

MRC Human Immunology Unit

Public Engagement and Communication Strategy

2017 – 2022

1.0 Background

The MRC Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine (MRC WIMM), located on the John Radcliffe Hospital site, Oxford, houses two MRC Units, the MRC Human Immunology Unit (MRC HIU) and the MRC Molecular Haematology Unit (MRC MHU). The MRC WIMM is a strategic alliance between the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the University of Oxford.

Following the MRC HIU quinquennium review in 2016/17 the Unit's MRC core grant was renewed. The MRC core grant supports eleven research programmes, each led by a programme leader, and the infrastructure that underpins the Unit. The eleven programme leaders are each affiliated to a University Department, eight are affiliated to the Radcliffe Department of Medicine, one to the Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences and two to the Nuffield Department of Medicine. There are five further affiliate research groups, two affiliated to the Nuffield Department of Medicine, and one affiliated to each of the Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology, the Radcliffe Department of Medicine and the Department of Paediatrics, see figure 1.

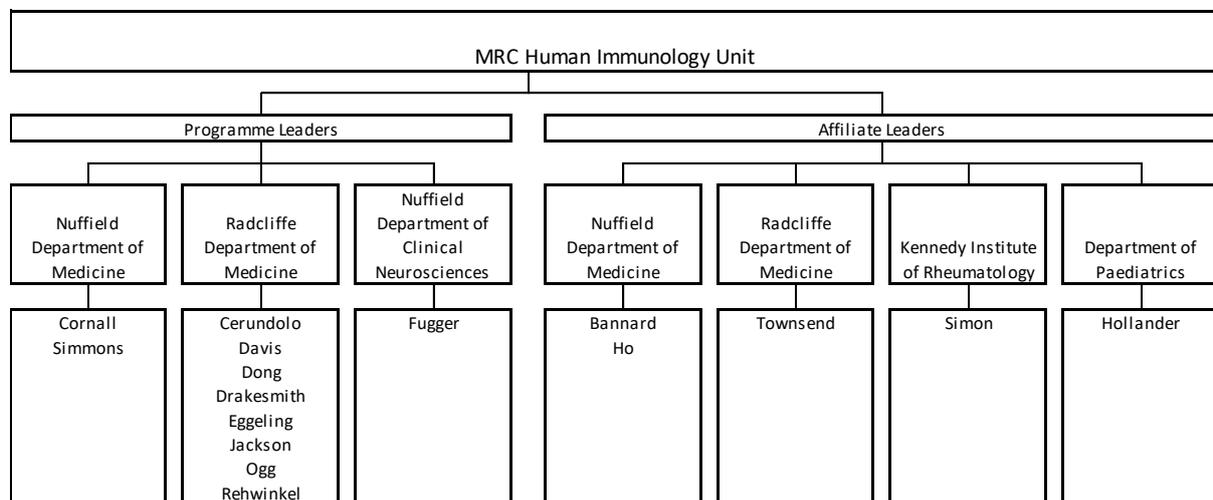


Figure. 1

A significant feature of the research within the MRC HIU is the interaction with clinical medicine through relevant University and Hospital departments within the John Radcliffe and Churchill Hospitals. Of the eleven programme leaders five hold consultant positions within the NHS, allowing researchers working within the Unit critical access to patients and patient samples, fostering the pursuit of basic scientific discoveries that are closely linked to the clinic. This close relationship with clinical research means that one of the Unit's five primary audiences will be patient groups. The other four being other researchers, non academic stakeholders, the MRC and funders. Approximately 150 staff and students are based in the MRC HIU (35 funded through the MRC core grant and 115 funded

through other external research grants) and each is encouraged to participate and support public engagement activities on behalf of the Unit as part of a coordinated programme.

Since 2012 the MRC HIU has been supported by the MRC WIMM Public Engagement with Research Committee (PERC) (formerly the Committee for Publicity and Public Understanding of Science (MRC WIMM PPUS)).

The remit of the committee is:

- to guide and support the delivery of the annual programme of public engagement events defined in the MRC WIMM, MRC HIU and MRC MHU strategies
- to offer input on the scientific background to the proposed programme of public engagement events
- to provide logistical support for event management when required
- to act as representatives of others within the MRC WIMM to reflect the views of non-committee members on public engagement and communications activities
- to evaluate public engagement and communication activities on an annual basis

2.0 Communication Aims and Objectives

Following the successful quinquennium review of the MRC HIU in 2016/17 the MRC have provided a detailed set of objectives for the Unit over the next five years. This document provides a five year strategy for public engagement and communication within the MRC HIU which focuses on those aims and objectives identified by the MRC in the QQR and which is in line with the strategic aims and objectives of the MRC Communication and Engagement Strategy 2014-2019¹.

The public engagement and communication aims and objectives for the next five years will be:

Aim 1: To develop a clear position for the MRC HIU to build its reputation as a world leader in its field.

During the next QQ scientists, clinician scientists and students within the Unit will be provided with the necessary tools to promote and enhance the Unit's reputation to enable them to, establish, build and strengthen collaborations at local, national and international levels. Through these interactions the Unit will strive to attract world leading scientists and students to the Unit.

This aim will be delivered by the following objectives:

1. to create a unique brand identity for the MRC HIU in order to increase the visibility of the Unit within the scientific community
 - 1.1. to agree a brand identity with the MRC to be used by all MRC core funded staff and students. For those staff and students who receive funding from other funders the branding can accommodate the acknowledgement of these funders.
 - 1.2. to raise awareness amongst staff and students of their affiliation to the Unit
2. using google analytics to assess the effectiveness of the MRC HIU website and revamp the website accordingly over time
3. utilize University resources by administering the Medical Sciences Divisional twitter account on dedicated scientific days.
4. the Director will proactively interact with the MRC press office through its socialmedia@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk email account in order increase the visibility of the Unit by submitting news stories throughout the year for them to be potentially published through at least one MRC communication channel, i.e. MRC Life, MRC twitter account, MRC website, MRC blog
- 5.

Aim 2: To make public engagement a core part of the Unit's activity.

The Director of the Unit, through the support of the Programme Leaders, will ensure that public engagement and communication is embedded within the Unit. The Director will ensure that adequate and appropriate resources are provided to equip staff and students with the necessary skills so they are able to communicate effectively their science to a diverse range of audiences in different formats

i.e. presenting a talk, visiting schools, hosting a stand at a festival, writing a blog, administering a twitter account.

This aim will be delivered by the following objectives:

1. for the WIMM PEC Officer to proactively organize strategically tailored events and projects and to seek out opportunities to participate in existing ones, e.g. Pint of Science, Cafe Scientifique and Science Festivals
2. to train MRC HIU members so they can effectively communicate their research by utilizing the training opportunities available through the University centrally and the Medical Sciences Division. Courses available include but not limited to Media Training, Communicating the Impact of Your Research, Presentation Skills and Public Speaking
3. to improve reporting and evaluation procedures in order to inform future activity planning
4. to submit at least one nomination during the QQ to the University of Oxford Vice-Chancellor's Public Engagement with Research Awards
5. to encourage the ten MRC core funded DPhil students within the Unit to submit an entry to the MRC Max Perutz Science Writing Award, submission will depend on the suitability of the student's science and where they have progressed within their studies
6. to encourage staff and students to apply to the annual WIMM Public Engagement awards

Aim 3: To make the research conducted by the MRC HIU accessible to non-academic stakeholders

By communicating effectively the MRC HIU aims to convey the research conducted by the Unit in an understandable and relatable way to non-academic stakeholders. This will enable non-academic stakeholders to be better informed, obtain a greater knowledge and understanding of the research conducted and the funding streams of the Unit.

This aim will be delivered by participating in public engagement activities centred around three flagship events

1. to participate in the annual MRC Festival of Medical Research either collaboratively with the MRC MHU and the CRUK/MRC Oxford Institute for Radiation Oncology or as a separate Unit depending on the focus of the science
2. to develop a series of patient facing events focused around cancer immunity delivered throughout the QQ
3. for two of the eleven programmes to pair up each year, to develop and carry out a public engagement event of their choosing

In addition, the Unit will

4. host work experience students within the Unit

3.0 Target Audiences

The MRC HIU recognises the many diverse audiences it needs to target via tailored activities in order to deliver its public engagement and communication strategy. The five main audiences will be:

- Scientists, Clinician Scientists and students who could potentially join the Unit or collaborate with existing members.
- Local patient groups
- Non Academic stakeholders (e.g. Interested adults, taxpayers, school teachers/students,-primary school level, GCSE and A-level age)
- MRC community (Other MRC Units and MRC funded scientists by submitting news to the MRC Head Office to be published through their numerous channels)
- Funding bodies (Industrial partners, charities, NIHR and BRC)

4.0 Key Messages

The key messages that the MRC HIU intends to convey via the Public Engagement and Communication strategy are:

- the MRC HIU is a world leader in human immunology research
- the MRC HIU is a distinct, branded unit with clearly defined scientific goals and accomplishments which is underpinned by the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine.
- the MRC HIU is conducting cutting-edge biomedical research into how the human immune system works, which is beneficial to society as a whole, and does not just directly impact other academics and clinicians.

5.0 Resources

The following resources have been allocated by the Unit to deliver the Public Engagement and Communication strategy

- the Director will commit 2% of his time annually to supporting and delivering the strategy
- the Business Manager will act as the Brand Champion for the Unit and produce the PEC strategy. The Business Manager will work with the WIMM PEC Officer and the HIU Executive Coordinator to ensure that administrative aspects for public engagement are recorded including maintaining ResearchFish.
- each staff member and student is encouraged to participate in public engagement activities for at least two days per annum
- a budget of £5k per annum has been allocated to support the Unit's public engagement activities. These funds will be used to support training and the activities carried out by each group. Should it be deemed that this budget not be sufficient the Director will look to supplement this budget in order to deliver the activities of the Unit. One possible source is the University of Oxford Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund.²
- if the unit identifies a public engagement activity for which pump priming funds are required the Unit will approach the MRC to see if any funds would be available through the MRC Public Engagement in Science Activities Seed Fund depending on the nature of the activity proposed

In addition to the above commitment the Unit also has access to the following resources which it will utilise during the five years

- access to patients through clinician scientists
- support from the Divisional Communications Manager to provide training, advice and feedback when required
- support from the Radcliffe Department of Medicine Public Engagement & Communication Officer to provide advice and feedback when required
- MRC WIMM, in particular
 - support from the MRC WIMM Public Engagement with Research Committee through Dr Hal Drakemsmith who is a member of the committee
 - two-way dialogue with the WIMM Public Engagement Officer to ensure that objectives and aims are being met, and activities are being effectively evaluated
 - to use the resources created by the MRC WIMM to take into schools to deliver workshops organized through the MRC WIMM Educational Programme
 - host work experience students in MRC HIU laboratories via the MRC WIMM Work Experience Programme
 - support the career development of sixth form students via the MRC WIMM Careers Day
- MRC MHU, in particular
 - Collaborate with the MRC MHU on flagship events to maximize resources and create best audience
- Other laboratories within the MRC WIMM
 - Use improved internal communications to improve collaboration and communication with other non-MRC HIU non-MRC MHU laboratories in the MRC WIMM, adding value to the unit via shared resources and expertise.

- Access to training courses run by the University of Oxford and the Medical Sciences Division

6.0 Monitoring and Evaluation Processes

Public engagement activities will be reported in ResearchFish on an annual basis. In addition, they are monitored across the MRC WIMM and recorded in a database. Staff will also provide evidence of any feedback/evaluation they have received as a result of participating in or delivering the activity.

Effective evaluation processes will be built into every activity that is conducted within the MRC HIU so that evaluation strategies can be informed by current thinking in the field and continually developed and improved to enable future improvement or to determine that an activity should be ceased.

Staff and students who participate in or plan their own events independently of this strategy will be encouraged to think about evaluation of their activity during the planning stages, and will be provided with training opportunities and resources to support this.

An annual plan of activities to accomplish the public engagement and communication strategy will be created by the MRC HIU Director at the beginning of each year, and reviewed at the end of the year. An annual report will then be submitted to the MRC.

To facilitate learning on an annual basis, statistics/observations as per each objective described above will be recorded in order to generate data which can be reviewed at the end of the QQ period in order to implement a new PEC strategy for the following five years.

During the third year of the QQ the Unit will review the PEC strategy to ensure that the aims and objectives remain pertinent and amend accordingly in conjunction with the MRC

The end of the QQ period presents an opportunity for the Unit to collate and review all annual reports from the past five years, allowing assessment of the objectives presented in the strategy document and adjustment of these where necessary.

¹ MRC Communication and Engagement Strategy 2014-2019

<https://www.mrc.ac.uk/publications/browse/communication-and-engagement-strategy-2014-19/>

² <http://www.ox.ac.uk/research/public-engagement/support-researchers>