

13. Listening to change: children as change agents for science in society

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The project

SiS Catalyst (www.siscatalyst.eu) is a four- year project supported under the Mobilisation and Mutual Learning action plan of the European Commission's Science in Society programme. It is coordinated by the University of Liverpool, and it involves 34 partners and advisors from 20 countries.

SiS Catalyst aims at building a culture of engagement and listening. The approach is based on the simple idea that today's decisions in science and education are significant for tomorrow's citizens, students and researchers who are children and young people at this time. The project is about the global change in education culture that we need to embrace for our future, through addressing the fundamental question of how we include children in the dialogue between society and the scientific and technological communities.

SiS Catalyst supports science organizations to engage better with young people and to successfully establish strong ties from the earliest age possible - in particular to target those who are currently unlikely to progress to higher education because of their social, cultural or economic background.

The experience that children have of society is hugely valuable in developing outreach and awareness programmes delivered by universities, schools, science festivals, museums and other science in society intermediaries. SiS Catalyst creates awareness among institutions of learning that young people are a relevant audience to be listened to. This engagement must also be reflected within the governance and institutional development in order to be sustainable. SiS Catalyst promotes the overall understanding that we need to treat young people not only as consumers of educational programmes, but as contributors as well, and acknowledges the role that young people have in the modernisation in all spheres of science education: they are Agents of Change!

One of the work packages of the SiS Catalyst project is devoted to the development of the ergonomics of listening for young people, and how this listening can be transformed into institutional change. In the following, we present some of the initial actions of this work package.

General principles

The relationship of young people to science and higher education institutions is a very complex one. In the last decades, there has often been a tendency to oversimplify this relationship. For example, the (presumed) disaffection of young people for scientific careers was often

