
Reaching out Our public engagement strategy

The Institute of Cancer Research, London



January 2017

Public engagement strategy



Introduction

Our vision

The ICR's vision for public engagement is to

- see public engagement firmly embedded across the organisation
- create innovative and effective public engagement activities that share our research and its value for patients
- encourage people to pursue careers in science
- work with the community to form lasting and fruitful relationships
- work with partners to deliver joint activities and events
- evaluate and learn from our work.

Defining public engagement

Public engagement is a broad term, encompassing different types of activities where there is open communication and discussion with non-specialists in a two-way dialogue. This could involve:

- sharing our research with the public and gaining feedback and input
- explaining and 'demystifying' the processes of research
- taking part in a dialogue about the direction of our research
- sharing information about careers in science
- working with and supporting the local community
- patient engagement and involvement.

The people we engage with

Our engagement strategy includes plans to communicate with different audiences, targeting out messages accordingly. Our high-priority audiences include:

- schools and young people, including hard-to-reach groups and those currently underrepresented in research careers
- local residents, both individuals and community groups that are physically close to our campuses in Sutton and Chelsea
- existing supporters and those who may support us in the future
- patients – where our patient engagement work will be done in partnership with The Royal Marsden
- young adults
- future staff and students
- the wider public, especially across London.

Why we engage



Engagement with families at Royal Holloway Science Festival

The benefits of engagement

Public engagement has a central role to play in helping the ICR to reach its goals. We believe it will deliver the following benefits:

- **Increase public debate and support for medical research**
Raising the level of public discourse on science and medical research through engagement can help build public support for science and influence policy.
- **Inspire the cancer researchers of the future**
Outreach and engagement help encourage the next generation of cancer researchers and make young people aware of the opportunities for careers in science.
- **Build support locally**
Developing good relationships locally is particularly important in order to gain support for upcoming projects such as The London Cancer Hub.
- **Raise our public profile**
By increasing our engagement activities, we will raise our profile locally, across London and beyond. This may help attract staff and students to the ICR, and support our fundraising.
- **Support staff development**
Engagement is beneficial to individual members of ICR staff, building and demonstrating skills, supporting their career development, and fulfilling funders' requirements.

Our research strategy for 2016 – 2021, *Making the discoveries*, sets out how we aim to achieve this.

Why we engage



Photo: Royal Society of Biology

Professor Nazneen Rahman speaking at a public debate in Biology Week 2016

Our responsibilities towards engagement

The ICR's Public Engagement Strategy supports the overall ICR Communications Strategy, in sharing with the public the excellence of the ICR's research and its benefits for cancer patients.

- Our primary commitment is always to the highest quality of science communication, and respectful and collaborative engagement with the public.
- As a publicly funded higher education institution and charity, we have a duty to communicate about our work transparently, to account for how our money is spent, and to share the benefits that arise from public investment.
- Several of our funders have specific requirements for our engagement work, and in these cases we will work to develop individual strategies to allow us to meet our commitments.
- Engagement also helps us to deliver our commitments to national programmes such as the Athena SWAN Charter and the Concordat for Openness on Animal Research

How we engage



New PhD students learning about engagement activities

1. Embedding engagement throughout the ICR

Progress so far

The ICR delivers a rich portfolio of engagement activities, supported by the Communications directorate, the Research Support Unit, and individuals and teams within the ICR. Staff members across the ICR regularly take part in activities at science festivals, visit schools and give public lectures.

We have launched a Public Engagement Forum, bringing together staff across the ICR to coordinate our activities and share best practice. We support staff by sharing news of upcoming opportunities in a monthly email, offering advice and support to researchers planning events, and creating resources and activities for researchers organising events or needing help in speaking about tricky topics.

We try to ensure that ICR staff members spending time on engagement and outreach receive recognition for this work through the ICR's internal newsletter, website and blogs. In 2015 we launched our first annual ICR Engagement and Outreach Report, celebrating the breadth of work undertaken by staff at the ICR. In 2016 we celebrated our first Public Engager of the Year award, to showcase exceptional commitment to public engagement.

Where we want to be

We would like to see public engagement firmly embedded in the culture of the ICR, and included in the ICR's overall vision, with staff appreciating the importance of engagement and seeing it as a standard part of academic life. We would like to create an environment that recognises and values staff members who take part in engagement, and allows them to feel able to spend time away from their research to take part in these activities.

We want to ensure that every member of staff feels enabled to deliver public engagement activities on behalf of the ICR and knows where to find support for public engagement. We also want to ensure that staff members have the engagement experience they may need to support their grant applications and other funding expectations.

How we engage

Targets

- We will include strengthened commitment to public engagement in the new Communications Strategy, which will be signed off by the Board of Trustees.
- We will develop and promote a 'one-stop-shop' for resources on the ICR intranet, highlighting resources to support delivery of engagement and outreach activities.
- We will establish Public Engagement Champions to provide a local point of contact and support for outreach and engagement within our scientific divisions, to promote and highlight engagement opportunities internally.
- We will set up a programme of training for staff on engaging with the public about research, and provide guidance to Team Leaders on how they can help develop their staff in this area.
- We will emphasise the important role that public engagement plays in career progression in our materials for staff and students.

How we engage



The ICR stand at Imperial Festival 2016

2. Creating innovative engagement

Progress so far

We have developed innovative activities for several public engagement events, often developed in collaboration between ICR researchers and members of the Communications directorate. The Public Engagement Forum is a venue for discussing new ideas for engagement, and we have attempted to develop and deliver engagement in ways that are new to the ICR.

Where we want to be

We would like the ICR's engagement activities to reach new audiences in new ways, not relying on old-fashioned models of public understanding of science, but instead creating innovative and interactive methods of communicating.

Targets

- We will apply for external funding to allow us to increase delivery of support and spend more time developing innovative activities.
- We will work closely with researchers to make use of their ideas and in-depth knowledge of their research areas.
- We will work with people who can bring us a new perspective on engagement, for example with arts charities and other organisations.
- We will learn from best practice in creating innovative engagement activities by attending conferences and engagement events, and working with others in the field.

How we engage



Dr Carol Box visits a primary school careers event

3. Inspiring careers in science

Progress so far

We have had a strong focus on outreach activities that focus on highlighting careers in science to young people. We have held two interactive evenings for local schools at the ICR and have been contributing to Greenshaw High School's STEM Careers Academy through career mentorship and workshops. We have also provided careers profiles, mentors and role models for local and national careers projects – helping fulfil our role in making young people aware of careers in science and encouraging the talent of the future.

The STEM Ambassadors programme, which puts researchers directly in contact with local schools, has continued to grow. The programme is coordinated by the Research Support Unit, and we promote the scheme at induction events and through the Science Communication course. We have hosted a STEM networking event in Chelsea for teachers in the local area to meet with local STEM Ambassadors.

Where we want to be

We want to encourage the talent of the future and have a part to play in making young people aware of the opportunities for careers in science. We will continue to focus a high proportion of our engagement activities at school-age students and would like to build stronger relationships with schools and youth groups in the local area.

Targets

- We will build on the success of our Schools Open Evenings by holding these events more frequently.
- We will prepare resources that support schools in teaching about cancer on the curriculum such as videos or online graphics
- We will run a competition with local schools and colleges to explain an aspect of cancer via an online presentation or a video.
- We will produce a booklet for young people about careers in science, focusing on the different routes that you can take into cancer research, and highlighting the multidisciplinary nature of science.
- We will develop projects aimed specifically at girls, particularly focusing on subjects with lower uptake such as maths and physics, detailing how those subjects can lead to careers in cancer research.

How we engage



Georgina Sava and Kevin Litchfield visit the Sutton branch of the University of the Third Age, a community group for retirees

4. Working with communities

Progress so far

We have been engaging with local community groups, providing speakers for local events, and organising dialogues and activities with local community groups such as the Sutton branch of the University of the Third Age, the Sutton Youth Centre and Sutton Arts Council.

Where we want to be

We hope to increase our engagement with our local communities in Chelsea and Sutton as well as across London more widely. We would like to focus some events on disadvantaged communities, and work more closely with a wide variety of community groups. We would like to establish long-term partnerships and projects with a few select groups, to ensure we are more likely to have a lasting impact through regular commitment. We hope to involve stakeholders more directly in designing and planning our activities, to make sure we're delivering the best service possible to the community.

Targets

- We will get in touch with community groups in Sutton and Chelsea to find out how best we can engage with and support them, and maintain these relationships with regular contact and visits.
- We will work with organisations that are already embedded within the community, such as schools, Sutton Council, Sutton Arts Council and local community groups to work on joint events and projects.
- We will organise invitational lab tours for priority local audiences.
- We will plan some activities specifically aimed at girls and ethnic minorities currently underrepresented in research careers.

How we engage



The ICR, Pint of Science, Sutton Council and Cancer Research UK work together at the Imagine Art Festival

5. Working with partners

Progress so far

We have worked closely with partners to deliver joint activities and events, and ensure that we fulfil our external commitments to funders and other partners. The Royal Marsden is a key partner for our engagement activities, and the two organisations have delivered several joint events, including high-profile talks at Cheltenham Science Festival.

We are committed to a programme of engagement through our Cancer Research UK Centre and are working closely with the Cancer Research UK Research Engagement team to deliver joint activities. We have also worked with Wellcome, Genetic Alliance UK, Understanding Animal Research and the British Library on joint activities or by providing speakers on a range of topics.

Where we want to be

We will increase our work with partners to help us to reach new and wider audiences, allow us to feed into and deliver an increased and broader programme of engagement activities, and give ICR researchers opportunities to get involved in large-scale collaborative projects. We want to gain a broader understanding of the needs of our partners, and to ensure that we're doing all we can to support ICR staff in fulfilling any commitments.

Targets

- We will seek out opportunities to work with partner organisations in new areas to deliver joint activities, provide ICR speakers for externally organised events and involve external partners in our ICR activities where appropriate.
- The Public Engagement Officer will reach out to Team Leaders and grant holders to discover their obligations and commitments for funders and partners. We will proactively seek to work with them on events that can meet these requirements.
- We will develop a closer relationship with patient involvement staff at The Royal Marsden, and support ICR staff with work in this area.
- We will engage with and commit to taking part in national programmes such as the Your Life programme.

How we engage



Otto Morris
demonstrating
lab samples for a
group of students

6. Learning from our experiences

Progress so far

ICR staff members have attended public engagement conferences to share our work with the wider community, and learn about new developments and best practice in the field. We are routinely evaluating our major projects by seeking feedback from staff, students, volunteers and the public to find ways to improve our activities, and sharing lessons learnt within the Public Engagement Forum.

Where we want to be

We want to make sure our engagement work has a lasting impact. We seek to become involved with innovative engagement that is based on evidence of best practice and shared experiences. We want to learn from staff at all levels of the ICR, and hear about what works for them.

Targets

- We can provide support and guidance for staff to evaluate their own events, including the development of specific tools for evaluation. We will ensure that the results of their evaluations are fed into the wider engagement work of the ICR.
- We will invite external engagement professionals to speak at the Public Engagement Forum meetings to share best practice and allow us to learn from what others in the field are doing.
- We will gather data on the audiences we reach to ensure that we are fulfilling our commitments to gender equality and diversity.

How we engage

Assessing our progress

We are committed to creating an effective and long-term culture of public engagement at the ICR. We want to embed engagement across the organisation, to inspire careers in science, and to work closely with partners and communities. We have three-year targets for each of our six major commitments and we will monitor our performance against these targets to make sure we are meeting our commitments. Our annual report on outreach and engagement at the ICR will describe our progress against each of the areas outlined in the strategy.

As part of our commitment to a useful programme of engagement, we will review this strategy regularly, and update it in three years.

