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The JKU Open Lab: enough young researchers to fill a stadium

To date, 21,530 children and young people have carried out chemical experiments under expert supervision in the Open Lab of the Johannes Kepler University Linz and have thus discovered their interest in the natural sciences. This successful project has now been prolonged for a further four years and incidentally, by way of comparison the Linz Stadium can accommodate 21,005 spectators.

In 2013, the JKU, Borealis and the Upper Austrian government launched their own experiment in which not only school pupils, but also children of kindergarten age should start to explore the exciting world of the natural sciences. This voyage of discovery was not to be undertaken through presentations or lectures regarding outstanding career opportunities, but rather through personal experience. The JKU Open Lab was thus created and the chemistry and instincts matched. Consequently, since the Lab's birth seven groups per week have been completing experiments suited to their ages under the auspices of university researchers. Moreover, according to Dr. Silke Renger, who heads the laboratory: "We cannot keep pace with demand and have 135 percent capacity utilization."

The JKU rector, Meinhard Lukas: "New discoveries all share the same origin, namely a question posed by an inquisitive human being. And no one is as inquisitive and hungry for knowledge than a child. This is exactly where we come into the picture, as only when we arouse an interest in and enthusiasm for technology and the natural sciences, will we have enough excellent scientists for social progress in the years to come."

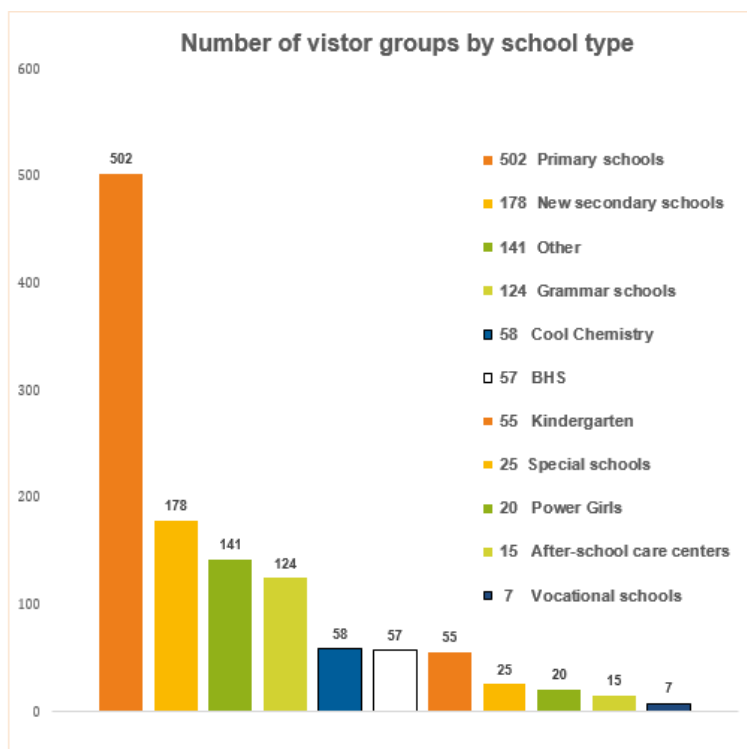


Fig. Primary schools provide the bulk of the visitors

Girls in the majority

What is particularly pleasing is the fact that although at present women are underrepresented in research and the sciences, there is hope for the next generation because with 11,197 participants, girls constitute 52 per cent of the young chemists, as opposed to 10,333 boys (48 percent).

Mark Garrett, the Borealis CEO: *“We have been supporting initiatives in the educational field for a number of years. And through our commitment, we wish to arouse the enthusiasm of the younger generation for research and the natural sciences, and make a worthwhile contribution to a responsible approach to resources and the environment. I am delighted that the JKU Open Lab in Linz is to remain in existence for four more years because our society is in urgent need of well-trained specialists and scientists, who will dedicate themselves to finding innovative solutions for our future.”*

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the sponsoring activities and bring these into line with its sustainability strategy to the greatest possible extent, Borealis is focusing the support offered by its Social Fund on projects in the following three areas:

- Education and social integration
- Water and hygiene facilities (Water for the World)
- Resource efficiency and the prevention of plastic waste in the seas and oceans

Dr. Michael Strugl, the Deputy Governor of Upper Austria with responsibility for economics, science and research: *“The young explorers of today are the researchers and technologists of tomorrow. The JKU Open Lab makes the natural sciences tangible and therefore represents a major initiative with regard to the awakening of an interest for research and technology among our young people. The extension for another four years underlines the outstanding achievements of the JKU Open Lab to date. At the same time, it constitutes a sizeable contribution to the long-term securing of a supply of qualified specialists for the Upper Austrian economic and research location.”*

Research at first hand

Interest in the Open Lab continues to grow and school groups from Lower Austria, Salzburg and Passau in Germany have all visited the JKU. If in 2014, 3,068 children attended the workshops, by this year they already number 7,372, which represents an increase of 140 percent and an excellent reason to prolong this successful cooperation up to 2022.



Photo 1: JKU Open Lab
© Christof Zachtl



Photo 2: Research in the realm of the 4
elements © JKU

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