

Dr Marianne Ellis
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The Research

Marianne is a tissue engineer who supports regenerative medicine (the process of replacing or regenerating human cells, tissues or organs) through the use of biochemical engineering. A new and burgeoning research interest for Marianne is that of cultured meat, developing systems that will allow the production of such meat on a large-scale, in a cost-effective manner.

The Engagement:

The key 'publics': Surgeons, industrialists.

The type of engagement: Receiving from these specialist 'publics' views, skills, knowledge and experiences that can be used to shape research and maximise its impact.

Marianne works closely with surgeons and industrialists in her research as **a means to identify particular problems that they have**, so that she can then engineer the most appropriate solutions:

"The nicest way to start working with my partners is to ask them to tell me the problem that they have and I then see whether we have or can develop the technology to solve it. It's then about having a conversation with them as to the best way we can find a solution."

Networking as a means to identify new research partners and opportunities is vital to Marianne's engaged approach; she uses everyday research activities (external meetings, conferences etc) to source potential collaborators. For example, at a recent conference on cultured meat, Marianne heard of a charity called **'New Harvest'** whose aim is to advance alternatives to conventionally produced meats. Their research needs matched Marianne's research interests and, following contact with the charity's Director, she now sits on their Board with ready access to a whole host of relevant contacts and information that will help forge her research.

When she engages, Marianne is careful to listen to what her partners want and to manage their expectations whilst also being open to challenging herself to do more. **She is aware of striking a balance between not promising too much versus not under-selling her knowledge and experience.**

The Motivation:

Engagement is fundamental to Marianne's research – at the end of the day, she sees little point in doing it unless it helps people. Through engaging with clinicians and industrialists, Marianne **ensures that her research has an impact, that it makes a difference.**

The mere act of engaging is something that Marianne finds inspiring:

"It's motivational to get out and speak to practitioners, to think about things differently. And it helps to keep your research grounded in the real world."

The Professional Development:

Marianne is certain that her engagement activities have benefitted her professionally, not least through the enhancement of her communication skills:

"I now feel far more confident to speak to a wide range of individuals, many of whom are highly skilled within their respective fields, and this enhanced confidence has helped me to broaden my own professional networks."

Being responsible and accountable to others, particularly industrial partners, has encouraged Marianne to work at a faster pace inspired by the 'can-do' attitude of her partners. This enhanced professionalism is something that she looks to imbue in her undergraduate and postgraduate students, most of whom will forge careers in industry.

"My belief is that you will develop a better technology or product if you're working from the start with the people who will be using it."

Top tip:

"Always be an ambassador for yourself – have confidence when talking to others that your knowledge and skills might be able to help them and to make a difference."

"It's really important, especially in the early days, to be open to others' ideas – to facilitate and support their thinking, rather than to shut it down."

The Learning:

When engaging across sectors, Marianne has found that language (terminology, acronyms etc) can become a barrier, yet **clear communication is vital to the success of any collaboration.** To prevent language becoming a barrier, Marianne recommends:

1. Being well-briefed on your partner and their field / business – read relevant journals; visit their website etc
2. Listening carefully to how your partner speaks and adopting appropriate language
3. Communicating clearly yourself, particularly as to how you might be able to help the other
4. Being unafraid to say if you don't understand something

Showing sincerity and intent is also crucial to any new partnership – Marianne recommends following up any initial meetings promptly to demonstrate this.