

# How professional bodies engage with the STEM Ambassadors programme



## Background: Royal Astronomical Society – Sheila Kanani, Education Outreach and Diversity Officer

The Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) is a learned society that encourages and promotes the study of astronomy, solar-system science, geophysics and closely related branches of science. They have a membership of over 4,000, most of whom are based in the UK, with a quarter based overseas. They represent astronomers, space scientists and geophysicists. Most of their members are academics, teachers, outreach professionals, amateur astronomers and industry professionals.

## The STEM Ambassador relationship

I have been a STEM Ambassador (SA) myself for 15 years. I've been doing outreach work since before I did my PhD. After I completed my undergraduate degree, I was interested in working with young people, so I offered myself into schools. At some point after that, I heard about the SA programme and signed up officially.

At the RAS, I had been working with other elements of STEM Learning's offer such as **ESERO-UK** (the UK Space Education Office), and on projects like **Mission X**. As we worked together and built up a relationship, STEM Learning suggested that a good way to mobilise our fellows to do more outreach work would be to make a link with the SA programme, and so we did!

I knew first-hand what it was like to be a SA, and that it would be something our members would be interested in too. So, whenever someone expresses an interest in doing any outreach, our first step is always to signpost them to the SA programme. There are three key things that the programme offers our members: a DBS check (we are too small an organisation to manage this ourselves); basic training about going into schools and working with young people; and access to outreach opportunities via the SA platform.

It's true that we have some routes for our members to go into schools – working with Girlguiding and after-school clubs – but the STEM Ambassadors programme offers a massive wealth of opportunities, and we cannot (and don't want to!) compete with that.

There are only two of us within the RAS who deliver education outreach programmes. I am based in the north-west and my colleague is in the south-east. So, by getting our members to become SAs, we can increase and open up our reach and delivery nationwide.



# What do the STEM Ambassadors do for you?

We try and use a range of ways to encourage our members to become SAs. We send out messages via emails and our social media. We talk about it at our conferences. We've also built a [webpage](#) to promote it too.

**Our members do a vast range of activities through the programme.** They run workshops, assemblies, careers talks and science weeks. They hold 'Ask an astronomer' sessions and they run public amateur astronomy events in evenings and at weekends. Some of our SAs are school governors or trustees. Others deliver lectures for Scouts and Girlguiding groups. We also have some who volunteer to support Duke of Edinburgh Award activities.

One key thing for us, partly to incentivise our members to volunteer their time, is to ensure that not only do we signpost them to outreach opportunities, but we also provide support around them so that they don't turn up unprepared.

**We also try and promote the benefits of the SA programme as we engage our members** – the fact that you can log your volunteering hours, get certificates that recognise your contribution to the programme and access additional training. There is a lot that the programme does beyond what we can offer by ourselves.

I definitely recommend the STEM Ambassador programme, both to other organisations and to individuals looking to do more outreach. I've got a lot out of being a SA myself – it has opened new doors for me throughout my career!

## 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](mailto:employersupport@stem.org.uk) or visit [stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors/partner-info](https://stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors/partner-info)

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