Inspiring Language Communities

Initiative

Approximately 40% of young people in Manchester are thought to be multilingual, with many using languages other than English to communicate within their local communities. Students from immigrant backgrounds in the UK are also known to be underrepresented at university level in pure sciences. The University of Manchester boasts one of the largest cohorts of international staff and students in the UK, bringing a variety of language capabilities from across the globe. Despite this, the vast majority of outreach, community engagement and widening participation efforts undertaken by the university are in English. This has the potential to affect the young people the university engages with, due to the potential difficulties bringing ideas experienced in English into conversations with main influencers surrounding subject, education and career choices in another language. Additionally, international members of the university community might sometimes be put off becoming involved in engagement, due to perception of their own language skills and the English accents they encounter in the local area.

To address these concerns, Nick has coordinated the partnering of bilingual researchers with local community groups and public institutions to provide science outreach in languages such as Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Polish, Arabic, Mandarin, Italian, Spanish and Greek.

How Nick has made a difference

Qualitative statements gathered after visiting over 300 young people have revealed both the traditional impacts of research engagement visits (general enjoyment of sessions / raising of aspirations) but also those specific to engagement in a language spoken at home (perception and appreciation of languages other than English / conferring of linguistic tools to allow discussion of science with key influencers). This initiative has received an award from the Inclusion and Diversity Fund of the Royal Society of Chemistry, and is currently being expanded into the rest of the university and other STEM organisations (Manchester Science Festival, Network Rail, Cogent Skills).