





Contents

Introduction	3
Centre structure 2025 - 2026	4
Core metrics	5
Key achievements	6
WCRC highlights and areas of impact	7
• CReSt: strengthening research foundations	7
• Building research capacity	10
• Brokering collaboration	14
• Delivering research enabling activity	19
Conclusion	23

Front cover image: Dr Rosie Mundy, WCRC Career Starter Award recipient



Introduction

I am pleased to present the 2025/26 Stakeholder Report for the Wales Cancer Research Centre (WCRC), marking the start of a new phase for cancer research in Wales. Building on progress from 2020–2025, we are strengthening research infrastructure and focusing on delivering measurable improvements for patients and communities.

Funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales and based at Cardiff University, WCRC provides strategic leadership and supports research to improve cancer outcomes. Our work is guided by the six priority themes of the Wales Cancer Research Strategy (CReSt): precision and mechanistic oncology, immuno-oncology, radiotherapy, cancer clinical trials, supportive and palliative care, and population-based prevention and early detection.

This year, we celebrated the impact of CReSt through a **new report** highlighting progress across Wales, alongside continued delivery of initiatives to strengthen the research pipeline. Our Career Starter Awards have supported early-career researchers to generate preliminary data and build competitive funding applications, while the Early and Mid-Career Researcher (EMCR) Network marked its first year by connecting and supporting emerging researchers across the community.

The 2026 Wales Cancer Research Conference was a key moment in the year, bringing together researchers, clinicians, and partners from across the UK to share advances and build collaborations. This collaborative approach is further reflected in our support for the Cardiff Cancer Research Partnership (CCRP), strengthening alignment between Cardiff University, Velindre University NHS Trust, and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to drive a more coordinated approach to cancer research in Wales.

These activities reflect our commitment to coordinated working across universities, NHS organisations, and partners to grow capacity, widen opportunities, and ensure research benefits people across Wales.

While challenges remain, including rising cancer incidence and persistent health inequalities, we are confident that the strength of our partnerships and the dedication of our research community will enable us to meet them. By continuing to attract investment, build networks, and champion high-quality research, the WCRC is well placed to help to deliver measurable improvements in prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and supportive care.

I would like to thank our researchers, partners, stakeholders, and funders for their continued commitment and support. Together, we will support the advance of cancer research in Wales, with a clear focus on improving the lives of patients and families.

Diolch yn fawr iawn,

Professor Mererid Evans
Director, Wales Cancer Research Centre

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M Evans'.

Image: Professor Mererid Evans

Centre structure 2025 - 2026

The current Centre leadership and delivery structure is as follows and receives advice and oversight from an External Advisory Board, WCRC/CRcSt Steering committee and a CRcSt Leadership Group.

WCRC academic leadership



**Professor
Mererid Evans**
Director



**Professor
Duncan Baird**
Associate Director



**Professor
Sunil Dowani**
Associate Director



**Dr Helen
Pearson**
Associate Director

WCRC Hub team



Jenni Macdougall
Strategy



Dr Ceri Morris
Operations

Plus ~3.3FTE of comms project, scientific project manager and admin support

WCRC lay research partners



Dr Sally Anstey
Lead Research Partner



Bob McAlister
CRcSt Research Partner

Plus 5 more Research Partners aligned to CRcSt themes

Crest theme leads

Cohort of 12 academic leaders responsible for:

- coordinating research activity for their theme
- acting as champions for research in their area
- identifying opportunities for collective progress within and across thematic areas

WCRC-funded researchers

Cohort of researchers and PhD students funded or part-funded by WCRC based at:

- Cardiff University
- Swansea University
- Bangor University
- Velindre University NHS Trust
- Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
- Swansea Bay University Health Board

Core metrics

Reporting period: **2025/2026**



Health and Care Research Wales infrastructure award to the group



Direct funding awarded
£972,391

Jobs created through direct funding



Grants won during reporting period

Grants won	Led by group	Group collaborating
Number	13	5
Value	£5.7m	£4.9m
Funding to Wales	£5.7m	£4.9m
Funding to group	£1.3m	£468,325
Additional jobs created for Wales	19	12
Additional jobs created for group	7	4



Number of publications

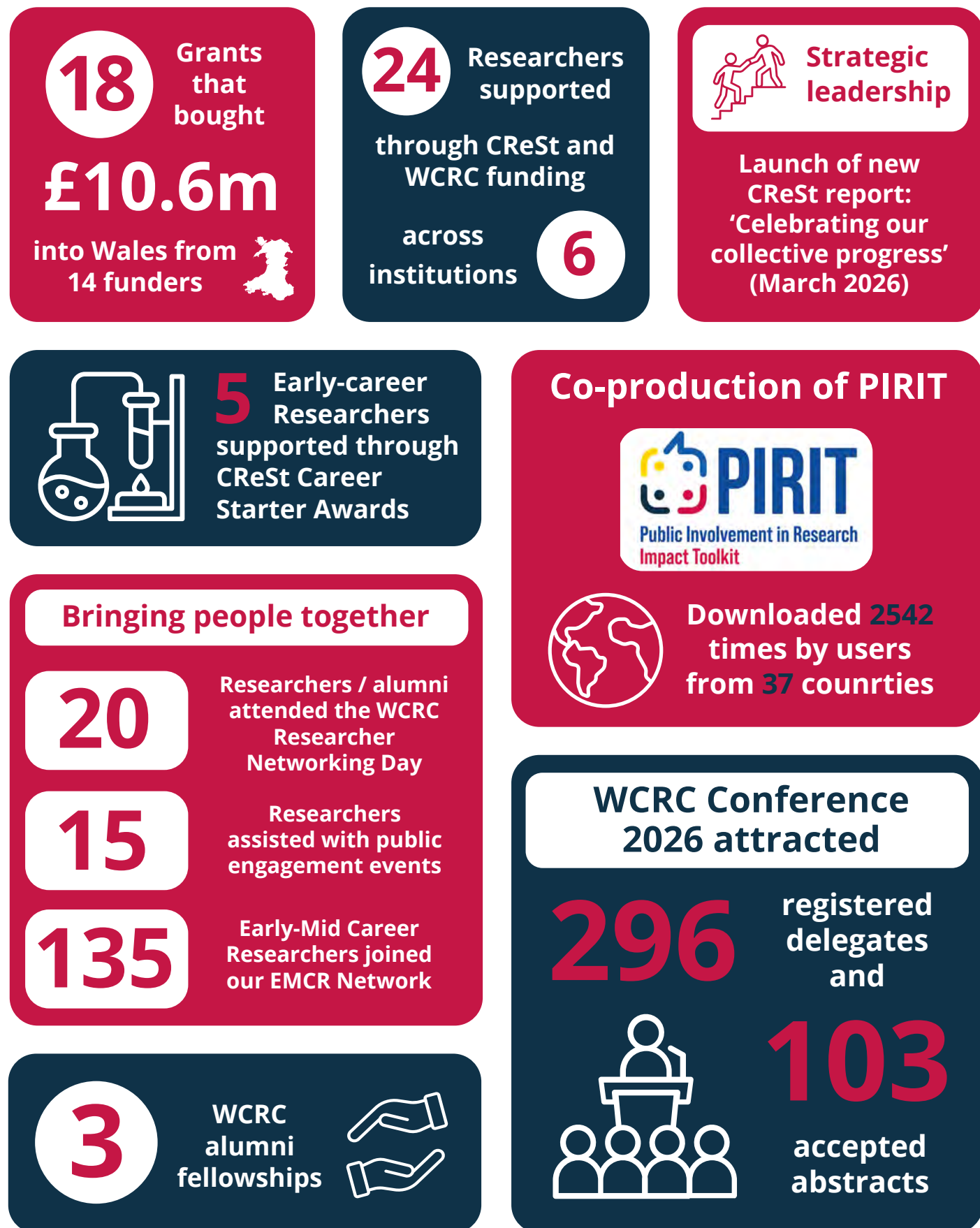


Number of public engagement events



Number of public involvement opportunities

Key achievements 2025 - 2026



WCRC highlights and areas of impact



CReSt: strengthening research foundations

Celebrating a Year of Momentum: Progress with the CReSt strategy

The past year has been enhanced by continued investment in our clinical research community, through the Health and Care Research Wales funding allocated to WCRC to support the delivery of the CReSt strategy for Wales.

Showcasing Wales' Achievements: The CReSt Progress Report

In March 2026, to coincide with the WCRC conference, we published a comprehensive summary of activity since CReSt's inception. This [report](#) captures not only the highlights of research underway across Wales, but also the strengthening infrastructure and depth of engagement achieved across clinical, academic, and translational communities. The publication serves as a touchstone for partners and funders, reinforcing the value and direction of our shared mission.

Investing in Clinical Research Leaders

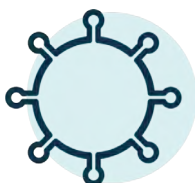
A major milestone this year was the launch of the CReSt Clinical Research Sessions call in June 2025, aimed at enabling cancer clinicians to dedicate protected research time for up to two days per week, to develop new cancer studies and associated translational work.

After assessment and interview, we were able to offer research time to four talented clinicians to progress their work. The first two to take up their posts in April 2026 were Dr Mark Willis, a Consultant Neurologist at Cardiff & Vale UHB, whose research interest is in neurotoxicity of cancer immunotherapy; and Dr James Powell, a consultant clinical oncologist at Velindre Cancer Centre who will use the time to expand Cardiff's portfolio of brain tumour clinical trials.

These appointments signal CReSt's commitment to a research-active clinical environment, and we hope to run a further call in 2026.



Theme 1:
Precision and
mechanistic
oncology



Theme 2:
Immuno-
oncology



Theme 3:
Radiotherapy



Theme 4:
Cancer clinical
trials



Theme 5:
Palliative and
supportive
oncology



Theme 6:
Prevention,
early detection,
primary care and
health services
research

Fuelling Innovation: The Concept Development Fund

A CReSt Concept Development Fund (CDF) was run in 2025 to provide essential seed funding for pilot data, feasibility work, training, and other early-stage research activity. In October 2025, we launched an open call aimed at empowering both clinical and nonclinical researchers from all Welsh institutions to explore new concepts and position themselves competitively for larger national and international bids.

The response was enthusiastic, with 18 applications received. In November 2025, the review panel recommended 12 projects for funding, representing a total investment of £97,500. These projects span population-scale data science, mechanistic laboratory research, imaging innovation, microfluidics, early detection, therapeutic target identification, and more. Successful applicants were:

- **Arron Lacey, Laura Baker** (Swansea University) and **Mathew Clement** (Cardiff University) – Brain cancer epidemiology using longitudinal healthcare data
- **Deya Gonzalez** (Swansea University) – Co-designed focus groups to improve symptom recognition in women's cancers
- **Stefano Zappala** (Cardiff University) – Deuterium imaging to validate advanced 7T MR coil sensitivity
- **Hadia Almahli** (Bangor University) – Development of next-generation CDK2 inhibitors
- **Nicholas Rawlings** (Cardiff University) – Identifying opportunities for earlier oral cancer referral
- **Chris Staples** (Bangor University) – Screening therapeutic targets in BRCA1-mutant breast cancers
- **Helen Brown** (Cardiff University) – Optimising a 3D prostate explant model
- **Helen Pearson & Tabitha Cunliffe** (Cardiff University) – Understanding distinct functions of PARP1 and PARP2
- **Paul Shaw** (Velindre UHB) – Mapping lung tumour blood flow via advanced MRI analysis
- **Lee Parry** (Cardiff University) – Enhancing the safety and specificity of bacterial cancer therapies
- **Catherine Hogan** (Cardiff University) – Investigating heterogeneity in pancreatic cancer cells of origin
- **Naledi Formosa** (Cardiff University) – Developing a human bone-on-a-chip model for breast cancer metastasis research

By enabling early ideas to flourish, the CDF continues to strengthen Wales's research excellence and competitiveness on the national stage.

“ This funding will enable the first population-scale analysis of brain tumour patients in Wales using linked, anonymised data from the SAIL Databank. It will support both secure data access and the training of wet lab researchers in data science, strengthening interdisciplinary capability. We will investigate how socio-economic status, geography, and access to care shape diagnosis, treatment, and survival, with a focus on glioblastoma. The project will generate vital evidence on inequalities in care and outcomes, informing future research, improving services, and providing a strong foundation for further funding. This study was conceptualised through collaboration between data scientists and glioblastoma experts at the WCRC Researcher Networking Day, and we are excited to advance this understanding for patients across Wales.



Dr Laura Baker, WCRC
Academic Research Fellow
2023-2028

Supporting the Next Generation: Career Starter Awards

Developing future research leaders remains a key priority, and this year saw the successful rollout of the CReSt Career Starter Awards providing 6-12 months of funding for early-career researchers. Following an open call in June 2025 we received 18 applications, demonstrating the breadth of early-career talent across Wales, as well as our growing international appeal, with two applicants relocating from overseas.

After interviews in September, five awardees were selected, beginning their posts from December 2025 onwards:

- **Dr Danielle Harper**
(Supervisor: Professor Deya Gonzalez, Swansea)
- **Li Rong Tan**
(Supervisor: Professor Andrew Sewell, Cardiff)
- **Dr Julian Fischer**
(Supervisor: Professor Alan Parker, Cardiff)
- **Dr Xiaoyan Zhang**
(Supervisor: Professor Aled Clayton, Cardiff)
- **Dr Rosie Mundy**
(Supervisor: Professor Alan Parker, Cardiff)

These awardees represent the future of translational cancer research in Wales – driving fresh ideas, diversifying skillsets, and strengthening scientific capacity across Wales' research centres.

“ Receiving this award is such a blessing for allowing me to transition into this new role and research environment. Linking up with Viral ImmunoTherapies and Advanced Therapeutics (VITAL) and working on the rapid generation of specifically tailored precision oncolytic agents puts me in a great position for continuing my career in research.



Dr Julian Fischer,
CSA recipient



Looking Ahead

As we reflect on these milestones, the CReSt funding from Health and Care Research Wales has enabled WCRC to accelerate growth, collaboration, and strategic investment in up-and-coming talent in Wales. This year's achievements reflect a maturing ecosystem:

- Clinician scientists with protected time
- A new wave of early-career researchers
- A portfolio of innovative pilot work
- Strengthening partnerships and national visibility

The foundations we are building position us strongly for continued progress, and together, we are building momentum across Wales.

Image: Dr Julian Fischer, WCRC researcher and CSA recipient



Building research capacity

Supporting next-generation cancer vaccine research

Professor Andrew Godkin and Professor Awen Gallimore have secured a major five-year funding award from Cancer Research UK to develop new types of cancer vaccines. Their work focuses on improving how the immune system recognises and attacks cancer by designing vaccines that better stimulate immune cells. Working with Dr Bruce MacLachlan (WCRC-funded researcher 2025) and international partners, the team will test these approaches with the aim of developing vaccines for bowel cancer.

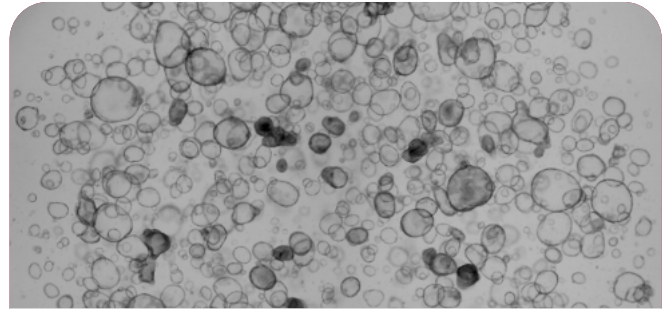
The goal is to create “off-the-shelf” vaccines that could be used more widely, rather than highly personalised treatments. The programme has also received additional support from the Bowelbabe Fund for Cancer Research UK, helping move closer to a more widely available bowel cancer vaccine.

This work is also closely linked to the Wales Cancer Research Centre through Professor Gallimore’s CReSt theme 2 leadership role, supporting collaboration across cancer research in Wales.

“ *This programme will allow us to explore how CD4+ T cells can be optimised to improve cancer immunotherapy. Our ultimate aim is to develop vaccines that are accessible and equitable, bringing the benefits of immunotherapy to a much wider patient community.*



Professor Andrew Godkin



Using data to improve cancer diagnosis

Dr Arron Lacey, (WCRC-funded researcher 2023-2025) and Dr Laura Baker (WCRC-funded researcher 2023-28) at Swansea University, are leading work to better understand how patients are diagnosed with gastrointestinal (GI) cancers.

The team have been awarded a total of £25,000 from the NHS Cancer Recovery Fund and the St Davids Medical Foundation to explore Routes to Diagnosis and Upper GI cancer trends at the population level in the SAIL Databank. These are three-year projects involving a collaboration between Swansea University, Swansea Bay University Health Board, and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, aiming to discover what patterns of the cancer diagnostic pathway and patient journey could be explored to detect cancer earlier and improve outcomes.

The team has also secured a funded PhD studentship via the Swansea University Research Excellence Scholarship (SURES) scheme which started in October 2025 and focuses on combining genetic data with health records. A pilot project is already underway with All Wales Medical Genomics Service, testing how genomic data from cancer patients can be securely integrated into the SAIL Databank.

Engineering viruses to engage the immune system

In late 2025 the first patient was treated in a clinical trial of a new virus-based cancer therapy originally developed in WCRC CReSt theme 2 lead Professor Alan Parker's lab at Cardiff University.

The treatment uses a modified virus that targets cancer cells and turns them into "factories" that produce anti-cancer drugs directly inside the tumour, while also helping the immune system attack it.

The early-stage trial (ATTEST) is being run in Cardiff by Velindre University NHS Trust and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, with support from the Cardiff Cancer Research Partnership. Dr Magda Meissner (WCRC-funded researcher 2021-2022) is Principal Investigator of the ATTEST trial at the Cardiff site.

The therapy was first developed in Cardiff and later taken forward by Accession Therapeutics, which has recently received €7.5 million in Horizon Europe funding to support further development and expand the trial. This approach aims to more precisely target tumours while limiting damage to healthy tissue, offering a promising new direction for cancer treatment.

“ TROCEPT-01 has been designed to have minimal activity in healthy tissues, with maximal activity in the tumour. This potent and highly localised activity gives promise in many cancers of unmet clinical need, and the ATTEST trial includes hard-to-treat cancers such as pancreatic, lung, bladder, head and neck, endometrial and cholangiocarcinomas.



Professor Alan Parker,
Professor of Translational
Virology at Cardiff University
and Chief Scientific Officer at
Accession Therapeutics



Enabling new strategies for treating brain cancer

Dr Mathew Clement (WCRC-funded researcher 2023–2025), has received a £30,000 Rosetrees Trust Seed Corn grant, which supports promising early-stage research and helps develop new ideas at a crucial point. He is working with Dr Oommen Oommen and Dr Stephen Paisey at Cardiff University to improve how drugs reach brain tumours.

Their focus is on overcoming the brain's natural defence system (the blood-brain barrier), which protects the brain but also blocks many treatments. This is a major issue in glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer with limited treatment options.

The team has developed tiny drug-carrying particles (nanoparticles) that can better target tumour cells and have already shown promising results. They are now comparing two ways of delivering them (through the bloodstream or under the skin) to see which works best.

Using advanced imaging, they will track how well each method gets treatment into the brain. The aim is to find more effective ways to deliver drugs and improve outcomes for patients with brain cancer.

Image: Dr Mathew Clement, WCRC Researcher Alumni



Celebrating year two of the Welsh Radiotherapy Medical Physics (RaMP) programme

The Welsh Radiotherapy Medical Physics (RaMP) Programme is now in its second year, helping build research skills by embedding projects into MSc Medical Physics training at Swansea University. Funded by Advancing Radiotherapy Cymru (ARC) Academy, it aims to develop future research leaders.

Run in partnership with Velindre Cancer Centre, South West Wales Cancer Centre, and the Wales Cancer Research Centre, the programme offers funded, clinically relevant student projects co-led by academic and NHS experts.

Students are supported to present their work at conferences, boosting both their experience and the visibility of research in Wales. The programme is already expanding, with new projects each year and a long-term goal of developing future PhD researchers and strengthening radiotherapy research nationwide.

“ *RaMP is important because it focuses on our future radiotherapy workforce. This programme allows talented students to gain valuable research and networking opportunities, developing tools they take forward into their future career in medical physics. Targets have been met for the first two years, and we are looking forward to expanding the programme further in the coming years.*



Dr Owen Nicholas, RaMP initiative co-lead and lead applicant on the RaMP ARC award

Supporting cancer treatment through clinical trials in Wales

The Wales Cancer Research Centre plays a key role in supporting clinical trials that aim to improve cancer treatment and patient outcomes.

The PICCOS trial is funded by a £1.9 million grant from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). Running from 2022 to 2026, it is a phase II randomised controlled trial investigating pressurised intraperitoneal aerosolised chemotherapy (PIPAC), a novel method of delivering chemotherapy as a fine spray directly into the abdominal cavity during keyhole surgery. The study compares this approach, alongside standard systemic chemotherapy, with standard treatment alone in patients with colorectal, ovarian, and stomach cancers that have spread to the peritoneum. The trial is led by Dr Sadie Jones (WCRC-funded researcher, 2025–28) and Professor Jared Torkington at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. Results from the study will inform future treatment strategies for patients with advanced peritoneal disease and support the potential wider adoption of this delivery approach if clinical benefit is demonstrated.

Accelerating genomic innovation in cancer research

Dr Kez Cleal (WCRC-funded researcher 2023-25) has developed a new software tool, described as “Google Earth for genomics,” that helps scientists explore genetic data much faster and more clearly. The tool, called Genome-Wide (GW), can analyse large amounts of DNA data up to 100 times faster than current methods. This makes it easier to spot important genetic changes linked to cancer, especially complex changes that are hard to detect with existing tools.

By allowing researchers to see these changes in real time, the software could speed up cancer research and improve diagnosis. The team is now using it to help identify patients with unusual genetic patterns and better understand how cancer develops, with the aim of improving future treatments.



Driving equitable lung cancer screening in Wales

Wales is rolling out a national lung cancer screening programme, building on a successful pilot led by Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board with support from Public Health Wales and Cardiff University. The pilot focused on detecting lung cancer earlier, when treatment is more effective.

Key contributors to this work were Professor Kate Brain (WCRC CReSt theme 6 lead) and Research Fellow Dr Grace McCutchan (WCRC-funded researcher 2018-25), who brought behavioural science expertise to the Clinical Steering Group.

Dr McCutchan's work also helped to ensure that patient information was clear, accessible, and designed to encourage participation, particularly among communities at higher risk of late lung cancer diagnosis. Her wider research focus on early diagnosis, health inequalities, and smoking cessation has helped shape a more equitable and patient-centred screening approach.

The project's success has recently been recognised with the 2025 Royal College of Physicians Excellence in Patient Care Awards for patient engagement. Dr Grace McCutchan has also been invited to showcase this work as part of a training module for best-practice PPIE, which is currently being developed by the School of Medicine, Cardiff University.

Advancing early detection and reducing inequalities in kidney cancer

Dr Huw Morgan (WCRC-funded researcher 2024-5) supported through bridging funding from the Wales Cancer Research Centre, secured a competitive Health and Care Research Wales Advanced Fellowship to tackle late diagnosis in kidney cancer in October 2025.

Kidney cancer is now the sixth most common cancer in the UK, yet it remains comparatively under-researched and under-funded. Almost half of cases are diagnosed at a late stage, when treatment options are limited and survival rates decline sharply. In contrast, when identified early, survival can exceed 90%. Despite this, there is currently no simple, non-invasive diagnostic test available to support early detection.

Dr Huw Morgan's three-year fellowship will focus on validating a panel of urinary biomarkers capable of detecting kidney cancer at its earliest stages. By analysing urine samples from well-characterised patient cohorts and biobank partners, his team aims to establish a robust, clinically reliable signature that could form the basis of a low-cost, accessible diagnostic test suitable for use in GP surgeries and community healthcare settings. This work will establish a core focus of his research group, centred on defining the biology of early tumour formation, particularly cancer stem cells and tumour-initiating populations, to advance biomarker discovery and therapeutic target identification.

“ Our work is about giving clinicians a simple tool that could transform outcomes for patients – if we can diagnose kidney cancer earlier, we can save lives.



Dr Huw Morgan



Brokering collaboration

The Wales Cancer Research Conference 2026

The Wales Cancer Research Centre continued to build on the success of our annual conference in March 2026, delivering another impactful event that showcased the depth and breadth of cancer research across Wales while bringing together researchers, clinicians, industry partners and charities.

The 2026 conference, held at the Vale Resort in Hensol, welcomed just under 300 delegates, including attendees from Bangor, Wrexham and Aberystwyth. The programme featured a diverse mix of research presentations and interactive sessions. There were also 103 abstracts accepted and published in the conference abstract brochure with 60 research posters selected to be displayed at the event.

A strong series of keynote talks formed a central part of the programme. These included Professor Rajesh Jena (University of Cambridge), who explored the role of artificial intelligence in transforming radiotherapy; Professor Dame Theresa Marteau (University of Cambridge), who addressed the challenge of achieving behaviour change at scale for cancer prevention; Professor Kevin Harrington (ICR/ The Royal Marsden), who highlighted advances in combining radiotherapy and immunotherapy; and Dr Alastair Lamb, who presented on digital spatial profiling and its application in understanding prostate cancer biology.

The conference continued to prioritise patient and public involvement, with a powerful contribution from Molly Fenton as the patient voice. Her perspective on living with a brain tumour brought lived experience to the forefront of discussions, reinforcing the importance of embedding patient insight in shaping research priorities and delivery.





Awards were presented to recognise outstanding contributions across research and PPI, including prizes awarded in memory of WCRC PPI Research Partner Sue Campbell and Dr Laura Bunting from Health and Care Research Wales who were both avid supporters of the WCRC and committed to helping to advance cancer research and improve outcomes for patients. There was also strong engagement from early-career researchers at a dedicated EMCR session which enabled participants to 'Meet the expert' in a range of different topics.

The conference was supported by key partners and sponsors, including platinum sponsor the Moondance Cancer Initiative who held a spotlight session during the conference given by Clinical Director Professor Jared Torkington who presented CADARN as a bold, system-level approach to unlocking the full potential of cancer research across Wales. The conference concluded with a forward-looking debate on whether whole genome sequencing should become standard practice in Wales, which was chaired by Dr James Calvert, Wales' Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

The Wales Cancer Research Conference 2026 highlighted the progress being made and the collective determination to turn research into real impact treatments for patients across Wales.



“ It was incredible to have the opportunity to be at the WCRC conference and listen to a varied line up of speakers and potential advancements, and to be able to speak as a patient. My speech mentioned the communication gap between the professionals and the patients. Between scary statistics and many cancer cases rising in the younger population, being at that conference provided hope for someone like me, and I could show the human side of this heavily stigmatised conversation in our society. And for it to be for Wales, a nation often forgotten in the conversation or seen as a subsection, made it even more special.



Molly Fenton,
patient advocate



Urology MDRG success in advancing prostate cancer research

The WCRC Urology Multi-Disciplinary Research Group (MDRG) continues to grow as a collaborative group bringing together researchers across Wales to develop new approaches to prostate cancer research and treatment.

Over the last few months, the group secured three grants, strengthening its portfolio and supporting the development of innovative, immunology-focused and translational research.

Two major project grants were awarded by Prostate Cancer UK. The first (£356,361 over 36 months), awarded in July 2025 and starting February 2026, is led by Dr Helen Pearson (WCRC Associate Director) and Dr Girish Patel. It investigates targeting the CD200 immune checkpoint as a new therapy for prostate cancer, with co-investigators including Professors Rob Jones, John Staffurth, and Dr Toby Phesse.

The second (£468,325 over 36 months), starting November 2025, is led by Dr Toby Phesse with Dr Helen Pearson and Dr Karl Wilert as co-investigators. It focuses on targeting FZD7/Wnt signalling to treat metastatic prostate cancer.

In addition, the group secured a £100,000 PhD studentship from Cancer Research Wales (36 months), starting October 2025. Led by Dr Oommen Oommen with Dr Helen Pearson as co-investigator, this project will model prostate tumour environments to better understand immune interactions and test potential therapies.

Celebrating the first year of the Early and Mid-Career Researcher Network

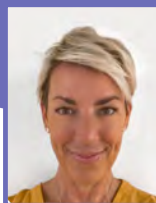
The Wales Cancer Research Centre (WCRC) Early and Mid-Career Researcher (EMCR) Network has completed its first year, helping researchers across Wales connect, share ideas, and build collaborations.

The network offers regular talks, training, and opportunities to present research, with sessions covering patient and public involvement, use of resources like the Wales Cancer Biobank, research integrity, and skills such as communication, leadership, and applying for funding. A mentoring scheme launched in November 2025 provides structured support at key career stages.

Over the year, 12 researchers from universities across Wales have presented their work, covering a wide range of topics from laboratory-based discovery science to clinical and behavioural research. "Meet the Expert" sessions at the Wales Cancer Research Conference also gave members direct access to advice from senior researchers on topics such as industry collaboration and developing funding applications.

The network continues to support the next generation of cancer researchers, with plans to expand activities, including invited speakers and an EMCR writing retreat.

“ WCB are immensely proud of our ongoing collaboration with the EMCR network and recognise the value of this vital research community. We are always grateful of the opportunities provided to link with and support local cancer researchers, ensuring the biobank is at the forefront of innovative research in Wales.



Abigail MacArthur,
Wales Cancer Biobank

WCRC Researcher Networking Day 2025: connecting researchers across Wales

The WCRC hosted its annual Researcher Networking Day (RND) on 23 October 2025, bringing together 20 funded researchers and alumni for an in-person event designed to encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange across Wales. Attendees delivered a series of quick-fire presentations, providing a broad snapshot of current cancer research activity, spanning molecular science to data-driven approaches.

The programme also highlighted key resources, with contributions from the WCRC PPI team and the Wales Cancer Biobank. An interactive session led by Dr Luned Badder introduced the Early and Mid-Career Researcher (EMCR) Network, outlining available support, practical career strategies, and plans for a forthcoming mentoring scheme. A Mentimeter survey* conducted during the session allowed the attendees to rank training needs by relevance, informing the EMCR committee of the most beneficial topics for future training sessions which will shape future EMCR network activity.

The event featured 11 alumni presentations showcasing innovative research and methodologies, reinforcing the depth and diversity of the WCRC community. Networking opportunities throughout the day strengthened connections among participants and supported the development of future collaborations. Feedback was positive, with 100% of respondents reporting the event as useful and highlighting the value of in-person engagement.

* RND – Mentimeter survey results

Training topic	Relevance (1 = least; 5 = most)
 Grant writing	4
 Networking event	3.5
 Teaching	2.4
 Leadership skills	3.3
 Fellowship writing	4
 Media training	2.6
 Public engagement	3.3



“ I enjoyed the informal setting and activity, which helped spark conversations without pressure. There was a good number of attendees meaning that it was easier to talk to most people in the room at some point during the day. I particularly enjoyed the quickfire presentations – a 5-minute snapshot of everyone’s research was very beneficial to understand their main aims.

Anonymous survey feedback from Researcher Networking Day attendee

Cardiff Cancer Research Partnership: strengthening translational research in Wales

The Cardiff Cancer Research Hub has been relaunched as the Cardiff Cancer Research Partnership (CCRP), bringing together Cardiff University, Velindre University NHS Trust, and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to better connect research and patient care. The partnership aims to speed up translational research – turning lab discoveries into real treatments – while improving access to clinical trials and attracting investment to Wales.

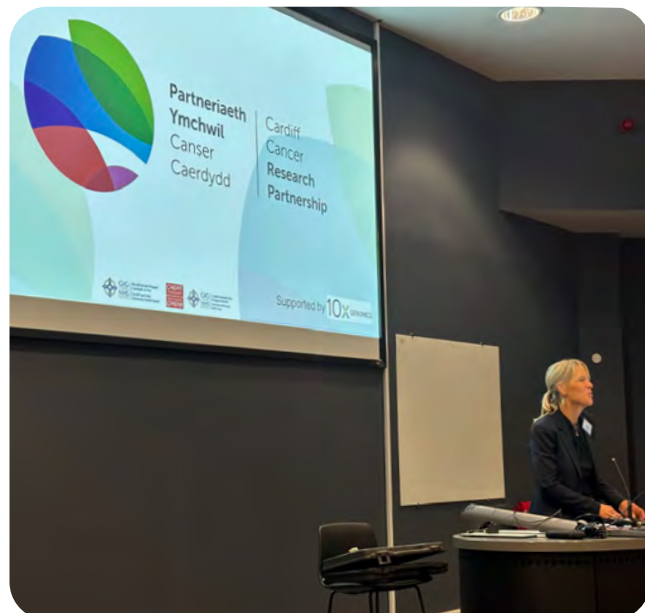
The WCRC has played a key role in shaping and supporting CCRP, with WCRC Director Professor Mererid Evans taking a leading role in helping to build research capacity, foster collaboration, and drive progress from research into patient benefit. It continues to contribute through joint roles, including a Clinical Research Fellow post, and ongoing involvement in CCRP activities.

Since launching in 2025, CCRP has set up data strategies and formal partnerships, positioning it as a major driver of cancer research and innovation in Wales.

“ The CCRP launch was an inspiring event. I left with the sense that we had collectively drawn a line in the sand – a fresh start where we put our best foot forward, united as one team committed to delivering bench-to-bedside research in Cardiff. There was a shared determination to channel our efforts into developing new medicines and best practices for patient benefit, while also nurturing, attracting, and empowering top talent. By fostering the next generation of cancer leaders here in Cardiff, we can continue to drive our ambition forward with renewed energy and purpose.



Prof. Alan Parker, CReSt Theme 2 Lead, Head of Solid Cancers and Director of the Wales Applied Virology Unit (WAVU) at Cardiff University

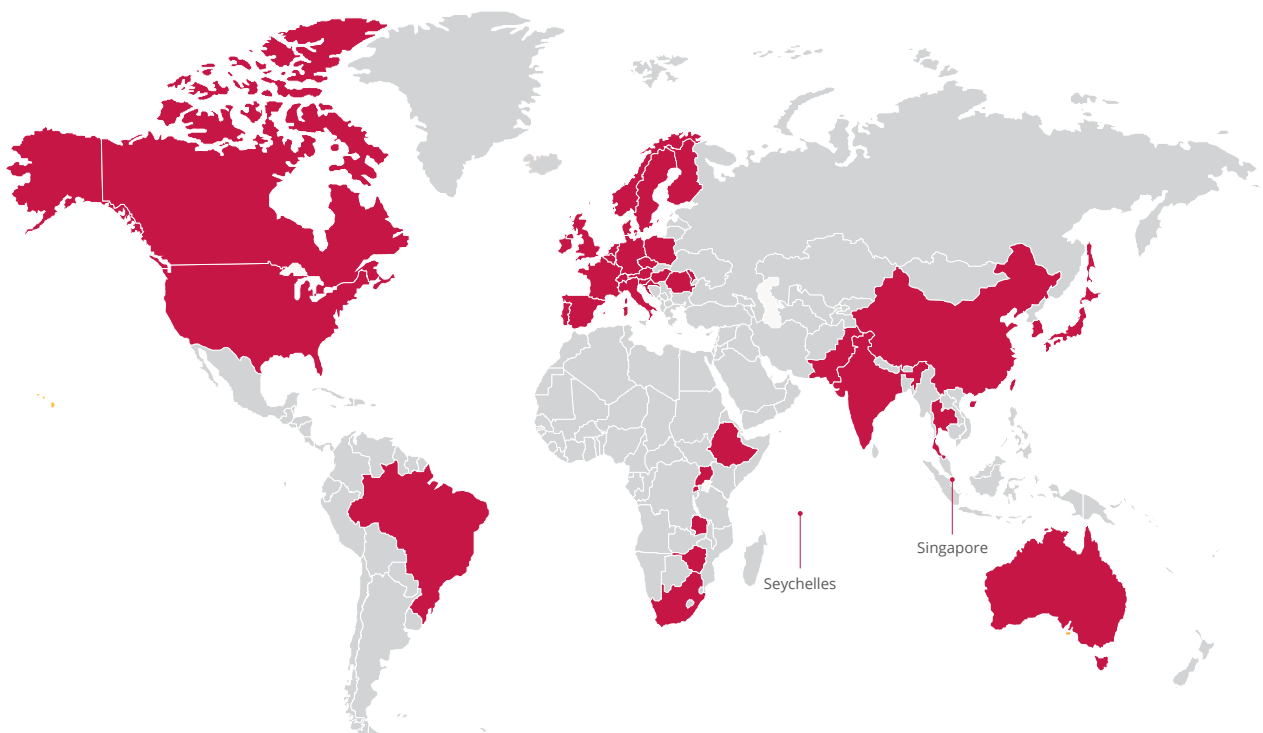




Delivering research-enabling activity

PIRIT survey findings: use, reach and value of the Public Involvement in Research Impact Toolkit

The Public Involvement in Research Impact Toolkit (PIRIT) was co-developed by public contributors and teams at the WCRC and Marie Curie Research Centre (MCRC) to support researchers and practitioners to plan, track and reflect on public involvement (PPI) in research, with a particular focus on understanding and evidencing its impact. PIRIT has been hugely successful and has achieved a strong international reach, having been downloaded over 2542 times across 37 countries.



- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Australia | 14. Ghana | 27. Singapore |
| 2. Austria | 15. India | 28. South Africa |
| 3. Bangladesh | 16. Ireland | 29. South Korea |
| 4. Belgium | 17. Italy | 30. Spain |
| 5. Brazil | 18. Japan | 31. Sweden |
| 6. Canada | 19. Luxembourg | 32. Switzerland |
| 7. China | 20. Malawi | 33. Thailand |
| 8. Czech Republic | 21. Netherlands | 34. Uganda |
| 9. Denmark | 22. Norway | 35. United Kingdom |
| 10. Ethiopia | 23. Pakistan | 36. United States of America |
| 11. Finland | 24. Portugal | 37. Zimbabwe |
| 12. France | 25. Romania | |
| 13. Germany | 26. Seychelles | |

“As well as helping to track the coordination of PPI for a number of internal and external research studies, the tool has helped me to show the amount of time and effort that goes into the coordination of PPI for each study, which in turn has aided me in validating funding for the role of PPI coordinator.”

PIRIT user

To assess how PIRIT is being used in practice and the value it provides, a user survey was conducted between 29 April and 19 July 2025, receiving 85 responses.

Respondents represented a wide geographical spread, including across Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as internationally in Ireland, Spain, Germany, France and Malawi. The findings show that PIRIT is reaching a diverse audience, with the majority of users based in higher education or college settings. This distribution indicates that the toolkit is being accessed across a broad research and public involvement landscape.

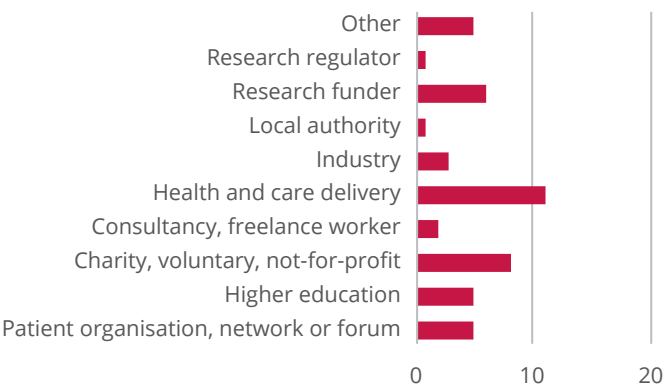
Use of the toolkit varied by component. Around a third of respondents (31%) used the planning tool, most often across one to three projects, though it was also used in training, pre-application work and learning activities. Importantly, it was used both at the start of projects and retrospectively to support reflection. One user described how it helped them “reflect on involvement so far... and identify where we could further involve the public.”

The tracking tool had higher uptake, used by 47% of respondents. It was valued for helping evidence and communicate the impact of PPI, supporting reflection, reporting, and discussion within teams. Users also highlighted its role in making visible the time and effort involved in coordinating involvement, helping justify dedicated PPI roles and resources. A smaller group (13%) adapted PIRIT for their own systems – for example by converting it into PDFs, embedding it in databases of public contributors, or linking it with feedback tools. This points to the toolkit’s flexibility and ease of integration into existing workflows.

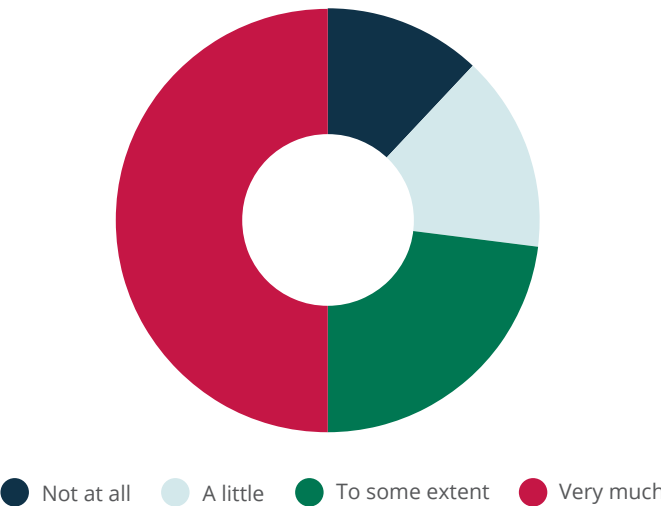
Overall, the findings show PIRIT is being used across sectors to strengthen reflection, improve reporting, and better evidence the impact of public involvement in research. While the planning tool is used less frequently than the tracking tool, both are supporting more structured and meaningful PPI practice.

The toolkit remains available to download from the [Cardiff University website](#).

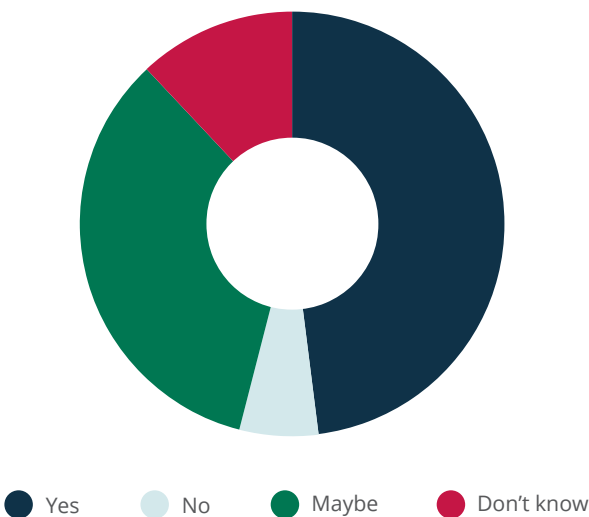
Organisations using PIRIT



Did you use the planning tool to reflect on the intended and actual public involvement activity?



Do you plan to use the PIRIT Tracking Tool for a future study or project?





A year in the PPI team by Dr Sally Anstey, WCRC PPI Lay Lead

I had the honour of taking over the Lay Lead Research Partner role from the stellar Julie Hepburn on 17 March 2025. Julie acted as my mentor and sounding board advisor for the first months and the existing Research Partners (Bob McAlister, Kathy Seddon, Sarah Peddle, Jim Elliot and Mark Edwards) offered much wisdom and guidance.

This year has been challenging, exciting and one of great opportunity for us as Research Partners (RPs). Our role remains focused on advising, supporting, and signposting researchers to established resources and networks with which we maintain strong working relationships. As a result, the internal Rapid Response Group – originally established to reduce delays and provide timely advice to researchers working to tight funding deadlines – has now been discontinued. It has been replaced by Public Involvement Clinics for researchers, delivered by Health and Care Research Wales, which provide a more structured route for support and guidance.

We have built on the existing core foundations of Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) activity in relation to researchers via the CRest themes, Early and Mid-Career Cancer Researchers network and have been newly involved in the recruitment and induction of the WCRC funded Career Starter Awards and Concept Development Fund Researchers based across Wales in Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea.

Engagement continues with for example Marie Curie, SAIL, ECMC, Velindre, Wales Cancer Biobank and Genomics Partnership Wales. We have also been involved in peer reviewing from a PPIE perspective research applications to Health and Care Research Wales and third sector organisations such as the Brain Tumour Research Charity.

We have been more actively involved in promoting the voice of underserved groups in Cancer Research PPIE specifically focussing on ways to increase diversity and inclusion. We have had a regular presence at the Minority Ethnic Communities Health Fair establishing links with many groups including the Muslim Women's network, Community Police Support officers, Disability Sports Wales, Young People from local Cardiff schools, the Community Gateway Team and members of the LGBTQ+ community. In this activity we have been supported by our Academic Lead Partners: Dr Pam Smith, Dr Grace McCutcheon and Dr Sarah Fry.

All our current RPs have been influential and actively involved in shaping PPIE educational tools, researcher workshops, masterclasses and conference presentations both face-to-face and virtually ensuring us a slightly greater reach across Wales. We are now invited members of the Welsh Government Cross-Party Group on Cancer and involved in Bevan Commission consultations.

Sadly, this year we have lost one of our valued Research Partners, Sue Campbell, a true force to be reckoned with and a mighty advocate for the patient voice in health and social care – she has left WCRC with an extraordinary legacy and many fond memories. Two of our very wise and knowledgeable Research Partners, Jim and Mark, have stood down in the last year but have agreed to stay with us as Research Ambassadors providing ad hoc specialist advice. Thus, we retain their expertise.

Moving forward we have successfully recruited a new Lay Lead and two new Research Partners, and we are currently finalising the details of their appointments. They will refresh our team and bring additional knowledge, skills and experiences to WCRC.

Image: Dr Sally Anstey, WCRC PPI Lay Lead and Bob McAlister, WCRC PPI Research Partner at the MEC Health Fair.

WCRC community engagement: broadening inclusion and reaching diverse communities

The WCRC continues to strengthen our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through a growing programme of community engagement activities designed to reach wider and more diverse audiences across Wales. Building on established outreach, recent efforts have placed a stronger emphasis on engaging underrepresented groups and raising awareness of both the work the Centre does and careers in cancer research.

In July 2025, WCRC participated in the Sutton Trust Summer School for the first time, delivering an interactive and engaging cancer research session to fifty Year 12 students from less advantaged backgrounds. Activities included helping the students to extract DNA from strawberries and playing a patient cancer diagnosis game. The programme offered valuable insight into careers in research, with WCRC researchers Dr Mathew Clement, Dr Jaya Vangara and Dr Kate Liddiard on hand to answer questions and share their experiences of research career pathways.

WCRC also continued its strong presence in local communities, taking part in initiatives such as Grangetown Careers and Role Models Week (February 2026) and the “Be a Scientist” event in Cardiff (February 2026). Activities offered hands-on experiences and direct interaction with researchers, helping to inspire young people to consider futures in STEM.

WCRC’s engagement also extended to national and cultural platforms, including participation in the National Eisteddfod in Wrexham (August 2025), where interactive activities brought cancer research to life for a broad public audience and gave the Hub team an opportunity to practice communicating in Welsh. The team has also contributed to wider public engagement through events such as the Minority Ethnic Communities (MEC) Health Fair (October 2025), strengthening connections with communities that are often underrepresented in research.

Through these initiatives, WCRC continues to make meaningful progress in embedding EDI within our engagement strategy ensuring that cancer research is accessible, inclusive and reflective of the diverse communities it serves across Wales.



