



Proposed strategy 2017 – 2020

Informed by the first 3-year strategy SFI proposes to reposition Smart Futures as the national coordinator of STEM career awareness activities.

The new **purpose** for the programme is proposed as:

Smart Futures – the national collaborative programme providing access to role models and careers information in science, technology, engineering and Maths (STEM) to increase the level of STEM subject and career uptake.

The core difference between the 1st & 2nd strategic plan is that Smart Futures will work with partners that are delivering school visits and step away from a highly administrative function of matching volunteers with schools. This will facilitate greater promotion and awareness raising of the myriad of activities available nationwide.

New Strategy Objectives

This new model will have three core objectives:

1. to provide access to STEM careers information through media and awareness campaigns, the Smart Future website and targeted career events
 2. to provide support to STEM volunteer/school programmes in association with Smart Futures
 3. to monitor, evaluate and disseminate data to inform and target STEM careers promotion activities in association with Smart Futures
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1. To provide access to STEM careers information through media and awareness campaigns, the Smart Future website and targeted career events

SFI manages and supports a significant amount of STEM engagement projects occurring nationwide through partners, collaborators and coordinators including national and regional Science Week and Festivals and the range of projects supported

through the annual SFI Discover Funding Programme. SFI also has access to data from individual organisations such as national policymakers and industry members carrying out research, such as reports from [Accenture](#) and Abbvie. Smart Futures will support bringing all this information together in an accessible platform, the Smart Futures website www.smartfutures.ie. Smart Futures will play a pivotal role in growing awareness of this resource and ensuring partner organisation are referencing the website in any STEM careers awareness activity. Smart Futures is responsible for ensuring the breadth of careers are represented on the website and for providing adequate direction to partner activities.

The media campaigns from the first strategy, which included cinema and TV advertising, were proven successful by the resultant increased traffic to the Smart Futures website. Research carried out over the duration of the Smart Futures strategy by organisations like Accenture and I Wish have demonstrated that there is still a lack of awareness about STEM career resources among parents and teachers. SFI is aware through its own work, and reports such as the American Chamber of Commerce *'Beyond Business: The Social Impact of US Investment in Ireland'*, that there is a multitude of programmes promoting STEM careers. The value of Smart Futures can be realised in ensuring people are aware of these programmes in an accessible way.

Parents have been identified as key influencers of STEM career and subject uptake time and time again in national and international research. Informed by the first three-year strategy it is proposed that Smart Futures concentrates greater efforts on growing awareness of and confidence in the opportunities STEM offers amongst parents. This will be targeted at parents of 8 – 13 year olds with a strong media focus plus running roadshows offering parents facetime with STEM professionals. Training on engaging with parents will continue to be offered to Smart Futures partners and their volunteers.

Smart Futures will continue to leverage partnerships with existing networks (e.g. [SciFest](#)¹, [BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition](#)², [Science Week](#)³, *Connecting Women In Technology*) to reach as wide a diversity of students as possible. Smart Futures will commit to feature partner organisations on the website and to create awareness of the range of the activity available through a broad reaching promotional campaign including a digital media campaign. Smart Futures will focus on growing content on the website to reflect the range and diversity of STEM careers, providing regular new content to ensure the website remains dynamic. Smart Futures will explore developing an app that will enable students to search career content and opportunities. Smart Futures will extend and grow its support for third and fourth level retention through developing a campaign to promote STEM career pathways to this community.

¹ <https://scifest.ie/>

² <http://btyoungscientist.com/>

³ <http://www.science.ie/>

2. To provide support to STEM volunteer/school programmes in association with Smart Futures

As part of this next phase, the Smart Futures programme will not directly coordinate volunteer to school visits but will work with its range of partners to support their delivery of this activity. Over 200 Industry members work with Smart Futures, delivering STEM programmes. Large scale volunteer organisations exist such as Engineers Ireland, Business in the Community, Junior Achievement Ireland, the Ada Lovelace Initiative and Connecting Women in Technology that are working with industry to bring role models into schools. These partners will be asked to work '*in association with Smart Futures*'. To do this Smart Futures will ask partners to commit to a charter which focuses on a consistent approach to training/quality of volunteer interactions and a commitment to sharing data on STEM career awareness activities taking place within the organisation. Partners will be asked to share data with Smart Futures biannually. This data will include what schools are being reached, the class year and gender of the students/participant and the school location.

SFI will continue to offer an opening meeting to new partners on best practice and preparation for volunteers for partner organisations. This is essentially a 'how to' session for potential partners.

Based on the collective data from the partner organisations, and the Dept. of Education and Skills, SFI will coordinate targeted career/volunteer events and media campaigns for areas in the country where current activity levels are low. Smart Futures will be better informed to target these areas. SFI will provide access to STEM careers awareness through roadshow events ensuring face time for teachers and students with STEM role models in these underserved areas. These roadshows will enable a more equitable access for students nationwide to meaningful career insights. This activity will help create awareness of SmartFutures.ie and how to access information to help with informed subject and career decisions.

SFI will also look to support several large-scale STEM career events which are strategically aligned to the Smart Futures objectives. Examples of this currently include [IWish](http://www.iwish.ie/)⁴, [TY Expo](http://www.tyireland.com/ty-expo)⁵, [Higher Options](https://www.irishtimes.com/higher-options)⁶, and the [Irish Guidance Counsellors \(IGC\) regional career events](http://www.igc.ie/)⁷.

3. To monitor, evaluate and disseminate data to inform and target STEM careers promotion activities in association with Smart Futures

As a national programme, Smart Futures needs to collect and analyse data, inviting key partners in the STEM careers promotion area to submit details of their outreach

⁴ <http://www.iwish.ie/>

⁵ <http://www.tyireland.com/ty-expo>

⁶ <https://www.irishtimes.com/higher-options>

⁷ <http://www.igc.ie/>

activities. This will facilitate analysis of national activity and in turn ensures this collective effort delivers fair and equitable access to information nationwide. This information will help inform Government policy and provide a picture to all partners of the part they individually play in the collective national STEM careers awareness effort.

Smart Futures must continue its purpose of driving collaboration across STEM organisations (Academia, Research, industry) and its commitment to enhance the quality of the STEM career awareness activity on offer.

It is proposed that a longitudinal study of the collective impact is commissioned under the 2017 -2020 Smart Futures strategy. This impact study should consider the long-term impact of one-off STEM careers engagements, such as in-class talks or careers event interactions. SFI could work with partner organisations for this study where programmes deliver access to STEM role models, and provide a starting point for students to consider more options, have their stereotypes challenged and enabling them to make more informed decisions about further and higher education routes. The Smart Futures website is the second part of any visit, offering access to a broader number of role model stories, videos and resources. The study can see examine this process inputs on decisions made by young people.

