



Social mobility through STEM

In2scienceUK is on a mission to promote social mobility and diversity in STEM. **Anishta Shegobin**, Head of Programmes, tells us about the charity's **In2STEM** programme, which is empowering 16 to 19-year-olds to find their passion and excel in STEM.

What challenges and barriers do young people from low socio-economic backgrounds face when pursuing STEM?

Poverty and low socio-economic backgrounds are huge barriers to progressing into careers within STEM. Many of the students who In2scienceUK support are in receipt of free school meals, with no family history of attending university and living in areas in which significantly fewer young people progress to higher education. For these students, there is far less exposure and fewer opportunities to access connections, information and resources to learn about the different types of STEM degrees and career routes. Some students have to juggle family responsibilities or financial worries, which present barriers to gaining relevant experience and exploring their options. On top of that, a lack of diverse or relatable role models can make it hard for students to see themselves succeeding in STEM careers.

How is the current cost of living crisis exacerbating these barriers?

The cost of living crisis continues to disproportionately affect the young people we support. Students face rising university tuition costs and projections suggest a decrease in the proportion of young people choosing to go into higher education. Outside of university, many opportunities to get ahead, like unpaid internships and networking events, also carry hidden costs. The price of transport, food and accommodation all



add up. This is why all our programmes at In2scienceUK include a bursary for students to help remove these barriers.

What is the demand for STEM professionals in the UK currently?

Sectors in STEM are always expanding and evolving to support global innovation – there's been a 280% increase in vacancies across this sector in the last decade! However, although there is huge demand for STEM professionals, there aren't enough people with the necessary skills to fill these positions. Promoting accessibility

to create a diverse workforce in these industries is essential and can also help address this shortage.

What is In2STEM, and how is it helping to address the skills shortage?

At In2scienceUK, we are passionate about supporting young people to gain exposure to STEM environments and role models. Through our In2STEM programme, we can empower young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to make better informed decisions about education and careers in STEM.

We aim to equip students with everything they need to progress on their STEM journey through a range of skills and employability workshops. The programme involves a fully-funded, in-person, 2-week placement working alongside STEM professionals and researchers. The placements are hosted by STEM professionals in their working environment and are matched as closely as possible to the students' interests, so that they can have hands-on experience with the kind of future career they might want to pursue. We also run public engagement competitions to support young people to develop their creative and literacy skills.

For In2STEM 2024, we are proud to have supported 851 participants from different schools across the UK. Year on year, we are committed to continuing to support more young people than ever before.

What makes the In2STEM programme so special?

By improving the accessibility of these high-quality opportunities at the start of students' career journeys, In2STEM helps

participants to achieve their true potential and become the next generation of researchers, innovators and pioneers.

What I think sets us apart is the additional and continued support on offer alongside the In2STEM placements. Completing an In2STEM placement is just the beginning! We know that some industries can be

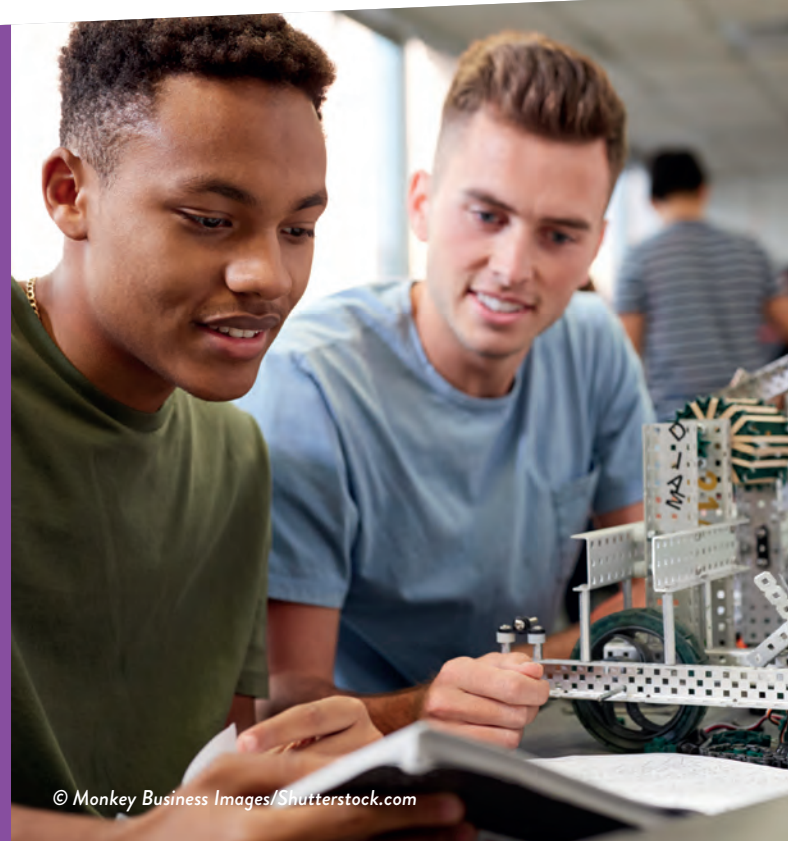
really hard to break into without the right background or connections, so through extensive networks that In2scienceUK has built over the years, we continuously provide opportunities for young people to build skills, gain further experience and meet lots of people from across the industry. ➔



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Following the programme, I am leaning towards a career in chemical engineering. Having the opportunity to speak to engineers from different departments and even from industry has made me realise that there are a lot of options and not one path to achieve it.

Nunem (In2STEM participant)

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What we hear often from students is how much In2STEM has encouraged positive shifts away from limiting belief systems that young people may have had at the start of the programme and improved their confidence and understanding of what their career options are within STEM. By getting hands-on experience and networking with academic and industry

professionals, young people can make more informed decisions about their future, and I'm proud that we can help them achieve this.

As well as gaining experience through their placement and making connections with their host and mentor, In2STEM participants also get the chance to attend online workshops

and careers panels. We want to make sure that students are supported even after they finish the programme, which is where In2careers comes in. This is our online platform which offers a support network and further resources, like exclusive events and job advice.

Who are the volunteer hosts that make this programme possible?

We are so grateful for our fantastic volunteers, who are professionals currently working within the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths in the UK. We're lucky to be able to offer opportunities at a wide range of universities and other organisations across the STEM sector, such as the Francis Crick Institute (crick.ac.uk) and Abcam (abcam.com). If you work in STEM, including PhD students, you can be an In2STEM host, and there are plenty of other ways for volunteers to get involved, like running workshops, participating in careers panels or becoming a mentor: in2scienceuk.org/volunteers-in2stem



What are the criteria for taking part in In2STEM?

To apply for In2STEM, you need to be in Year 12 (or the equivalent) and studying at least one STEM qualification. The programme is specifically designed for students with fewer opportunities and resources available to them. If you are,

for example, eligible for free school meals, if your parents haven't been to university, if you have been in care or have caring responsibilities, or if you receive financial support, then you could be eligible to apply. For full eligibility, see: in2scienceuk.org/our-programmes/in2stem/eligibility

What does the future hold for the In2STEM programme?

We will continue supporting as many young people as we possibly can! Applications for In2STEM 2025 are now open: in2scienceuk.org/our-programmes/in2stem/apply. If you're interested but not in the right school year yet, you can register your interest, and we'll be able to let you know when applications open for future In2STEM programmes.

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Where I am from, you don't get opportunities like this to explore science. I am even more excited to study neuroscience at university now. I am interested in working in research, and I was lucky that my host is a really great person, from a similar background.

Jazmin (In2STEM participant)




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