Inspiration in the space sector - a student’s perspective

Rachel Venn
Non-governmental organisation and professional network for 18-35 year olds

Aims to represent university students and young space professionals to the United Nations, space agencies, industry and academia

Good forum for young people to establish networks and gain experience - opportunities help students and YPs to stay on the path

But members have an ‘inspiration bias’ - if active in SGAC, likely already have an abundance of self motivation
Space School UK

• Summer schools run by the University of Leicester for students between 13 and 18 years old
• ~2400 alumni over 30 years
• Paper “Assessing the Impact of Space School UK” presented at 3rd Symposium on Space Educational Activities 2019 finds:
  • Women and students from non-selective school backgrounds report a stronger influence from SSUK to join the space industry
Assessing the Impact of Space School UK

Daniel Robson1,2, Henry Lau1, Áine O'Brien1,2, Lucy Williams1, Ben Sutcliffe1,4, Heidi Thiemann1,5, Louise McCaul1, George Weaver1 and Tracey Dickens1

1Space School & Senior Space School UK, School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Leicester, UK 2School of Pharmacy, University of Nottingham, UK 3School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, UK 4Anton Pannekoek Institute for Astronomy, University of Amsterdam, Science Park 904, 1098 XH Amsterdam, The Netherlands 5School of Physical Sciences, The Open University, UK
tp57@le.ac.uk, spaceschool@le.ac.uk

Space School UK (SSUK) is a series of summer residential programmes for secondary school aged students, held at the University of Leicester over 3 weeks each year. Each programme involves space-related activities run by a team of mentors - currently including university students, graduates, teachers and young professionals associated with the space sector - all of whom attended programmes in their student days. The aim of SSUK is to encourage and inspire students to consider a STEM career, e.g. lectures, small group practical experiments and problem-solving workshops. Students also learn other space-related skills such as scuba diving, which gives them an experience of astronaut training and an understanding of the effects of microgravity on the human body. Students stay in university accommodation, except for one night of camping.
Assessing the Impact of Space School UK

- What impact did SSUK have on your opinions/plans of entering HE?
- To what extent did SSUK prepare you for higher education?
- To what extent did SSUK encourage you to pick your degree subject?

[Bar chart showing responses by gender]
Assessing the Impact of Space School UK

Fig. 7. Average score of answers to ‘To what extent did Space School influence you to consider a STEM career?’ displayed by gender
Assessing the Impact of Space School UK

Fig. 12. Percentage of selectively and non-selectively schooled respondents’ answers to ‘Which of these categories would you say has helped you most with your studies/career?’
Falling off the escalator - common refrains from other students

- “I’ll never get into a technical job - the competition is too high and I’m not a genius at engineering/programming”
- “I’m just not *that* passionate about space. Isn’t space something for people who are really inspired?”
- “The city/finance/consulting pays more”
- “I’m not interested in just doing rocket science and engineering”
- “I’d rather use my skills to make a difference in more important fields like energy/climate, and have an impact on society”
Encouraging inspiration

- Help young people to build a like-minded space community - people drive passion, and role models drove motivation

- Sell space more pragmatically to non-space STEM students, as:
  - A field with a wide range of jobs, including business and consultancy components - room to customise
  - An industry with growth, funding, and a skills shortage - room to succeed
  - A tech and coding field with many options, from industry to academia, to start-ups - room to innovate
  - A green field with tangible benefits to life on Earth - reclaiming the narrative from the ‘billionaires’ playground’ - room for impact