

Communication and Public Engagement: Engaging society with Sanger Institute Science

Open access is part of the Sanger Institute ethos; from the earliest days staff have hosted student and public visits. The Communication and Public Engagement programme, officially established in late 2004, has built on this enthusiasm to strategically expand and focus the Institute's activities. We seek to promote understanding of the nature, discoveries and wonder of science – and its implications for individuals and for society.

Our Aims:

- To stimulate public interest in biomedical science
- To encourage informed discussion of issues raised by biomedical research
- To foster a community of researchers who can engage effectively with the public

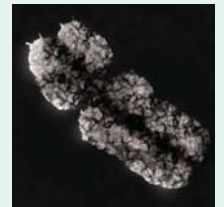
Complementing the work of the Sanger Institute Press and PR office, we try to make complex biomedical research accessible. Although all audiences are important to us – because genomic information will have an impact on all our lives – programme staff are initially focussing on students aged 14-19, their teachers, other science communicators, and adults who can either visit the Institute or attend events/exhibitions hosted by our collaborators.

Our Approach

The approach of our programme draws upon the Sanger Institute's unique history and resources: its reputation as a world-leading genomics centre; its diverse range of contemporary biomedical research; its abundance of enthusiastic researchers; and its facilities that remain unrivalled in Europe.

Onsite activities – offered for 1500-2000 visitors per year – are based in the Franklin Centre for Public Engagement, a dedicated and flexible activity, studio and work space. To stimulate interest and encourage informed debate about biomedical science, we vary our approach to match audiences' interests and understanding. Activities like sequence bracelets or origami DNA, are fun and introductory; while molecular animations of processes or debates on controversial issues can be challenging. Each is a 'way-in' to the science, providing researchers at the Sanger Institute with a chance to discuss their work.

The team offers training and opportunities to help researchers involved in the programme work with different audiences. Staff can gain experience from giving tours and presentations, developing



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resources and activities for on- or offsite participants, or taking part in online broadcasts.

Through online resources, collaborations and offsite events, our activities extend well beyond the Genome Campus. We publish online our resources developed for onsite use (on the recently-redesigned YourGenome.org website, www.yourgenome.org) and use them in events like the Cambridge Science Festival or professional development sessions for teachers. The Franklin Centre's new videoconferencing facilities offer audiences nationwide the opportunity to interact with working scientists – without the need to use National Rail or a budget airline.

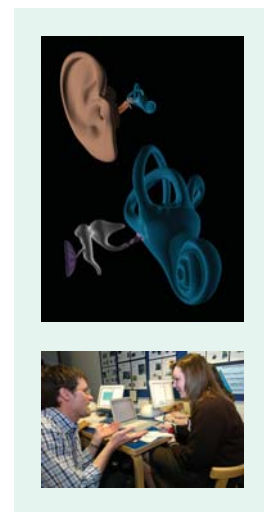
Our Collaborations

Like most of the Sanger Institute's activities, the majority of public engagement projects are collaborations. We try to complement rather than compete; revise rather than redo. Collaborating with institutions and venues with existing programmes provides Sanger Institute scientists with opportunities to engage with a wide range of new audiences. The programme feeds into venues and media that already have established audiences and communication mechanisms, including:

- the National Network of Science Learning Centres, for contemporary science updates and 'resource roundups' as part of continuing professional development programmes for teachers

- the UK network of science centres and museums (Ecsite-uk) who are partners in *Inside DNA: a genomic revolution*, a travelling exhibition on contemporary genetics and genomics. Their member venues will also display a collaboration with the production company Windfall Digital: a compact, video-based 'interactive drama' called *Choose Your Character*, that offers a very personal look at the impact of genetics on people's lives.

- the Cambridge Science Festival – as part of a close collaboration with the European Bioinformatics Institute – where more than 30 staff have offered activities for the last few years to between 2000 and 3000 people visiting the Biology Zone.



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