INTERESTS AND RECRUITMENT IN SCIENCE (IRIS)

Background

IRIS is a collaborative EU funded research project addressing the challenge that few young people (women in particular) choose education and career in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The project runs from 2009-2012 and the six partners are:

- University of Oslo, Norway (project co-ordinators)
- King's College London, UK (Professor Justin Dillon)
- University of Leeds, UK (Dr Jim Ryder)
- University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Observa, Italy
- University of Copenhagen, Denmark

More details about the project can be found at: http://iris.fp-7.org/about-iris/

Research questions

1. On what priorities, values and experiences do young people base their educational choice?
2. What are the success factors for efforts aimed at recruiting more (female) students to STEM?
3. In what proportions, and why, do students opt out of STEM education?

Research instrument

The main instrument is a questionnaire to completed by first-year students during the spring semester 2010. In England, students from 11 universities took part. The data collection in England was co-ordinated by Dr Jim Ryder, University of Leeds. All partners contributed to instrument development, data collection and analysis, each with a specific focus. Questionnaire data is being complemented by literature reviews and smaller quantitative and qualitative studies.

Students were asked to rank a series of factors in terms of their importance in choosing their course. The statements were grouped into 'school experiences', 'influential people', 'media and out-of-school experiences'. Students were also asked about how they felt about their university experience at the end of their first year.

Findings

Q. How important were: Museum/science centre [in choosing your STEM course]?

Responses from students in mathematics, physics, biology and computer science (n=3,666 students).

	Not important				Very important		
	1	2	3	4	5	Total	sum 4 & 5
Norway	323	145	177	102	16	763	118
UK	226	118	121	134	25	629	159
Italy	586	352	326	195	84	1543	279
Denmark	330	127	148	104	20	731	124
Total	1465	742	772	535	145	3666	680

	Not important				Very important	
	1	2	3	4	5	4 & 5
Norway	42 %	19 %	23 %	13 %	2 %	15 %
UK	36 %	19 %	19 %	21 %	4 %	25 %
Italy	38 %	23 %	21 %	13 %	5 %	18 %
Denmark	45 %	17 %	20 %	14 %	3 %	17 %
Total	40 %	20 %	21 %	15 %	4 %	19 %

Headlines

1 in 4 university students studying STEM courses at English universities report that visits to museums or science centres were important or very important in influencing their choice of course. This figure is higher than for Denmark, Norway or Italy (which have fewer science centres than the UK).

Gender does not appear to be a factor – data for both females and males are similar.

NB The data from Slovenia are still being processed.

This document has been prepared for Dr Penny Fidler, CEO, Association for Science and Discovery Centres by Professor Justin Dillon, Head of the Science and Technology Education Group, King's College London, June 6, 2011.