

Centre of the Cell's Story

Work Experience

the
switch



"We're really keen to help young people get into STEM careers. We know how hard it can be to get that first bit of experience, so we want to offer as many young people as possible the chance to explore the sector through Work Experience." – Anna, Centre of the Cell

Many young people in Tower Hamlets face barriers to accessing certain career paths due to limited opportunities, networks, or exposure. Nationally, disadvantaged students are 44% less likely to aspire to a career in STEM compared to their peers.

Centre of the Cell, a science education centre attached to Queen Mary University of London, is working to tackle that inequality by offering Work Experience to students aged 14-19 all through the academic year, exposing them to the diverse career options in the field.

The Switch has collaborated with Centre of the Cell over the past three years to connect aspiring students with STEM Work Experience opportunities. In 2025, Centre of the Cell hosted two students from Mulberry Stepney Green Maths, Computing and Science College for a one-week placement.

Before their placements, Ayaan and Ibrahim* associated STEM careers with people in lab coats. However, their experience at Centre of the Cell helped them gain a broader understanding of what a career in STEM looks like.

Through exposure to a range of disciplines and interactions with researchers, their view of STEM expanded. They realised that STEM is not a single, linear career path, but a vast and dynamic sector with multiple paths that cater to a wide variety of skills and interests.

"Before Work Experience, I had a vague idea of what a career in STEM looked like, but now I've learnt that there are lots of different fields that you can go into and many different ways to get started in the one you enjoy." – Ibrahim, Mulberry Stepney Green School

These experiences empowered the students to think more strategically about their futures. By gaining a comprehensive view of the sector, they came to understand that STEM offers a broad range of career opportunities, allowing them to make more informed decisions about what comes next.

This placement was a valuable opportunity for Ayaan to explore the field of medicine, a subject he is passionate about studying at university. During the week, he met medical students and learned about various pathways into the profession.

"I wanted to learn more about how I could get into medicine. We had a chance to talk with medical students and that was really helpful for me to understand what next steps I'll need to take." – Ayaan, Mulberry Stepney Green School

Ibrahim had previously visited Centre of the Cell on a school trip and was keen to get a deeper look into the organisation's work. He was particularly interested in understanding what it's like to work in a STEM environment and getting general experience in the sector.

"I wanted to get an insight into the STEM industry and learn more about what a role in the industry could look like for me." – Ibrahim

Centre of the Cell's placements focus on science communication, teaching students how to explain scientific ideas in a clear and engaging way. Students help staff to develop and deliver interactive workshops, write blogs or articles, and create educational games. These activities help build key skills like public speaking, presenting, and creative thinking.

As Centre of the Cell is located within working biomedical research laboratories, students also get a rare opportunity to witness science in action and gain invaluable exposure to the

world of scientific research. This experience helps break down barriers, allowing students to see scientists not as distant figures but as relatable role models. It shows them that a career in science is within reach.

"A lot of young people don't know about the opportunities available to them. Exposing them to all the options and possibilities is really important. Giving them the chance to meet people in the field, whether they're science communicators, scientists, doctors, or medical students, helps them realise that these careers aren't out of reach. It's all very achievable." – Anna

By the end of the week, both students walked away with the knowledge and confidence to picture themselves in STEM careers. Placements like those offered by Centre of the Cell don't just inform, they inspire.

Work Experience in STEM demystifies the world of science, making it feel like a more accessible industry. For many young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, stepping into real workplaces and meeting professionals can be a transformative experience – one that sparks ambition and sets them on a more informed and inspired path towards their future.

Find out more about The Switch's Work Experience programme:

theswitch.org/employers/host-a-work-experience-student/

*Student names have been changed.