



I WISH

2026 REVIEW



**NO GIRL
GETS LEFT
BEHIND**

I Wish started as a showcase event – and has become a movement. Our annual survey reports emphasise the need for earlier, structured and inclusive intervention throughout primary- and second-level education to ensure female students see STEM as both an accessible and viable career path.

This year's report highlights several important findings. Most notably, 66% of girls identified gender inequality in STEM as the most significant barrier to pursuing a STEM pathway. This was followed by 66% reporting a lack of information about STEM careers, while 61% said they had limited opportunities to engage with female STEM role models through school visits. Disparities in subject availability, particularly for hands-on STEM subjects in single-sex schools, remain a persistent concern.

These findings matter now more than ever as AI and emerging technologies reshape the world. Girls are already thinking about how it will affect their future careers and opportunities and we can see the gender gap in AI is already stark: women hold just 26% of AI-related jobs globally, with representation falling to 15% in AI leadership (Digital Silk). Women are 25% less likely than men to have basic digital skills (UNESCO, 2024). These figures underline the importance of ensuring girls are not simply prepared to use AI, but see themselves as the people who will design, develop, lead and shape these technologies and ensure that these powerful technologies are inclusive for all.

The importance of early intervention is clear. 93% of primary school students believe STEM is for everyone, but by age 16 or 17, girls face major hurdles—like low confidence, a lack of role models, and persistent inequality. This highlights the importance of sustained intervention throughout their education, rather than waiting until barriers have already emerged.

At I Wish our mission has always been not only to increase female participation in STEM, but to ensure girls have a voice in shaping these industries. At I Wish, we're not just increasing female participation in STEM – we're empowering girls to shape its future. As AI develops, it is more important than ever to build girls' confidence, digital skills, and sense of belonging.

Over the past 12 years, I Wish has empowered 69,384 girls to reimagine their place in STEM. Our annual survey gives us the opportunity to hear directly from them about how their views are evolving. This report showcases their voices and highlights the action needed to ensure girls and women have an equal opportunity to shape the future of STEM. When women are excluded from STEM, organisations lose skills, economies lose productivity, and society loses diverse voices in shaping the AI that increasingly governs our lives.

I Wish Team

12 YEARS OF IMPACT: THE I WISH LEGACY



Engaged with **69,384** Secondary School Students

25,025 Girls have shared their Voices through our Surveys

144 Industry Partners

25% DEIS Schools

1,225 Volunteers

1,059 Role Models

927 Primary School Students

"When I attended I Wish, little did I know that this showcase would spark my future on such a fundamental level. It showed me the amazing opportunities that awaited my future as a woman in STEM." I Wish Alumna

Our programmes include:

- Annual I Wish Festival.
- I Wish Deloitte Mentorship Programme.
- I Wish Primary Programme powered by Logitech.
- I Wish Campus programmes in partnership with Higher Education institutes.
- Transport Partnerships with Iarnród Éireann and Translink.



"Science is the most incredible thing I have ever witnessed. It is the closest to magic we will ever come to. We just need the courage to look farther than what we already have, so thank you, for inspiring us to be those people." 6th Class Student



STARTING EARLY: BUILDING STEM ASPIRATIONS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Our findings through the I Wish Primary Programme powered by Logitech highlights that students overwhelmingly believe that STEM subjects are suited to everyone regardless of gender identity (93%). Furthermore, the majority of students said they either liked or loved the I Wish activities in school (78%), enjoy hands on activities (73%), feel calm when it is time to do maths (63%) and feel confident when trying maths problems (69%). While only 33% of students said that more hands-on experiments and practical activities would make learning Maths more engaging and beneficial, it is promising that only a minority (34%) worry about getting maths answers wrong. Overall, students demonstrated overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards STEM, with just 9% finding some aspect boring or unenjoyable.

These positive attitudes are especially significant when considering that, according to UNESCO (2024), girls who are encouraged to explore science, technology, engineering, and maths early in life are more likely to see themselves as future scientists, engineers, and innovators. Since many children form career and subject preferences before age 10 (Archer et al., 2020), providing early support in STEM is paramount, particularly for young girls.

Encouragingly, these findings suggest that students are moving beyond traditional gender stereotypes and increasingly view STEM as a space where everyone can learn, succeed, and thrive.



SHAPING STEM ASPIRATIONS & CAREER IDENTITY

In contrast with the positive outlook to STEM expressed by primary school girls, at the age of 16/17, 66% of the girls that were surveyed at the I Wish festival identified poor gender equality as a leading barrier, 66% lacking information about careers in STEM and 61% lack school visits by female role models in STEM . Furthermore girls in single sex schools were more likely to report this concern than those in mixed sex settings. However instead our education system selects boys over girls where only 71% of single sex girls schools are offered a STEM subject other than Maths or Science versus 96% of single sex boys schools (Department of Education, 2025).

Although it is estimated that only 1-in-4 STEM employees in Ireland are women (Global Gender Gap Report, 2025), the ratio of STEM graduates is 2:1 (CSO, 2024). This disparity suggests that many qualified women are choosing not to pursue STEM careers, even when they have the necessary qualifications and opportunities.

The persistence of poor gender equality as the leading perceived barrier underscores the urgent need for interventions that foster both STEM aspirations and a sense of belonging among young girls. Unless these perceptions are challenged, concerns about inequality may continue to discourage talented young women from pursuing STEM careers, contributing to the ongoing gap between STEM graduates and the STEM workforce.

CAREER IDENTITY

	It is a barrier	Not a barrier	Unsure
Poor gender equality in STEM careers	66%	16%	18%
Lack of information about careers in STEM	66%	16%	18%
Lack of school visits by female role models in STEM	61%	21%	18%
Lack of self-confidence in my ability in STEM subjects	60%	24%	16%
Lack of information about STEM college courses	57%	24%	19%
Lack of access to STEM work experience programmes	57%	21%	22%
Lack of self-confidence in my ability to pursue a career in STEM	56%	29%	15%
Lack of access to female role models in STEM	48%	22%	30%
Limited STEM subject choices in my school	44%	40%	16%



"I'm the only girl in my Construction Studies class, and sometimes I feel like I don't really fit in... I'm still not sure where Construction Studies could take me in the future. At first, I wondered, 'Is this just going to mean cutting timber?' But the more I learn, the more I realise there are so many different opportunities in construction. I just wish I could see more women doing these jobs, so I could see where I might fit in too."
Transition Year Student



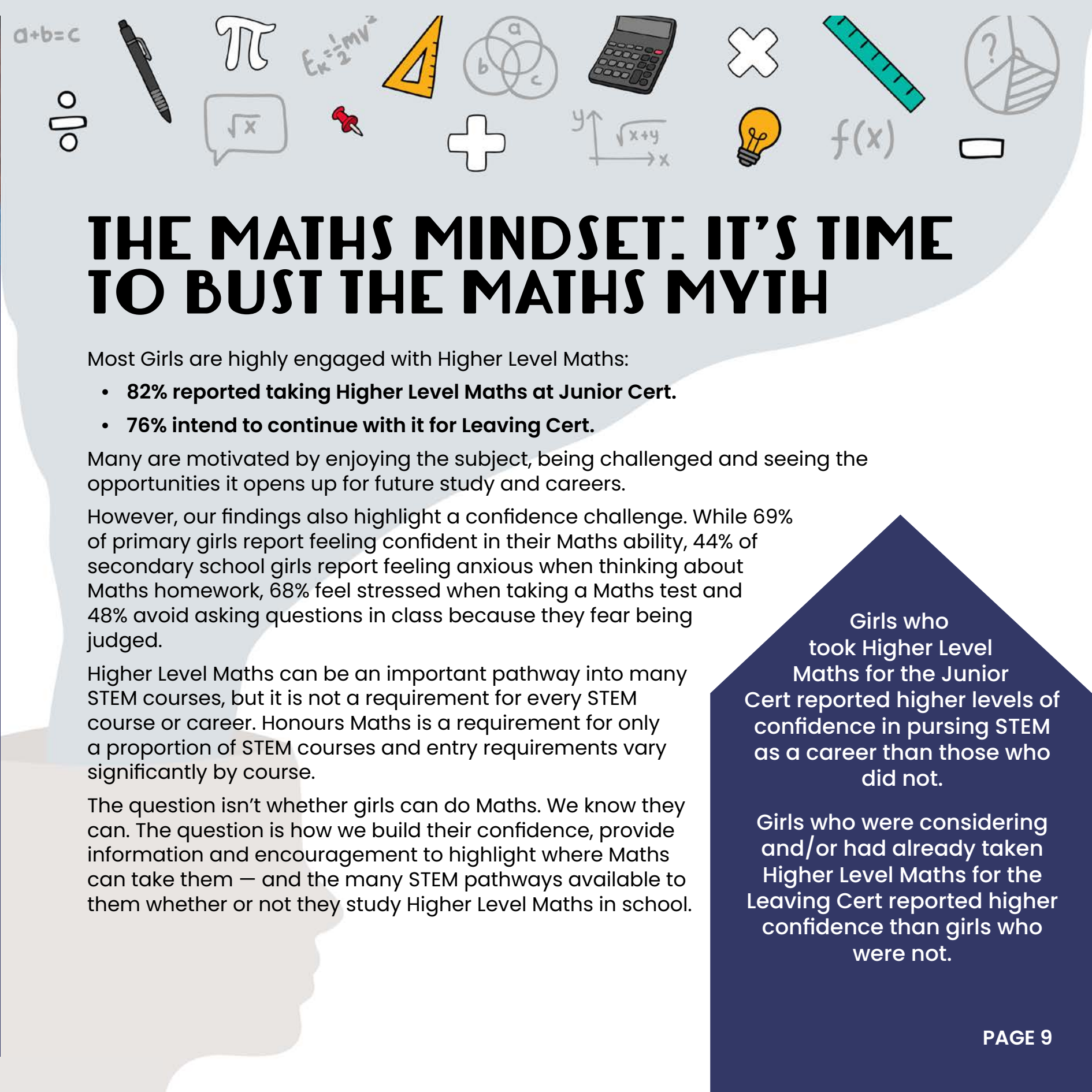
ACCESS, EQUITY & OPPORTUNITY IN STEM

Our findings show that girls from DEIS schools are significantly more likely to identify poor gender equality in STEM careers as a barrier to entry. Positively, however, there was no significant difference between girls in DEIS and non-DEIS schools in their interest in pursuing a STEM career or their confidence in their ability to do so. This suggests that, within our sample, the challenge is not a lack of aspiration or self-belief, but the barriers girls perceive within STEM pathways and careers.

This is an important distinction. While our findings do not indicate a significant difference in STEM aspiration or confidence by DEIS status, inequalities in access to STEM subjects and opportunities remain a concern. Students’ ability to explore STEM can be shaped by the subjects available in their school, opportunities for hands-on engagement, exposure to role models and the quality of career guidance they receive.

Wider research, including the Higher Education Authority’s work on widening participation, similarly highlights the importance of addressing structural barriers to participation in higher education and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Higher Education Authority 2022).

Together, these findings suggest that efforts to widen participation should not focus solely on increasing girls’ interest in STEM. They should also ensure that girls who already have an interest and confidence in STEM can access the subjects, experiences, information and pathways that allow them to pursue that interest. This means addressing inequalities in subject provision and exposure, while ensuring that career guidance and STEM initiatives reach girls across different school contexts.



THE MATHS MINDSET: IT’S TIME TO BUST THE MATHS MYTH

Most Girls are highly engaged with Higher Level Maths:

- **82% reported taking Higher Level Maths at Junior Cert.**
- **76% intend to continue with it for Leaving Cert.**

Many are motivated by enjoying the subject, being challenged and seeing the opportunities it opens up for future study and careers.

However, our findings also highlight a confidence challenge. While 69% of primary girls report feeling confident in their Maths ability, 44% of secondary school girls report feeling anxious when thinking about Maths homework, 68% feel stressed when taking a Maths test and 48% avoid asking questions in class because they fear being judged.

Higher Level Maths can be an important pathway into many STEM courses, but it is not a requirement for every STEM course or career. Honours Maths is a requirement for only a proportion of STEM courses and entry requirements vary significantly by course.

The question isn’t whether girls can do Maths. We know they can. The question is how we build their confidence, provide information and encouragement to highlight where Maths can take them – and the many STEM pathways available to them whether or not they study Higher Level Maths in school.

Girls who took Higher Level Maths for the Junior Cert reported higher levels of confidence in pursuing STEM as a career than those who did not.

Girls who were considering and/or had already taken Higher Level Maths for the Leaving Cert reported higher confidence than girls who were not.

CHOOSING THE FUTURE: SUBJECT CHOICE & DECISION-MAKING

We asked Girls whether their school offered the following subjects at Leaving Cert level:

Subject	Mixed-sex	Single-sex	Difference
Agricultural Science	72%	72%	0% ▬
Applied Maths	72%	76%	+4% ▲
Art	97%	96%	-1% ▼
Biology	98%	98%	0% ▬
Chemistry	96%	98%	+2% ▲
Construction Studies	81%	6%	-75% ▼
Design and Communication Graphics (DCG)	85%	37%	-48% ▼
Engineering	70%	8%	-62% ▼
Physics	89%	93%	+4% ▲
Physics with Chemistry	35%	25%	-10% ▼
Technology	64%	23%	-41% ▼
Computer Science	60%	27%	-33% ▼

"I feel like maybe it would be hard, or it just doesn't interest me, maybe due to lack of information about STEM or I just don't see myself doing it." Student

The data shows that although subjects like Biology and Chemistry are widely available, hands-on STEM classes like **Construction Studies, Engineering, and Design and Communication Graphics (DCG)** are much less available in single-sex schools.

The Department of Education's Indicator Report shows a similar pattern with only 71% of single-sex girl schools offering a STEM subject other than Maths or Science as opposed to 96% of single-sex boy schools and 94% of mixed-sex schools.

Concerningly, the gender gap becomes much more pronounced when Maths and Biology are excluded from STEM choices. Only 43% of girls take at least one subject other than Maths or Biology compared with 70% of boys (Department of Education, 2025). This suggests that girls' underrepresentation in STEM is not due to a lack of participation in Maths or Biology, but instead stems from a lower uptake of other STEM subjects.

This pattern is reflected in research across Europe, where women remain significantly underrepresented in certain STEM disciplines. While women are approaching gender parity in some Scientific fields (such as Immunology, Pharmacology, and Medicine), they accounted for just 21% in Maths, 19% in Computing, 18% in Physics, and 16% in Engineering (Kwiek & Szymula, 2026).

This highlights the importance of continuing STEM outreach in both traditional and currently male dominated fields such as AI.





KEEPING THE MOMENTUM: FROM SECOND LEVEL TO HIGHER EDUCATION

We've come a long way! There has been a steady increase in the percentage female new entrants into STEM undergrad programmes (HEA, 2025) from 31% (2018) to 36% (2025).

	2018	2025
Natural Sciences, Maths & Stats	50%	56%
Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction	21%	26%
ICTs	21%	26%

Although progress is positive it remains slow particularly in the ICT and Engineering sectors. A point that is echoed in the secondary level data on subject availability in single-sex versus mixed-sex schools. Together with our findings from the primary programme this suggests that structural barriers from early teens continue to shape participation pathways. This underscores the importance of targeted outreach and early engagement initiatives to increase irls' exposure to and interest in underrepresented STEM fields.



*"Every girl should have the opportunity
to see herself in STEM, access the
pathways that can get her there, and
choose her future without barriers."
Sharon Lombard I Wish*

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:

CONFIDENCE, BELONGING & STUDENT EXPERIENCE

In terms of sports and hobbies the majority of girls reported playing a **Sport (67%)** and feeling more confident because of a **hobby or activity (86%)**. Furthermore, girls playing sports reported higher confidence in all of the following domains:

- **General life outside school.**
- **School life.**
- **Speaking up in class.**
- **In STEM subjects.**

Additionally, girls who played sports were significantly more likely to report taking higher level Maths. These findings are supported by emerging research which argues that sport participation may support girls' engagement with STEM by fostering self-efficacy, resilience, leadership skills, and a sense of belonging (Calkins et al., 2023).

As such, sports and hobbies may represent valuable avenues for fostering the confidence, resilience, and sense of belonging that underpin girls' participation and success in STEM.



WHAT MATTERS MOST: CAREER VALUES & MOTIVATION

Over the last 3 years the top 5 most important career values have stayed consistent:

	2014	2024	2025	2026
1	An interesting Career	Having a good salary	Having a good salary	Having a good salary
2	Being good at it	Work-life balance	Work-life balance	Work-life balance
3	Excellent job opportunities	Being good at it	Being good at it	Being good at it
4	Contributing to the world/helping others	Opportunity to travel	Job security	Opportunity to travel
5	Work-life balance	Job security	Opportunities to work abroad	Job Security

A consistent trend in recent years is the **growing importance students place on salary and work life balance.**

We asked students what they feel a career in STEM might offer them they said the following:

- **A chance to make new discoveries.**
- **A chance to put new discoveries into practice.**
- **A chance to work collaboratively.**
- **Opportunities to work in Ireland.**
- **Opportunities to work abroad.**

Programmes like I Wish make an impact by helping girls to envision themselves in STEM pathways that might otherwise feel inaccessible.

“The future isn’t waiting for girls to catch up. It’s waiting for us to remove the barriers that hold them back.”
Caroline O’ Driscoll, I Wish Co-Founder

Together these findings suggest that young girls are drawn to STEM not as an abstract academic pursuit but as an impactful and practical career space. STEM is understood to offer opportunities to work across both local and global contexts, while enabling individuals to apply new discoveries to real-world challenges.

Interestingly when asked if they had ever changed their mind about their career **82% of students said yes** and when asked why they reported the following as the most important factors:

- **Changing interests.**
- **Work experience.**
- **Talking with parents.**
- **Potential salary.**
- **Education required.**

This showcases the flexibility of young people’s career plans and opinions highlighting the importance of outreach activities to ensure that young girls see STEM pathways as accessible and attractive career pursuit.

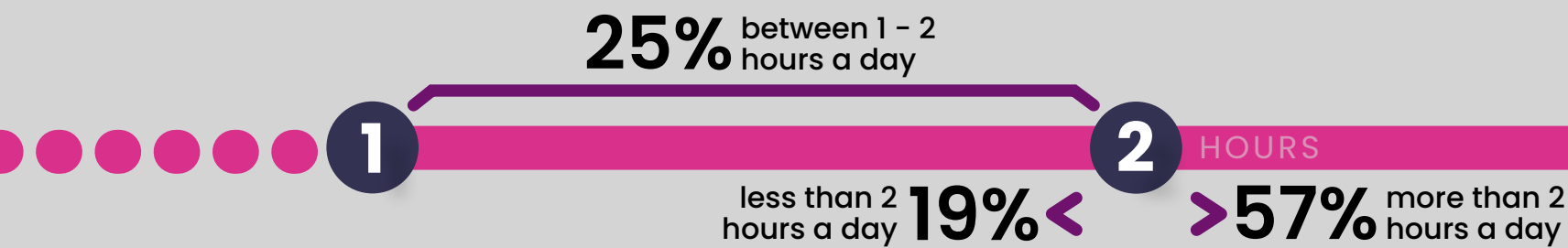




GROWING UP ONLINE: SOCIAL MEDIA, WELLBEING & BELONGING

Social Media remains a constant force in students' lives.

Students' reported Social Media usage:

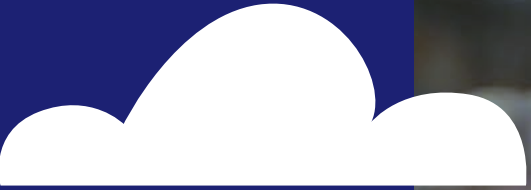


Rather than focusing solely on the negative influences of Social Media, there is an opportunity to understand how it can be used as a positive force. Sport provides a powerful example. Young athletes have increasingly used Social Media to build communities, share their journeys, connect with role models and inspire the next generation. There is an opportunity to learn from this approach and consider how the same platforms could be used to make STEM more visible, relatable and aspirational for girls.

Research shows that well-designed Social Media content can spotlight inspiring STEM role models, challenge stereotypes and motivate young girls (Steinke et al., 2024). The opportunity is not simply to put more STEM content online, but to create content that girls want to engage with — authentic, relatable, diverse and connected to the people and possibilities they can see themselves in.

If sport can use social media to make our younger generation aspire to be athletes, STEM can use it to help girls see themselves as scientists, engineers, construction workers, mathematicians and technologists.





THE ROAD AHEAD: CLOSING THE STEM GENDER GAP

Primary Level

To encourage girls' participation in STEM from an early age:

- Build confidence and belonging through engaging, hands-on STEM experiences and by challenging gender stereotypes.
- Increase exposure to female STEM role models through early initiatives such as the I Wish Primary Programme Powered by Logitech.
- Introduce AI and emerging technologies appropriately to help girls see themselves as future creators, designers and leaders, not just users of technology.

Second Level

As girls' confidence in their STEM ability declines at second level:

- Maintain confidence and interest through inclusive STEM experiences, mentorship, meaningful career exposure and visible female role models.
- Strengthen career guidance by providing clear information on STEM subjects, qualifications and pathways, and challenging misconceptions about who STEM is for.
- Highlight the breadth of STEM pathways, including routes that do not require Higher Level Maths.
- Build AI literacy and awareness by showing how AI can augment human skills, create opportunities and transform careers, while encouraging girls to see themselves as future users, developers and leaders of these technologies.

Society and Culture

Creating a more inclusive STEM culture means:

- Challenge stereotypes about who belongs in STEM and increasing the visibility of diverse female role models.
- Showcase positive examples of women in AI and technology so that girls see emerging technologies as accessible opportunities.
- Support a broad range of interests and experiences, including sport and extracurricular activities that build confidence, teamwork, leadership and resilience.
- Engage girls through influential settings, with schools, industry, sports organisations and social media platforms all playing a role in making STEM relevant to their lives.

Policy

Policymakers, educators and industry should:

- Improve access to STEM subjects across all schools, particularly hands-on subjects such as Construction Studies, Engineering and Design and Communication Graphics (DCG).
- Strengthen career guidance by highlighting the breadth of STEM pathways, including university, further education and apprenticeships.
- Provide equitable access to AI literacy and future-focused career education, helping girls understand both the opportunities and disruption AI may bring.
- Sustain investment in early intervention, gender equity, role models and inclusive engagement to support girls' progression into STEM participation and leadership.

REFERENCES

Archer, L., Moote, J., MacLeod, E., Francis, B., & DeWitt, J. (2020). ASPIRES 2: Young people’s science and career aspirations, age 10–19. UCL Institute of Education. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/departments/education-practice-and-society/aspires-2>

Calkins, C. A., Jakobi, J. M., Cherkowski, S. L., & Trevor-Smith, H. (2023). Positive aspects of sport for fostering strong STEM identities. *Frontiers in Education*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1217091>

Central Statistics Office. (2024, February 23). Society Measuring Ireland’s Progress 2022. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-mip/measuringirelandsprogress2022/society/>

Department of Education, & Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. (2025). Education indicators for Ireland 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/>

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. (2022). National access plan: A strategic action plan for equity of access, participation and success in higher education 2022–2028. Government of Ireland.

Digital Silk. Digital Trends & Expert Advice | Digital Silk. <https://www.digitalsilk.com/digital-trends/>

Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. (2023). Report on the future of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Houses of the Oireachtas. 2023-07-13_report-on-the-future-of-science-technology-education-and-maths-stem-in-irish-education_en.pdf

Khalaf, A. M., Alubied, A. A., Khalaf, A. M., & Rifaey, A. A. (2023). The Impact of Social Media on the Mental Health of Adolescents and Young Adults: A Systematic Review. *Cureus*, 15(8), e42990. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.42990>

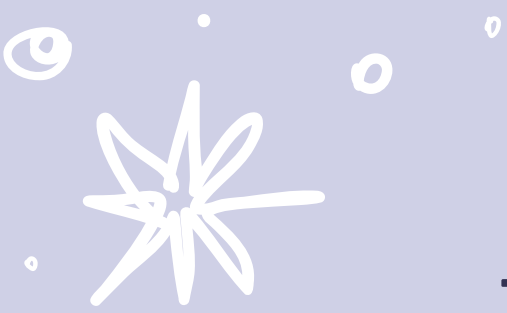
Kwiek, M., & Szymula, L. (2026). Women in science: Measuring participation in Europe across disciplines, generations and over time. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 13(1), 759. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-026-06912-x>

Steinke, J., Gilbert, C., Coletti, A., Levin, S. H., Suk, J., & Oeldorf-Hirsch, A. (2024). Women in STEM on TikTok: Advancing Visibility and Voice Through STEM Identity Expression. *Social Media + Society*, 10(3), 20563051241274675. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241274675>

UNESCO. (2024). UNESCO call to action: Closing the gender gap in science.

World Economic Forum. (2025). Global gender gap report 2025. World Economic Forum

Zander, L., Höhne, E., Harms, S., Pfof, M., & Hornsey, M. J. (2020). When Grades Are High but Self-Efficacy Is Low: Unpacking the Confidence Gap Between Girls and Boys in Mathematics. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(552355). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.552355>



THANK YOU



The team at I Wish would like to thank all of the schools, teachers, industry partners, I Wish alumnae and, most importantly, the girls who took the time to participate in our survey.

Your feedback, enthusiasm and engagement are incredibly valuable to us. Your insights help us understand the impact of the programme and ensure that we continue to create meaningful STEM experiences that inspire curiosity, confidence and ambition in young students.

We would like to offer special thanks to Jen O’Shea , PhD Research, School of Applied Psychology, Department of Anatomy and Neuroscience, UCC and Ella Doran, PHD Researcher, School of Applied Psychology, UCC for their invaluable expertise and support with the data analysis.

Thank you for helping us Dream, Dare and Do.

The I Wish Team

#DreamDareDo

www.iwish.ie

Designed by Kim McCullough, Minti Studios

“Every statistic in this report represents a girl making decisions about her future. Our job is to ensure those decisions are shaped by possibility, not limitation.”
Gillian Keating, I Wish Co-founder



*"We have the opportunity
to create the future and
decide what that's like."
Mae Jemison*

I WISH