

## **CHILDREN SHAPE SCIENCE EDUCATION IN NEW EUROPEAN INITIATIVE**

LIVERPOOL, UK – 26 July 2011: The University of Liverpool has launched a £3.6 million initiative aimed at developing children's ideas on new science and technology activities at schools, universities, and cultural organisations that will engage young people across Europe.

The Liverpool team are working with universities, as well as education departments at country and regional level, to create new delivery guidelines that will support institutions in developing projects aimed at children from families with 'non-traditional' higher education backgrounds. The four-year project involves a consortium of over 30 partners and advisors from across 23 countries.

The initiative builds on the University's outreach activities, which has seen the 'Professor Fluffy' scheme rolled out to schools throughout the UK. The scheme was created for primary school children that are unlikely to progress to higher education in order to teach them about the benefits of going to university. It has been delivered to more than 50,000 young people in the UK so far.

Using the colourful toy academic – Professor Fluffy – as a teaching aid, children aged nine and 10 are taught a mini-curriculum in subjects such as medicine and science. The children also visit university to learn about life on campus where they meet students, visit lecture theatres and take part in hands-on activities that support the national curriculum.

The team at the University is now working with European networks and organisations to build upon activities that are designed to help institutions talk about science with young people aged between eight and 14 years old. The project promotes the beneficial role that children have in shaping the content of educational programmes and influencing the way science and society based subjects are delivered by organisations, such as universities, science festivals and museums, throughout Europe.

ECHO, as the Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Adviser will lead the Minimum Quality Threshold process. The Minimum Threshold will be developed to ensure that all aspects SiS activities complies with the focus of being targeted at children with ability, who are currently least likely to progress to study science in post secondary education.

Tricia Jenkins, Director of the International Centre for Educational Opportunities at the University, said: "Children are learning at a time when the pace of technological development will eventually outstrip an adult's ability to teach them. This new initiative recognises that we now need to treat children, not only as consumers of educational programmes, but as contributors as well. The experience that children have of society, and particularly the digital age that we operate in, is hugely valuable in developing programmes of learning that resonate with a young audience."

“An important part of the project is identifying children, in areas local to the organisations we are working with, who are unlikely to progress to higher education. This is a group of young people that often feel excluded from educational opportunities, and yet our research shows us that many of them could succeed in higher education and contribute many ideas towards the development of various learning schemes.”

Octavio Quintana Trias, Director of the European Research Area, said: “By placing education at the heart of the dialogue between science and society, and by considering children as highly relevant actors in the science and society relationship, this new project brings together the core issues required for responsible behaviours in a sustainable society.

“Education will play a major role in the ambitious task of raising awareness on the grand challenges facing society. The initiative tackles this ambition by including elements on interdisciplinary, governance, public engagement, social inclusion, mutual learning and ethics. Considering these components and their added value, the project is well placed to contribute to solving the EU 2020 societal challenges, as well as to strengthen the European Research Area.”

The four-year initiative, called SIS Catalyst: Children as Change Agents for Science and Society, is one of the first Mobilisation and Mutual Learning (MML) action plans funded by the European Commission under the Framework 7 programme.

#### **Notes to editors:**

1. The University of Liverpool is a member of the Russell Group of leading research-intensive institutions in the UK. It attracts collaborative and contract research commissions from a wide range of national and international organisations valued at more than £110 million annually.

#### **For further information:**

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