

Public Engagement and Openness in animal research at The Crick

JAMIE REDDEN, EWELINA KOZLOWSKA, CLARE BRAZILL-ADAMS, CAROLINE ZVEREV and SARAH HART-JOHNSON

The Francis Crick Institute

Correspondence: Jamie.redden@crick.ac.uk

Introduction

Public engagement is one of The Crick's strategic priorities, by looking to engage and inspire the public with discovery and science. As much of our life-changing science involves the use of animals, we aim to ensure we are being open and transparent about the way we use animals in science and the benefits they bring. To support this commitment, The Crick is one of over 100 signatories to the Understanding Animal Research (UAR) Concordat on Openness. As more organisations pledge to be open about the work that they do involving animals, the various methods by which we can communicate and engage with the public become more widely known and institutions are able to learn from each other and trial what works most effectively for their operating model, including what is practical and achievable, whilst still making an impact.

Here we highlight some of the different ways in which The Crick has engaged with the public to promote openness in animal research, including the different mediums and formats used and different audiences we have reached. We aim to show the variety of methods that are available to organisations, how staff of various seniority can be involved in outreach, the opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration, and to demonstrate how a diverse and varied approach to openness can be more effective.

Public-facing Website – customisable, accessible, familiar

The public-facing website at The Crick is a key part of how we can communicate with the public. The Crick website has a dedicated section on animal research, explaining how animals play a key role in our science (Figure 1). We

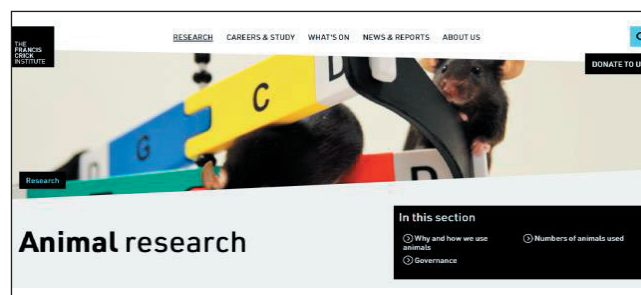


Figure 1. The Francis Crick Institute public facing web page for animal research.

also publish our annual returns of procedures, as well as non-technical summaries of the projects licensed to carry out work at The Crick.

The use of public-facing websites can be tailored to include as much or as little information as an organisation is able or willing to provide, and often already exist within an organisation in some form. For smaller organisations, there are easily accessible hosting solutions and applications; a method that requires an initial time commitment but following this is relatively low cost and low time commitment to maintain.

Social media – low cost, accessible, widely used

The Crick uses multiple social media platforms to engage with the public, including Instagram, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube. Social media is widely used by the public of all ages and backgrounds and at a relatively low cost (often free) is also accessible to most organisations and their staff. The support available from others in the industry who use these platforms is also readily available,



Figure 2. Craft and Graft exhibit video showing Animal Technicians in aquatics working with Zebrafish.

creating opportunities to have real time engagement with the public, as well as learn from other establishments and collaborate through social media events.

Public exhibits and events – creative, eye-catching free access

The Crick is a multi-disciplinary institute, covering a wide range of research topics, and we can use the scale of the building and the diversity of skills to create public exhibits and events.

Whilst large-scale exhibits are great for generating interest, they may not always be feasible. However smaller exhibits or events are still a way of engaging the public especially those local to the establishment, in an eye-catching and varied way showing the work behind the science.

Craft and graft

The Craft and Graft exhibit aimed to highlight the scale and variety of the science that goes on behind the scenes at The Crick. The public exhibit included videos (Figure 2) and interactive stations to demonstrate how specialist technicians, including Animal Technicians, make science happen.

Outwitting cancer

The Outwitting Cancer exhibit was an immersive installation and series of films that discussed how science at The Crick contributes to cancer research. Part of this exhibit discussed the use of animal models in cancer research, including how and why they are used (Figure 3) but also the investments being made to migrate to non-animal models where possible.



Figure 3. Outwitting Cancer discussion on the use of animals in cancer research.

Behind the scenes

One example of how The Crick has used social media to promote openness in animal research is by collaborating with UAR, who shadowed two Animal Technicians for the day inside the animal facilities (Figure 4) to produce materials for use on social media. This video showed how our Animal Technicians care for a variety of species including ferrets and mice and the day-to-day tasks they carry out.



Figure 4. You Tube video showing Animal Technicians handling ferrets.

Meet a scientist

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Crick was able to run public events such as Meet a Scientist where members of the public could engage with them and discover their work. This event then relocated to social media via Instagram Stories, where scientists took part in Instagram features on the official Crick Instagram page, sharing behind the scenes insights and answer questions submitted by the public.

After the events, visitors to The Crick website are given the chance to revisit previous take overs and catch up on stories from around The Crick (Figure 6).

Another way of using social media and engaging with the public but also with the wider scientific community is by participating in social media events, which are often widely publicised and participated in. Some examples of how we have engaged with these events are as follows:

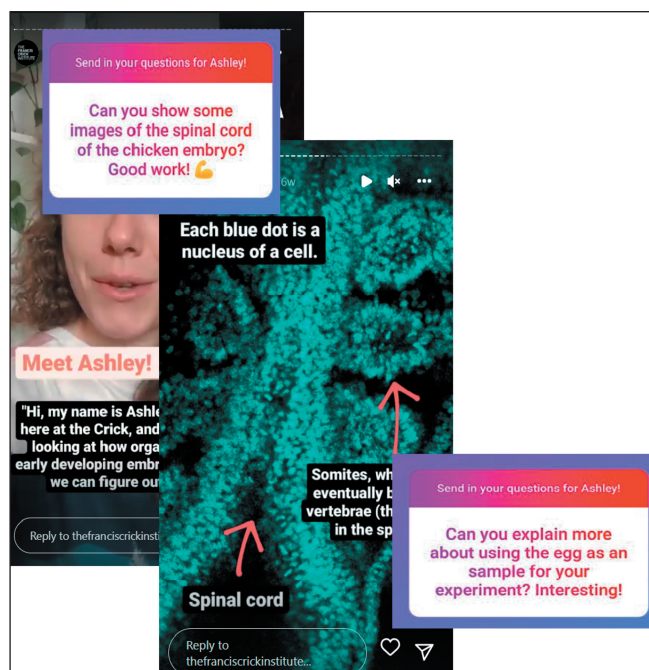


Figure 5. Instagram stories take over for Meet a Scientist.



Figure 7. Mollie Millington, manager of the aquatic facility in a YouTube video for Fish in Research Week.

Fish in Research Week

Fish in research week is an initiative by Understanding Animal Research (UAR), where facilities are encouraged to share information on fish/aquatic species in research. As part of this event, The Crick shared a video from our Aquatic facility, describing the species we house and how they are used. This video was made publicly available on YouTube (Figure 7) and was an excellent way to highlight the use of fish and frogs, the use of which is lesser known to the public.

Be Open About Animal Research Day (BOARD)

BOARD is a yearly Europe wide initiative lead by the European Animal Research Association (EARA). Here organisations are encouraged to share their animal research activities on social media using the hashtag #BOARD. This provides all participating organisations with support from others, as well as the chance to learn and inspire further engagement. As part of #BOARD23 Turner laboratory from The Crick shared how they are

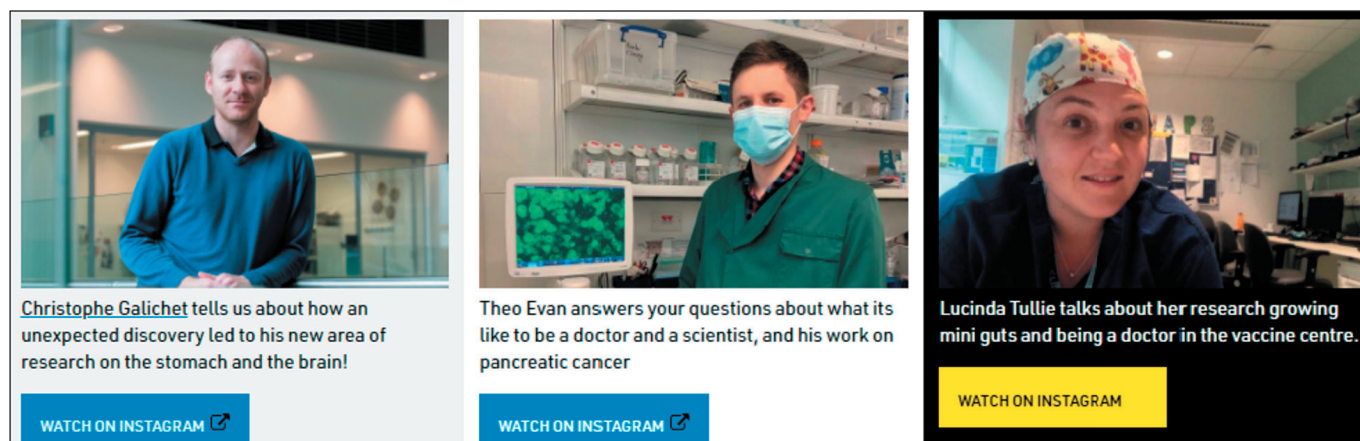


Figure 6. Previous Meet a Scientist features available on The Crick website.



Figure 8. #BOARD23 video on the use of opossums at the Crick.

using opossums in research into sex chromosomes (Figure 8). Opossums are a unique species and provide an interesting topic for engagement.

Learning and conclusions

- Committing to public engagement comes with challenges but can be approached from various angles depending on an organisation's goals.
- The availability of resources does not have to be a barrier to public engagement. Larger organisations with more staff may be able to designate more time. The availability of a media or public engagement team within the establishment can aid in producing materials and designated funding can facilitate generation of materials.

However there are a wide range of methods and approaches that can be utilised in many ways and can be manipulated to each organisation's goals, as well as, available resources.

- Public engagement and openness are best lead by staff who are happy to act as champions on behalf of their organisation, rather than as a mandatory initiative.

Staff from all career stages and backgrounds can participate, with enthusiasm being the only common trait. Establishments should show an open commitment to the public and their staff, supporting ideas and activities. This may include open calls for contributions aimed at all staff, support by line managers, time allowances for staff to attend or participate in events, provision of training on outreach and recognition of staff for their contributions.

- Don't be afraid to ask for help! Openness can be daunting but there is a community both internally and externally that can be utilised.

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to BRF Senior Management for supporting their staff to engage with the public and for fostering a culture of openness.

Thank you to UAR, who have supported The Crick with outreach ideas, such as You Tube videos and social media events and to other organisations such as EARA that have developed initiatives The Crick has been able to engage in.