

HSC R&D Division Final Report

PPI in Research Small Grant Scheme


Updated March 2026

Reports should be submitted via electronic copy to HSC R&D Division within 6 weeks of the request. The report should be completed on the attached form in Arial 11. Please extend boxes as required. Please adhere to any word limits. These reports may be subject to external peer review. Details from the Report may be placed on the HSC R&D Division website and shared with appropriate key stakeholders or members of the public.

HSC R&D Division Award Details

HSC R&D File Reference	STL/5562/19
HSC R&D Funding Scheme	PPI in Research Support: Small Grant Scheme
Project Title	PPI in Action; an interactive workshop for early career researchers in biomedical science
Award Holder Name (Employer)	Emma Allott (Queen's University Belfast)
Host Organisation	Queen's University Belfast
Award Duration	
Award Start Date	05.03.25
Award End Date	24.10.25

Signature

Award Holder Signature:	
	Date: 30/04/26

Evidence Brief for PPI in Research Small Grant Scheme

(2 pages: which may be used for dissemination by HSC R&D Division)

Why did we start?

(The purpose and need for the PPI initiative)

We previously identified an unmet need for more training and support around PPI for early career researchers (ECRs) in the field of biomedical science. Feedback from these ECRs highlighted a few points, that they were apprehensive of approaching people with lived experience of cancer for fear of upsetting them, or in case they appeared tokenistic. Many also felt their project was too far advanced. As a result, the majority were not actively engaging PPI in their research. We decided to address these challenges by showcasing a variety of peer experiences with PPI, ranging from those who had just participated in their first Irish Association for Cancer Research (IACR) communication workshop, to those embedding PPI in their projects from the start. Our goal was to showcase positive experiences both for ECRs and for individuals with lived experience of cancer, and to highlight the value of PPI to these research projects. Our hope was that this would inspire more ECRs to engage with PPI.

What did we do?

(Please comment on how the [UK Standards for Public Involvement](#) guided your plans and what you did)

As part of the ECR symposium at the 2025 IACR meeting, we ran a two-part 'PPI in action' session. The first part set the scene, including talks from three invited speakers. Chris Curtis, founder and chairman of the Swallows Head and Neck support charity, spoke about his lived experience of head and neck cancer. Lorna Donlon, Artist-in-Residence at University College Dublin spoke about a project 'Cut from the same cloth' involving minorities in PPI, and Clodagh Flynn, IACR PPI Council member, spoke about her experience as a patient researcher. The second part was a facilitated, interactive workshop, led by Prof Amanda McCann (Chair, UCD Patient Voice in Cancer Research) and Ms Elaine Quinn (UCD Conway Institute Communications & Education Manager). The session began with flash talks and a panel discussion on the theme of 'building PPI partnerships that work' where ECRs paired with their PPI partners spoke about their experiences working together. This was followed by workshop participants brainstorming their ideal PPI initiative. This was done at round tables each including one PPI contributor, one table facilitator, and 5 ECRs, followed by facilitated discussion and debrief.

What did we achieve?

(Please describe any outputs and the short and longer-term impacts of this initiative)

The major achievement was to raise awareness of the value and benefits of engaging PPI in cancer research. Our workshop highlighted real-life partnerships between ECRs and PPI, allowing workshop attendees to appreciate how achievable this may be to them. The ECRs attending the workshop left with a improved sense of the importance of PPI, and with a more tangible idea of how they could integrate PPI into their own research projects. Short term, we believe that these ECRs will seek out opportunities for PPI engagement within their respective institutions. Longer term, they will hopefully take these learnings as they progress through their careers, to engage with PPI early in the development of research ideas and funding applications.

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What should be done now?

(Practice/Policy Implications and/or Recommendations for PPI in HSC Research)

Early career researchers in biomedical science are generally keen to engage more with PPI. However, they may have started their research in environments unconnected with PPI and without any budget to involve PPI. Many were entirely unaware of the importance and value of integrating PPI as they started out in their research careers. As such, many feel that they have lost the opportunity to engage with PPI. A recent survey of ECRs at one university showed that only one third knew of the local PPI organisation, and that the majority responded they would use an internet browser search to try to find out about PPI opportunities in their local area. This highlights the need to signpost opportunities to ECRs at the start of their careers.

What do you feel has been the **most significant impact** of being awarded the PPI in Research Small Grant?

Although more and more researchers are becoming aware of the importance of integrating PPI in research, there remains much uncertainty among researchers about how to accomplish this. Receiving this funding has not only helped to raise awareness of PPI engagement for ECRs, but has improved awareness for the whole IACR council, which includes researchers from most of the universities across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I would say that it is this awareness of the importance of PPI, alongside an introduction to some of the individuals and organisations that can support this work, that is the most significant impact of this award.

Do you have any **'lessons learned'** from your PPI experiences during your award that would serve as useful learning for others in the future?

It takes extra consideration and effort to engage PPI. Academics are often unused to working with the public, who may not be familiar with the academic environment. However, there is a strong appetite for engaging with PPI in research. Data collected during our workshop highlighted the ECRs felt the PPI engagement provided important motivation for them carrying out their research. I believe that the hesitancy of researchers to engage with PPI could be overcome by appropriate signposting of resources to support them, and education around what a good PPI partnership could look like.