

# High School students visiting the university: What's in it for an academic researcher?

Henrik Leion  
Educator



Chalmers facilitates popular science seminars for High School students aiming at leveraging the general knowledge in science and technology. Hundreds of students visit different parts of Chalmers annually. The activity is clearly contributing to the University's application rate, an essential part of the ability to deliver high qualified and attractive technologist in the long run. This type of activity engages senior researchers around the world in mind blowing dimensions, increasing general knowledge and interest in science and technology. Energy related research is naturally a well visited part, engaging some of our senior researcher. Out of curiosity, we asked one of them, Assistant Professor Henrik Leion, what's in it for him?

Henrik Leion has been responsible for High School visits at the Department of Chemistry, a work he handed over to a colleague when I left for parental leave. *"I was coordinating the visits and worked with training of high school teachers, gearing them with tools for teaching science and technology. And because of my area of interest, it got a chemistry and energy focus."* he tells me. We have managed to find some time to talk over the phone, while his kid takes a nap. I ask him how it all started and he replies: *"I thought it was needed, so I asked about it. I think this type of work is important and*

*I know the need, since I used to work as a teacher before I became a researcher. It turned out that there was no one working with this at that moment, so I got the assignment on 10-20% of my time and last year our laboratory received visits from almost a hundred high school students. As researcher we are obligated to inform the public about what we are doing and at that time there was a lack of coordination, even though we did have quite a lot of visits. It was very much up to the high school teacher to find out where to go and whom to contact."* His enthusiasm is obvious, even over the phone, so I ask him why it is so important, and he replies: *"I have a passion about it."* he quickly answers, and continues: *"The general knowledge is too low. In Sweden, everyone knows that August Strindberg wrote the Reed Room, but if you ask about the lightest element on the periodic table, that will not be so obvious. Science and technology is not included in what is considered as general knowledge."*

## Challenged by the unexpected

On the question about if his type of work enriches him as a researcher or a teacher, Henrik Leion answers: *"Absolutely! It is has been great fun and given me a lot. I got so many strange and unexpected questions. Students at Chalmers are often used to be among the best at High School. They usually don't dear to ask. During our High School visits I meet so much more and often very challenging questions. It has given me a*

*better understanding of what is difficult and how that can be explained in a simpler way". He thinks for a short while, and then he adds: "And I think this work has made me a better teacher for my students."*

Text: Niklas Fernqvist

## Making Science Useful

**Roles:** Seven types of roles are identified in relation to making science useful. The roles are developed from different activities for diffusion and utilisation, carried out by one or a group of researchers, or by an entire part of the organisation. The roles are; researcher, educator, advisor, debater, entrepreneur, infrastructure developer and networker. These roles are in general intuitive but develop differently, based on personal characteristics, area of research, the recipients of results within the area, and by different local traditions of how to work with utilisation.

**More information:** This framework is developed by Staffan Jacobsson, Eugenia Perez Vico, Chalmers University of Technology, Hans Hellsmark, SP Technical Research Institute of Sweden and Merle Jacob, Lund University. For more detailed information, please contact Eugenia Perez Vico (eugenia.perez@chalmers.se) or Hans Hellsmark (hans.hellsmark@sp.se).

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