Bridging the Gender Gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

A vast range of opportunities in the world of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) were brought to life for almost 200 Year 8 and 9 girls from nine local schools at Ahead Partnership’s first large-scale cross-school event in March 2015.

This ‘STEM for Girls’ event took place across a full-school day, giving pupils a chance to engage in a range of activities supported and run by inspirational volunteers from the 20 businesses in attendance. These included: panel Q+A sessions, interactive workshops, careers networking and round-table discussions.

At a time when there are large gender disparities in many STEM roles and the importance of STEM subjects is being recognised in schools on a nationwide, the event aimed to: introduce the girls to some of the many roles that are available through STEM; introduce them to inspirational role models; and discourage gender stereotypes in these fields.

“It was a really enjoyable experience today and an absolute pleasure to speak to so many young, aspirational women” – Amy Parker, A-One+
Results and outcomes:

• Business volunteers were able to dispel gender stereotypes through the range of activities whilst being given the chance to relay to those present the routes into, and exciting things about, careers in STEM that many had not considered.

“A lot of young people, especially females, have the general misconception that they need to be G.I. Joes. This has given us the opportunity to clear most of those theories and also to let them know of the many options that are available to them.”

Airtrooper Maisema, Army Air Corps

• In turn, an overwhelming number of pupils left with an instilled sense that their gender should not factor into decisions regarding school subjects and their future careers. In response to the question ‘What is the best thing that you will take away from today’s experience?’, they said:

“It was interesting to find out about STEM careers. I think the best thing is that I have found out I am not limited.”

“The confidence to take a stand and help change society’s perception of the genders and their specialties”

“I learnt a lot about STEM careers and met inspiring women. I also got an idea of what I’ll do when I’m older!”

• 99% of pupils said the day had encouraged them to work hard in school, whilst 97% felt the activities had improved their confidence and self-belief.

“I enjoyed today because it has helped me more for when I pick my GCSEs and let me know I can do anything I like”

20 businesses attended the day, representing a vast range of STEM-related industries, from veterinary pathology and medical solutions, to gaming and 3-D printing. These were: A-One+, Appris Management, Army Air Corps, ASDA, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Fab Lab Airedale, IC Brands, Incommunities, International Zoo Veterinary Group (IZVG), Kier Construction, Mansfield Pollard, Medical Technologies, Northern Gas Networks, Northern Powergrid, Opta, Siemens, The Test People, Willmott Dixon, Women in Games Jobs, and WYG.

“The ‘gender equality’ message was strong yet subtle – a clear message that if you find something you enjoy and work hard, you can succeed”

Sherean Isherwood, Roundhay School’s Widening Participation Assistant