

March 2020

The Medical Research Zone was an online event held over four weeks and funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC).

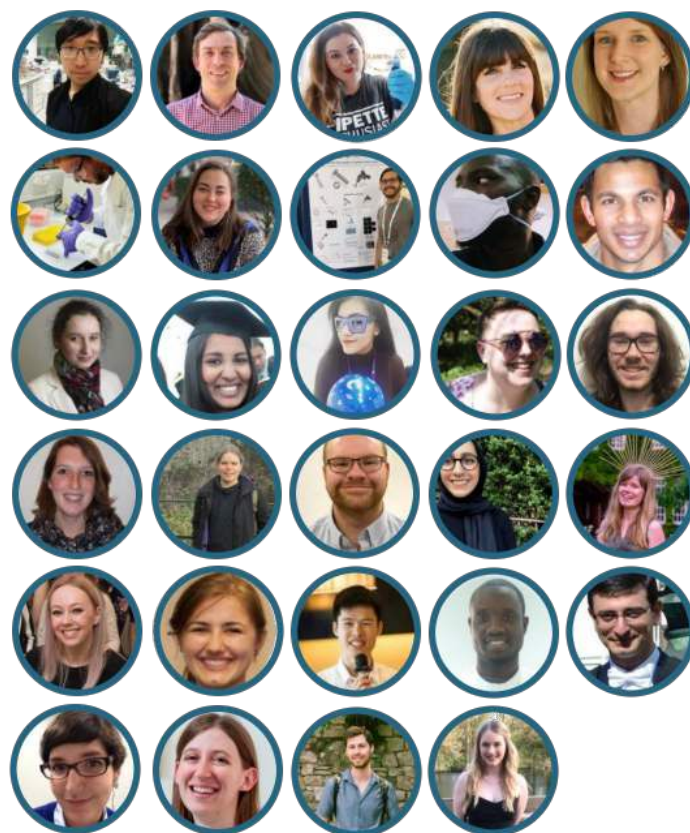
29 MRC researchers and technical staff created profiles on the website, and engaged with students throughout the month in live CHATs and the ASK section.

1,012 students from **23 schools** all over the UK logged into the zone over the four weeks. **74% of the schools** were **widening participation and/or underserved**.

In the ASK section, **349 questions** were approved and sent to the researchers and technical staff, who between them wrote **1,564 answers**.

45 online live CHATs took place during the event, including **four evening live CHATs** where students could join in from home with their family.

An average of **6 researchers and technical staff** came to each session, giving students a wide variety of roles and people to find out about.



Key figures

The effects of coronavirus meant substantial disruption was reported by many schools during the last two weeks of the event. In the final week of the Zone, schools officially closed, meaning many CHATs were cancelled. There was also a reduced number of questions in ASK and votes cast in those weeks. CHATs were opened so students could still use the site from home.

In the final week, two booked CHATs took place with 4 and 6 students attending in each. In the final 'all schools' open evening live CHAT there were 6 students (compared to an average of 8 in previous evening chats) and 20 students attended in the final Friday live CHAT (compared to 51 in June 2019).

*Figures for other zones held in March 2020, following a two week format.

**Figures for a previous MRC zone held in June 2019 over four undisrupted weeks.

	MRC Zone Mar '20	IAS UK Mar '20 average*	MRC Zone June '19**
Schools	23	7	33
Students logged in	1,012	300	1,204
% of students active in ASK, CHAT, VOTE, or comments	82%	86%	90%
Questions asked	590	251	770
Questions approved	349	154	342
Answers given	1,564	287	2,072
Comments	114	27	156
Votes cast	594	204	924
Live CHATs	45	14	63
Lines of live CHAT	20,045	4,869	29,683
Average lines per CHAT	445	357	471

Participating schools

We allocated places to 47 schools in total who applied for the activity, expecting around 20% to drop out. Due to the coronavirus outbreak and school closures in the final week of the event, a lower than expected number of schools took part.

In total, 23 schools took part in live CHATs in the MRC Zone. 17 of those schools (74%) were widening participation (WP) and/or underserved (U), the criteria for which is defined at: about.imascientist.org.uk/under-served-and-wp

All Saints Catholic School, Knowsley (WP)

Arbroath High School, Angus (U)

Arrow Vale RSA Academy, Redditch (WP/U)

Colmers School and Sixth Form College,
Birmingham (WP)

Colne Community High School and College,
Colchester

Denmark Road High School for Girls, Gloucester
(U)

John Flamsteed Community School, Ripley (U)

Kepier, Houghton le Spring (WP)

Lincoln College, Lincoln (U)

MidKent College, Gillingham (U)

Rainham Mark Grammar School, Gillingham (U)

Reading Girls' School, Reading (WP)

Redmoor Academy, Hinkley (U)

South Wilts Grammar School for Girls, Salisbury
(U)

St Dominic's High School, Belfast (WP)

St John's School and Sixth Form College, Bishop
Auckland

St Martin in the Fields High School for Girls,
London (WP)



St Ursula's Convent School, London

The Ecclesbourne School, Belper (U)

The Petchey Academy, London (WP)

Trevelyan Middle School, Windsor

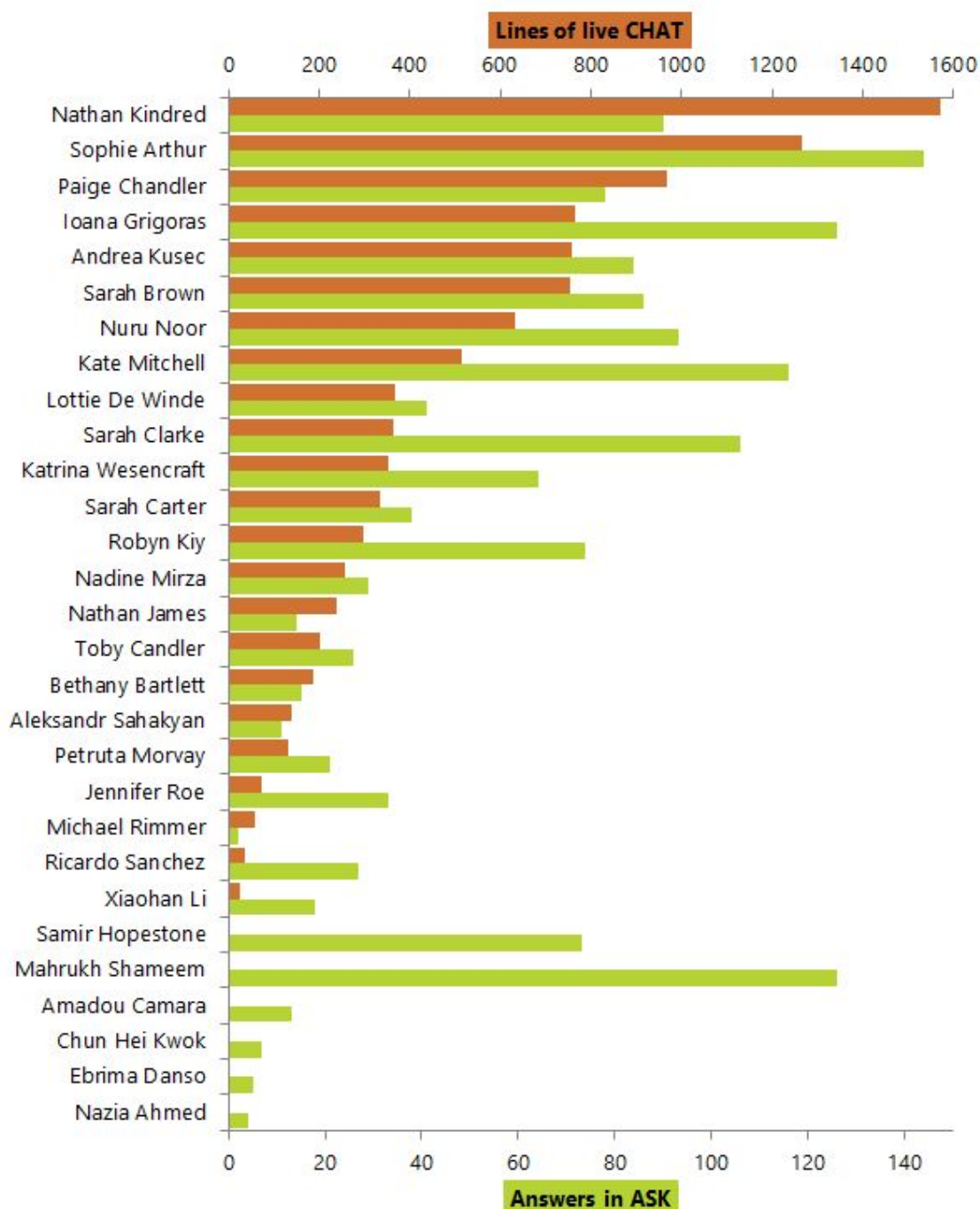
Wigan and Leigh College, Wigan

Writhlington School, Radstock

Researcher and technical staff activity

Each live CHAT lasts for 30 minutes and involves researchers and technical staff connecting with a class to answer their questions in real time. ASK questions are sent to the researchers and technical staff outside of the CHATs and can be answered at any time.

Across the four weeks of the event there were **45 live CHATs**, with a total of 20,045 lines of conversation between students and the MRC researchers and technical staff. 349 approved questions from students were put through in ASK. Scientists wrote 1,564 answers in response.



Popular topics

Frequent words used in live CHAT
by students and scientists



ASK Question themes and example questions

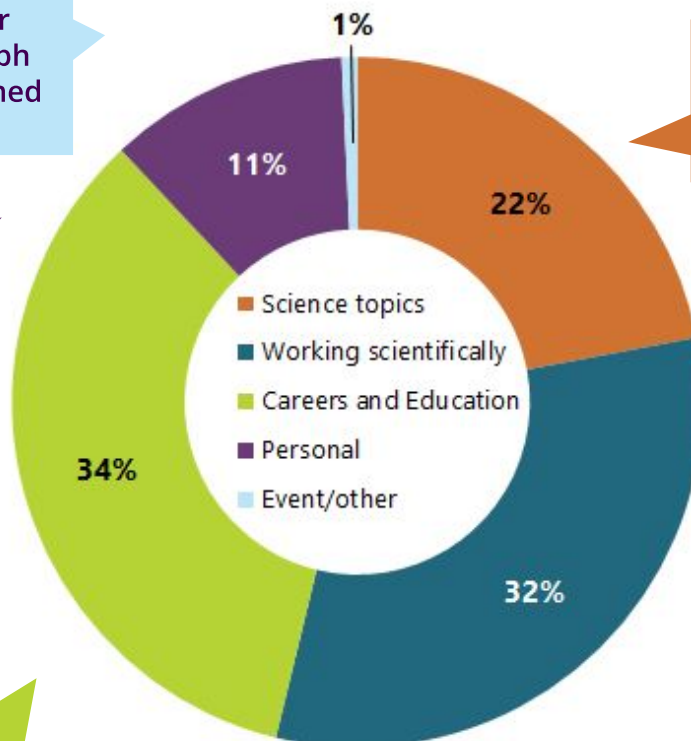


What age would your
"build your own lymph
node" activity be aimed
at?

Do you like
Doctor Who?
And if so who
is your
favourite
doctor on the
show?

What was your
favourite subject
in school?

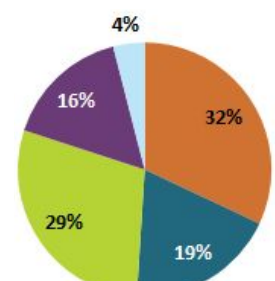
When doing science
GCSEs, is this stressful
and if you could do it
again what would you do
differently?



How was our skin
colour made?

How can you
make someone
with a brain
tumour feel
better?

Have your mice had any specialised
mutations that make them better
evolved or is it mainly behaviour
changes?



Historic averages for all
I'm a Scientist zones

Examples of good engagement

There were discussions about the impact of medical research on society and the ethics of this research. The researchers and technical staff increased the students' knowledge and understanding of medical research, by discussing their work and explaining concepts to the students, contributing to their science capital. The chats are a great way for students and the MRC participants to have lengthy conversations and for students to get their questions answered on a level they can understand, such as in this example with Sophie, a Science Communications Officer at MRC London Institute of Medical Sciences:

"How do you think your research could help society?" - Student

"Well stem cell research could help us to understand developmental disorders and also come up with treatments for near all diseases and conditions" - Sophie

"What kinda stem cells do you use for your research e.g bone marrow?" - Student

"I was actually working with embryonic stem cells and also cancer stem cells" - Sophie

"Have you encountered ethical problems when using embryonic stem cells and if so what are your solutions to these?" - Student

"Well it is a question I often get asked when I do events about stem cells and I just explain the facts about where they come from and the regulations that are in place, and of course the importance of doing this research" - Sophie

"Thank you. How do you obtain stem cells?" - Student

"Well the ones I was working with are called teratocarcinomas - which are tumours of germ cells - eg sperm and egg" - Sophie

"Have you faced any struggles in trying to get these?" - Student

"Not personally because I was using what we call a cell line, this is compared to primary cells which are taken from patient samples for example" - Sophie

"That's really interesting, thank you" - Student

"No problem, thanks again for asking such fantastic questions. Have you heard of cancer stem cells before?" - Sophie

"No I've only learnt about embryonic stem cells and bone marrow stem cells as I'm in year 9" - Student

"Well now you know a bit more :) there are many other places you can get stem cells from too" - Sophie

"Thank you for helping me to understand more about stem cells!" - Student

"No problem at all, that's what I'm here for and what I love to do too" - Sophie

Weekly Winners:

Students voted each week for their favourite MRC participant to take home the prize money. At the end of each week, votes were counted and a Weekly Winner was announced. In week 4, two of scientists tied for votes.

The five Weekly Winners were **Nathan Kindred, Sophie Arthur, Sarah Brown, Ioana Grigoras** and **Nuru Noor**.

At the end of the activity, the person with the most votes across the four weeks was announced as the Overall Winner of the Medical Research Zone.

Overall Winner: **Nathan Kindred**

Nathan's plans for the prize money: *"I would like to use the prize money to engage more people both in understanding research involving animals and in my own research. Ideally, I would do this by visiting different schools across the country to give talks/workshops."*

Read Nathan's [thank you message](#)



Student Winners: **adegboyegao19, essentiallyellie, daniya19 and amckeswick**

For great engagement during the event, one student was chosen by the researchers and technical staff each week to receive a gift voucher and a certificate.

Feedback

Here are a few of the comments made about March's Medical Research Zone...

My students got so much out of the live chats with the scientists and asking questions. My students were thrilled to get answers and learn more.

— Teacher, Arrow Vale School

Chatting has been so fun!! You are all intelligent individuals and can educate me in whatever I ask!!

— Student

I found it very rewarding and was really impressed with the questions the students were asking!

— Anthony De Souza, Researcher

This experience has been amazing! You all make me so excited, thank you for this opportunity!

— Student