CURIOSITY CARNIVAL
European Researchers' Night

MEET THE RESEARCHERS!

Tom Sarah Sami Sam Sabina Rohan Raquel Priyanka

Pawan Patrick Ophélie Nayeli Mary-Kay Martin Mario Kanta

Joel Imogen Gergely Daniel Arianna Andreas

I'm a Researcher Get me OUT of here

September 2017

The Curiosity Zone was the first zone of *I'm a Researcher, Get me out of here*. It was funded by the European Commission under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, which is an EU funding programme to support research careers. The Zone ran for three weeks, connecting secondary school students in Oxfordshire with 22 researchers from the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University. The aim was to engage students with the wide variety of local researchers and to encourage students to attend to the live final at the Curiosity Carnival on 29th September.
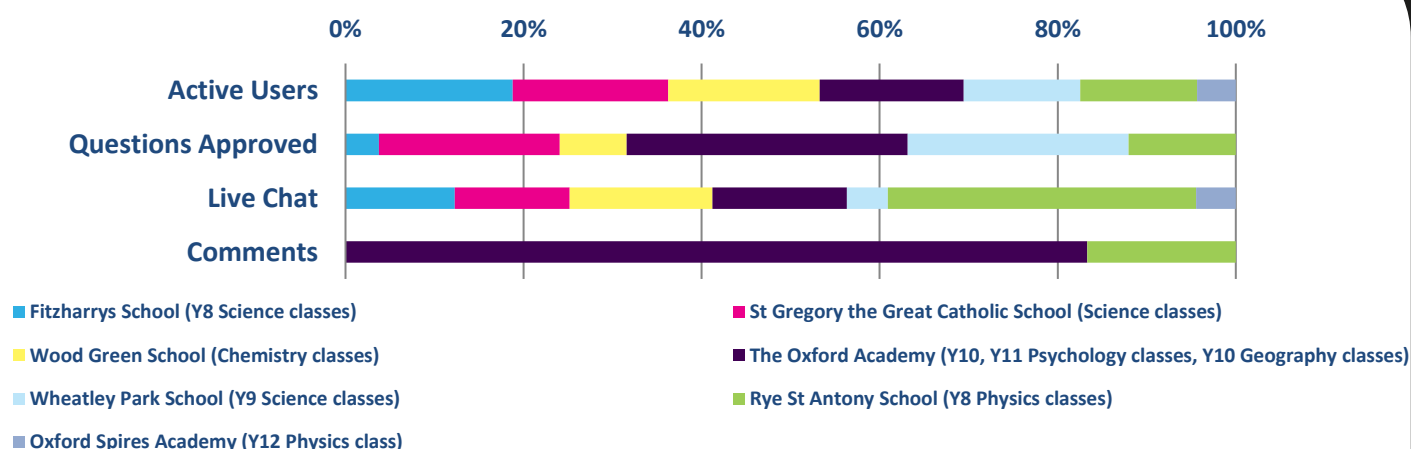
Among the researchers online was an archaeologist looking at the DNA in chicken bones to see how ancient people travelled, a sociologist interviewing families about moving to huge cities in China, a psychologist figuring out why people like to take part in rituals, an engineer working out how to stop jet engines melting, and a medical ethics researcher asking whether you own your own body.

In total, researchers answered 133 approved questions sent in by students in ASK and, there were 14 live chats with classes. The majority of the students who took part were in Science classes. There were also Geography and Psychology classes who contributed 30% of the total questions in ASK. The majority of the activity took place in the second two weeks, as the start of the event coincided with the first full week of the new academic year for students and teachers.

Many of the researchers engaged well, with 18 of the 22 attending a live chat and all of them answering questions in ASK. The most active researchers were also spread across the different university divisions, demonstrating that the online engagement worked for a variety of disciplines.

The students voted for the five researchers they wanted to make up the panel in the live final. In the final itself at the Weston Library, the audience of 70 people put these researchers on the spot with their questions. At the end of the event the audience voted for their favourite researcher. Research engineer Priyanka Dhopade won the most votes, becoming the first champion of *I'm a Researcher.*

School data at a glance

	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Active Users						
Questions Approved						
Live Chat						
Comments						

- ■ **Fitzharrys School (Y8 Science classes)**
- ■ **St Gregory the Great Catholic School (Science classes)**
- ■ **Wood Green School (Chemistry classes)**
- ■ **The Oxford Academy (Y10, Y11 Psychology classes, Y10 Geography classes)**
- ■ **Wheatley Park School (Y9 Science classes)**
- ■ **Rye St Antony School (Y8 Physics classes)**
- ■ **Oxford Spires Academy (Y12 Physics class)**

Target schools: The University of Oxford particularly wanted to engage students at four local schools. Three of these schools took part in the online event, contributing 40% of the active users

Researcher's activity

Researcher	ASK answers	Live CHAT lines
Sam Parsons - Medical Sciences Division	33	454
Sarah Finnegan - Medical Sciences Division	32	203
Nayeli Gonzalez-Gomez - Medical Sciences Division	27	72
Rohan Kapitany - Social Sciences Division	24	157
Priyanka Dhopade - Mathematical, Physical, and Life Sciences Division	21	72
Raquel Pinacho - Medical Sciences Division	20	132
Martin Pickup - Humanities Division	17	202
Kanta Dihal - Humanities Division	16	162
Pawan Kumar - Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division	13	328
Joel Butler - Humanities Division	11	137
Sabina Fiolna - Humanities Division	11	57
Imogen Goold - Social Sciences Division	10	193
Andreas Zoettl - Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division	9	209
Patrick Esser - Oxford Brookes University	9	86
Mary-Kay Thompson - Medical Sciences Division	9	68
Gergely Rost - Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division	9	23
Mario Collura - Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division	9	0
Daniel Brown - Oxford Brookes University	7	0
Ophelie Lebrassuer - Social Sciences Division	4	43
Sami Miaari - Social Sciences Division	3	0
Arianna Ponzini - Humanities Division	1	0

Key figures from the Curiosity Zone and IAS average for comparison

PAGE VIEWS	CURIOSITY ZONE	JUNE '17 ZONES AVERAGE
Total zone	12,532	20,354
ASK page	557	1,630
CHAT page	1,423	1,969
VOTE page	914	1,741

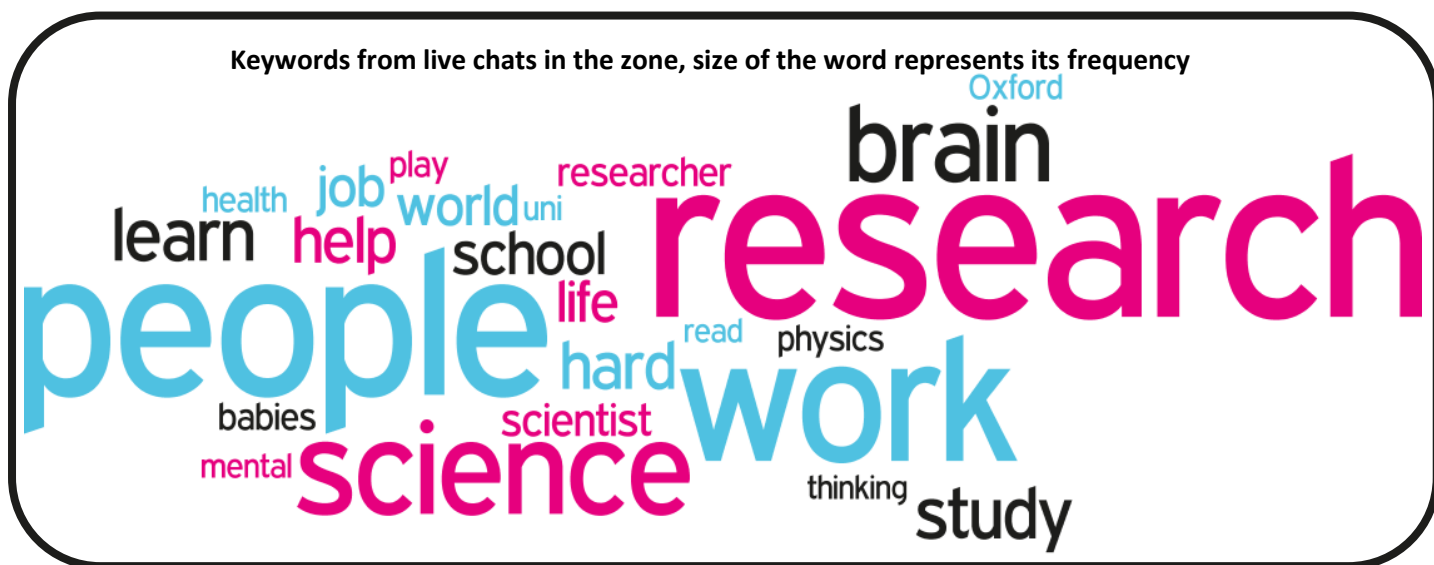|	CURIOSITY ZONE	IAS 2012-17 AVERAGE
Schools	7	10
Students logged in	278	381
% of students active in ASK, CHAT or VOTE	83%	85%
Questions asked	214	709
Questions approved	133	306
Answers given	295	543
Comments	6	76
Votes	158	299
Live chats	14	16
Lines of live chat	5,178	5,315
Average lines per live chat	370	344

Popular topics

Students readily engaged with the work of the researchers, and the discussions within chats could be varied, depending on which researchers were present and the subject of the class.

For example, Martin was asked about the meaning of life allowing him to address misconceptions about philosophy, Kanta was asked why communicating quantum physics was so hard, and Patrick answered questions about brain injuries and whether he helped people with disabilities.

Students asked many questions in both ASK and chats about the researchers' views on what it was like to work in research, including whether there were things they didn't like, allowing the researchers to give honest opinions about their work. There were many questions related to their personal careers such as why they research their particular areas, why they chose to work in Oxford, and what they wanted to do in the future. Another popular area was students challenging the researchers to explain the value of their research.

There were also questions about the researchers' personal lives, asking about their childhoods, pets and their families. Some specific questions showed that students were intrigued by the researchers' profiles. For example, Nayeli had questions about her son and Gergely was even asked questions in Hungarian by a student who spoke the same language.

Keywords from live chats in the zone, size of the word represents its frequency

Ask ?

Top Keywords of questions approved in the Zone. Area represents frequency

son	inspire	
school	experiment	
career		
work		

talk | life | swim
emotional | | baby
ritual | book | people
culture | language | brain
learn | jet engine | research

☐ Careers and Education ☐ Research topics ☐ Motivations

Example questions in the Zone (click for links)

Is there something you don't like about researching?

Why do you like 'being wrong in interesting ways?' and what interesting ways are they?

Did your son inspire your interest in babies development or were you interested beforehand?

how will your research help humanity?

If you study history which is the century that you study the most and why?

Does looking at brain scans ever get boring for you?

What is interesting in ecology?

Do you ever relate your sport to your research? if so how?

What made you so interested in research, why not something else?

what is your sons favourite game?

What was your worst mistake and how would u correct it?

why did you decide to be a psychologist?

Examples of good engagement

The students sometimes began conversations using their own personal experiences as a starting point. Many of the researchers took the chance to engage open and honestly with the students, often talking about the realities of research and the limits of knowledge.

Student: Does your job deal with seeing coulors and colour blindness

Sarah: a little bit! I sometimes test people for colour blindness when I teach science to undergraduates

Student: thats cool! i am coulor blind myself

Sarah: oh wow thats interesting! Red Green colour blind?

Student: Sarah yes i am red and green

Sarah: Sometimes we have people come for our lessons who didn't realise they were colourblind! Once we had someone who didn't realise they actually couldn't see in 3D. he wondered why 3D movies didn't work for him but never knew why!

Student: will i bee coulor blind 4 ever??

Sarah: I think there isn't a treatment at the moment but that doesn't mean there won't be! Every day we find out something new that could be a game changer

Student winner: swhawking

For great engagement during the event, this student received a gift voucher and a certificate.
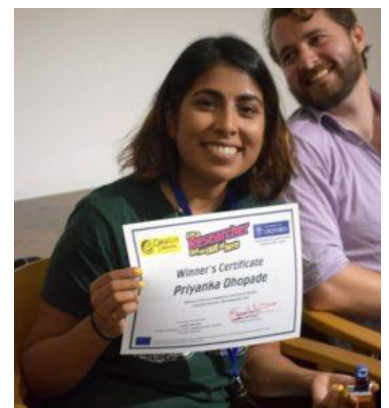
I'm a Researcher – Live!

The live final took place on Friday 29th September in the Weston Library Lecture Theatre at the Bodleian Libraries. Five researchers who had received a high number of votes and represented different divisions and research disciplines were selected to face questions from the audience. On the night, MC Kat Arney selected questions from young people among the audience of 70 people and each researcher got to speak and try to win votes. At the end of the event, the audience voted for who they thought had answered best.

Researcher winner: Priyanka Dhopade

The Live final was pretty nerve-wracking, I must admit – I was very nervous at the beginning. But the audience's appreciation and interest in our subjects, their insightful questions and the other researchers' friendly and relaxed demeanour quickly helped me to get into the "zone".

The Live final was like nothing I'd ever done before, and I'm so glad I got the opportunity to participate and donate the winnings to the charity of my choice (Women's Engineering Society). It actually made me more enthusiastic about my own research (pretty convenient for writing my current grant proposal) and STEM outreach, having seen the demand and appreciation for it. **Read Priyanka's thank you message**

Evaluation

European Researcher's Night projects aim to raise awareness in communities of the range of research being done in their local areas.
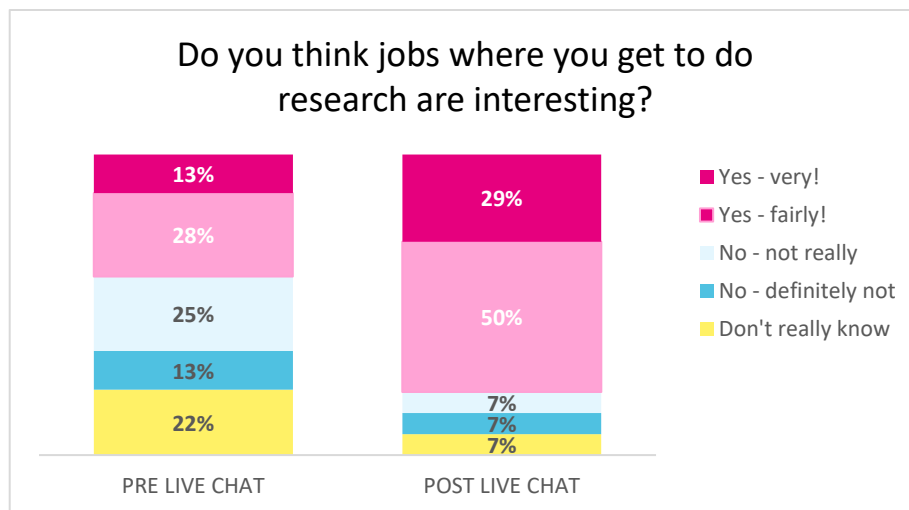
Students

"Lots of the researchers had really specific interests that I never thought you could explore in science labs or publish papers on. It showed me that nothing is off limits"– **Student**

"I've learnt a lot about how personal interests can lead to something extraordinary, like providing answers to questions you thought could never be answered"– **Student**

"Researchers are not really smart, boring, old people who sit in a room all day ☺"– **Student**

Students were asked what topics can be the subject of research, through an online survey on their profiles before (n=34) and after taking part in their live chat (n=14). 87% of the responses after taking part were the single word 'Anything', compared to 14% before the event. Pre-event the responses were much more specific to one or two words with the largest group (34%) being science subjects such as like biology and chemistry.

Do you think jobs where you get to do research are interesting?

	PRE LIVE CHAT	POST LIVE CHAT
Yes - very!	13%	29%
Yes - fairly!	28%	50%
No - not really	25%	7%
No - definitely not	13%	7%
Don't really know	22%	7%

Students were also asked for their views on jobs involving research. The proportion who thought these jobs were interesting rose from 41% to more than 79% of respondents.

Teachers

"My least confident student is having the best lesson ever!" – **Teacher**

"The students enjoyed it and found it very interesting"– **Teacher**

All of the teachers who responded when asked said they were satisfied with the event, and 54% were 'very satisfied'. All teachers who completed an online survey (6) agreed that *I'm a Researcher* was effective at improving student's understanding of what research is, engaging their whole class, helping students understand what happens in universities, and improving students' motivations towards their own education.

All the teachers felt the experience lived up to their expectations for their students, which included *'seeing the exciting breath of research that was being conducted, with the hope that it might inspire them to do well academically'* and '*an understanding of careers in research and the importance of research skills to our world'*.

Two teachers felt that the language used by some researchers was at a high level that made it difficult for some students to engage. All teachers said they would do *I'm a Researcher* with their class again.

Target schools *I'm a Researcher* aimed to reach pupils at four schools with traditionally low levels of engagement with the local universities. Classes from three of these schools (St Gregory The Great, The Oxford Academy and Oxford Spires) took part. In the pre-event survey 45% of the students at these schools said that their close family had been to university (compared to a figure of 65% for all respondents). These students made up 31% of the users active on the site and contributed 52% of the approved questions, pointing to substantial engagement with the event. At least 5 of these students then came to the live final.
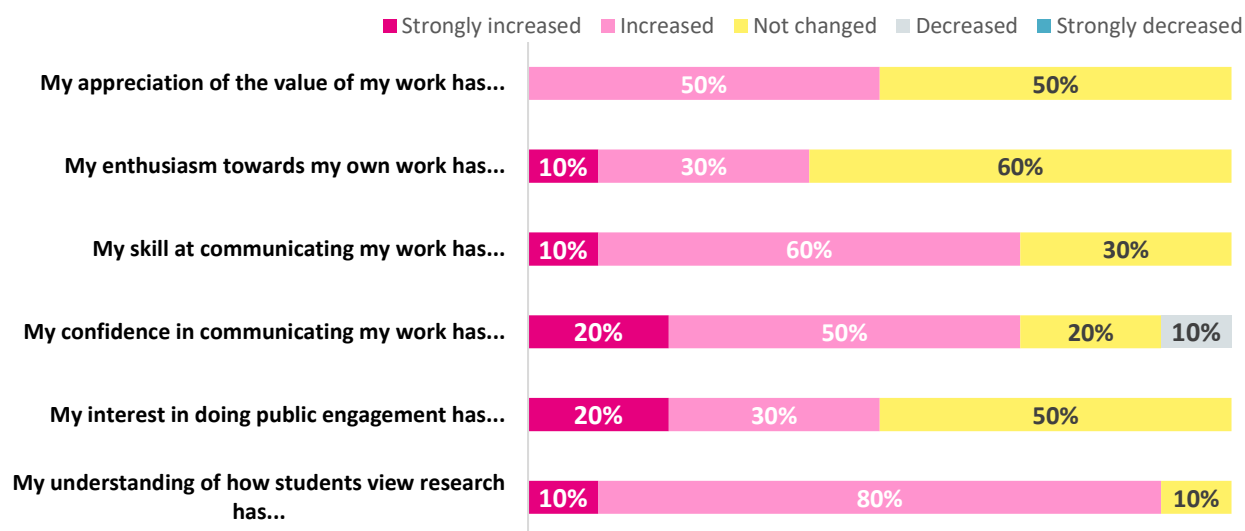
Researchers

"It beats standard lecture-style talks, as it gives a much better opportunity for the students to really engage with researchers as people, which is sorely missed in much of research public engagement / communication" – **Researcher**

"It was much more directed by the students and their interests." – **Researcher**

The researchers completed an online survey after the event to evaluate what effect taking part in I'm a Researcher has had, if any, on them. 10 researchers completed the survey.

After taking part in I'm a Researcher

Legend: ■ Strongly increased ■ Increased ■ Not changed ■ Decreased ■ Strongly decreased

	Strongly increased	Increased	Not changed	Decreased
My appreciation of the value of my work has...		50%	50%	
My enthusiasm towards my own work has...	10%	30%	60%	
My skill at communicating my work has...	10%	60%	30%	
My confidence in communicating my work has...	20%	50%	20%	10%
My interest in doing public engagement has...	20%	30%	50%	
My understanding of how students view research has...	10%	80%	10%	

The strongest effect was on the researcher's understanding of how students view their research, where 90% reported an increase in understanding. 70% also felt their communication skills and confidence had increased. All researchers said they had enjoyed taking part and would do so again.

Learning and improvement

Timing of event To engage the target schools as much as possible, these schools were given the option before the summer holidays to sign up multiple classes in the same year groups. The Oxford Academy and St Gregory the Great took up this offer, signing up 16 classes across 6 subject areas. Reminders and offers of support to all teachers were then regularly made in the lead up and during the event. In the event 7 of these classes from 3 subjects logged in, had chats and asked questions.

Due to the date of European Researchers Night, the event started in the first full week back to school after the summer break for students and teachers. It is likely that this timing meant teachers busy with the start of the year felt they didn't have time to prepare classes to take part. In future we would run an *I'm a Researcher* event nearer the same time as the main *I'm a Scientist* and *Engineer* events, after the October half term, when teachers have fully settled in and have time to prepare classes for engagement activities.

Live event attendance This was the first time an online *I'm a….* event was also used to encourage people to attend a live event. To encourage as many students as possible to go, teachers were given promo codes for free tickets to give to their class, the researchers were asked to talk about the live final in their chats and information about the live final was put on all pages of the site and emailed to all students who registered with an email address.

In the event, 16 young people were counted as attending the final. In the evaluation, 5 students (11% of respondents) were recorded as attending St. Gregory the Great, Oxford Academy, or Oxford Spires School. Initially tickets were £4 but free for student at schools doing *I'm a Researcher*. On the Tuesday before the final a decision was made to make all tickets free and they had all sold out by Thursday morning. As many students may have only decided to go to the final on the Friday itself, this option was then denied to them. To improve the attendance of students in future, it may be that a portion of the tickets be kept reserved until the final starts

Information on the final format All researchers were informed of the exact format of the final on the Wednesday before it took place. However, some of the researchers selected for the final said they would have appreciated knowing earlier as they had been worried that they were going to be doing presentations rather than answering audience questions. In future, we will include more detail about how the final works in the briefing notes sent to researchers at the beginning of the event and remind researchers at the halfway stage.