

[Kanchana Gamage, The Aviatrix Project - My Aviation Career Journey](#)



I'm Kanchana Gamage and I hope to share a little of my aviation journey with you from my early years I was really passionate about stem careers growing up in Sri Lanka, below the approach to Colombo Airport. I dreamt about flying over vast oceans and when I moved to England in my teenage years, I still held the ambition to become a pilot.

A lack of knowledge about opportunities and certainly a lack of finances meant that this dream never materialised, well not then!

Anyway, after much thought I decided to pursue a career in education and became a teacher, then a Headteacher and most recently a Lecturer.

My passion for aviation remained throughout my life and in my early 30s I was able to gain my Private Pilot Licence, but I've been really frustrated by the lack of cohesive stem education programmes and the clear lack of diversity in the industry.

So, I decided to create [The Aviatrix Project](#) in 2015. The vision was simple to raise aspirations and inspire everyone to take to the skies.

The main aim of the project is to encourage young people from all backgrounds to consider their careers in aviation aerospace.

I realised that I had something really unique to offer by combining my two passions and my two areas of expertise. I could now help to bridge the gap between aviation and education.

Our volunteers regularly visit schools, colleges, aviation events and air shows, and offer assemblies and workshops as well as mentoring. Also, flight opportunities and they are all

offered without cost they aim to inspire young people to aspire to do something that they never thought possible.

They're from all areas of the industry from pilots, engineers and air traffic controllers and they also represent different flying disciplines from rotary, fixed-wing, ballooning, gliders and also drones.

What I love is that they've got a story to tell, you know, it's not financially viable for everyone to enter the flight deck but it is possible with the right solutions and pathways. With the right support and we tap into the concerns of young people and families and support them to achieve their dreams.

Since the start of the project in 2015, I've been part of countless conversations about STEM education and diversity and inclusion. It's often centred around how we can inspire more women to enter the industry and how we can overcome financial barriers.

What's clear is that not much has really changed in the last 10 years. I'm often asked why I do what I do and why I champion aviation. It's not just because of my love of aircraft. I do believe that aviation is such an important part of our economy and I believe that it will play a vital role in the recovery from the pandemic.

That's why it's so important that we support young people and those who want to enter the industry. Role models are so key to this. You can't be what you can't see - this is such a true statement and it's certainly true for me.

I wanted to fly since I was about three years old but it was really at the age of 31 that I achieved my dreams. I know that the lack of visible role models had a big part to play in that, but role models can't work in isolation, nor can it be a tokenistic gesture.

It can't be one assembly, workshop, or STEM outreach event. It needs to be targeted and sustained.

I have learned from my career spanning 15 years in the education industry that children form perceptions at an early age. Around six-seven years old they form perceptions about their careers and gender stereotypes.

Of course, career aspirations can change but those early ideals do stay. If you've got STEM aspirations 8-10 years old you're likely to have them at 14-18 years into university and beyond.

If we know that gender imbalance takes hold at such an early age it's important to know that outreach in universities and colleges, even secondary, isn't the best answer. We need to start much much younger. That's why I'm so passionate about the work that we do.

We do a huge amount of work in the primary age range in primary schools, early-year settings and also community groups. For me, it's a long game. I see it as cultivating and nurturing future talent and that's how we inspire the next generation.

I know that we'll reap the rewards in ten years. I know that we will see young people we've worked with on the flight deck or as engineers and in STEM careers.

Diversity and inclusion aren't just about women. it's about all underrepresented groups of society. We know that organisations thrive when there's a diverse workforce, so not only is it the right thing to do, but it's the smart thing to do.

This is why we ensure that we've got a diverse range of ambassadors. There are still perceptions about what pilots and engineers look like.

We believe that there are no limits other than the ones that we've put there as a society.

We work together to change perceptions held by families, parents and teachers so that we can break the cycle of underrepresentation.

I do believe that we're at a crossroads and there is some progress being made but it takes passionate people with the right mindset to make that change.

We focus on inspirational role models, high-quality stem outreach and always keeping the principles of diversity and inclusion at the forefront of our minds.

But what I do know is that aviators are incredibly resilient. Despite the crisis in the industry, there's been so much determination and support for each other. I feel a great sense of responsibility as a female pilot to make a difference and if I've made a difference to just one young person, then I feel that all of our work is worth it.

Visit theaviatrixproject.com and follow us on Instagram [instagram.com/aviatrixproject](https://www.instagram.com/aviatrixproject) and we hope we can bring our work to Elstree Aerodrome very soon.