

The Brief:

This is a fixed term, 3-month interim/fractional CIO / IT Director role, working up to 12 days per month on average.

STEM Learning wishes to commission an independent strategic review of the overall IT function including systems, technologies, structure, staff & skills to provide a clear, objective picture of its current state and inform future decision making.

You will also manage a transitional period as the current head of department takes maternity leave, acting as key point of contact for the CFO and co-ordinating the activities and priorities of the teams within the department during a busy period of project delivery.

With weekly check-ins and verbal reporting to sense-check initial thoughts, after 8-10 weeks you will provide a concise board level 'status report' with bullet point findings and recommendations.

The review will take place in York, operating on at least a hybrid basis, with time required on-site at the National STEM Learning Centre.

The Interim CIO / IT Director will need excellent fact-finding, communication, people and reporting skills to gather a clear and balanced picture within a short timeframe.

The Interim CIO / IT Director's mandate will be to deliver a clear, evidence-based report that equips the CFO to make informed decisions on the future shape of the function.

ABOUT STEM LEARNING

STEM Learning Limited, is a not-for profit company, owned by four northern universities (York, Leeds, Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam). It is the UK's largest provider of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and careers support to schools.

We deliver teacher CPD, digital resources, and long-term partnership support to schools across the UK, to improve teaching, alongside delivering student focussed engagement and enrichment programmes aimed at inspiring the next generation of STEM students, on behalf of government departments, trusts and foundations, and corporate funders.

The organisation operates from the purpose-built National STEM Learning Centre at the University of York, hosting the nationwide STEM Ambassadors programme and the National Centre for Computing Education.

THE IT FUNCTION

STEM Learning's IT team of 23 supports a national organisation with a broad range of teacher CPD programmes, digital resources, and client projects delivered in collaboration with schools, funders, and delivery partners across the UK.

The incumbent head of department is shortly due to take 12 months maternity leave (September 2026). The findings of the review will help shape future recruitment to cover any skills gaps as well as maternity cover arrangements.

The function encompasses an in-house team, a portfolio of external client and in-house projects, and a range of external IT vendors supporting infrastructure, systems, and data. It is

currently split into five teams, comprising Data & Evaluation, Support, Engineering, Product and Infrastructure & Security.

THE ROLE

The Interim Consultant / CIO / IT Director will report to the CFO and will need to commit an average of 12 days per month for the duration of the assignment, with at least a hybrid presence on-site in York.

Objectives:

- Conduct a thorough review of STEM Learning's IT service — its structure, balance, capability, and performance — through structured fact-finding and stakeholder engagement, highlighting any gaps in capacity or capabilities required to support the organisation.
- Review the team's prioritised portfolio of client and in-house projects ,and assess how effectively they are resourced and governed
- Assess the IT architecture, systems, and technology stack for fitness, scalability, and alignment with the organisation's needs
- Review the organisation's current data strategy and data management practices, identifying gaps and opportunities
- Assess the infrastructure supporting the organisation's operations, including resilience, security, and value for money
- Review of the IT Roadmap – priorities for the next 12 months and resource implications
- Review of inhouse v outsource strategy – including network maintenance & support and product development & support from a value for money perspective.

You will:

Engage openly and constructively with the existing IT team and wider stakeholders across the organisation;

Build effective working relationships with other members of the leadership team

Synthesise findings into a clear, concise board level report with recommendations (bullet point format is acceptable)

Ensure the review is conducted in compliance with applicable regulations, including data protection requirements

THE PERSON

It is anticipated that the appointed Interim Consultant / CIO / IT Director will:

Be an experienced, senior IT executive, able to quickly conduct strategic reviews or diagnostics of IT functions

Have held a CIO or IT Director role, ideally across organisations of a comparable scale (SME),

Possess direct experience across team, architecture, programme delivery, data strategy, infrastructure, and vendor management

Be comfortable engaging confidently at Board level, translating technical detail into clear, high-level findings

Have operated effectively as an independent reviewer, building trust quickly with teams unfamiliar with them

Be a clear and effective communicator, able to engage people at all levels with genuine warmth and credibility

Be pragmatic and decisive, comfortable with ambiguity, and well-suited to the pace and demands of a short, intensive engagement

Be able to operate at both strategic and operational level, remaining clear-sighted about delivering the brief, while remaining hands-on with fact-finding

Be available for the timeline envisaged, able to commit fully to the assignment for its duration, and based on-site in York on at least a hybrid basis

WHY TAKE ON THIS ASSIGNMENT?

STEM Learning is a purpose-led organisation with a well-established national reputation, a centre of excellence, high-profile externally facing IT platforms and a clear public-benefit mission with sustained demand for its programmes.

What it needs is an independent, experienced perspective on IT — the kind that a senior former CIO or IT Director can bring quickly and credibly to form an overview quickly and efficiently.

The scope is well-defined, the timeline is short and clear, and the opportunity to have a genuine, tangible impact on the organisation's future decision-making is real.