campaign for gender balance in science, technology & engineering

People Like Me: an evaluation
People Like Me – WISE’s initiative to raise awareness among girls of the sort of jobs open to them in science, technology, engineering and manufacturing (STEM) – was introduced in 2015.

Since then we’ve worked with employers, schools, academics and STEM professionals to persuade girls that people like them can indeed go into STEM careers.

We’ve supported People Like Me workshops for girls and their parents, providing resources and guidance on boosting knowledge of STEM careers, broadening horizons and challenging stereotypes of what a scientist or engineer is. We’ve also worked with companies to train their professionals to deliver the workshops and to help them develop materials tailored to their own industry.

As we began planning the next phase of the development, we wanted to know how well the programme was working and if there were aspects we could improve. So we asked researchers at the Open University to carry out an evaluation, talking to those involved in the workshops and the training, and assessing the impact of both.

This is what their research showed:

• Overall the strategy has been very successful in attracting interest from both schools and companies and in delivering thought-provoking career workshops which have a clear impact on girls’ ambitions and interests. The resources are readily accessible on the website and well suited to the target age range (12-14 year-olds) and their parents.

• Girls were overwhelmingly positive about the workshops, particularly liking the personality quizzes and interaction with STEM role models. Feedback after the sessions showed:
  - 57% were more interested in studying science and maths at school
  - Those not interested at all had gone down from 10% to 4%
  - 59% had learnt more about different STEM careers.

• Among parents and carers, 76% said they were very interested in STEM and 96% said they would be very pleased if their daughter went into a STEM career.

• Teachers reported that the sessions were enjoyable and broadened students’ understanding, but felt they needed to be set in a wider context, perhaps through working with other organisations.

• Those who delivered the sessions were enthusiastic and felt the workshops were well-received, but wanted more ongoing support in identifying suitable schools and setting up the sessions.
Companies who have sponsored People Like Me have been able to develop their own bespoke training packs covering specific job roles and case studies, but some have been unclear about what to expect after this.

The researchers made a number of recommendations arising out of their findings. These include:

- Update materials to cover a wider range of jobs and offer guidance on new digital materials
- Help those trained in workshop delivery to make contact with schools
- Keep better track of events and a central database of people trained
- Clarify the role of company sponsors after initial training
- Help schools to embed People Like Me in wider programmes of STEM engagement
- Clarify whether resources can be used by anyone or just those who have been trained
- Review use of language to improve engagement and avoid any mixed messages, e.g. long list of personality adjectives presented to girls, inadvertent pigeonholing of girls as personality types
- Extend workshop interaction with role models
- Consider research into long-term impact on girls’ subject choices.

The response from WISE:

“We are delighted that People Like Me is having an impact. This gives us confidence that our plans to reach 200,000 girls and train 7,000 deliverers through taking the resource online is the right approach.

These new online resources will make it much more effective to raise awareness of the huge breadth of career options available to you when you retain a STEM subject post 16 and help girls engage more with potential employers and understand their pathways into STEM careers.

For companies, we have a clearer offering including new tools to help with schools engagement, ways to track events and girls reached and greater support for those trained.

We are really excited to be taking this People Like Me further, making it stronger by implementing the advice from the Open University.”

Helen Wollaston
Chief Executive, WISE