

VOICE COURSE SEPTEMBER 2025

31st August – 5th September 2025

13 Graduates from 7 countries

11 Speakers

20+ Lab Demons

Pathology Team

And the ICPV team behind the scenes

Course Facilitator : Dave Chuter and Ceri Steele

Student Assistants : Afreen Abarika Isam, Furqan Mohammed Waseem

Lecturers and Lab Masters : John Marshall, Louise Jones, Angus Cameron, Richard Grose, Sam Walis, Shoshana Burke, Miriam Fiscal, Stuart McDonald, Hermant Kocher, Mike Allen, Frances Balkwill

Attendees : Lisa Radcliffe, Hans Rueffert, Antonella Cardone, Christine Campbell, Elsa Ryder, Frances McGreevy, Lorna Pirozzolo, Markus Taylor, Mila Ogalla Toledo, Anita Granero, Rashmi Kumar, Sophie Wintrich, Thea Warren

Sound and Video : Stephen Rowley



Graduates and Demons 2025

Sunday, 31st August

After checking in to QMUL Mile End Campus, we walked around the corner for a Pizza evening at The Cherry – our traditional introduction and meet and greet for all the ‘students’



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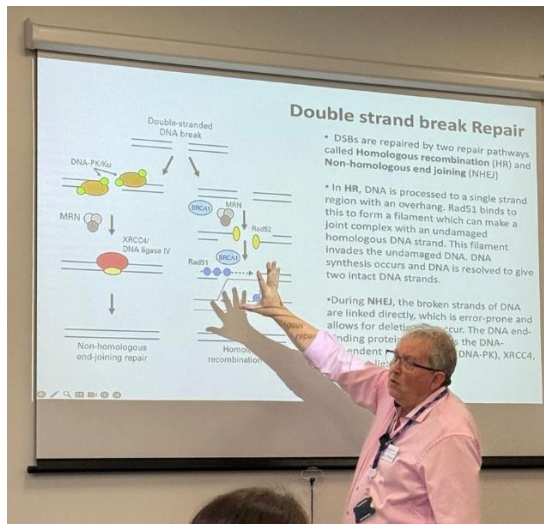
Day 1 – Monday, 1st September

Lecture : Basic Cancer Biology 1 – John Marshall

The course began with an introduction to basic cancer biology. Topics covered included the cell and cell components, DNA, RNA, proteins and specialisation/differentiation of cells. John went on to discuss how cancer is caused by mutations in genes, and talked about oncogenes and tumour suppressor genes.

‘John is a very skilled lecturer; he has a calming reassuring presence and a lot of patience with our lay questions.’

‘The issues around errors in mutations is so much clearer now.’

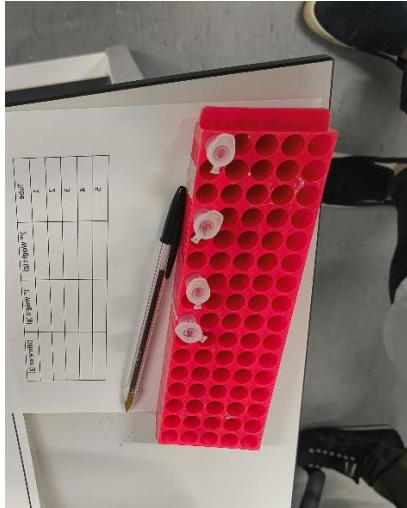


Practical : Solutions and Dilutions - John Marshall

In the afternoon, the students were introduced to the laboratory - this really is the Unique Selling Point (USP) of the course, with ‘ordinary lay people’ being given access to the labs and expert tuition in laboratory techniques – the patient advocates became scientists for a week! The first afternoon saw the students learning some basic lab techniques including measuring, weighing and pipetting. They wore lab coats and gloves and began to learn what it would be like to be a scientist. Some of the PhD and Masters students from Barts came along to help teach and supervise the students.

‘First practical realisation of the minutiae of experiments – and the time it requires.’

‘A sound introduction to lab work...loved “playing” lab rats and the precision work!’



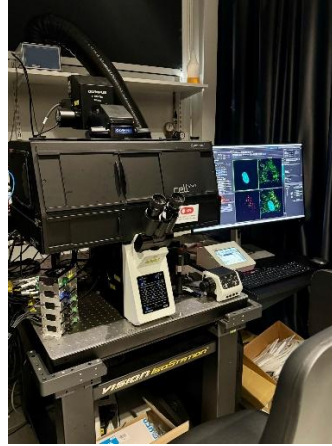
Demo : Confocal Microscope - Sam Wallis

Students were given the opportunity to go to a microscopy demonstration. Sam Wallis gave a tour of the microscopy laboratories and explained how all the equipment worked. Students were able to look down some of the microscopes and find out more about how each of them was used.

'A glimpse into current progress.'

'I particularly liked that we could touch and try the sophisticated microscopes.'

'Mindblowing and fascinating.'



Lightbulb Moment : There are a lot of cells and each is like a mini computer...oh, and TP53 – wow!

Day 2 – Tuesday 2nd September

Lecture : Basic Cancer Biology 2 – Richard Grose

Day 2's lectures were delivered by Richard Grose. Richard had prepared a brilliant lecture with many slides to help the students get to grips with the subject.

'Another foundational lecture with lots of dense, technical info I will definitely go back to.'



Practical : Conducting PCR to observe changes in cancer oncogenes - Angus Cameron

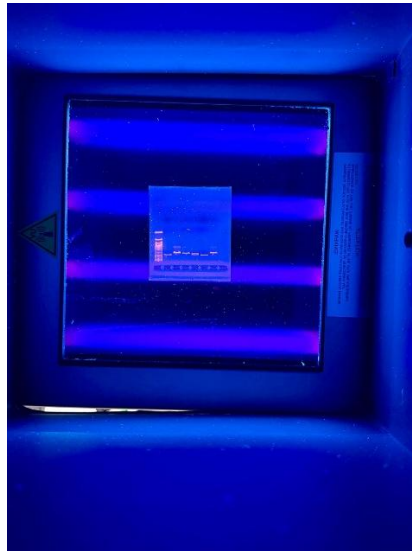
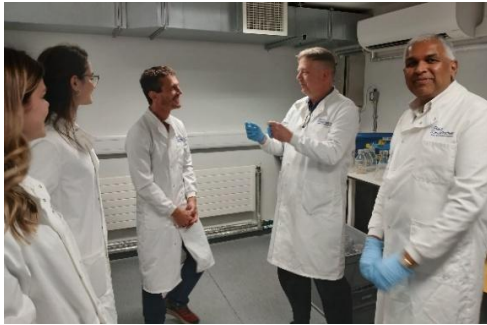
The aim of today's practical was to understand how a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) can be used to amplify specific fragments of DNA and how PCR can be used to observe changes in cancer-causing oncogenes.

Angus led the session with super enthusiasm and energy! The students responded to this well, soaking up the teaching and the help of the Barts students.

There was an unexpected announcement of Angus's elevation to Professor partway through the afternoon.

'Amazed at the many steps required, the complexity of it, and the enormous potential for errors.'

'A very exciting project that led to a directly observable result.'



Evening Visit : Evening Trip to Centre of the Cell - Stem Pod Show - Professor Frances Balkwill

Students were invited to visit the Blizard Institute at Whitechapel. Prof Frances Balkwill and her team of demonstrators gave an amazing presentation from the 'Stem Pod', usually open to school and college groups. VOICE students learnt more about the cell and were given the opportunity to try some of the interactive games in the pod.

'A very positive and encouraging initiative.'

'A great complementary activity.'

'The place is quite incredible and very stimulating.'



Lightbulb Moment : Cancer treatment can lead to further cancers

Day 3 – Wednesday 3rd September

Three different presentations were given on different types of cancer. As with previous VOICE courses, the cancer types talked about were all relevant to the students' experiences.

Lecture : Shoshana Burke - Leukaemia

'She was able to make this complex field very clear and accessible'.

Lecture : Louise Jones - Breast cancer

'It was so useful to have terminology broken down and defined.'

Lecture : Miriam Fiscal Colorectal – Gastric Cancer

'This presentation was interesting for general knowledge on these types of cancers, with a focus on prevention and risk predicting.'

Practical : Examining Cancer Cells

Students used their newly developed lab skills to handle cancer cells and to look at them down a microscope.

'The project was a bit trickier than previous days.'



Practical : Pathology – Samples Dissection – Louise Jones

Students were given the opportunity to observe this brilliant pathologist at work: Louise was processing tissue from breast surgery which had been carried out earlier that day. Students were able to see how a pathologist makes a diagnosis by looking and touching the tissue and then how samples can be taken for use in a tissue bank.

‘It was extraordinary to be able to touch the tumour cells.’

‘An absolute must of the course!’



Lightbulb Moment : There is empathy in the laboratory

Day 4 : Thursday 4th September

Lecture : Stuart McDonald – Upper GI

'A very interesting presentation on a rarer/lesser known cancer'

Lecture : Louise Jones – Introduction to Neoplasia

'Fascinating to see examples of what a pathologist would see down the microscope'

Lecture : Hermant Kocher - Surgery and Epidemiology Pancreatic Cancer

'the brutality of pancreatic cancer lethality and statistics hit very hard'



Practical : Evaluate tumour sections for biomarkers using antibodies – Mike Allen

This practical session really showed the students how laboratory research work can be laborious and time consuming! In preparing their slides, the students needed to go through a long process of staining, washing, waiting, re-staining, rewashing, waiting again and so on.

'Long pauses were necessary to complete the protocol'



Lightbulb Moment : How location of tumours can affect the success of treatment

Day 5 : Friday 5th September

Lectures : Communicating research - scientific papers - John Marshall and Angus Cameron

'A very important topic for advocates'



Future VOICE Courses.

Feedback from the students is really important when it comes to planning future VOICE courses. We therefore asked the group the following questions:

What was your main take home message?

'How crucial it is to explain research to the general public - how much more PPI work is needed - train young researchers to practise PPI'

'Cancer research relies mostly on the passionate work of those involved'

'Patient diversity is key in cancer screening and risk prevention'

'A much richer understanding of PPIE, and a broader and more nuanced knowledge of cancer research'

Was there anything we didn't cover which you would like to have learnt about?

'Hormone therapy which is key to many long-term cancer treatments'

'Paediatric cancers, palliative care'

'Feedback from lecturers on how PPI has affected their work'

'Talk about barriers to PPI work, as not everyone in research is a fan of PPI, or sees the benefits of it'

What did you enjoy most about the course?

'The patience, good will, humility, helpful attitude and eagerness of all lecturers'

'The learning, the comradery, the discussing, the brain storming'

'The networking time and opportunities (dinners, receptions, breakfasts) to informally chat were very well balanced throughout the course'

'I felt safe and understood throughout and in complete admiration for the experiences and life stories that were shared'

'The speakers were world experts but they also had huge respect for the expertise of the patient advocates'

How did you find the overall pace of the course?

'Mix of exhausting, inspiring and thrilling'

'It will definitely take me a while to process everything and I will have to go back to the shared slides to make sure the information sinks in'

'A lot of detail but well explained'

Which, if any, of the session stood out for you as particularly useful or memorable? Why was this?

As in previous VOICE courses, Louise's pathology demonstration was outstanding, with many of the students highlighting this as their 'stand out session', but it did have a bit of competition.

'Richard Grose's lecture on receptors, signaling and what is needed to make drugs work'

'Louise's empathy and respect for her patient was touching, her humanity uplifting'

'I also like all the practical sessions. It was the first time I had experienced a lab in that way'

'I will forever remember the incredible respect and care Louise showed for her patient, and grateful for this unique opportunity to confront my own reality of cancer'

'I particularly liked the first session which set the scene and the bar very high for the rest of the course'

Will you do anything extra or differently in terms of patient and public involvement (either getting involved yourself or involving others) as a result of attending this course?

'I will definitely advise my fellow advocates to attend'

'At Cancer Patients Europe we are going to organise a CPE academy and I will do my best to also include some hands on trainings'

'I definitely feel more confident and knowledgeable now reading research papers and abstracts'

When we run this course again is there anything you think we should do differently?

'I would prepare an info pack to distribute beforehand with the draft agenda'

'Would include a longer break in the day for walking outside, get some fresh air and process the load of information and emotions'

'More time speaking with young researchers'

We tried to go paperless this year but it was clear that the students needed to scribble down notes rather than have an open laptop, it was a distraction, lesson learnt.

ICPV would like to thank Barts Cancer Institute for allowing us to use the facilities at Charterhouse Square and thank you to the many lab DEMONS that made the lab experience so special.

We would also like to thank the Speakers, Lecturers and Lab Masters: John Marshall, Louise Jones, Angus Cameron, Richard Grose, Sam Walis, Shoshana Burke, Miriam Fiscal, Stuart McDonald, Hermant Kocher and Mike Allen.

Also, Frances Balkwill for the Centre of the Cell Visit.



ABBA seems to be part of the VOICE course soundtrack now, thank you Ceri.