

How professional bodies engage with the STEM Ambassadors programme



Background: STEM Ambassador Chris Pearson – Cosmologist

I am a cosmologist – I study the evolution of the Universe. I worked in Japan for seven years on space missions before moving to the UK to work on the Herschel Space Telescope that the UK was developing with the European Space Agency. Now I work on future missions and ground-based projects for UKRI STFC RAL Space, an organisation that carries out world-class science research and technology development relating to space missions.

The STEM Ambassador journey

I have always been interested in conveying what we do in astronomy to the general public, from children to adults. I love sharing the excitement of my work with them. When I first started doing this sort of thing, the STEM Ambassadors (SA) programme didn't exist, but I signed up to become a SA about a decade ago when my institute started having a more formal relationship with the programme. **Any time we want to interact with the public outside of my work, it's vital that we have a DBS check, which is one of the benefits of being part of the STEM Ambassadors programme.**

What I do as a STEM Ambassador

I do a lot of wide-ranging activities. They are often quite closely tied to the projects that I work on, but this isn't always the case. I've run solar system workshops for children in Year 1 and Year 5.

I tailor the content and my approach to the age group, but the topics we look at are very similar. We make a human solar system, sometimes using inflatable planets or different sized balls that are scaled to the size of the planets. We paint our own planets, we do team quizzes and I bring things like meteorites in that the children can touch, or I run question and answer sessions.

Sometimes I run rocket-making workshops, space-station-making sessions or even astronaut training! For the secondary school students, I tend to do more talks which are likely to be careers orientated. I find myself doing more with the younger age group as what I can offer fits better with their curriculum. I have also participated in CPD sessions for teachers.



Chris Pearson



The impact of being a STEM Ambassador

When you start out as a STEM Ambassador, the idea of walking into a classroom can be a bit intimidating. But I've done it so much now I am happy standing up in front of a class. We often bring along junior colleagues to observe and shadow our outreach activities.

The STEM Ambassador programme is a really good thing – it's a really good idea. If someone was considering doing outreach activities and is looking for opportunities in their local area, I would recommend it. Not only that, **but the training we get when we sign up is interesting. I had done outreach work before, but I took a lot away from the SA training.**

I sometimes get feedback from the children and schools I work with. I try and ignite an interest in science with the younger pupils, and for the older primary school children I show them that science doesn't have to be dry or boring. We know that there's a change that many of these older pupils experience – they encounter stereotypes about what certain jobs or subjects are like, and they make subconscious decisions about what children like them should or shouldn't be interested in. I try and break down those barriers and those stereotypes! **It's great to hear that children who weren't interested in science before my session go on to tell their teachers or parents that they want to become an astronomer or an astronaut!**

About STEM Ambassadors

STEM Ambassadors is a fantastic volunteer programme that has been running for over 20 years.

Our volunteers offer their time, passion and energy to visit schools, colleges and youth group organisations to deliver requests from teachers and youth group leaders who want to link STEM subjects to the real world of work.

Find out more at our [information session](#).



Become a partner

Our STEM Ambassadors programme inspires the next generation and helps young people to develop the skills, confidence and mindset to build successful futures in STEM.

By running a STEM volunteer cohort we provide even more opportunities to connect young people to real-life STEM careers, prioritising support for those who need it most.

Find out more at our [information session](#).



How to get involved

If you have been inspired by how STEM Ambassadors support the learning and development of young people across the UK and you'd like to know more, please contact us at employersupport@stem.org.uk or visit stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors/partner-info

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