

Public engagement at the ICR

2024/25



Progress towards our strategy

Introduction

Public engagement is an essential part of how The Institute of Cancer Research, London, delivers on its mission to make the discoveries that defeat cancer. Through the four priorities of our *Be Part of It* public engagement strategy (2021-24) – strengthening our relationships with local communities, broadening participation and diversity in science, building strategic partnerships, and nurturing an organisational culture that values engagement – we continue to open our work to the wider world.

Two-way dialogue sits at the heart of our approach. By creating opportunities for conversations between our researchers and the public, we gain new insights, welcome diverse perspectives, and inspire the next generation of scientists and professionals. For our staff and students, engagement offers valuable chances to develop skills, build confidence, and broaden their career horizons. Our engagement activity also complements our advocacy, communications and fundraising work, helping people understand what we do and why it matters.

As a publicly funded research institute and charity, we have a responsibility to share the benefits of our discoveries. We remain committed to openness, relevance and social responsibility, ensuring our work continues to meet the needs of the communities we serve.



“Science progresses through collaboration and open communication. Engaging the public with our research is an important part of this process, helping to build understanding and support for the work we do. At the ICR, we value the commitment shown by our staff and students in contributing to activities across our local communities in Chelsea and Sutton, and in inspiring young people to learn more about careers in science. Each year, we welcome A-Level students into our laboratories, and it is encouraging to think that some may choose to pursue scientific careers in the future, potentially returning to contribute to our research.”

Professor Kristian Helin, Chief Executive of the ICR

Reflecting on 2024-2025

In 2024–2025, our public engagement programme has continued to grow in scale and impact. Our staff and students took part in around 50 engagement opportunities, reaching more than 5,600 people. Around 15 per cent of the ICR community – more than 200 staff and students – contributed their time and expertise, together giving more than 900 hours to support this work.

In 2024-25:



50

public engagement
events involving
the ICR

5,600+

members of the
public have been
involved in public
engagement

550+

hours of staff and
student time spent
on public
engagement

200

staff members and
students took part
in public
engagement



ICR The Institute of
Cancer Research

A major highlight of the year was our flagship Careers in Research Open Evenings at both Sutton and Chelsea. More than 100 Y12 students had the chance to meet researchers, tour our state-of-the-art labs, and take part in hands-on activities. To complement these events, we updated our careers video and student booklet, resources that help showcase the wide range of roles in cancer research and provide practical advice for young people considering a career in science.

We also continued to broaden the ways we connect with schools and the local community. Our staff and students took part in numerous careers events in local schools, engaged with local scouts' groups, and connected with teachers to show how the science taught in classrooms links directly to real-life cancer research. We went online with *I'm a Scientist, Get Me Out of Here*, opening new opportunities to reach students who might not otherwise encounter our researchers. In addition, we contributed to an escape room-style game funded by the Biochemical Society, which highlights careers in the biochemical sciences, and an activity designed by our researchers was selected for inclusion in the British Science Week secondary school activity pack.

Our involvement in large-scale community events remained strong. At the Great Exhibition Road Festival, in partnership with the Cancer

Research UK Convergence Science Centre at the ICR and Imperial College London, more than 600 visitors explored our Patient Power: Innovating Cancer Technologies stand. At the Pint of Science festival, ICR researchers spoke at three sold-out events across London and Sutton, bringing cutting-edge science to informal, local settings. And during the London Cancer Hub Open Day, part of the London Festival of Architecture, 60 visitors toured our labs and tried their hand at practical science activities.

All of this has only been possible thanks to the commitment of our volunteers. Their enthusiasm continues to inspire the next generation of scientists, while deepening our connection with schools, communities and the wider public.

Looking forward

As we look ahead, we will focus on further embedding public engagement across the ICR, ensuring that everyone who joins our community is aware of the opportunities to take part. We aim to strengthen our partnerships with schools by developing sustained, multi-touchpoint programmes that create deeper, ongoing relationships with students and teachers.

Building on this progress, our new public engagement strategy, which we plan to finalise in Spring 2026, will provide a clear framework to guide and grow our work in the coming years.

By continuing to integrate engagement into everyday research culture, we will ensure our work continues to inspire, include and empower people within and beyond the ICR.

Note: in this report, when we refer to “Year 12 and Year 13 students,” we mean students in post-16 education, including those studying A levels, BTECs, T Levels, or other Level 3 qualifications.

Actively engaging with our local community

A key focus of our public engagement strategy is building strong connections with our local communities in Sutton and Chelsea. We are continually exploring innovative ways to achieve this, whether through events on site or events within the community. As the London Cancer Hub continues to develop, this work will only grow in importance, ensuring that our expanding presence in Sutton is matched by deeper engagement with the communities around us.

Opening our doors to the local community

Our local community had the chance to connect with our research during the London Cancer Hub Open Day, held in June as part of the London Festival of Architecture. We opened the doors of the Centre for Cancer Drug Discovery and welcomed around 60 visitors for tours, workshops and interactive demonstrations. Feedback was fantastic, with many describing the day as insightful, engaging and even mind-blowing.



Local residents connect with our research during the London Cancer Hub Open Day

Visitors joined guided tours of our chemistry and biology labs, where researchers explained how new drugs are designed, tested and developed into potential treatments. Hearing directly from our scientists about their day-to-day work gave people a deeper understanding of the research process and sparked conversations about the challenges and opportunities of drug discovery.

Families also got hands-on with activities such as extracting DNA from strawberries and practicing pipetting techniques. These simple experiments helped show how everyday methods connect to the cutting-edge research happening in our labs. For younger visitors especially, it was an inspiring glimpse into what a future career in science could look like.

"It was a great opportunity to be a part of this event, giving us the chance to share what our day-to-day work looks like, explain the drug discovery process, and highlight our role in this long and complex journey."

Researcher at the London Festival of Architecture event

Great Exhibition Road Festival

At this year's Great Exhibition Road Festival, our researchers joined with students from the Cancer Research UK Convergence Science Centre to showcase *Patient Power: Innovating Cancer Technologies*.

More than 600 visitors stopped by our stand in the Future Medicine Zone, taking part in interactive activities that explored how innovation can improve the patient experience. Visitors could test a soft-robotic prototype that mimicked the feeling of human touch, play a clinical trials "this or that" game, and solve an AI-powered jigsaw puzzle. The stand encouraged people to reflect on how science and technology can make cancer care more supportive, empowering and effective.

The partnership helped spark curiosity and meaningful conversations with people of all ages. A graffiti table captured visitors' thoughts on what "kinder care" means, showing how strongly the theme resonated and how public perspectives can contribute to shaping the future of healthcare.

The enthusiasm of our volunteers brought the science to life, ensuring that everyone who visited left with a deeper understanding of how patient-centred research and collaboration can transform cancer experiences.



ICR staff and students engaging members of the public at the Great Exhibition Road Festival.

Pint of Science: Bringing cancer research to the pub

This year's Pint of Science festival saw ICR scientists reach almost 130 people across London and Sutton, turning pubs and cinemas into vibrant spaces for science. The events gave researchers at different career stages the chance to connect directly with the public, demystify their work, and practise communicating complex ideas in an informal and engaging way. Attendees responded enthusiastically, with lively questions and discussions showing just how much interest there is in cancer research when it is shared accessibly.

For the ICR, the festival was also an opportunity to strengthen local connections. The Sutton event, supported by Socius, the developing partner of the London Cancer Hub, and attended by local MP Luke Taylor, highlighted our role at the heart of the community and our vision for the London Cancer Hub.

Speakers reflected on how valuable it was to move away from technical presentations and focus on storytelling, humour and passion – approaches that not only resonate with the public but also help our researchers sharpen a vital skill: making their science meaningful beyond the lab.

Visiting local schools and opening the doors of opportunity

Throughout the year, our staff and students took part in a wide range of school-based events, helping pupils understand the many routes into science and research. These included careers fairs, carousel sessions, speed-networking events and school talks, all designed to make careers in cancer research accessible and relatable.

At events such as the Careers Carousel at St Philomena's Catholic High School for Girls and The Ashcombe Careers Fair, our volunteers spoke with students in small groups, answering questions about their jobs, education paths and daily work at the ICR. We also joined Cheam High School Next Steps event, Speed Networking at Harris Academy and Holland Park School, and Women in STEM at Greenshaw High School, where staff inspired pupils to consider STEM pathways and shared personal stories about their journeys into research.

Inspiring future diversity in science

Inspiring the next generation of researchers is a central focus of our public engagement work, with particular attention on creating opportunities for young people from underserved communities. Over the past year, our staff and students delivered 25 events in schools, giving pupils a chance to meet scientists, explore research first-hand, and learn more about the wide variety of careers in science. Alongside these in-person activities, we also expanded our digital outreach, producing careers videos and resources to support local schools and reach even more students.

Strengthening school partnerships

One of the real strengths of our approach has been the strong and growing partnerships we have built with local schools, many of whom return year after year to take part in our activities. Our well-established Careers in Research Evenings continue to receive excellent feedback, with this year's programme welcoming students from schools including Chelsea Academy, Hammersmith Academy and St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College. These events give young people and their teachers the chance to explore our labs, meet researchers, and try hands-on activities such as DNA extraction and pipetting – all designed to make cancer research accessible, inspiring and relevant.

The impact of these opportunities is clear. At our most recent event, 81 per cent of students said they felt more confident in their ability to pursue a career in science, and the same proportion reported a better understanding of the skills needed to succeed.

"Superb structure of the evening, excellent insight, great activities, good hospitality."

Teacher at the Careers in Research event

"The lab tour gave me insight on what the environment is like working in a lab. I wouldn't be able to experience this feeling through looking at an image."

Student at the Careers in Research event



Year 12 students visit our laboratories in Chelsea and Sutton

Alongside these flagship evenings, our newer resources – including educational booklets and videos – are helping us extend our reach even further. By sharing these widely with schools and at local events, we can connect with young people who may not otherwise have access to these opportunities. This focus on equity and inclusion ensures that more students, regardless of background, can see themselves in science – inspiring the next generation of researchers and broadening participation in STEM.

Expanding opportunities through work experience

This year, our work experience programme reached new heights, thanks to a successful collaboration between the Centre for Cancer Drug Discovery (CCDD) and the Centre for Cancer Imaging (CCI). Building on a pilot scheme launched in 2024, the teams joined forces to design and deliver a structured, inclusive, and inspiring week of activities for local Y12 and Y13 students*.

The impact was clear: 100 young people applied, and 22 were welcomed into our labs to take part in practical experiments, interactive demonstrations, and career talks with researchers at every stage of their journey, from PhD students to senior scientists. By introducing a fair and transparent application process, the programme opened doors to

students from underrepresented backgrounds in Sutton and beyond, ensuring equitable access to STEM opportunities.

The benefits extend far beyond the students. For participants, the hands-on experience demystified cancer research and sparked new ambitions, with 93 per cent of students saying they felt more likely to pursue a science-related qualification after school.

The long-term impact of the programme is also evident in the achievements of past participants. As one former student shared:

“I based half of my personal statement on my placement at the ICR, where I was able to talk about what I did in the labs and explain how I did further research on something I learnt during the placement. This helped me secure interviews at Oxford and Imperial, and I later received offers for an MSci Chemistry degree from Imperial, UCL, KCL and Queen Mary.”

Work experience student, 2023 cohort

For ICR researchers, the programme offered valuable opportunities to develop mentoring and science communication skills in a supportive setting, helping embed a culture of engagement across departments. With clear evidence of success and growing sustainability, the programme highlights the ICR's role as a responsible and engaged institution, committed to inspiring the next generation of scientists while strengthening community connections.

Establish and maintain productive partnerships

Public engagement is never a solo effort. Building and sustaining productive partnerships is essential to achieving our current strategy and shaping those to come.

Over the past year, we strengthened our long-standing collaborations with the Cancer Research UK Convergence Science Centre, delivering joint PhD training and partnering on the Great Exhibition Road Festival. We also deepened our work with Socius through the successful delivery of the London Cancer Hub Open Day, part of the London Festival of Architecture. Together, these partnerships helped us connect with our local community and showcase the impact of our research in accessible and creative ways.

“By opening its doors to local communities, the ICR provides unique opportunities to experience world-leading research, view state-of-the-art facilities, and explore the breadth of career pathways available in science and healthcare. This activity directly contributes to the regeneration objectives of the London Cancer Hub, strengthening links with the local community.

The ICR is a vital partner in the delivery of community engagement for the London Cancer Hub. Its work builds trust, visibility, and participation at a local level while inspiring people — particularly those from underrepresented or underserved backgrounds — to pursue careers in research, science, and healthcare.”

Olaide Oboh, Executive Director at Socius

We also reignited past collaborations and forged new ones. A key example was our contribution to the Equalex Programme, a national initiative by the Careers & Enterprise Company that aims to modernise work experience and broaden young people’s understanding of career pathways. As part of this programme, we designed and delivered an interactive session introducing students to the breadth of roles within cancer research and the skills and qualifications needed across our organisation.

Feedback from participating students was very positive. All students said the session helped them reflect on their own passions and skills, and every participant reported leaving with new ideas about potential career

paths. They described the activity as fun and engaging and particularly valued the interactive elements.

Feedback from participating students was excellent. Eighty per cent agreed that the activity helped them understand the variety of workplaces that exist, and sixty per cent said it helped them understand different types of employment. All participants reported that the session made them think about the range of skills and qualifications people need in the workplace. Every student said they could identify their own passions, interests and skills and understood how these might guide future career choices. All also reported having new ideas about possible career paths. Students described the session as a very good and fun activity and particularly valued the interactivity. They noted they would be interested in hearing more about the challenges and struggles people may face while pursuing their career pathways.

In addition, we partnered with the British Science Association to share our research with schools nationwide through the British Science Week secondary school activity pack. The featured game, Defeat the Tumour – originally created for the Great Exhibition Road Festival – introduced students to the concept of cancer evolution in an engaging, interactive way.

Embedding engagement in the culture of the ICR

Delivering our public engagement strategy depends on the enthusiasm, involvement and commitment of people across the ICR - from every role, department and background. It is vital that engagement is recognised as a meaningful and rewarding part of our work, bringing personal and professional benefits alongside time spent in the lab, at the desk or analysing data. Our priorities focus on showcasing the breadth of STEM careers and inspiring students from underrepresented backgrounds to consider futures in science.

To achieve this, we involve a diverse community of researchers in our activities, reflecting a wide range of career paths, experiences and backgrounds. By doing so, we strengthen the inclusivity of our engagement and ensure the ICR is seen as a place where everyone can contribute, belong and thrive.

To ensure staff have the skills and confidence to take part, we delivered engagement training opportunities across both sites and promoted external development programmes. Feedback from the on-site sessions was highly positive, with several participants going on to volunteer at our Careers in Research Evenings, putting their new skills into practice. In partnership with the Cancer Research UK Convergence Science Centre, we also delivered public engagement training for new PhD students, embedding engagement from the very start of their research journey and helping to build a lasting culture of openness and collaboration across the ICR.

Celebrating success

To celebrate and recognise those who give their time to engagement, we hosted drop-in coffee mornings at both Sutton and Chelsea. These informal gatherings provided a space to thank volunteers, share experiences and strengthen our growing community of practice. Feedback was excellent, and the events are set to become a regular feature in our calendar.

Recognition also came through formal channels. Lisa Pickard, Lisa Patterson, Carol Box, Tatiana McHardy and Louise Johnson received the ICR Impact Award at the Above and Beyond Awards for their exceptional leadership and contribution to the work experience programme – reflecting our aim of embedding engagement within our culture.

We also continued to diversify opportunities for involvement, including participation in online activities such as I'm a Scientist, Get Me Out of Here, and delivering researcher development opportunities like Pint of Science, which enable staff to gain valuable experience in science communication, teamwork and event leadership. Collaboration between departments remained strong, particularly between the Centre for Cancer Drug Discovery and Centre for Cancer Imaging, who worked together to deliver an expanded work experience week. These examples highlight how engagement is becoming increasingly integrated into our research environment – not as an add-on, but as a core part of how we connect, collaborate and communicate science.

Appendix 1 – 2024/25 public engagement activity

This appendix comprises a list of events that occurred in 2024-25 according to the public engagement log, categorised based on the strategic priority they fulfil. While some events may fulfil more than one objective, we have listed them under the priority that best fits their purpose.

Actively engage with our local community:

- Dr Aline Tabib-Salazar and Samantha Howard hosted a stall as part of the Sutton STEAM Fair, engaging families in hands-on activities and conversations about cancer research.
- Iona Ferguson, Lixuan Sim, Dr Soham Mandal, Dr Erica Oliveira, Dr Heather Grant, Dr Chloe Colson, Zarrin Hassan, Renali Senaratne, Dr Shakil Khan, Wanting Zeng and Shan Ding represented the ICR at the Great Exhibition Road Festival, running hands-on activities and games about patient-centred innovation with over 600 visitors.
- Dr Adam Sharp took part in LinkedIn Local Portsmouth: Prostate Aware, a quarterly networking event bringing together local businesses with a focus on prostate cancer awareness.
- Dr Patrick Elder attended the Ashcombe School Careers Fair, running a stall to talk to Year 10 students about the ICR, his role, and opportunities in cancer research.
- Denzil James, Dr Eva McGrowder, Elizabeth Page and Reshma Rageevakumar hosted the TRANSLATE: Meet the Researchers event in Sutton to engage key community stakeholders, including Black men and people with a family history of prostate cancer, to strengthen bridges between research and the community and link to Marsden's PPIE networks.
- Dr Anna Zachariou, Lydia Turner and colleagues from the DDU hosted the Patient and Family Open Evening, welcoming families to learn about research and the work of the Royal Marsden CYP team.
- Dr Jessica Hislop took part in a lunchtime careers Q&A at St Philomena's High School for Girls, answering students' questions about her career path in science.
- Alejandro Allo Anido, Dr Amin Mirza, Brooke McMenamy, Chardonnay Blair, Dr Fatemeh Ahmadi Moughari, Dr Lisa Pickard, Dr Mark Stubbs, Dr Martina Palomba, Sam Shepherd, Sharon Gowan, Dr Shakil Khan and Dr Tatiana McHardy hosted Sutton London Festival of Architecture – London Cancer Hub Open Doors, running three tours of the biology and chemistry labs plus DNA extraction and pipetting activities.

Inspire future diversity in science:

- Samantha Howard and Dr Owen Conway took part in the Careers Carousel at St Philomena's Catholic High School for Girls, circulating between groups of Year 11 students to discuss careers in science and research.
- Dr Ian Rivens delivered the Peter Wells Memorial Lecture 2024, a public lecture and exhibit series introducing school students to medical physics, research opportunities and UCAS decision-making.
- Dr Eva McGrowder spoke at the STEM Careers event at Westminster City School, sharing her education and career pathway with Year 10 and Y12 and Y13 students.
- Samantha Howard attended the Evening with: Women in STEM networking event, connecting In2research alumni with students to discuss challenges and opportunities in STEM.
- Naman Julka-Anderson delivered a careers talk at Whitgift School Year 11 event, highlighting the variety of roles and routes into healthcare and research.
- Dr Hira Ale participated in Speed Networking at Holland Park School, supporting rotating small-group discussions on career journeys and interview tips.
- Samantha Howard and Amy Clarke delivered Women in STEM sessions at Greenshaw High School, showcasing potential careers and role models.
- Dr Christie English spoke at the Dunottar School careers evening for Years 7–13, providing insights on education and career pathways.
- Ricardo Sainz and Dr Aline Tabib-Salazar hosted a careers stall at Cheam High School – Next Steps Higher Education + Alternative Pathways, answering students' questions about future options in science and research.
- Esther Olufikayomi Ige spoke at the Denbigh High School International Women's Day event, sharing career experiences and participating in small-group discussions.
- Amadeus Xu delivered the Experiences in Research talk at London Academy of Excellence, engaging Y12 and Y13 students about life as a researcher.
- Dr Aline Tabib-Salazar, Dr Amin Mirza, Ben Kolbington, Dr Hira Ale, Lauren Knightley, Dr Lisa Pickard, Martina Brayley, Dr Owen Conway, Dr Patrick Elder, Penny Flohr, Dr Questa Karlsson, Dr Sahra St John-Campbell, Dr Sam Squire, Dr Sara Silva, Dr Soham Mandal, Tom Bland, Dr Diego Dos Reis, Naveeta Bhatia, Selene Manning, Sabeque Miah, Amy Clarke, Eilish Randall, Sarah Lothian, Ayoub El Azoui and Samantha Howard hosted the Careers in Research Evening at Sutton.
- Hradini Konthalapalli, Dr Nitya Mohan, Dr Gemma Crupi, Dr Paramita Kundu, Iona Ferguson, Esther Ige, Alex Kanellou, Joshua Killilea (CRUK CSC), Aria Torkpour (CRUK CSC), Saki Okada (CRUK CSC), Emma Pryke (Imperial), Andrea Kohn, Liz Hammond, Mernie Gilmore, Mark Jones, Robbie Lockyer, Zoe De Courci, Dr Alex

Radziskeuskaya, Dr Gideon Coster, Dr Matt Jessop, Dr Teige Matthews-Palmer, Daniel Price, Dr Tanya Trakarnphornsombat, Grigory Zemlyanskiy, Billie Delpino, Dr Aditya Sethi, Samia Khatun, Yuliya Semochkina, Naveeta Bhatia, Alex Cooper and Rumaysa Tajuddin hosted the Careers in Research Evening at Chelsea.

- Iona Ferguson and Samantha Howard gave careers talks at Chelsea Academy and All Saints Catholic College during National Careers Week, introducing students to careers and apprenticeships in science.
- Joshua Konecnik gave a careers talk at Ashcroft Technology Academy, presenting about careers and education as a cancer scientist.
- Dr Sahra St John-Campbell presented The Role of Chemistry in Drug Discovery at Bullers Wood School for Girls, highlighting drug discovery, medicinal chemistry and career paths in industry.
- Alejandro Allo Anido, Dr Erica Oliveira, Dr Soham Mandal, Stephanie Foster and Hradini Konthalapalli took part in I'm a Scientist – Get Me Out of Here, answering questions from children online about their research and life as a scientist.
- Oluwabamike (Banke) Faboyede, Pavi Venkat and Lisa O'Fee contributed researcher profiles for the Biochemistry Society Escape Room Activity, introducing students to careers in biochemical sciences.
- Dr Ben Bellenie and Imogen Thrussel delivered school talks and careers presentations at local Y12 and Y13 science fairs, introducing students to life in research and routes into scientific careers.

Establish and maintain productive partnerships:

- Dr Jessica Oliver, Dr Eva McGrowder, Denzil James, Ricardo Sainz and Dr Erik Wennerberg filmed the Careers in Research Video funded by Socius/Aviva through the London Cancer Hub partnership, shared on the ICR and London Cancer Hub websites.
- Dr Erica Oliveira, Dr Chloe Colson and Samantha Howard submitted an activity for inclusion in the British Science Week secondary school activity pack on the theme of 'Change and Adapt', based on their "Defeat the Tumour" board game.
- Dr Anna Zachariou, Dr Lydia Turner and colleagues hosted the DDU Patient and Family Open Evening, strengthening links between researchers, patients and families.
- Dr Katie Begg, Emilia Chen, Alejandro Allo Anido, Diana David, Dr Hanna Braun, Dr Giulia Lerda, Gaby Richter, Samantha Howard partnered with Socius to sponsor a Sutton Pint of Science event, enabling local residents, including MP Luke Taylor, to learn more about cancer research and plans for the London Cancer Hub.
- Dawoud Dar and Denisa Bogdan spoke at Pint of Science: Seeing the Invisible, explaining how biomarkers and imaging detect and treat cancer.

- Professor Sir Mel Greaves and Dr Pebs Edwards spoke at Pint of Science: Too Weird to Be True, exploring the hidden battles of the human body.
- Dr Nick Cundy and Daniella Hares spoke at Pint of Science: Marvellous Medicines, highlighting how new anti-cancer drugs are designed and optimised.

Embed a culture of public engagement:

- Across all our engagement events, staff and students volunteered their time and expertise to support delivery – from running lab tours to facilitating interactive activities – demonstrating the strong culture of public engagement across the ICR.
- Liliana Bowler coordinated the Sutton Family Day for ICR staff and their families which demonstrates activities used with public engagement.