

‘Researcher in Residence’ scheme piloted at Queen Margaret University



A new scheme focused on raising children’s awareness of science is being piloted at Queen Margaret University.

The ‘Researcher in Residence’ scheme is part of the University’s community outreach work and involves children aged 10 – 11 at a local primary School.

Three QMU researchers visited children at Towerbank Primary School in Portobello, where the young academics created fun, interactive sessions which demonstrated aspects of their research projects.

The challenge for the researchers is in making PhD level research accessible to primary children. However, the academics obviously hit the mark with their entertaining sessions as feedback from teachers and the children was overwhelming positive.

Zoe Roxburgh, speech researcher, used two different types of technology to show children what their tongues were doing inside their mouths during speech. This included pioneering ultrasound technology developed at QMU as well as an iPad app that showed the general motions the tongue, throat, and mouth made when saying certain sounds.

She explained: “Through the use of an ultrasound scanner, children, for the first time, were able to view all the different shapes that an actual tongue makes when forming different sounds. For example, they were able to see where the tip of the tongue was when creating the sound ‘L’ as well as

tongue movement at the back of the mouth to form the sound 'G'. The children seemed to really love the visual stimuli of the ultrasound as well as the iPad app as they were able to mimic exactly what they were seeing on the screens."

Zoe also tried to raise awareness amongst the children that there can be a huge variation as to how different people speak and suggested that they shouldn't be too quick to judge people on the way they sound.

Two researchers from Dietetics and Nutrition also had great fun with the children exploring different aspects of taste and diet. The school pupils especially enjoyed the food rainbow which raised awareness of different food groups.

Dr Wendy Beautyman, Lecturer in Researcher Development at Queen Margaret University, said: This is a brand new community engagement project and brings science to life. It emphasises the relevance of QMU's research work by showing the children how science has a very real part to play in their everyday lives. When, for example, the children stop to think about how you actually form certain words or taste certain foods, they begin to understand how science affects everything."

Dr Beautyman continued "This is a great opportunity to encourage the children in our local community to raise their aspirations. The researchers can clearly show the children how their work affects people's health and quality of life. Hopefully, we are giving them an insight to the variety of science-based careers which are now available, as well as providing a glimpse of some of the fascinating work which goes on within the University. Maybe, we will inspire the children, especially from non-traditional backgrounds, to believe that a future place at university, or within the field of science, is within their grasp."