

# Communications and Outreach Activities

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CLF Impact and Engagement Officer

## The CLF's communication strategies

The role of the CLF's Impact and Engagement Team is to promote CLF science and technology to some of our key audiences, with a view to sharing what we are capable of, engaging with our community, and recruiting new people. Different audiences require different types of interaction, and we are continually working to develop and harness the tools needed to communicate with each effectively.

As a Team, we are responsible for internal and external engagement functions, including: the CLF website and social media for our general science audience, staff and user community; talks, tours and activities for our general and 'next-gen' audiences; and a fortnightly newsletter for CLF staff.

## CLF Website

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:



Our website had  
**32,000** active users



Most users found our website via  
**organic searches**  
(such as Google)



## People around the world

viewed our website—the highest numbers of users were based in the UK, USA, India, China, Germany and France



**“Facilities”, “News” and “Vulcan”**  
were the most visited pages after landing on the homepage



## Over 4,000 people

viewed the website during the month of October—around the time of the **Vulcan 20–20 announcement**

## Social media

We maintain a social media presence to create and sustain connections with the science community, primarily users, industry and stakeholders. Our primary audience are CLF users and potential new recruits.

We have had consistently high engagement rates on both platforms, with Twitter reaching over four-times, and LinkedIn over two-and-a-half-times, the standard engagement rate.

Due to ownership and platform changes on Twitter, it has been harder to track analytics and gain followers. Whilst our follower count has had some growth this year, this was largely seen between April and August 2023. Around this time, Twitter's major rebrand to X was rolled out, which included several unpopular changes to the platform. Despite this, we have maintained a strong interaction with our intended communities.

As for LinkedIn, the platform continues to grow steadily, attracting our target demographics.

### Twitter in 2023–24

**1,456**  
followers

**132,887**  
people saw our posts

**4.3%**  
engagement rate

### LinkedIn in 2023–24

**664**  
followers

**1,868**  
people saw our posts

**4.88%**  
engagement rate  
(good engagement rate is 2%)

### Top follower demographics on LinkedIn 2023–24\*

1. Research
2. Engineering
3. Education
4. Operations
5. Business Development



\*Data was collected from Q3–4 of 2023–24

### Connecting to wider audiences

We keep in close contact with the STFC Social Media team, through whom we can reach a more general public audience. Additionally, we regularly touch base with Social Media teams from the other STFC department to share new ideas, campaigns and best practices.

## Engaging the public

As part of our goal to engage with the next-gen audience, we often host visits to our facilities. These visits, organised through RAL Public Engagement, have allowed us to engage a key demographic: 8 to 14-year-olds. This is the age at which children are starting to think about their future careers, and is also around the age when many young girls unfortunately decide that science and engineering is not for them.



Overall, in Financial Year 2023–2024, we engaged with 1,271 people in 119 visits hosted by our facility:



## Looking more closely at next-gen public engagement efforts...

A total of

# 48 events

(including an Engineering Experience Programme project, which actually comprised multiple interactions (about 10 sessions), but counted as one here)



were supported by

# 18 CLF staff

including work experience supervisors



reaching a total of

# 1,789 people

(counting both visits to the CLF, and CLF events and activities conducted elsewhere)



49% of which were from

# Wonder Areas

(Index of Multiple Deprivation 1–4)



“ I cannot express how much my pupils loved the trip. By the end of it everyone was giddy with excitement. All of us felt like kids in a toy shop, or geeks and nerds at a ComiCon or Sci-Fi Convention. Thank you so much for the experience. ”

– Feedback from one group who visited facilities at RAL site, including the CLF



## Attracting a wider audience

Communication this year has begun to look a little more like how we operated before the COVID-19 pandemic, although things may never fully return to the way they were. For example, many audiences are now far more comfortable with online engagement, and this means that we can reach people without the constraints of distance and capacity.

We have completed an array of projects to help make the CLF more appealing to a wide range of audiences. Several of these projects have already been mentioned in this summary, and a few more are highlighted below

### Daresbury Open Week 2023

One of the most memorable events of 2023 was taking part in the Open Week at Daresbury Laboratory, with over 5,000 people visiting the site on 15 July. The dedicated school days that took place in the days before saw 1,300 pupils from 50 schools across the region visit for curriculum-related activities, encouraging engagement with STEM.

Led by the CLF's Impact and Engagement Officer Helen Towrie, the Open Day team consisted of the CLF's communications Industrial Placement student Kaylyn Snelgrove, Mechanical Design Engineer Cameron Taylor, and Graduate Mechanical Design Engineer Churk Chung. After spending hours setting up on the night before and the morning of the event, the team of four dove headfirst into engaging with the public about the wonders of scientific lasers, how they work and what we can do with them.

The popularity of our exhibition could be seen thanks to the numerous families walking around with their "laser lanterns", and the total depletion of CLF-themed postcards by noon. Additionally, feedback from our location (which included all exhibits in the DL Visitor Centre) was overwhelmingly positive.







**“ There were just four volunteers from the CLF in my area at the Open Day, but they somehow kept a constant stream of children interested in science all day. I’m still not sure how!**

**The paper lanterns activity was very popular, and it was fantastic to see the children hanging onto the volunteer’s every word and concentrating hard despite all the other exciting distractions in the area.**

**And who doesn’t love a good laser demo? Especially when it’s been created in-house for such events. ”**

— Mark Leese, Senior Network Engineer and Area Manager for the Visitor Centre on the Open Day



The CLF was just one of over 250 meticulously designed activities, and we were pleased to have been given the opportunity represent laser science on the first Open Day in nearly a decade.



# Engaging the next generation

## International Day of Light

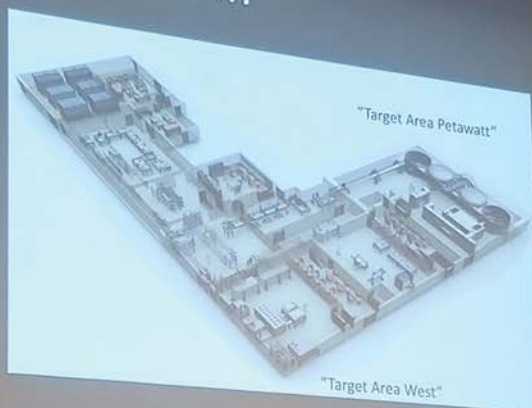
In May, we celebrated International Day of Light 2023. Around 200 secondary school pupils found out how to create supernovae with lasers, and saw the Vulcan Control Room and future EPAC facility up close. This was an excellent opportunity to share the excitement of laser science with students who are just beginning to think about their future careers, and indeed many of these young people seemed invested in the talk with several thought-provoking questions being asked. This event also prompted the 'What's your favourite thing about lasers?' board, which was filled with ideas from staff who were encouraged to think about the work and technology that inspires them. These ideas were shared with the visiting students, giving them an insight into the exciting world of scientific research through the varied responses from the team.

## Visit from the Lightyear Foundation

In October, the CLF welcomed a group of post-16 education students with the Lightyear Foundation, who encourage young disabled people to consider careers in STEM. Part of the day was hosted in the CLF Visitor Centre, featuring its interactive activities and an experiment with vacuums and marshmallows. The feedback was incredibly positive and reflected that the students enjoyed the visit and were more likely to think about a job that includes physics as a result.

*But, there's another problem!!*

- Now the pulse is so powerful that it's going to start burning the air around it!
- We fix this by directing the beam into a vacuum, where there is no air to burn.
- If we are using Vulcan's Petawatt target area, this is the final step before the pulse hits the target and creates the mini supernova.



Now into 2024, RAL has recently held its annual Stargazing event, featuring activities across campus. The CLF Visitor Centre was opened up with all its demonstrations, in an excellent display of how different technologies and sciences can come together in exciting fields such as space research. Over 600 people attended and gave an average rating of 4.7/5—a great success.

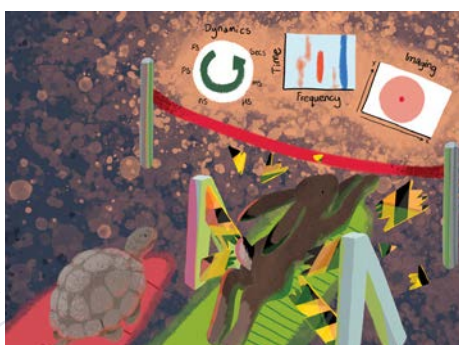




## Engaging through artwork

Over the past few years, the CLF has increasingly used illustration as a tool to attract and engage different audiences. Illustrations have a way reaching across the invisible boundary between STEM and the public, elevating CLF science within the scientific community, and creating a unique identifiable image for the CLF.

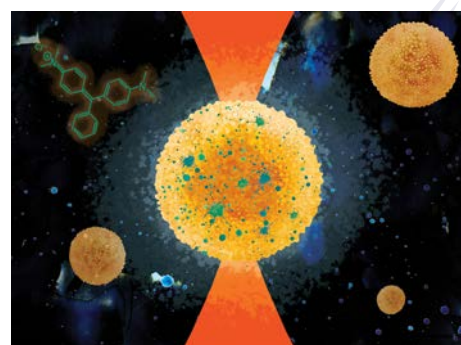
This year, we have been especially focused on using art to help push CLF papers to the forefront. Two front cover submissions and one article front cover have been accepted by peer-reviewed scientific journals, giving the associated papers the best chance possible of being noticed.



Chemical Science



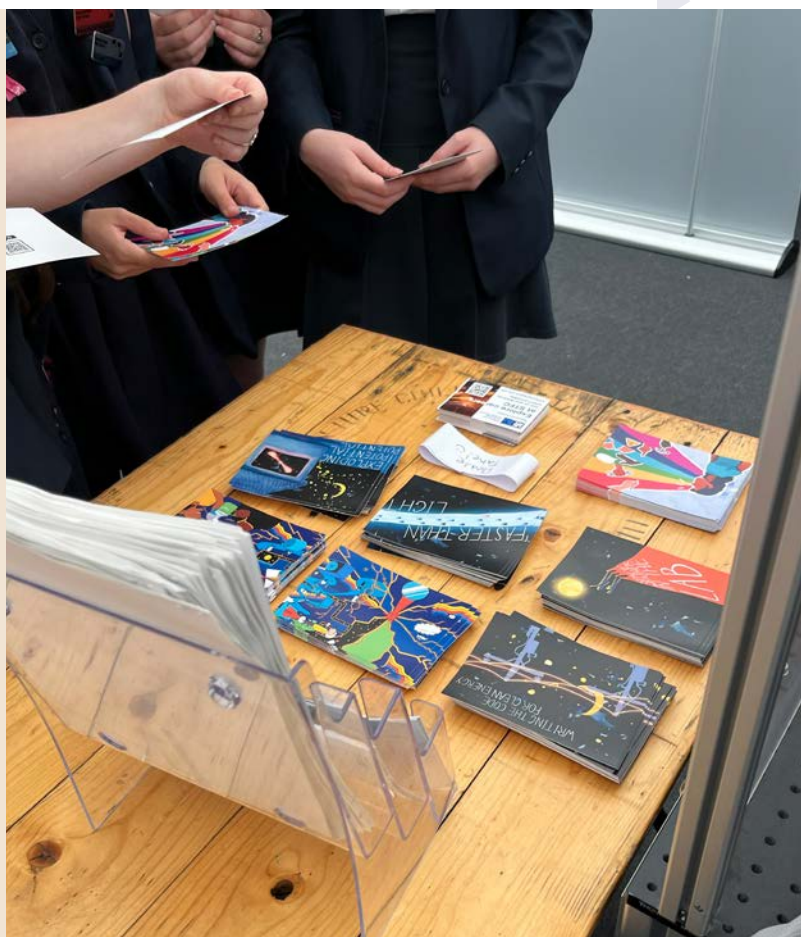
Accounts of Chemical Research



Materials Advances

Additionally, we used an in-house illustration to accompany a major press release on identifying COVID-19 counterfeit vaccines.

Finally, we have continued to reuse existing illustrations, most notably for Daresbury Open Week 2023, where the CLF mural was used on roller banner posters, and a fresh batch of CLF-themed postcards were printed as freebies.





## Vulcan 20-20 publicity and celebration

The announcement of Vulcan 20-20, the CLF's plan to build the most powerful laser in the world, was huge – not just for the CLF, but for the UK government as a whole. Our team spent considerable time and energy preparing for and supporting this announcement and in helping to develop the ensuing short- and long-term publicity for all audiences.

The Vulcan Celebration Event welcomed senior scientists, staff and long-term Vulcan users to walk through the doors of Target Area Petawatt for one last time. The day included a selection of talks from impactful members of the High-Power Laser community and a gallery of images recalling the last 40 years of Vulcan. Over 100 people attended the event to reminisce over the CLF's flagship laser.

On a very different note, we also took inspiration from SunSpaceArt's activity at Daresbury Open Week and worked with them to create a new CLF craft activity for KS2 (7-11) based on Vulcan. Named "Space in a Box", the activity will be trialled for the first time at a local Primary School in the next few weeks.



## Harwell Open Week 2024

In July 2024, Harwell Campus will open its doors for the first time since 2015 to welcome thousands of families to learn about all the different types of science we do. Preparations are already well underway for this mammoth event, and we expect it to be our focus until after July.