



Science for everyone

Breaking down barriers and opening pathways to opportunity

Highlighting the value and impact of the UK's science and discovery centres



Association for
**Science and
Discovery Centres**

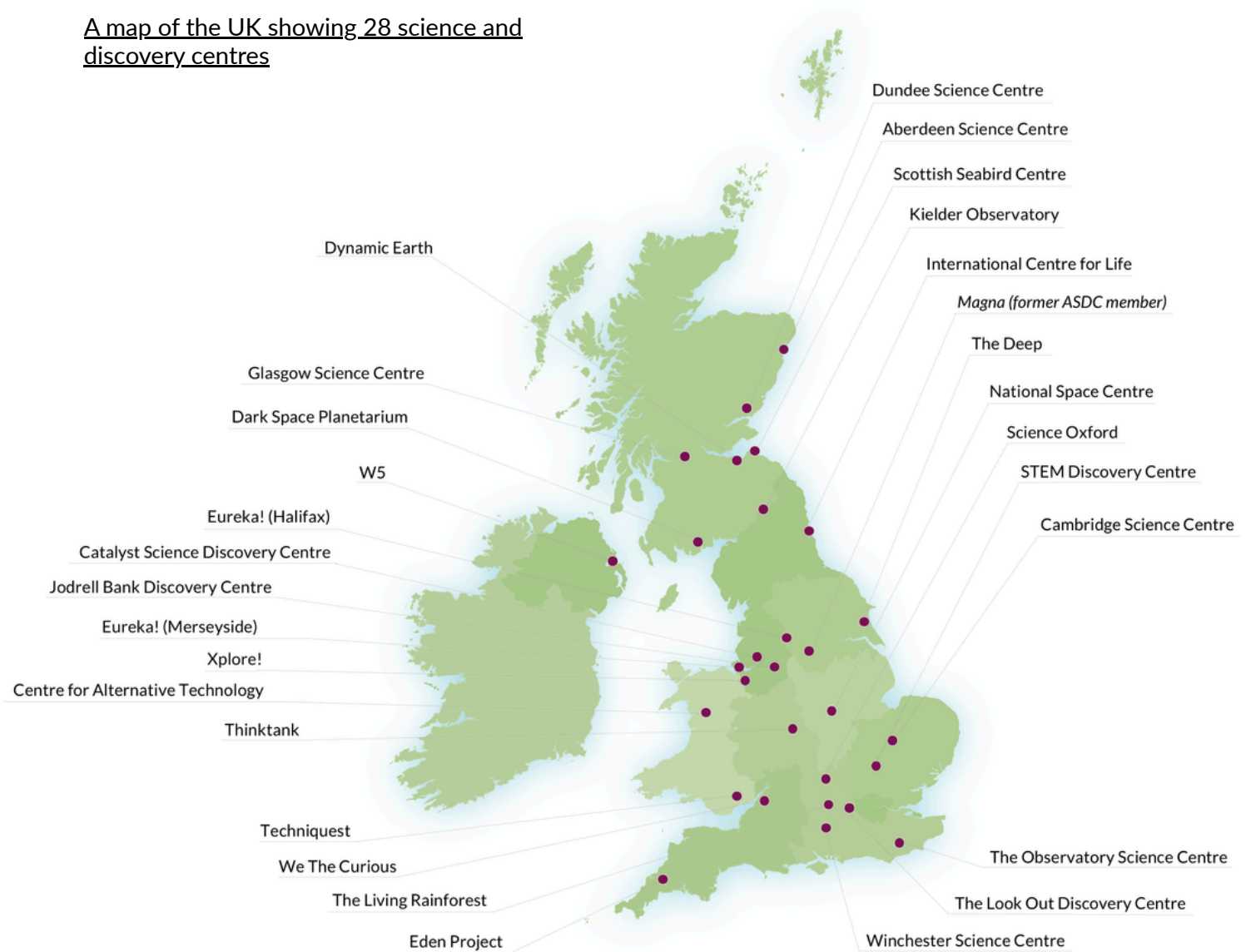
The UK stands at a defining moment. Rapid advances in technology, the urgency of the climate crisis, breakthroughs in energy, biotech, and finance are reshaping every sector of our economy and society. Each of these fields demands a new generation of curious, creative, and engaged citizens. Science and discovery centres are vital to this mission. They broaden access to science, spark ambition in young people, raise aspirations in schools, and showcase the UK's capacity for innovation. More than visitor attractions, they are powerful connectors linking industry with communities, academia with civic life, and global challenges with local action.

Across the world, governments recognise the strategic role of science centres in driving innovation-led economies. The UK is fortunate to have a vibrant network reaching into every region and nation. Resilient and imaginative, these centres are anchor institutions in their communities, convening people, ideas and opportunities.

Yet, to deliver their full potential, science centres must be strengthened through sustained investment in infrastructure, dynamic exhibitions and transformative programmes. They are not just assets of cultural value; they are engines of engagement, equity and innovation. With the right support they will help shape the society and economy of the future.



A map of the UK showing 28 science and discovery centres



The Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) represents over 60 STEM engagement organisations around the UK. For the focus of this report we refer to the science and discovery centres shown on this map.

OVER 25 YEARS

Science and discovery centres have played a strategic role in the nation's engagement with science for over 25 years, breaking down barriers to STEM participation and showing the value of science to society.

110 MILLION PEOPLE

Since 2000, this network of organisations has inspired and engaged over 110 million young people and adults, making a positive contribution to the UK's understanding of STEM topics.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Visitors develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, supporting them to make healthier, more sustainable and informed choices, and inspire future generations to pursue STEM careers.

The Government has set its sights on 'forging a better Britain through science and technology'. Its ambitions, built on research, innovation and tech diplomacy are clear: to harness the power of British science and technology to tackle global challenges, from clean energy to healthcare, while positioning the UK as a world leader in innovation.

But these ambitions cannot be delivered by universities and industry alone. They depend on a society that understands, accepts and actively shapes new ideas. They depend on a pipeline of curious, creative and science-engaged people across every corner of the UK - people ready to fuel discovery, drive innovation and share in the economic benefits.

Science centres play a critical role in building that pipeline. They are living proof that the UK values science, technology and innovation. They connect people to the discoveries and ideas shaping our world. They enrich education, inspire young people and broaden opportunities. They bring communities into the conversation, empowering them to engage with the choices that will define our shared future.



Supporting the delivery of our national priorities

Science and discovery centres are located in towns, cities and rural areas outside London including Glasgow, Cardiff, Bristol, Belfast, Newcastle, Leicester, Wrexham, St. Austell, Aberdeen, Halifax and Hull. These centres have become trusted anchor institutions in their local communities, recognised as local hubs of STEM expertise working closely with local schools, academic, business and industry partners to engage all ages with science and technology.

This model helps to break down barriers and empower communities and individuals to understand and engage with big national challenges including clean energy transition, environmental goals and the net zero transition, the tech revolution, the fundamental impact of AI and our ageing society.



In addition to being hubs for science engagement, 1/3 of all science and discovery centres run active research projects on site.

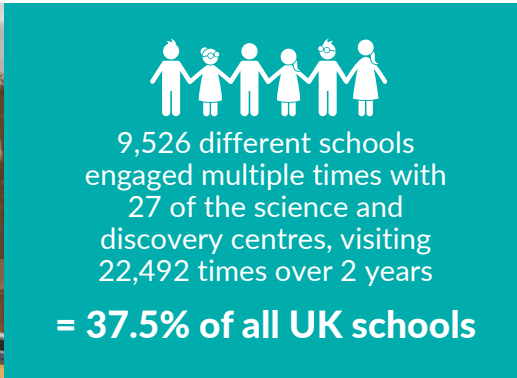
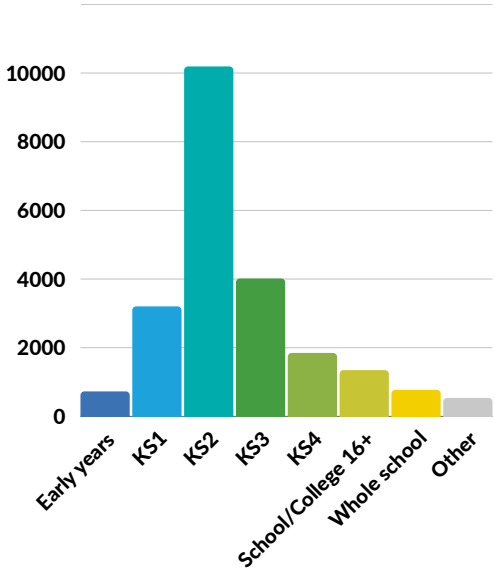
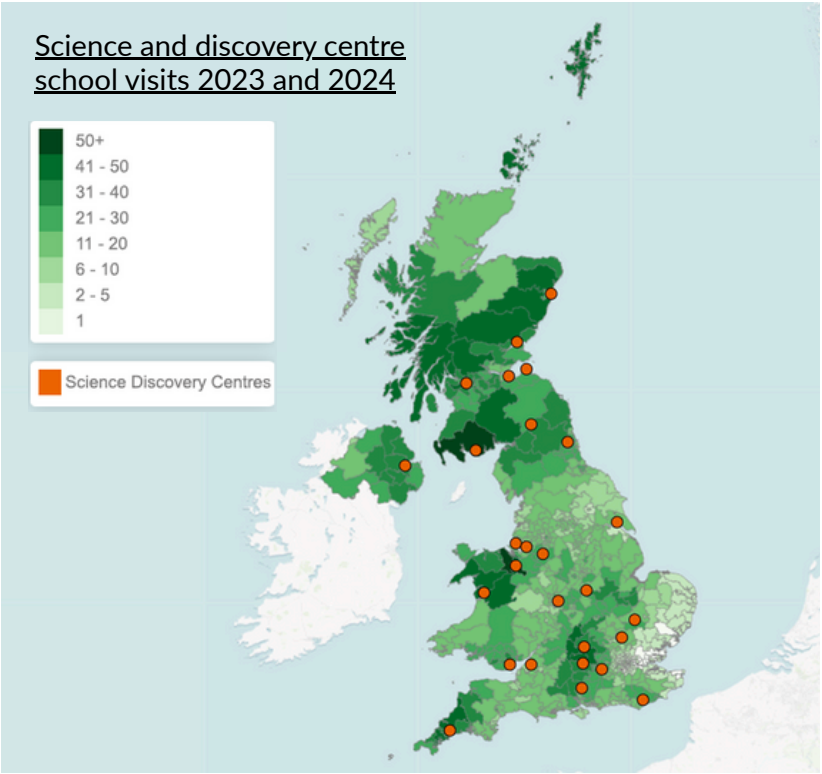
Science and discovery centres are also a core part of the scientific, educational and cultural infrastructure of this country. Their work helps the UK meet its obligations under article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to ensure cultural access to science.



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Key partners in science education across the UK

The network of science and discovery centres are an embedded part of the educational ecosystem. Over the last two years, the science and discovery centres mapped below have worked with >37% of all UK schools, supporting curriculum science concepts, science inquiry and STEM skills, for pupils and teachers across 96% (624 out of 650) of all Parliamentary constituencies across the UK.



Making science accessible to all

Equitable and inclusive STEM education and engagement is not a 'nice to have' but an economic and societal imperative, fundamental if we are ever to achieve greater diversity in STEM. In this way, the Informal STEM Learning sector plays its role in achieving a fairer, STEM-positive future society where everyone can thrive, a STEM-sector that is both innovative and prosperous and where STEM solutions benefit everyone



All centres provide discounted tickets to support access and participation, with more than 450,000 people visiting centres completely free of charge every year*.

**Data taken from ASDC sector survey reports (collected Spring 2024 & 2025)*



Giving power to communities

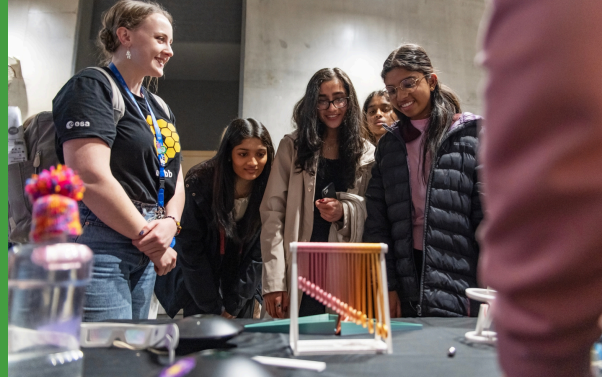
Science centres are uniquely placed to contribute to the UK's mission of national renewal: driving growth, supporting the NHS of the future, making streets safer, opening opportunity, and establishing Britain as a clean energy superpower.

Every one of these priorities rests on science, technology, innovation, and creativity. But the ecosystem cannot thrive without a society that understands and values the ideas shaping our world. If we want a generation of bright, ambitious, science-engaged citizens, we must invest in the spaces that connect people to these ideas.

Science centres embody community power in action. They open up science to everyone by breaking down barriers, building confidence, and giving people the tools to take part in national and global debates. They move engagement from the top-down to the grassroots, supporting communities to shape their own futures.

This is prevention, not reaction. By nurturing curiosity, skills, and problem-solving mindsets, science centres help individuals and communities address the challenges of climate change, economic transition and the rapid pace of our current technological revolution. They don't just inspire the next generation of innovators, they empower society itself to be part of the solution.

In 2024, these science and discovery centres alone engaged and involved over 5.2 million school children, families and communities with interactive, practical and relevant science and technology, with 55% of all visitors identifying as women and girls.



“Across political parties we recognise the importance of the public’s relationship with science in the UK, not just as the cornerstone of our economy, but to successfully navigate topics like climate change, artificial intelligence, and pandemics. Places such as We The Curious are now more important than ever as trusted, objective, and accessible places where science and society meet.”

Carla Denyer, MP for Bristol Central

“Greater support for organisations and educators in the informal science learning sector is urgent and necessary if we are going to change the field to realise more equitable youth outcomes.”

Professor Louise Archer, Chair of Sociology of Education, University College London

“Hands-on science centres are an important resource underpinning lifelong learning. Learning by doing - learning through personal discovery - is so powerful. These centres are highly valued by schools, providing a tangible way to engage with science and technology. They are highly valued by universities - partnering with these centres for public engagement with research. They are highly valued by the thousands of families who attend them, learning about scientific theory in practice, but also about technological and ethical challenges facing us as a society. They are an important part of our culture in the UK, and need supporting as such.”

Alice Roberts, Anatomist & anthropologist, author & broadcaster, Professor of Public Engagement in Science, University of Birmingham

This impact report has been produced by ASDC using data from the sources listed below:

[ASPIRES 3 Young People’s STEM Trajectories, Age 10-12](#) (Archer et al., 2023)

[From STEM learning ecosystems to STEM learning markets: critically conceptualising relationships between formal and informal STEM learning provision](#) (Archer et al., 2025)

[Prioritising community over content: value shifts in science centres](#) (DeWitt, J. and Leverment, S., 2024)

[Learning Lab](#) (Glasgow Science Centre)

[Mindsets + Missions Insights Report for the Cultural Sector](#) (ASDC, the Museums Association, the Liminal Space, July 2025)

[Science and Discovery Centres school postcode heatmap](#) (ASDC, 2023 & 2024)

[Thinking, Doing, Talking Science](#) (Science Oxford, The Oxford Trust) (Educational Endowment Foundation. July 2025)

[Science Education Tracker](#) (The Royal Society & Engineering UK, 2023)

[Science & Discovery Centre Futures: Missions and Opportunities](#), (The Liminal Space, 2021)

