discuss the outcomes.

By harnessing the untapped talent within underrepresented communities and young people, we not only address critical skills gaps but also create a more inclusive and dynamic workforce. The evidence presented underscores the immense benefits that such initiatives bring, from increased employee engagement and skills development to tangible social and economic value for both businesses and society at large. Through structured engagement with schools and collaboration with expert partners like STEM Learning and STEM Ambassadors, organisations can embark on our journey of meaningful impact and improving lives through STEM education.

Join an Organisation Information Session and make that first step:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/cc/stem-ambassadors-organisation-information-2607039>

Appendix of resources:

CEC employer engagement standards

Employer's guide to supporting STEM careers education in England
– from the CEC and STEM Learning

STEM Ambassadors volunteering programme

FAQs – About volunteering

FAQs – for organisations wanting to start volunteering

Guide to volunteering for new and experienced STEM Ambassadors

STEM Ambassadors virtual information sessions (Eventbrite)

STEM Ambassadors digital community – you must be a registered
STEM Ambassador to join

STEM Resources – to use in your engagement with young people,
schools, and communities



To find out more about the services STEM Learning offer, including the STEM Ambassadors programme, please contact us: employers@stem.org.uk