“University isn’t for people like me” - Investigating the effect of outreach activities on attitudes towards university, for school pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

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Internship Description:

Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland, and contains the highest concentration of deprived areas in the country. The University of Strathclyde is based in Glasgow city centre, and many of our students are from such areas.

The Scottish Government has set ambitious but achievable targets to increase the university attendance of students from deprived areas. To help meet these targets and fulfil our mandate as a socially-responsible university, the department of Pure and Applied Chemistry at Strathclyde has numerous outreach activities with local schools, particularly schools in the aforementioned areas. These activities are especially important in raising awareness of what university is like, as some pupils may be the first in their family to consider higher education and have very little awareness of what goes on in a university. This often leads to negative self-belief in pupils – “university isn’t for people like me”.

Each June, the department of Pure and Applied Chemistry runs a particular outreach activity, the “fun lab”, for 2 weeks, hosting 125-150 pupils. Pupils do hands-on activities which demonstrate various chemical & physical principles in an entertaining and engaging way. For many, this represents their first visit to a university chemistry department.

This research project will use these school visits as an opportunity to conduct some basic chemistry education research, in order to answer the following questions:

• What is the perception of a university chemistry program in pupils from deprived backgrounds?
• Does attending a Strathclyde outreach activity make someone more likely to believe that they could study chemistry in future?

The internship will begin by surveying the relevant chemical education research literature and designing a suitable survey, then surveying pupils and teachers as they attend “fun lab” sessions as well as helping out in the sessions. You would then spend the second half of the internship interpreting and analysing the data, then writing up your findings in a suitable format for dissemination.

The project will have full ethical approval, according to local standards of confidentiality and data handling, and you will be required to work to these standards.

Qualifications:

• An understanding of school-level chemistry is required
• An understanding of basic statistics is preferred but not required
• An understanding of survey design and survey methodology is preferred but not required
• Experience of outreach, teaching, or tutoring is preferred but not required