Smashing Stereotypes 2026 Discussion Pack

BRITISH SCIENCE WEEK

#SMASHINGSTEREOTYPES

Celebrating the diverse people and careers in science & engineering

About this discussion pack

This discussion pack is designed to help educators, parents, and others interested in learning about STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) jobs, share the Smashing Stereotypes campaign with young people aged between 14 and 18. It can provide a starting point for discussions about careers and the variety of ways science is incorporated into different career paths.

This deck includes some slides for each person profiled in the 2026 campaign, briefly explaining what they do and a bit about their background.

For each profile, we ask readers to consider how each profile challenges stereotypes. The idea is to get young people thinking like the people featured in the campaign, putting them in their shoes and facing the tasks and challenges they did. We hope you enjoy learning about the wonderful people #SmashingStereotypes, and that you find something inspiring to take into your own day-to-day life!

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What is Smashing Stereotypes?

Smashing Stereotypes is a campaign that challenges your perception on what a scientist looks like or does.

We want to show you that scientists come in all shapes and sizes and do super cool things you might not even connect to science.

We created some fun and exciting interviews and videos with talented individuals who work in science, to share their journeys. We hope their stories will surprise and inspire you.

You'll learn about a UX designer, a sustainable fashion brand founder, a data consultant and more!

Why do we need to address stereotypes in STEM?

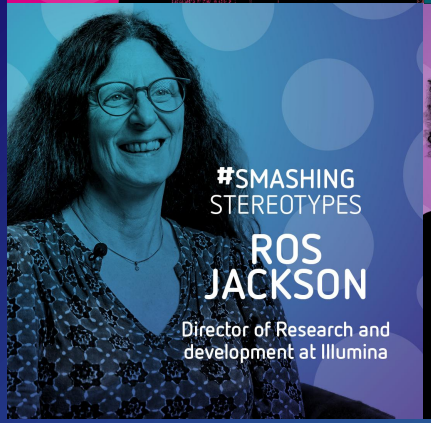
The Smashing Stereotypes campaign is on a mission to shatter perceptions of what it means to work in STEM.

- Working in STEM is so much more than just lab coats and computers — there are so many careers that you may not have even known exist.

- Video games, apps and cosmetics come from the minds of STEM professionals. We want to use their stories to inspire you and show you that science is everywhere!

Scientists aren't all men, middle-aged and dressed in lab coats. Nor do they work on their own.

Introducing our 2026 profiles



Ayesha Mustafa

Ayesha Mustafa is the founder of Everyday Phenomenal, a sustainable fashion brand that proves science and creativity go hand in hand.

She builds clothing using eco-friendly fabrics, biodegradable packaging and responsible supply chains, showing that STEM is part of what we wear every day.

Her interest in sustainable fashion began in childhood. Instead of buying new clothes, her grandmother would redesign old saris and fabrics into new outfits. This early lesson in reuse and design sparked Ayesha's curiosity about how clothes are made and where materials come from.

Ayesha Mustafa

At 16, she interned at Grameen Bank, which supported women in Bangladesh to turn their textile skills into businesses. She saw how economics, innovation and fashion could work together to empower communities.

After working in marketing, she launched her own ethical retail business before founding Everyday Phenomenal. Today, she works with UK factories, produces small batches to avoid waste, and carefully selects certified organic materials.

Ayesha's journey shows that every outfit tells a story of science, design and responsibility.

Watch Ayesha's video

https://youtu.be/VyROBtnojK0

Dedun Oyenuga

Dedun Oyenuga designs digital products like apps and websites, but her real focus is people. She makes sure technology is easy, useful and enjoyable to use.

At school, Dedun loved both science and art. Instead of choosing one path, she combined them. She studied Maths, Physics and Art at A-Level, then completed a degree in Design Engineering at Imperial College London, where she learned coding, robotics and design research.

Dedun Oyenuga

She didn't even know UX design existed when she was 15. That's because many STEM careers don't have obvious names.

Dedun's job involves asking important questions before anything is built: Who is this for? What problem are we solving? What impact could it have?

Watch Dedun's video

https://youtu.be/i1jjOnIQTPw

Anjola Adebowale

Anjola Adebowale helps companies use powerful computers and smart technology to understand lots of information and solve difficult problems in a faster and better way.

But her journey wasn't straightforward. Growing up in Nigeria, she struggled academically and didn't think STEM was for her. She sometimes needed longer to understand concepts and doubted her abilities.

Everything changed when a maths teacher in Norwich recognised her potential. Sitting at the front of the class, she began to build confidence. She discovered she enjoyed problem-solving: how small equations could lead to bigger solutions.

Watch Anjola's video

https://youtu.be/1C0RoJQB_qo

Rugile Sestokaite

Rugile works at Illumina, making sure the machines and software used to study DNA work together properly. Her job helps scientists understand diseases and create tools that can save lives.

Rugile is from Lithuania and moved to the UK for better opportunities in science. She started as a research assistant, studied biochemistry at university, and later learned data analytics while working. Over time, she moved into engineering and became a system integration engineer.

Rugile has spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), which affects her muscles, so she can't run and gets tired standing for a long time. Many people don't realise she's disabled because she can walk.

Rugile Sestokaite

At Illumina, her team has made adjustments to help her work safely, like using lifts and adapted chairs, and they support flexible hours.

Rugile's curiosity started when she was a child – asking lots of questions, reading, watching futuristic films, and doing chemistry experiments at school. She was inspired by her parents, her teachers, and stories of women in science like Marie Curie.

She hopes her story shows young people that STEM is for everyone: women, disabled people and anyone curious about science.

Watch Rugile's video

https://youtu.be/18jlyDxBY7Q

Irene Mbutu-Austin

Irene Mbutu-Austin works in a hospital using powerful imaging machines to help doctors see what's happening inside the body.

When patients need certain scans, they are given a tiny amount of a radioactive liquid called a tracer. Special scanners then detect it and create detailed images. Irene operates this equipment and supports patients through the process. Her job combines physics (how the machines work), biology (how the body works) and caring for people.

She didn't always plan to do this. She first wanted to study medicine, but at university she discovered nuclear medicine and realised it allowed her to mix science with patient care.

Irene Mbutu-Austin

After 25 years in the job, Irene began asking a new question: does being around small amounts of radiation affect technologists over time? When she couldn't find clear answers, she decided to research it herself. Now she studies radiation safety while still working in a hospital.

Growing up in Kenya, she watched her dad fix broken electronics instead of replacing them. That curiosity inspired her.

Her story shows STEM isn't just labs, but also in hospitals and helping people every day.

Watch Irene's video

https://youtu.be/dltj4M3KzSA

Ros Jackson

Ros leads a team that develops new ways to study DNA. Her work helps scientists understand life better and create tools that can help doctors and patients.

Ros loved science as a kid. She was fascinated by how things worked, from chemistry colour changes to dissecting animals in biology class, and solving codes and puzzles. She went to university to study biochemistry and then started research jobs in the lab.

After having her children, Ros took a break from work for eight years to focus on her family. But she wanted to return to science, so she started a PhD in her thirties. She did lab work during school hours and wrote up her results at night.

Ros Jackson

Ros has worked at Illumina for 16 years. She now leads a team that plans experiments and improves the machines and chemicals used to study DNA, making the process faster, more accurate, and more affordable.

Ros wants young people to know you don't have to pick your career when you're a child. You can take different paths, start new things later in life, and combine different interests.

Watch Ros' video

https://youtu.be/ibOwS0xYlYo

Daniel Clarke

Daniel Clark helps lead huge engineering projects. His team designs and builds large industrial plants that help produce nuclear fuel for low-carbon electricity.

But Daniel didn't enjoy school at all. He left after his GCSEs with low grades and didn't get into an apprenticeship the first time he applied. Instead of giving up, he went to college to take some additional access qualifications and tried again.

A year later, he got an engineering apprenticeship.

Daniel Clarke

He discovered he preferred learning by doing: building things, solving practical problems and working with his hands.

While working full-time, he later studied Electrical and Control Engineering at Liverpool John Moores University in the evenings and at the weekend. . It was tough, but he worked hard and graduated with top marks.

Over time, he took every opportunity to learn and move forward. Now he manages teams of engineers working on major international projects.

Daniel's story shows you don't have to be perfect at school to succeed in STEM.

Watch Daniel's video

- https://youtu.be/UcWd5H1GXbE

Mohammed Essa

Mo Essa works in the Business Developing team at Urenco, researching medical isotopes. After finishing university, he joined as an intern and was later offered a permanent role. Medical isotopes are produced using nuclear technology and are used to diagnose and treat diseases like cancer.

At school, Mo wasn't completely sure what he wanted to do. His family work in medicine, but he didn't want to follow the exact same path. He studied chemistry, biology, physics and maths at sixth form, then chose Natural Sciences at university to keep his options open.

Mohammed Essa

After graduating, jobs were hard to find and he worked in a restaurant while applying for roles. Then he saw an opportunity in medical isotopes, a field he hadn't heard about before.

Specialised isotopes are used to create medicines called radiopharmaceuticals. These medicines use tiny amounts of radiation to image and target harmful cells inside the body. Mo's work is rewarding knowing he's making a positive impact in a way that helps people beat cancer.

Mo's journey shows you don't need a perfect plan. Stay curious, try new opportunities and keep an open mind. You might discover a career you never knew existed.

Watch Mo's video

https://youtu.be/dzAHIeRBTBM

Activity: Spot the STEM trailblazer

Dive into the journeys of STEM trailblazers, unleash your research skills, and share their inspiring stories with your fellow classmates.

Your mission is to research someone who's breaking the mould in STEM.

Do your research

Research someone who challenges stereotypes and stands out in the world of STEM.

Create a profile

Put together a presentation that introduces your chosen trailblazer, their background, notable achievements, and how they are challenging stereotypes in the STEM field.

Make it visually engaging, and incorporate images, videos, impactful quotes and more.

Present your discoveries to your class

Get ready to showcase your findings!

Activity: Spot the STEM trailblazer

Here are some prompts to get you started:

Think about your hobbies, as they are likely to involve science! You don't have to pick someone who describes themselves as 'a scientist'.

For example, if you like sport, you could choose a STEM trailblazer who is a sports scientist or innovator of sporting equipment. If you're into music, what technology is important and who invented it?

Look around you for inspiration. Start asking the people in your life about their work and careers. You may find out something interesting and unexpected!

Your future role? If you have an idea about what career you would like to follow, why not use this opportunity to interview someone who does it?

Do you have aspirations to work in fashion? You could look up someone who works in manufacturing or design and speak to them about what they do.

Explore the full campaign at
www.britishscienceweek.org/smashing-stereotypes

#SmashingStereotypes #BSW26

Share your feedback with us at bsw@britishscienceassociation.org

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Celebrating the diverse people and careers in science & engineering