

educate<sup>north</sup>  
awards

2023 WINNER

# Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Initiative Award

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## Project that asks kids: “Could you be a laser scientist?” wins award

A Northumbria University project helping children find out about the skills and attributes of people who work in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) has been recognised for boosting young interest in STEM careers.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Person of the Week (SPOTW) is a project developed by NUSTEM – a group launched by the University almost 10 years ago to increase diversity of people working in STEM careers. SPOTW aims to reduce stereotypes about science and

scientists by introducing diverse STEM role models to primary school children.

The Educate North Awards celebrate and share best practice and excellence in the education sector in the North. NUSTEM's win in the STEM initiative category reflected recognition from the judges of the success and creativity behind the SPOTW activity.

SPOTW is designed to be suitable for children aged from five to 11-years-old and primary schools are encouraged to run the activity with their whole school. This way, children and teachers can share learning beyond the classroom, into the playground and the staff room.

SPOTW consists of classroom materials including presentations, posters and postcards, which introduce children to individuals like laser scientists, marine biologists, satellite engineers and polar geologists. The materials introduce the personal attributes which help the STEM workers in their jobs – like creativity, being observant, and communication skills – and invite children to reflect on their own attributes and qualities. [Research has shown that](#) through the scheme, children develop a much less stereotyped view of people who work in STEM, and gain a deeper understanding of the skills used in these jobs.

The judges said: “This is a great idea for making STEM relatable. The initiative effectively addresses many of the challenges facing the promotion of STEM subjects to students, while inspiring them to further their knowledge in these areas”.

NUSTEM is based in Northumbria's Think Lab, within the Faculty of Engineering and Environment in the heart of Newcastle City Centre. Think Lab provides a dedicated space which can be used by local schools to offer a taste of university life.

It's also used extensively by physics, maths and engineering students, which means visiting pupils can work alongside university students.

Much of NUSTEM's work is delivered through a network of partner schools across the region, with a focus on providing activities and opportunities to help children recognise options opened by studying science. All of NUSTEM's

partner primary schools have a higher percentage of pupils receiving free school meals than the national average.

Dr Carol Davenport, Director of NUSTEM, said: “Our vision has always been to help create a vibrant and sustainable STEM sector to meet the needs of learners and employers while also reflecting the diversity of wider society. Winning this award is a significant recognition of the value of our intervention and we hope it will prompt more partners to step forward and work with us. We would love to roll out STEM Person of the Week to a wider geographical area.

“The University’s commitment to promoting STEM careers to younger children has been unwavering and our work with partner schools and organisations to inspire young minds has been a remarkable journey. To be recognised for this work is a huge boost to an exceptional team.”

Speaking at the awards, award chairman Emeritus Professor Phil Harris, said “they were a startling reminder of the excellence, innovation and brilliance of so many institutions”.

Discover more about the services NUSTEM offers for schools, families and employers at [nustem.uk](https://nustem.uk)

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UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR 2022 (Times Higher Education Awards)

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--- Please contact [media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk) with any media enquiries or interview requests ---

## Contacts



### **Rik Kendall**

Press Contact  
PR and Media Manager  
Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences  
rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk  
07923 382339



### **Andrea Slowey**

Press Contact  
PR and Media Manager  
Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences  
andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk  
07708 509436



### **James Fox**

Press Contact  
Student Communications Manager  
james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk



### **Kelly Elliott**

Press Contact  
PR and Media Officer  
kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



### **Rachael Barwick**

Press Contact  
PR and Media Manager  
rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk  
07377422415



### **Ruth Lognonne**

Press Contact  
PR and Media Officer  
ruth.lognonne@northumbria.ac.uk  
07971274253



**Gemma Brown**

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

[gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk)