IMPERIAL
Societal Engagement

Engagement Academy 2025-2026

Project Summaries

Centre for Societal Engagement
22 April 2026

Engagement Academy

Overview

Each cohort of this staff training programme explores the evolving relationship between research and society to develop their public engagement practice through study, active experimentation and reflection.

The Engagement Academy is delivered by Imperial's Science Communication Unit and Public and Community Engagement Team.

It is accredited by The Institute of Leadership in line with the Higher Education Academy.

What does the Academy involve?

- Seven days of seminars, practical workshops, visits and group discussions
- Internal and external speakers
- Reading and activities between sessions
- Developing, delivering and evaluating their own practical engagement activity with support and feedback from session leaders, mentors and peers

2025-2026 Staff

Engagement Academy

Science Communication Unit

A team of practitioners and researchers delivering internationally-renowned masters courses which combine media training with academic perspectives.

Dr Felicity Mellor
Dr Julia Pitts (she/her)
Dr Kanta Dihal (she/her)
Gareth Mitchell

Public and Community Engagement Team

Central team of practitioners supporting staff and students to engage diverse audiences with Imperial's work through exchanging ideas and experiences.

Vicky Brightman-Hahn (she/her)
Dr Amy Seakins (she/her)
Charlotte Coales (she/her)
Sam Crisp (she/her)

2025-2026 Cohort

Engagement Academy

Lina Aimola (she/her), School of Convergence Science (Health and Technology)

Anissa Alifandi (she/her), School of Convergence Science (Space, Security and Telecoms)

Rosie Allen (she/her), Public Affairs, Office of the President

Laura Barclay (she/her), Imperial Enterprise

Sam Brzezicki (he/him), Mathematics

Demi Corr (she/her), Marketing, Outreach, Recruitment and Admissions

Jing Fu (he/him), Bioengineering

Theo Glashier (he/him), Civil and Environmental Engineering

Samuel Macaulay (he/him), Life Sciences

Rabeea Maqsood (she/her), Bioengineering

Lasse Havgaard Nyhegn (he/him), National Heart and Lung Institute

Lillie Purser (she/her), National Heart and Lung Institute

Ester Reina-Torres (she/her), Bioengineering

Jessica Stacey (she/her), Infectious Diseases

Project summaries

Academicians developed a range of projects to engage audiences

Lina Aimola (she/her)

School of Convergence Science (Health and Technology)

At the School of Convergence Science, Health and Technology theme, we plan to establish a public advisory group to ensure our research missions are grounded in real-world health needs, societal priorities and impact. As health technologies increasingly influence how people live, manage illness and share data, public involvement helps ensure the innovations we propose are accessible, affordable, effortless and trustworthy from the outset.

This group would include people with lived experience of health conditions, representatives from health charities and underserved communities, reflecting a wide range of ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, digital access needs and lived health realities. Through the Academy, I explored approaches to reach these audiences and build equitable, respectful partnerships.

This advisory group would ultimately bring diverse perspectives to help shape our missions priorities, challenge assumptions and highlight ethical, practical and inclusion-related issues that may not be visible within academic or technical settings.

Anissa Alifandi (she/her)

School of Convergence Science (Space, Security and Telecoms)

Within the School of Convergence Science, one of the Space, Security and Telecoms missions is LACE (Low-Altitude Advanced Communications and Earth Observation).

LACE is a smart telecoms and Earth Observation system which will be led by Imperial, launching satellites and newly innovated infrastructure into orbit to monitor our planet.

My project is creating a series of marketing videos for a stakeholder audience, inspiring and informing them about the mission.

To maximise impact for the audience, we're developing an 'immersive' version which can be shown on the Data Science Institute screens. Viewers can stand in the middle and see the satellites moving around them.

Rosie Allen (she/her)

Public Affairs, Office of the President

My project idea for the Societal Engagement Academy was to run engagement sessions with school children, responding to art pieces, created by amateur artists paired with climate scientists. Unfortunately, I am unlikely to deliver these sessions, as I will be leaving Imperial to pursue a PhD at the University of Leeds.

However, the process of planning this project has been invaluable. My PhD will focus on participatory research in environmental justice and schools, meaning the skills developed through this project are directly transferable. Planning this work has helped me articulate and refine my research interests, and I will carry forward both the skills and enthusiasm for societal engagement into my future career, where it will be more relevant than ever.

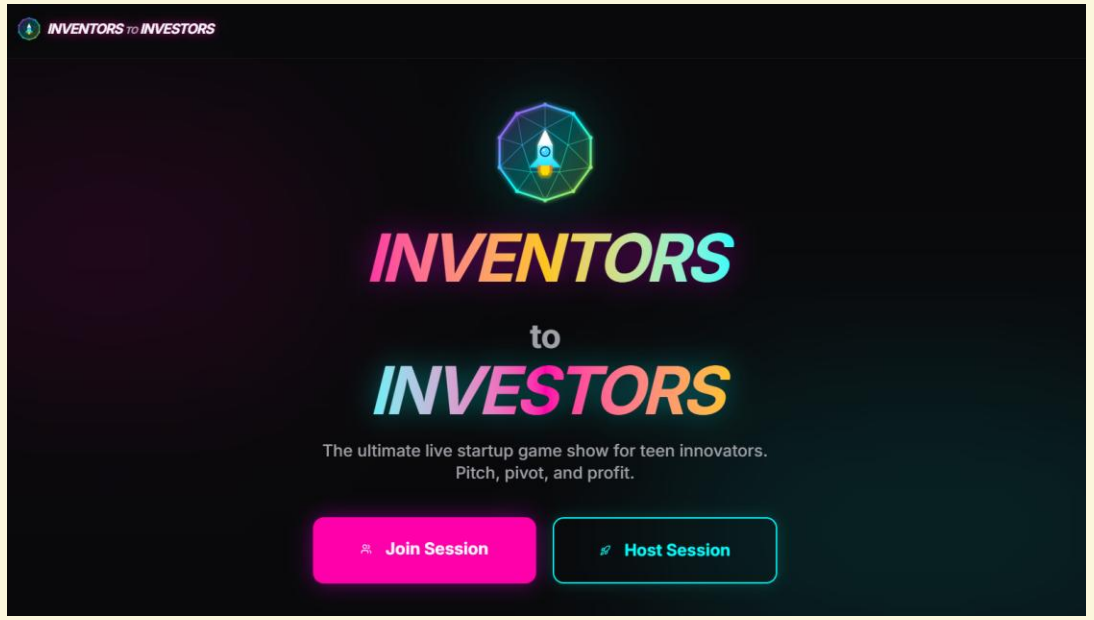
Laura Barclay (she/her)

Imperial Enterprise Lab

Working with entrepreneurs at Imperial has shown me how powerful confidence and mindset are at the earliest stages of building a startup. Yet many young people lack accessible, engaging ways to explore entrepreneurial thinking and the tools to innovate before entering university or work.

‘Inventors to Investors’ is a two-hour, gamified engagement activity for teens. During the Engagement Academy I built a prototype web app for online and in-person delivery. The experience guides participants through four rounds: Ideation, Discovery, Prototype and Investment, which mirror the early stages of a typical startup journey. Working in groups, teens identify problems from their own lives, test assumptions through customer interviews with each other, rapidly prototype solutions and pitch ideas using a playful coin-based investment system.

My project aims to help teens feel empowered to brainstorm and implement solutions in response to their own problems. The app is set to be tested with scouts this summer.



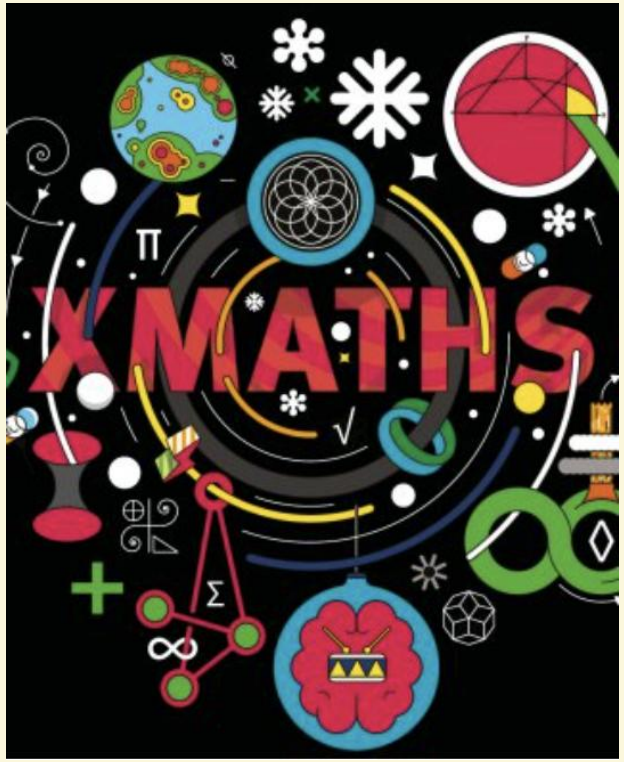
Sam Brzezicki (he/him)

Mathematics

From the Engagement Academy I knew I wanted to expand my engagement practices to a group I've worked a bit less with – adult audiences.

In January I did some fun work with college comms on performing a light touch mathematical analysis of the TV show "The Traitors". During the Academy, a few others came up with the nice idea that I form my engagement project around this work!

Although this is what I intend to do: create a short engagement activity aimed at an adult audience around "The Traitors" game including some snippets of maths to discuss how to play the game well, this has gotten me to think more widely about maths and an event like Imperial Lates being connected together. In 2019 the college ran a maths themed Imperial Lates, Christmas edition, called "Xmaths". Maybe this can make its long awaited sequel...



Demi Corr (she/her)

Marketing, Outreach, Recruitment and Admissions

My project aims to develop and deliver a series of scholarship-focused workshops for Year 11 and Year 12 students in schools to help them make informed decisions as they approach choosing their university. The workshops would aim to improve students' understanding of what scholarships are, how they can support access to higher education, and how to approach scholarship opportunities with greater confidence.

Through my role in scholarships at Imperial, I would use this project to make what can often feel like complicated or inaccessible information much clearer and more approachable for young people, especially those who may not automatically see scholarships as something for them. While the workshops would be shaped by my experience at Imperial, the skills and understanding students take away would be relevant to scholarship opportunities across any university.

Jing Fu (he/him)

Bioengineering

My project is a Science Day for a local primary school near Imperial College London. It will take place during the school's Science Week.

Pupils from Years 1 to 6 will take part in fun, hands-on science sessions. Each group will explore simple activities and work together to ask questions and share ideas.

The sessions will focus on microbes, food, and sustainability. Pupils will discover that microbes are everywhere, even in the food they eat. They will learn how microbes help make bread and yogurt, and how scientists use them to create more sustainable solutions.

The aim is to make science feel exciting and easy to understand. The project will help pupils feel more confident, ask more questions, and see that science is for everyone.

Theo Glashier (he/him)

Civil and Environmental Engineering

Practitioners & Researchers: Partnering for the future of ageing infrastructure

To ensure that academic research in maintenance engineering responds to the challenges faced by engineers in industry, it is important that these stakeholders participate in the planning and tailoring of research activities.

An in-person meeting, named ‘Discovery’, will bring together practitioners, technicians, and structural repair engineers with researchers from Imperial College London and other universities. During this day-activity, a facilitator will encourage conversation on the topic of managing ageing civil structures. The desired outcome is for everyone to have gained new insight into the day-to-day, challenges and goals of both the researchers and participants from industry. The facilitator will intend to ensure that participants understand, rather than simply assume, what the problem is. With consent, note takers will document the contributions.

Organised in partnership with the Institution of Structural Engineers, funding will be made available to participants for travel, while meals and tea/coffee will be provided. A series of three follow-up meet-ups will see the definition of the common challenge, the co-design of different answers to the challenge, and finally the delivery of multiple selected solutions.

Samuel Macaulay (he/him)

Life Sciences

Capturing carbon and feeding people - with rocks

This drop-in activity at Science Museum Lates demonstrates the natural carbon cycle, how we have disrupted it by increasing greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change, and introduces how carbon dioxide removal technologies - such as enhanced rock weathering - could help tackle this.

Visitors will explore a hands-on model featuring an interactive papier-mâché volcano that can “erupt” using a CO_2 smoke machine and the classic vinegar-and-baking-soda reaction.

Participants will add sugar cubes as “rocks” and pour over rainwater to illustrate the natural weathering process. They will then explore how this can be accelerated by crushing the “rock” into sugar granules and spreading it over farmland to increase the surface area for weathering, capturing more carbon and storing it in the ocean.

The activity also highlights how enhanced rock weathering can improve soil health and crop yields, linking climate solutions with improving global food security.

Rabeea Maqsood (she/her)

Bioengineering

Heart Heroes: the HRV challenge.

Have you ever wondered what heart rate variability (HRV) is?

HRV is a useful biomarker and appears on many smartwatches and fitness trackers as a number, but many users do not understand what that means for their health and well-being.

In this interactive Heart Heroes activity, you will find out what HRV means and what it can tell us about how our bodies respond to stress, breathing, movement, and relaxation. You will roll the giant dice and get a movement challenge—which could be anything from energetic jumping jacks to calm breathing exercises. As you try each challenge, you'll measure your own HRV and watch how it changes in real time using a wearable device. Along the way, you will also discover how you can "train" your HRV, just like you can train your muscles in the gym and use it to personalise your health.

This activity will be held at the Great Exhibition Road Festival in June 2026.

Lasse Havgaard Nyhegn (he/him)

National Heart and Lung Institute

My engagement project is an interactive board game designed for children aged 11–14 to explore what it is like to live with Type 1 diabetes. Through gameplay, participants take on the role of a young person managing their condition in everyday situations such as school, sports, and social events. Players make decisions about insulin, food, and activity levels, learning how these choices affect blood glucose and overall well-being.

The aim is to build understanding, empathy, and awareness of chronic disease management in a fun and accessible way. By combining education with play, the game encourages discussion, reduces stigma, and helps demystify diabetes for young audiences. The activity is designed to be used in schools, but can also be used at public engagement events, supporting both scientific learning and social awareness while highlighting the real-life challenges faced by people living with chronic conditions.

Lillie Purser (she/her)

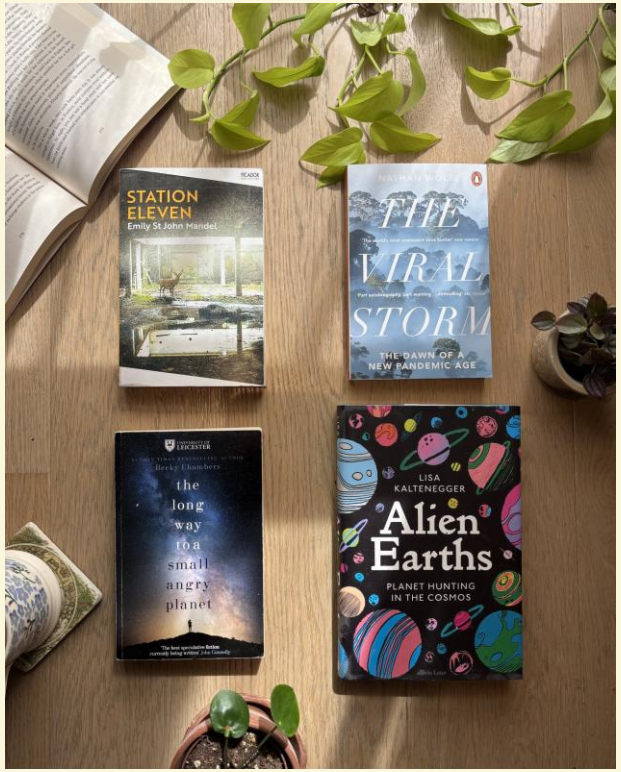
National Heart and Lung Institute

Parallel Pages – A book club for the science curious literature lovers!

Two books. One conversation.

Parallel Pages pairs a novel with a non-fiction book that explores its themes, uncovering the real science behind the story.
Could we really live in space?
How likely is a world-ending pandemic?
If you love stories and have the curiosity to dig into the details, this is the place to read, think, and discuss with scientists and book lovers alike.

Parallel Pages is a quarterly book club pairing popular fiction with popular science, giving readers the opportunity to discover the details behind their favourite stories. Each session will be held in a pub or coffee shop, with the chance to discuss the theme with a researcher. There's no pressure to read the whole non-fiction book – specific excerpts will be recommended. The aim is to encourage people to engage with science in a relaxed, accessible setting beyond the classroom.



Ester Reina-Torres (she/her)

Bioengineering

Public involvement in shaping future glaucoma therapies

As researchers seeking to understand health and disease, it is easy to become absorbed in the science and lose sight of the ultimate goal: improving the lives of those affected. In my work on intraocular pressure regulation and glaucoma, we are now moving towards developing new treatments for this leading cause of irreversible blindness.

This project focuses on engaging patients, carers and healthcare professionals early in the development process. Through structured public involvement sessions, including interactive discussions and feedback activities, we will gather insights on treatment priorities, acceptability and practical implementation. These sessions will foster open dialogue and ensure that lived experience informs key scientific and translational decisions.

By embedding public engagement from the early stages of research, and allocating appropriate time and resources within project plans and funding applications, we aim to develop therapies that are not only scientifically robust but also relevant, accessible and responsive to patient needs.

Jessica Stacey (she/her)

Infectious Diseases

Resistance Reservoirs

This giant Jenga-style game will introduce Great Exhibition Road Festival-goers to the problem of antifungal resistance. Players will add treatable or treatment-resistant fungal pathogens to their tower in response to specific events and interventions – from strong winds which spread fungicides beyond their agricultural target, to the discovery of new antifungal drugs and their protection for clinical use. The game aims to engage players while communicating a key One Health message: antifungal-resistant infections in the clinic or hospital can arise from the decisions we make about farming, horticulture, animal husbandry, and how we treat our environment.

Resistance Reservoirs is intended to be the first element in a Public Engagement “toolkit” for members of the Fungal One Health and Antimicrobial Resistance Network. This summer, we’ll be making a short film with farmers, researchers, and people living with resistant infections, and citizen science activities will be coming up at festivals in the autumn.

Potato blight outbreak

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Potato blight is caused by the oomycete ***Phytophthora infestans***. A vulnerable crop may be sprayed up to 15 times. The James Hutton Institute produces a Potato Blight Forecast: risk is high when humidity is above 90% for two consecutive days

IMPERIAL

Societal Engagement

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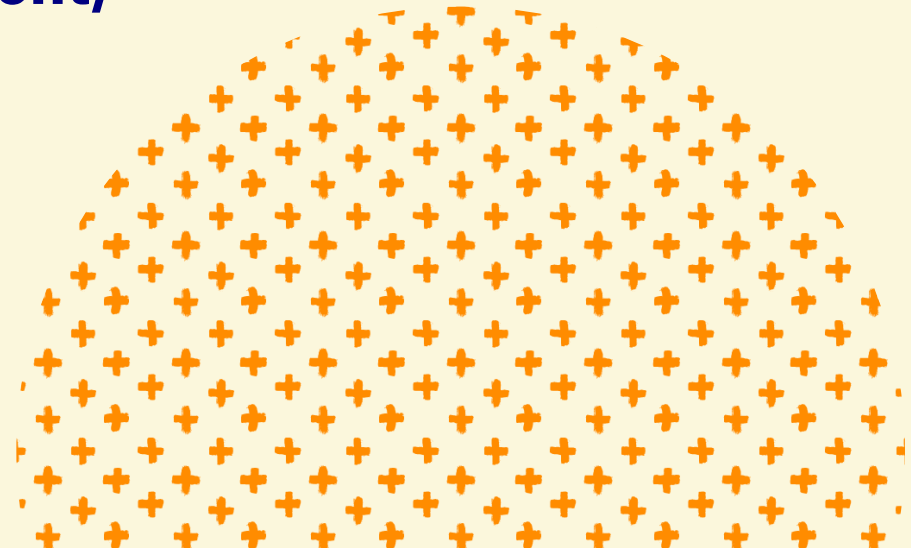

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