

My involvement with S4 started many years ago on their previous project, this project followed a similar vein to the current project whereby their main remit was to encourage young people from areas of deprivation to have an interest in STEM subjects and chose to study them at GCSE and A Level.

To give you some background information, I taught at Cymer Afan Comprehensive in the Afan Valley for almost twenty years. The catchment areas for the school ranked at 7, 9 and 15th most deprived areas in Wales. Despite this I always strived to ensure that the pupils I taught enjoyed Science and developed an enthusiasm not only for the subject but also an appreciation that they COULD go on to study in Higher Education. From this ideology my close relationship with the team at S4 grew.

Initially we were approached to run a Summer School for one week during the holidays with the Year 6 pupils of our feeder primaries, before they started at the comprehensive. I felt that this was an excellent opportunity for the pupils to get to know some of the staff at the comprehensive and pupils from other feeder primaries but at the same time was apprehensive as I was very aware of the apathy that existed in the valley, and I was expecting the pupils to give up a week of their summer holidays to study Science. To try to encourage them to sign up S4 organised after school taster events at each of the primary schools and the response from this resulted in us getting quite a few pupils sign up. On the first morning of the Summer School I can still remember how anxious I was to see if there would be any pupils waiting for us in each village. As the bus drove around several pupils got on at each village and I breathed a sigh of relief. The first day was a roaring success and I can remember the phone line to S4 being red hot with other parents wanting their children to attend, when word got around the villages of how much fun they had. The week was amazing, and I cannot explain just how much they learnt, not only the scientific knowledge but also the personal skills they developed. Nearly all the pupils came from homes where none of their family had attended Higher Education or had even visited a university and for them to realise that it was accessible to them was as important as their newfound enthusiasm for science.

So successful was the week that it was repeated the following year without us having to do any promotion. Both ESTYN and the LA highlighted the summer school as an invaluable transition event.

On a personal note, I must talk about the support S4 gave Cymer Afan during the very difficult and traumatic time of the school closure. They were more than just a university outreach team, they became friends and allies and ensured that the pupils were given a voice and wouldn't lose out on the support S4 had provided over the years when they started at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

I was only part of the current project for the first year. This project was much more ambitious than the previous and I was pleased to be part of the planning and initial workshops.

As all pupils in Year 7 were involved and they visited termly then the impact on their scientific knowledge was very evident. Also, the topics covered through practical activities were taught very differently from the way they were taught in school, so there was no repetition and pupils were able to apply their knowledge to different situations accordingly, as the S4 team ensured that their content mirrored the National Curriculum for progression through KS3.

When pupils transitioned to Ysgol Cwm Brombil this process was made easier as they attended S4 sessions with their peers and friendships were made with Cwm Brombil pupils through group work settings and enjoyment of completing science practical activities together.

In summary, outreach programmes such as S4 have become integral to providing young people with possible low aspirations, opportunities to not only broaden their knowledge and passion for STEM subjects but provide an insight into education and career pathways that previously they would not have contemplated.