

Be part of it

Our public engagement strategy



Our vision

We will create an environment in which public engagement thrives so we can share our science and expertise, connect with our local communities, celebrate our diversity, and inspire young people from across society to engage with science and consider a career in research.



Be part of it: our public engagement strategy



Introduction

The Institute of Cancer Research, London, is one of the world's most influential cancer research organisations, with an outstanding record of achievement dating back more than 100 years.

We aim to improve the lives of people with cancer through our world-class research, and we are passionate about sharing our expertise with members of the public whose lives will be touched by the work we do.

Public engagement allows us to learn about the research that matters most to the public we serve. It enables us to connect meaningfully with our local communities, helping them to feel a sense of ownership of our and cancer research. Engagement helps us to build our profile, attracting the best and brightest scientific minds to join The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) and generating support for our work so that our world-leading research can continue. For our existing staff members and students, public engagement provides a rich opportunity for professional development and enjoyment.

Broadly, engaging with the public encourages public audiences to get involved in the conversation about science and medical research, building support for science and influencing policy.

As a publicly funded higher education institution and charity, it is also our responsibility to share our discoveries and the benefits of research with the public. We are committed to openness and accountability, and to telling our story effectively.

Since we launched our previous public engagement strategy, *Reaching out*, in 2017, we have made considerable progress in embedding engagement in the ICR's culture. We have increased the numbers of ICR staff and students who have taken part in public engagement, successfully connected with our target audiences through creative engagement activities, and delivered innovative projects in collaboration with our partners. We intend to build on our previous successes as we look to the future of public engagement at the ICR.

Professor Paul Workman, Chief Executive of the ICR, said: "I'm proud that our staff and students are so dedicated to sharing their research with our public audiences. We're passionate about encouraging a sense of ownership in our research among our local communities, and inspiring a diverse range of young people to pursue careers in science. As a

Be part of it: our public engagement strategy

publicly funded higher education institution and charity, we also have a duty to share our discoveries with the public, and we make a contribution in guiding the public debate over investment in science and the benefits it brings.”

Developing our new strategy

The Communications and Policy directorate has developed this strategy in collaboration with the ICR’s Public Engagement Forum and with input from across the organisation, to reflect the public engagement priorities of the organisation and its staff and students.



Over the next three years, we intend to further enhance our culture of engagement at the ICR, so that all of our researchers feel empowered and encouraged to carry out purposeful and reflective engagement, being part of our thriving public engagement community. We will create meaningful experiences for both ICR staff and students and members of the public, bringing researchers and audiences together in worthwhile, mutually beneficial interactions.

A major focus of our outreach work will be to engage with students and young people from disadvantaged and under-represented groups, including those from low socio-economic backgrounds and from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. We aim to encourage these students to pursue careers in science and to help them overcome the barriers they may face in doing so. We will also connect with a range of adult audiences as part of our community engagement work, ensuring that our audiences for engagement reflect the diversity of our local communities.

We will also evaluate, reflect on and share our experiences in public engagement practice. We will monitor our performance against the targets outlined in this strategy to make sure we are meeting our commitments and assess progress in our annual report on public engagement.

Public engagement has been considerably affected by the coronavirus pandemic. With physical distancing measures in place, opportunities for in-person interactions have been extremely limited. We have therefore been developing new models of digital two-way engagement so we can continue to connect with our audiences and share the ICR’s knowledge and expertise with them.

Our approach to public engagement

What we mean by engagement

At the ICR, we use the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement's definition of public engagement:

“Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.”

Here are some examples of public engagement at the ICR:



Visiting schools to discuss careers in science and cancer research



Hosting workshops or interactive demonstrations for public groups



Engaging with patients about our research



Taking part in discussions with public groups in person or online

Our approach to public engagement



Who we engage with

We have identified two priority audiences for the focus of our engagement activity.

1. Local community

We will connect with a range of audiences within our local and neighbouring boroughs, ensuring that our audiences for engagement reflect the diversity of our local communities. We will work with local community groups and schools to reach local audiences and partner with local councils to deliver meaningful community projects.

2. Students and young people, especially from backgrounds currently under-represented in research careers

Diversity is vital for world-leading research to take place, and we are passionate about encouraging a more diverse and inclusive research workforce. We received a strong steer from our researchers that we should strengthen our focus on engagement with schools, particularly on reaching school children from disadvantaged backgrounds who might be unlikely currently to consider a career in science.

We know that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to pursue careers in science. We will work on promoting careers within this group, by engaging with local schools that have a high intake of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

We also received feedback from BAME staff that outreach activities could play an important role in helping equalise access to science, and so we will develop specific projects to encourage children and young people from BAME backgrounds to pursue careers in science.

While these audiences are particular priorities for our public engagement activity, we believe that engaging with all public groups has value. We will continue to support staff and students to engage with a range of audiences including supporters and potential supporters, patients, policy makers and the wider public.

Our pillars for public engagement

Our pillars for public engagement

There are four pillars, or priorities, of the strategy. They set out what we are trying to achieve through our public engagement activity.



Actively engage with our local community



Inspire future diversity in science



Establish and maintain productive partnerships



Embed engagement in the culture of the ICR

Our pillars for public engagement



Actively engage with our local community

Connecting with our local community is a major priority for the ICR. We are committed to sharing our research with the communities in and around Sutton and Chelsea, as well as the wider London area, to encourage a sense of ownership and participation in our research, and to generate support for our aims and activities. It is particularly important to engage actively with our local community in Sutton given our leading role in The London Cancer Hub, and the need to grow local support and enthusiasm for the new developments taking place in the borough.

Over the life of the previous strategy, we took part in more than 55 events in Sutton and Chelsea, connecting with the local communities and strengthening our relationship with local partners. We will continue to play an active role through community events, festivals and work with schools to share with local people the world-class research taking place on their doorstep. We will explore how we can best support our communities through new engagement projects and partnerships, meeting the needs and interests of the diverse communities of which we are part.

We will:

- Take part in festivals and events local to our two sites, such as the Great Exhibition Road Festival and Big Bang Festival in Sutton.
- Build sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships with local community groups, and develop collaborative community engagement projects with local organisations.
- Work with the London Borough of Sutton to engage with the local community:
 - around public engagement and organisational strategic priorities

Our approach to public engagement



Inspire future diversity in science

Outreach with schools has been a strong focus of our public engagement for some time. Since the launch of our previous strategy, 47 per cent of events we've taken part in have had a careers element, and our almost 200 local sixth-form students have attended our flagship public engagement event – an annual 'careers in research' open evening which we have held in our labs for the past three years. We have developed a range of resources specifically for students and teachers, including a guide to careers in cancer research, showcasing the wide range of roles and career paths available.

Our new public engagement strategy will seek to do more to inspire a diverse and inclusive next generation of cancer researchers. We will focus our outreach work on students from backgrounds currently underrepresented in science and research careers – targeting specific schools and audiences. We will engage with schools and young people to share our enthusiasm for discovery, highlight the skills needed for careers in science, and showcase the many different roles that contribute to our mission.

We will:

- Develop a schools outreach programme to promote careers in research in our target schools, which will include:
 - events/workshops/talks in schools
 - opportunities for students from target schools to visit the ICR
 - new resources for schools.
- Develop a long-term partnership with Harris Academy Sutton.
- Launch an educational film and resource pack to support the science curriculum and promote this resource both locally and nationally.
- Work with the BAME forum at the ICR and The Royal Marsden to encourage students from BAME backgrounds to pursue careers in science and cancer research.
- Launch a section of the ICR's website that features resources for schools and teachers.

Our pillars for public engagement



Establish and maintain productive partnerships

Public engagement is all about connecting with people, and that includes close working with partners to help us reach new audiences. Over the past four years, we have built on established relationships, such as those with the London Borough of Sutton, The Royal Marsden and the Science Museum, to deliver our public engagement and reach our target audiences. We have continued to work closely with funding partners including Cancer Research UK to meet our commitments for engagement around the research they fund. We have established a new partnership with Harris Academy Sutton, a science-specialist school on the site of the London Cancer Hub, which we plan to develop further.

We will work with carefully selected partners to engage with our target audiences in schools and the local community, and to reach new audiences. We will establish sustainable relationships with new partners, and continue to develop our existing partnerships, ensuring clear, mutually beneficial goals are set and reached.

We will:

- Collaborate with partner organisations to:
 - ensure public engagement obligations for research centres and grants are met (Cancer Research UK etc.)
 - reach new and wider audiences
 - support patient engagement.
- Build on sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships with partners in our existing network, particularly those within our local community such as Harris Academy Sutton.
- Establish relationships with new partners to enable us to reach target audiences.
- Work with the London Borough of Sutton to engage with the local community:
 - around public engagement and organisational strategic priorities
 - as part of their Sutton Steams Ahead project, funded by a Cultural Impact Award.

Our pillars for public engagement



Embed engagement in the culture of the ICR

We have ensured that public engagement is firmly embedded in the culture of the ICR, creating an environment that recognises and values staff members who take part. We aim to ensure that every staff member or student feels enabled to participate in public engagement and knows where to find support.

Since 2017, we have developed in-house 'introduction to public engagement' training, created a one-stop-shop of public engagement resources on Nexus, and continued to run the 'public engager of the year award' for recognising staff who are committed to engaging with the public about the ICR's research. We have continued to celebrate public engagement on Nexus and in the monthly public engagement and outreach newsletter, and the ICR's Public Engagement Officer has been visible around the organisation, meeting new staff and students, presenting to staff conferences, and offering one-to-one support.

We will continue to nurture a culture where public engagement is valued, recognised and can thrive across all levels of the organisation. We will support the ICR community to engage with the public by providing training, facilitating opportunities and organising events, and recognising and rewarding efforts to engage the public with our research. We will promote the benefits of public engagement for professional development and career progression.

Over the last three years, an average of around 150 staff members and students each year have been involved in engagement activities – over 10 per cent of our organisation. We have noticed that many more women take part in public engagement than men, which suggests that both the workload and benefits of engagement are falling unequally on female staff. We would like to investigate and address any perceived barriers to engagement at the ICR for men, and encourage both genders to participate in engagement activities.

- Recognise and reward staff members and students for their public engagement efforts through the Public Engager of the Year award, the public engagement annual report and other internal communications.
- Update the Public Engager of the Year award process so that more staff and students are recognised.

Our pillars for public engagement



- Carry out a project to explore and address barriers to public engagement at the ICR, with the aim of encouraging more staff members and students to become involved.
- Establish public engagement champions – staff and students within research and corporate teams who promote public engagement, provide peer-to-peer support and signpost. Promote the benefits of public engagement for career progression for both scientific and corporate staff by, for example, demonstrating how public engagement can be used to represent the ICR values in appraisal documentation.
- Provide staff members and students with:
 - in-house public engagement training and external training opportunities
 - guidance and support through resources and tailored opportunities to engage with the public through both ICR-led and externally-organised public events.
- Expand and enhance our library of public engagement resources and activities for staff and students.

Continue to support the activity of the Public Engagement Forum, which provides a channel for discussing public engagement and drives embedding of public engagement at the organisation.