The annual MRC Festival of Medical Research took place in June, with 40 MRC-funded establishments and collaborations showcasing their work through events and activities in England, Scotland, Wales, The Gambia, Kenya and Uganda.

Thank you to the MRC researchers and support staff who shared their research, either by taking their science into the local community or by inviting the public into their workplace, and to everyone who contributed in other ways to inform, inspire and stimulate thinking about medical research.

Members of the public joined MRC HGU and MRC IGMM researchers, clinicians and patients at the ‘Shining a Light on Genetics Disorders’ event which focused on families affected by genetic conditions.

Guides took part in a ‘Biohazard Relay’ during their visit to MRC-UoG CVR where they competed against the clock to dress in PPE and inactivate the big bad nasty virus.

University of Sheffield researchers ran an ‘Exploring Hearing Loss’ activity stand where children built models of hair cells, which was part of the event ‘Fighting the Good Fight: How medical research helps us combat disease’.
Queen’s Birthday Honours

Congratulations to the following people closely connected with the MRC who have been recognised in the 2019 Queen's Birthday Honours list:

Knighthoods

Professor Mark Caulfield
Interim Chief Executive and Chief Scientist, Genomics England and Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Queen Mary University of London. Professor Caulfield was a Principal Investigator on the MRC’s British Genetics of Hypertension (BRIGHT) study. For services to the 100,000 Genomes Project.

Professor Peter Donnelly
Chief Executive, Genomics plc and Professor of Statistical Science, University of Oxford. Former MRC Principal Investigator (University of Oxford Big Data Institute). For services to the Understanding of Human Genetics in Disease.

Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG)

Professor Charlotte Watts
Group Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for International Development; Member of the MRC’s Global Health Group. For services to Global Health and International Development.

Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)

Professor Graham Collingridge
Former MRC Centre Director (Synaptic Plasticity, Bristol). For services to Biomedical Sciences.

Professor Sylvia Richardson
Director, MRC Biostatistics Unit, University of Cambridge. For services to Medical Statistics.

Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)

Professor Max Parmar
Professor of Medical Statistics and Epidemiology and Director, MRC Clinical Trials Unit at UCL. For services to Medical Research and Clinical Trials.

For further information, please visit: http://bit.ly/2xGg29m
Executive Corner

As one of our most important channels to engage with the MRC community and celebrate the successes of MRC staff and MRC-funded researchers, we really value your contributions to MRC Life. For this reason, I’d like to encourage you to complete the Annual Readership Survey (see page 5) to help us improve MRC Life.

On the theme of celebrating success, we have once again seen the great talent of MRC researchers recognised through the Queen’s Birthday Honours (see page 2) as well as the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO) list of new fellows and Gold Medal (see page 11). Congratulations to all whose achievements have been recognised.

At the MRC we are proud to have a skilled technical workforce who greatly contribute to the research we do. I believe we need to support and encourage excellence across all staff. One method of doing this is by actively promoting the Technician Commitment, which recognises the achievements, responsibility and career development of our technical staff. This has been a great success at the MRC Harwell Institute which celebrated 60 professionally registered staff members in May earlier this year (see page 5). And in July, our institutes held the first ever Inter-MRC Institute Technician Symposium – a great start to growing a positive culture and supportive environment for our technician community (see page 9).

Finally, I would like to thank all of those who got involved in the MRC Festival this year. I am pleased to say it will be returning next year from 18 May to 30 June as we continue our commitment to public engagement.

Hugh Dunlop
Chief Operating and Finance Officer

New home for the MRC London Institute of Medical Sciences

The development of the new MRC London Institute of Medical Sciences (MRC LMS) building reached a major milestone in July when they received planning permission from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

The new building will create approximately 12,000 metres squared of advanced research facilities in an environment which will promote collaboration between all building users. Built on the former cyclotron site, the new building will bring together LMS researchers who are currently spread across five buildings at the Hammersmith Hospital campus in West London.

In addition to the state-of-the-art research facilities and office space, there will be a café and 120-person seminar room, breakout spaces and east-facing terrace on the seventh floor of the building.

The enabling works will be undertaken through the summer, with construction of the building expected to begin in October once planning conditions have been met.

For updates on the LMS development, please visit: http://bit.ly/2xEMTLP
Cabinet Secretary for Health in Scotland visits MRC researchers

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Jeane Freeman MSP, visited the Royal Edinburgh Hospital last month to find out more about the research the MRC is funding in Scotland.

Hosted by Professor Andrew McIntosh, the Cabinet Secretary met MRC researchers working on the MRC Mental Health Data Pathfinder award and the Generation Malawi project, both based at the University of Edinburgh.

The data pathfinder project aims to better understand the causes and consequences of common mental health conditions by using cost-effective data integration and analysis. Generation Malawi seeks to build research training capacity and expertise by developing a cohort of 6,000 mothers, their children and wider families in two areas of Malawi. It will develop a large biobank with which to facilitate future studies of common mental disorders and attract inward investment in one of the poorest countries in the world.

The Cabinet Secretary heard from researchers about how the Scottish Government can support researchers in the vital work they are doing, for example by improving access to data.

Ms Freeman said: “These two projects being funded by the MRC are important. Improving mental health is a priority for the Scottish Government and research looking at the causes and consequences of mental health conditions, both in Scotland and abroad, is crucial.”

MRC Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine wins Public Engagement Award

The MRC Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine (MRC WIMM) and its two units, the MRC Molecular Haematology Unit and MRC Human Immunology Unit, have won this year’s University of Oxford Vice Chancellor Public Engagement with Research Award, in the ‘building capacity’ category. The biannual awards celebrate excellence in public engagement across the University of Oxford.

The MRC WIMM was recognised for its comprehensive public engagement programme, including science festivals, school visits, science in the supermarket and a work experience programme for under-represented students. The activities are led by the Public Engagement with Research Committee which includes academics, technical and administrative staff. The institute has grown its public engagement efforts from only 12 activities and 24 volunteers in 2012, to 126 volunteers (roughly 25% of the institute) in 66 events during 2018.

The award recognises the efforts of past and present members of the MRC WIMM, so many thanks to all who have participated.

For more information, please visit: http://bit.ly/2Lexefh
MRC Harwell Institute celebrates professional registration for staff

The MRC Harwell Institute held a celebratory event on 21 May to mark 60 staff members becoming professionally registered with the Science Council.

The institute launched its professional registration scheme in May 2016. Its first Registered Science Technicians, Registered Scientists and Chartered Scientists were announced in October 2016. Professional registration provides independent recognition of the achievements, levels of responsibility and decision-making of scientists and technicians, and is recognisable across all areas of science.

Dr Tertius Hough CSci, Head of Pathology and Technical Training at the MRC Harwell Institute, said: “Since launching the scheme three years ago, there has been a growing interest in professional registration and we are pleased to see that being registered is fast becoming the norm. Professional bodies help to broaden the perspectives of their members and create awareness of events and opportunities for continued professional development. We hope to be celebrating 100 members of registered staff in the not-too-distant future.”

The institute has been actively promoting professional registration since signing the Technician Commitment in April 2018, which includes a pledge to ensure greater visibility, recognition and career development for their technical staff.


Help us make MRC Life even better

Help us to improve MRC Life by taking part in a short readership survey. MRC Life seeks to share information across the MRC community and to celebrate the successes of MRC staff and MRC-funded researchers.

MRC Festival of Medical Research 2019

Continued from front cover

MRC WIMM scientists took their research on new cancer therapies to the local community in Didcot, Reading and Oxford. Researchers from MRC HIU, MRC MHU and others across the institute worked together to translate their research on cancer immunotherapy into an engaging stand for adults and children.

“It’s so valuable being able to talk with the scientists, and hear what being a researcher is really like”

The LSHTM created a short film called ‘Be Your Sisters’ Keeper’. The specially created film gave a voice to sex workers in Nairobi, Kenya: the violence they face, how it affects them and the ways they are coming together to address it. The film was screened in both Nairobi and London.

MRC LMB invited students from two sixth form colleges to preview the exhibit ‘A Recipe for Primordial Life’. Students explored the volcanic landscape of the early earth to find out how the fundamental molecules needed for life began and how these might have combined in the first cells.

The University of Edinburgh Centre for Inflammation Research ran a teacher training workshop using their ‘Supercytes – the immune cell standoff’ card game which focused on immunology and inflammation.
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Next year’s MRC Festival takes place 18 May - 30 June 2020

The University of Warwick gave talks at their ‘Superbugs: Mega Magnification’ event and used virtual reality to immerse participants inside bacteria to learn why previously effective antibiotics are no longer winning the battle against some infections.

“I think that we were all both humbled and inspired by the patient stories that we heard.”

The Summer Science Fete at UCL was a fun day for all ages and included hands on activities, interactive demonstrations and games. It was hosted by MRC CTU, MRC LMCB, MRC LHA, MRC Prion Unit and UK DRI.

“One conversation can spark an interest in science in a child. This is why it is so important that you are here today.”

Acronym guide:

- LSHTM: London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- MRC CTU: MRC Clinical Trials Unit at UCL
- MRC HGU: MRC Human Genetics Unit at the University of Edinburgh
- MRC HIU: MRC Human Immunology Unit at the University of Oxford
- MRC IGMM: MRC Institute of Genetics & Molecular Medicine at the University of Edinburgh
- MRC LHA: MRC Unit for Lifelong Health & Ageing at UCL
- MRC LMB: MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology
- MRC LMCB: MRC Laboratory for Molecular Cell Biology at UCL
- MRC MHU: MRC Molecular Haematology Unit at the University of Oxford
- MRC-UoG CVR: MRC-University of Glasgow Centre for Virus Research
- MRC WIMM: MRC Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine at the University of Oxford
- UK DRI: UK Dementia Research Institute
BactiVac receives award at the Antibiotic Guardian Awards 2019

The University of Birmingham-hosted BactiVac Network recently attended the Antibiotic Guardian Awards 2019, held as part of the ongoing Antibiotic Guardian campaign led by Public Health England (PHE), and received an award under the research category. The BactiVac Network is supported by the Global Challenges Research Fund Networks in Vaccines Research and Development, which is co-funded by the MRC and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

PHE's Antibiotic Guardian campaign aims to increase commitment and raise awareness among the public and healthcare professionals about how we can slow the development of resistant bacteria and cut unnecessary use of antibiotics.

Professor Adam Cunningham, Co-Director of the BactiVac Network, said: “The BactiVac Network is honoured and delighted to receive this award. BactiVac's winning entry recognises the Network's efforts to address the global antimicrobial resistance (AMR) challenge by developing vaccines to prevent disease and therefore reducing the need to use antimicrobials.”

The Antibiotic Guardian Awards ceremony, held on 27 June, recognised members of the public and a host of health professionals from a variety of fields including human and animal health, and highlighted the collaborations from various sectors.

For more information, please visit: http://bit.ly/BVaward

I'm a Scientist - MRC Festival Zone 2019 inspired and engaged over 1,200 students

The MRC Festival Zone was an I'm a Scientist - style online competition where school students asked researchers and technical experts questions and then voted for who they thought should win. During the four weeks of the competition, over 1,200 students logged in to connect with our 25 MRC-funded researchers and technical experts. 33 schools took part, of which 80% were underserved and/or widening participation.

342 questions  63 Live Chats  924 Votes cast

Weekly winners included: David Wilson – MRC Human Genetics Unit at the University of Edinburgh, Nina Rzehorzek and Ross Hill, both from the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology.

Another weekly winner and the overall winner was Deepak Chandrasekharan – Clinical Research Training Fellow at MRC Harwell, who plans to spend his £500 prize on public engagement with schools in his local community. See Deepak's full thank you post: http://bit.ly/2McLrJ4

To read the MRC Festival Zone Report, please visit: http://bit.ly/2ZvU7ON

“The past four weeks has been one of the most rewarding, fulfilling and thought-provoking periods I have had in science.”
Technicians keeping us at the forefront of innovation

Over a year ago, the MRC signed the Technician Commitment pledging to ensure and support the visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability of the technical workforce across MRC institutes.

In July, the first ever Inter-MRC Institute Technician Symposium took place with a view to promoting networking opportunities and celebrating contributions to research.

The keynote was delivered by Professor Sir William Wakeham, who highlighted the importance of events such as the symposium in creating a sense of community across the technical workforce. He stressed how we must recognise that technicians are the backbone of the scientific workforce and are vital to ensuring that the UK is at the forefront of innovation.

The Technician Commitment strives to create practical frameworks for professional registration, networking and career progression, which were explored through presentations and networking workshops.

Volunteers from the MRC London Institute of Medical Sciences, MRC Harwell Institute and the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology delivered nine presentations across the morning. The presentations sought to celebrate the technical work that keeps the MRC running and demonstrates the diversity of the roles and responsibilities of our technicians.

The symposium was a great start to growing a positive culture and environment for the MRC’s technician community.

For more information, please visit: http://bit.ly/2JuaUL5

New research to improve diagnosis and treatment of stroke in young adults

The Medical Research Foundation (MRF) has awarded over £1 million of funding to support research aimed at improving diagnosis, treatment and post-stroke recovery in young adults.

Four mid-career researchers from across the UK were selected for funding, including scientists from the universities of Cambridge, Birmingham, Oxford and Manchester.

Stroke is a major health problem that can have devastating consequences. People over the age of 65 are more likely to have a stroke, although around a quarter of strokes happen in young people of working age.

Angela Hind PhD, Chief Executive of the MRF, said: “Historically, we’ve thought of stroke as only affecting older adults but recent evidence suggests a growing problem in young adults. We consider this to be an area of high unmet need, which is why we’re supporting mid-career researchers who have the potential to be the research leaders of the future.”

To find out more about the funded projects, visit the MRF’s website: http://bit.ly/2XzAe8B

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Taking public engagement international

Dr Nicola Muirhead works in drug development and communications with the MRC Prion Unit at UCL and the MRC Unit in The Gambia at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. But outside of work her passion is supporting disadvantaged children in resource-constrained settings. Here she shares her international volunteering journey.

“Following years of mentoring children from disadvantaged areas during my degrees, I started volunteering abroad in 2016 with an initial trip to Ghana, where I taught maths and science to primary-school-aged children and painted educational material, such as fractions, electrical diagrams and labelled biological structures, on school walls. Sustaining these educational materials is very important as the children do not have text books to learn from and teachers regularly fail to attend schools, leaving the children alone for days at a time with no guidance.”

“A year later in 2017, I volunteered in Morocco with both disabled children in the city and children in hard-to-reach villages, which often struggle to attract teachers. Classes focused on colouring in educational material and rote learning. In the villages, local communities provided a building and volunteers brought teaching materials and heaps of enthusiasm.”

“I found volunteering in Bulgaria with Romany children in 2018 to be the most challenging given the lack of a common language. Nevertheless, every day was rewarding as the children developed new skills and gained confidence. Volunteers focused on counting games and developing team work, whereas I used my experience as a yoga instructor to teach group learning skills, as many of the children don’t attend school and are not used to a classroom or structured learning environment.”

“The enthusiasm of the children I meet while volunteering motivates me to continue my communications work both abroad and at home, with science festivals being a priority.”

Meet Nicola at the UCL ‘It’s All Academic Festival’ on 5 October on the UCL Campus: [http://bit.ly/2YScFs8](http://bit.ly/2YScFs8)

Citizen Science

[RODENT LITTLE BROTHER: SECRET LIVES OF MICE](#)

Burrow into the secret lives of mice to help us advance medical research and mouse welfare.

#SECRETLIVESOFMICE

To find out more, please visit: [bit.ly/secretlivesofmice](http://bit.ly/secretlivesofmice)
EMBO recognises outstanding MRC researchers

MRC-supported researchers are among the 56 outstanding life scientists named in the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO) list of new members. EMBO elects new members annually in recognition of their contributions to scientific excellence.

EMBO will formally welcome its new members and associate members at the annual members’ meeting in Heidelberg between 29 and 31 October 2019.

The newly-elected MRC-supported scientists include:

- Professor Sadaf Farooqi, Wellcome Trust-MRC Institute of Metabolic Science, Cambridge
- Professor Sten Eirik W. Jacobsen, MRC Molecular Haematology Unit at the University of Oxford
- Dr Garib Murshudov, Group Leader, MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge
- Professor Lalita Ramakrishnan, Group Leader, University of Cambridge Molecular Immunity Unit, at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge
- Professor Katrin Rittinger, Group Leader, Francis Crick Institute, London
- Professor James M. Turner, Group Leader, Francis Crick Institute, London


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**Royal Society Royal Medal**

Dr Michel Goedert from the Neurobiology Division at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology has been awarded the Royal Society’s 2019 Royal Medal for Biological Sciences.

Dr Goedert has been honoured for his work on neurodegenerative diseases, especially for identifying and characterising key molecules that form the inclusions of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.


**EMBO Gold Medal**

Professor Madan Babu, a Group Leader in the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology’s Structural Studies Division, has been awarded the EMBO Gold Medal for his “fundamental contributions to the field of computational molecular biology”.

Professor Babu shares the prize with Professor Paola Picotti of ETH Zurich.

EMBO awards the annual Gold Medal to honour the exceptional achievements of selected life scientists under the age of 40 in Europe, highlighting the role of young independent group leaders.

Professors Babu and Picotti will each receive a gold medal and a cash prize of 10,000 euros.

For more information, please visit: [http://bit.ly/2XwZV9l](http://bit.ly/2XwZV9l)
MRC Delivery Plan 2019

The MRC’s Delivery Plan forms part of the 2019-20 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Delivery Plans which highlight the areas of focus and key activities of UKRI’s nine constituent councils and its cross-cutting themes.

In the centre of the diagram are the four foundations that are central to addressing our vision.

We give particular emphasis to developing research and partnerships in our health focus themes, indicated around the outer circle of the diagram.

To translate the outcomes of our work, we develop partnerships for health and economic impact, pictured inside the grey ring.

Find out more: [http://bit.ly/2xOC0HB](http://bit.ly/2xOC0HB)

Please contribute

Send comments or article ideas to:
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