

Driving gender equality in STEM

A key message from the [London STEM Roundtable report](#) was that gender stereotyping remains a pervasive force that creates barriers to girls accessing careers in STEM. This parallel session, chaired by **Jennette Arnold OBE AM**, explored the evidence behind gender inequality and how businesses, third sector organisations and schools can work together to challenge gender stereotyping both inside and out of the classroom. London STEM findings can be found in the [Annual Report STEM summary](#).



Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business) outlined how girls consistently outperform boys in exams - yet 40% more boys took STEM A-level subjects last year. This is why the Mayor has committed £7million towards a [Digital Talent programme](#) aimed at underrepresented groups including young women.

Rajesh is also committed to promoting the [London Ambitions Portal](#) to businesses. The free tool makes it easy for businesses to connect with schools and provide career development opportunities. Its search function can also identify STEM opportunities for girls.

Rajesh outlined the importance of City Hall leading by example. Following the publishing of a gender pay audit, the GLA Equalities Taskforce is now writing an action plan to ensure equal representation at senior levels. The Mayor has also appointed a majority female Business Advisory Board, with women from senior tech sector positions.

Jessica Rowson (Gender Balance Manager Pre-19, Institute of Physics), explored how gender stereotyping is often caused by unconscious biases we all possess. The [Opening Doors report](#) outlines how schools can combat these at all levels, promoting institutional-wide change towards gender equality. A key take-home message was that *“differences between males and females should not be of major concern to educators. There is more variance within groups of boys and within groups of girls.”*



Kuljit Rahelu (Headteacher, Hornsey School for Girls) joined Jessica and Rajesh for the panel session. Kuljit made the case for empowering young girls to feel a sense of belonging when walking into any room. The recent film *Hidden Figures* was given as an example of media that invigorates dialogue about gender stereotyping in STEM. Kuljit explained the need for partnerships between schools and STEM organisations to have depth – not just involving one-off events. She noted that City Hall should continue to create space for discussion that brings educators together to network and exchange ideas.

The approx. 50 school leaders attending then gave feedback on how the Mayor can help drive gender equality in STEM.

Through analysis of comments received, we found overwhelming support for:

- CPD provision on equality to empower teachers to challenge gender stereotypes in classrooms
- Targeted science programmes to raise aspirations in groups underrepresented in STEM
- An Equal Play campaign and event to showcase and encourage gender equality in the toy manufacturer and retailing sectors
- Encouraging diverse STEM professionals to provide careers support to schools