Dear Students,

Welcome to our first project newsletter! Together we hope to analyse soils from schools across the whole of Scotland. The wider aims of the project are to provide you with an understanding of Scotland’s environmental history and to encourage you to think about current environmental issues. We really hope you will enjoy taking part and that it might encourage you to study more chemistry at school and even consider a career in the chemical sciences in your future plans.

Hopefully you have already been collecting soil samples from your school’s grounds, or are soon going to, ready to send in for analysis by our team at Strathclyde. We are going to determine the levels of copper, lead and zinc in your samples. This will take us a few months, and we plan to share details of how this will be done and keep you updated on progress with a newsletter every month.

In our February newsletter we will launch our Poster Competition. You will be asked to design posters on a particular environmental issue (details to follow) either individually or in teams. Your school will choose the best poster and the winning student/team and your teacher will be invited to Strathclyde for our National Environment Event next summer. We can’t wait to see what you come up with!

If you wish, please send in any pictures of your activities during the project; from sampling; undertaking your own analysis as outlined in our worksheets; to playing the Zap game which has also been sent to your teacher. It would be brilliant to see what you have been doing.

Until next time...

Dr Debbie Willison and Dr Christine Davidson

Sampling at Strathclyde

Our team tested out the soil sampling procedures before sending them to you all. It was a cold wet day in the centre of Glasgow – and we got some very strange looks from passing students and university staff, who were probably wondering why we were digging up the campus! However, all went well and below you can see a picture of our sampling site after our samples had been taken and all the turf had been neatly replaced. We are going to use our Strathclyde sample as a reference for the project – that means we’ll be comparing our levels of copper, lead and zinc with the ones we measure in your soils.
Meet the Researchers

We have three senior undergraduate students working on our project, Stuart Stables, Craig Duncan and Bethany Pringle. You can see them in the picture above. Each month we’re going to give you the chance to get to know one of them better, starting with Craig:

“Hello everyone, my name is Craig Duncan. I am 22 years old, I come from Renfrew and I’m currently studying Forensic & Analytical Chemistry at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow.

Although I greatly enjoy laboratory work, I wasn’t always dead set on being a Forensic Scientist. I actually had originally wanted to be a police officer like my Grandad. This led me to watching a great many police shows when I was growing up and – the more I watched these shows – the more I became interested in the scientific side of law enforcement and the various techniques and equipment related to it.

When I entered high school, my interest in the field of chemistry grew. This interest and a lot of hard work allowed me to come to Strathclyde University where I’ve been able to expand my knowledge base as well as refine my practical skills. This will allow me to one day work in a laboratory where I might be involved in testing all sort of different types of sample. This could include analysis of household products to see if they are safe to use (e.g. drinking water, food, personal hygiene products); testing soils for metals (like you are all helping us to do); or even helping the police to analyse evidence from a crime scene in order to catch a suspect.

Outside of university, I like to spend my time either reading (really enjoy fantasy and sci-fi books), gaming (again, mainly sci-fi and fantasy games), doing karate or just watching stuff on Netflix and YouTube”.

The BGE Pupils Analysis of Soils in Scottish Schools project is funded by the Royal Society of Chemistry