

Annual Review



- Introduction from Institute Director, Professor Andrew D Dick

At a glance

- Financial year 2022-2023
 - Funding bodies
 - Human Resources
 - Communications and Events
-
- From IoO Deputy Directors



Research

- Research themes
- NIHR Moorfields Biomedical Research Centre activity
- Published papers in 2022 – 2023
- Early Career Researchers highlights
- Feature: Dr Siegfried Wagner
- Moorfields Eye Charity
- Tenpoint Therapeutics

Education

- Degree Programmes at UCL Institute of Ophthalmology 2022-2023
- Perspective: Associate Professor Fiona Reid, MSc Bioscience Entrepreneurship Programme Lead
- Student focus: Jama Suad, Dean's list 2023
- Kinga Papp, Thesis Prize for MSc Bioscience Entrepreneurship, 2022-2023
- Aimee Cecil, MSc Orthoptics (pre-registration), 2022-2024
- Dominic Wong, MSc Ophthalmology, 2022-2023, AI Co-Creators project

Operations

- Operations staff thank you
- Events, UCL IoO Awards, and social media reach
- UCL Institute of Ophthalmology 2023 Awards
- Feature: Dr Jill Cowing
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at the UCL IoO
- Sustainable IoO

- Oriel



Welcome to the 2022-2023 edition of the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology's Annual Review

This publication is our annual opportunity to reflect on the successes we garnered over the year. No matter what happens externally, we manage to continue an upward trajectory for our research, education, and community, as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic proved.

I was very pleased to see our inaugural lectures continue throughout 2022-2023, with people joining us both on site, in our Lecture Theatre, and remotely. The content is available for everyone to see [in a dedicated space](#) on our website. It was also a great pleasure to celebrate Dr Anthony Khawaja's Lister Award at a special lecture on 16 May. If you missed it, you can [watch the recording](#) of an inspiring and very informative talk.

This year we had several exciting news on AI applications to vision science with, among other things, the announcement of an [AI 'innovation to accelerate health'](#) award granted to Professor Pearse Keane, and then the publication of the largest study to date on

[retinal imaging in Parkinson's research](#), led by Siegfried Wagner and Pearse Keane and combining with the wider strengths UCL brings. We also welcomed six new research fellows: Siyin (Shane) Liu, Rodrigo Young, Celian Bimbard, Tom Burgoyne, Giulia De Rossi, and Davide Zecchin, their excellence bringing and sustaining our future fundamental research.

The start of the new five-year funding for our NIHR-Biomedical Research Centre (BRC), our partnership with Moorfields Eye Hospital, was a valued occasion to develop our ambitions in experimental and translational ophthalmology, with the grant and fellowship awards expanding our fundamental science.

'Collaboration' being one of our core values, it was great to see the launch of a series of [Cross Innovation Hub](#) events, aimed at encouraging and facilitating dialogue and cooperation between clinicians and researchers.

This year we had another fantastic round of promotions with six members of our academic staff appearing in the [UCL Senior Academic, Research and Teaching Promotions 2022-23](#) list and four of our [early career researchers](#) promoted in July.

In March I was happy to hear that two of our students were recognised in the [Dean's list](#), a testimony to the great talent we attract at the institute. On the educational front we continue to develop, and I am so pleased with the expansion of our [menu of educational offering](#) for our students.

I was delighted to announce the crucial appointment of [Associate Professor Rashmi Mathew](#) as the institute's first Race Equity Lead

which allows us to link in with our faculty's work on this, and to develop our own programme of listening and action.

Remarkable to see our commitment to sustainability within our offices and labs celebrated again this year with the institute being awarded Gold in both the [Green Impact and LEAF awards](#) for the third year running.

Great milestones were achieved on the Oriel front. Following regulatory approval, the Oriel team asked me what Oriel means to me, and you can see my response in [this short video](#). Later in the year we received news of a [£300 million contract](#) being awarded to Bouygues UK to build our new integrated UCL-Moorfields Eye Hospital centre for advancing eye health. The news was very well received both on social media and in the [local press](#). This was then followed by a very exciting step forward with a breaking ground ceremony on construction site.

We are now one big step closer to creating our new integrated centre.

We have kept growing our international partnerships, with Santen continuing to support PhD programs at our institute, among other things and continuing to partner with many biotech and pharma companies to facilitate our common aims.

We had to say goodbye to some key people including Denis Lincoln, our esteemed Head Porter, and Cynthia Wilson our long-term Executive Assistant, both retiring after more than 20 years at the institute. I would like to take this opportunity to also congratulate Astrid Limb, Julie Daniels, Phil Luthert (and for his many years as Director), and Steve Moss on their retirement and emeritus status and Peggy Khaw for her tireless and professional support. All their great achievements over the years have helped make the institute a vibrant and inspiring place to work and study.



Read on for further details on these activities and more.

Professor Andrew D Dick
Director, UCL Institute of Ophthalmology

At a glance



Nearly **500**
Research papers published



2 Gold Awards for Sustainability

Data from financial year 2022-2023

77

Grants received



£26,837,196.18

Total amount awarded



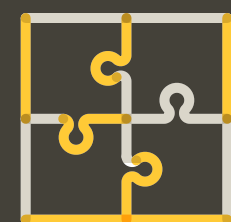
£2,997,973

Income from Education



£848,943

Equipment costs



£24,256,987

Operating costs

Funding bodies:

The Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS)

British Heart Foundation (BHF)

Choroideremia Research Foundation (CRF)

Diabetes UK

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)

Eyes on the Future

Fight for Sight

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST)

Leverhulme Trust

Macular Disease Society

Moorfields Eye Charity

Medical Research Council (MRC)

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

National Institute for Health Research Biomedical Research Centre at Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and UCL Institute of Ophthalmology (NIHR BRC MEH)

National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)

Prime Medicine

Retina UK

Rosetrees Trust

Santen

Sight Research UK

Simons Foundation

Stichting Ushersyndroom

Stoneygate Trust

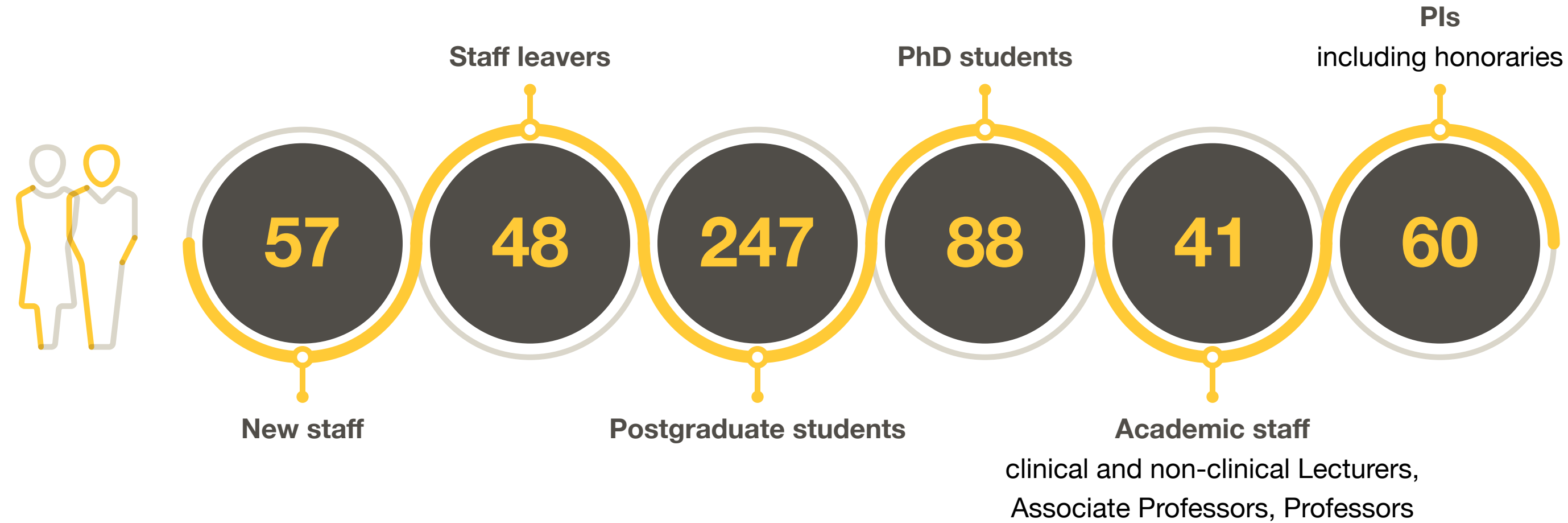
The Said Foundation

UCL Technology Fund (UCLTF)

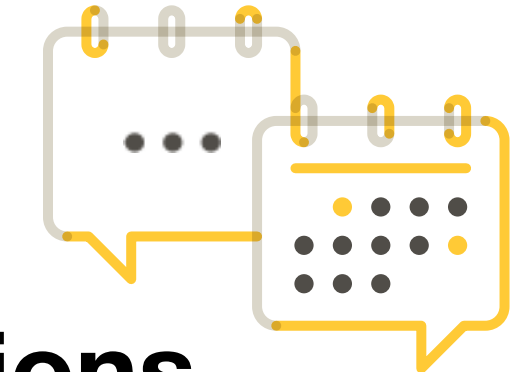
Wellcome Trust

Yuyu Pharma

Human Resources



Communications and Events



39	Bulletins disseminated of whom 7 special editions with Director's update
5900	followers on X (previously Twitter)
4000	followers on LinkedIn
496	subscribers on YouTube
3	all-staff meetings
12	seminars with external guest speakers (average attendance: 40)
9	research networking events (average attendance: 35)
2	Inaugural Lectures (average attendance: 100)
1	Annual Lecture (97 attendees)
1	Lister Award Lecture (75 attendees)

Early career promotions

4 Staff promoted to Senior Research Fellow

Celian Bimbard
Gary Chung
Loriana Vitillo
Victoria Tovell

Senior promotions

3 Staff promoted to Professors

Bruce Allan
Konstantinos Balaskas
Anthony Khawaja

2 Staff promoted to Associate Professor

Emily Eden
Ryan Macdonald

1 Staff promoted to Principal Research Fellow

Nikolas Pontikos

6 New Fellowships

Siyin (Shane) Liu
Rodrigo Young
Celian Bimbard
Tom Burgoyne
Giulia De Rossi
Davide Zecchin

3 UKRI Fellows

Pearse Keane
Anthony Kawaja
Alice Davison

Wellcome Trust Discovery Award

Matteo Carandini

Ophthalmologist's 'Hall of Fame'

Ted Garway-Heath
Sir Peng Khaw

Best Bioscience Entrepreneurship thesis

Kinga Papp

2022 Optica Diversity and Inclusion Advocacy Recognition

Dr Danuta Sampson

UCL Institute of Ophthalmology: Deputy Directors



Another great year for celebrating grant and fellowship success, and through these awards we have continued to build on our shared infrastructure and new equipment. Thank you to everyone for all your hard work, it is wonderful to see our ground-breaking and impactful research hit news headlines.

Deputy Institute Director
and Deputy Director for Research,
Professor Alison Hardcastle



Education has become a major activity at the IoO and will be an integral part of Oriol. We are very grateful to all of you who keep on making impactful contributions at every level as tutors, teaching assistants, lecturers, leads and education team members. Thank you.

Deputy Director for Education,
Professor Marcus Fruttiger.



For this first full post-pandemic year, all 4 subteams managed to obtain some kind of new normal, developing actions to improve different aspects of life at the IoO: students, Professional Services and Technical Staff, Careers and Mental Health, and Academics and Researchers. Also, the IoO FullStop team continued to work to improve our work/study culture. On behalf of the whole institute, I thank all team members for their contributions. A stand-out step forward we made in the last 12 months is the appointment of Dr Rashmi Mathew (Assistant Professor) as the institute's first Race Equity Lead.

Deputy Director for Equality,
Diversity and Inclusion,
Professor Tim Levine



During the COVID-19 pandemic, most international activities came to a halt. Now, we are resuming our regular operations. We currently have two research collaborations with Santen, in addition to the SenSyT Santen PhD studentships. UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences maintains active communication with both Tohoku University and Osaka University. Our goal is to create new PhD programs and foster collaborative projects. Furthermore, we are in discussions with other universities and corporations, including Mitsui Chemical. Our aspiration is to strengthen and expand our ties with international partners.

Deputy Director for
International Relations,
Professor Sahin-Ichi Ohnuma



Research

Research themes

Activity surrounding our four inter-related research themes has been steadily growing over the last year with an increased number of seminars, workshops, guest lectures, monthly meetings, events, away days and training sessions on the use of the equipment.

“Following on from the ‘Ocular Health and Disease’ discussion at the PI Away Day in September, we were excited to announce the instigation of regular focus groups as part of our monthly ‘Development Ageing and Disease’ and ‘Rescue, Repair and Regeneration’ theme meetings. These sessions will bring together research scientists and clinicians from the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology and Moorfields Eye Hospital to discuss their current and future research directions and collaborations.

Also, after applying for funding to support a Cytation C10 Confocal imaging plate reader through the UCL Faculties of Life and Medical Sciences Capital Equipment Fund, the bid was successful and the Cytation C10 arrived in May 2023. Installed in the new multi-user lab, the Cytation is an invaluable resource for automated high throughput imaging at the institute.”

Deputy Theme Lead for ‘Rescue, Repair and Regeneration’ theme, Dr Amanda Carr



“Over the last year we continued to communicate with each other through presentations and shared interest groups. We had a fantastic workshop where most theme members and affiliates presented their work and techniques to the rest of the institute. This allowed us to identify areas where we align and opportunities for sharing resources and increase collaboration. We have been making plans to take this forward and delve deeper into areas of common interest with a view to bringing our collaboration out to external researchers at UCL and beyond.”

Deputy Theme Leads for ‘Visual Neuroscience and Function’ theme, Dr Tessa Dekker and Dr Jennifer Sun

NIHR Moorfields Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) activity

Our NIHR Moorfields Biomedical Research Centre continues to thrive and is now in its fourth five-year term to take advances in basic medical research from the laboratory to the clinic. The centre was awarded a further £20 million funding for a five-year period starting from December 2022 to further enable patients to benefit more quickly from world-class scientific breakthroughs, treatments, and diagnostics.



It is now demonstrating a wider reach into other health conditions through digital technology and advanced therapies. This milestone was celebrated in an Open Day in July to showcase the centre's research activity to the general public, patients, and staff.

Additionally, the BRC's engagement team met with patients and the public at Bloomsbury Festival. The team prepared activities for families and children as well as workshops that helped to demonstrate some of the research support it provides.

The BRC's collaboration with charities was also a focus throughout the year, supporting, among other things, an 'Esme's Umbrella' meeting at the House of Commons hosted by Rupa Huq bringing together politicians and those affected by Charles Bonnet Syndrome to call for change and funding. All of the events, meetings and research milestones can be found on the [BRC's new website](#).



We had nearly 500 papers published in 2022 – 2023 including:

Behavioral origin of sound-evoked activity in mouse visual cortex



Eupatilin Improves Cilia Defects in Human CEP290 Ciliopathy Models



A foundation model for generalizable disease detection from retinal images



Loss of the crumbs cell polarity complex disrupts epigenetic transcriptional control and cell cycle progression in the developing retina



Multidisciplinary team directed analysis of whole genome sequencing reveals pathogenic non-coding variants in molecularly undiagnosed inherited retinal dystrophies.



Early Career Researchers (ECRs) highlights

Our annual ECR symposium was the highlight of the summer. This sixth edition was held in person at UCL Institute of Child Health and was supported by Moorfield Eye Charity, NIHR BRC and the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology.

There were over 150 attendees and more than 50 early career researchers showcasing their research in talks and posters.

We were joined by Professor Julie Daniels as the keynote speaker, who shared her inspirational yet personal career story highlighting the importance of mentorship and working with others.

We awarded £1500 amongst five categories that celebrated the accomplishments and work of the institute's ECR community.

This year the ECR committee also awarded the institute's Research Excellence award for excellent peer-reviewed, original, published research authored by an ECR, to Siegfried Wagner.



Best Talk	
First	Amy Leung
Second	Sara Toros
Third	Cecile Mejecase
Communication Award	Mark Chia
Best Poster	
First	Yuting Zou
Second	Martina Rudnicki
Third	Natalia Jaroszynska
Communication Award	Natalia Jaroszynska
Best Lay Abstract	
Joint First	Mark Chia
Joint First	Ana Alonso-Carriazo Fernandez
Runner-up	Dominic Williamson
Best Scientific Image	
Best	Julio Corral Serrano
Runner-up	Yuan Tian
Best Data Visualisation	
Best	Riccardo Cheloni
Runner-up	Atika Safriti

Feature: Dr Siegfried Wagner



What is your background and how did you become involved with the institute?

I am a research-active ophthalmology trainee based in the London region. I qualified from the University of Oxford in 2012 and moved to London as an ophthalmology resident in 2014. I first joined the Institute as an NIHR academic clinical fellow in 2017, becoming a part of Professor Pearse Keane's research group. This role afforded protected research time to firstly cultivate my research interests and skillset, complete an MSc in Epidemiology and Statistics and prepare a fellowship application for PhD. I completed my PhD at the institute earlier this year, in July 2023.

What does your current role involve?

I recently returned to full-time clinical training and am currently a vitreoretinal TSC fellow at Moorfields Eye Hospital - final year of ophthalmology training. A privileged position providing bespoke training into the surgical aspects of retinal disease, I work under the preceptorship of several renowned vitreoretinal surgeons, many of whom are clinician-academics themselves. I maintain an honorary senior fellow position at the institute collaborating with other researchers into health informatics, retinal imaging, and oculomics-based projects. I am also Chair of the Membership Subcommittee for the Consortium for Vision and Oculomics in Psychiatry.

What have been the greatest achievements in your career so far?

In 2019, I was awarded a Medical Research Council (MRC) Clinical Research Training Fellowship, a competitive PhD scheme open to all medical fields in the UK. This provided the resource and support to undertake a PhD at the institute. More recently, I have been fortunate to have been selected as one of ten "Rising Star" ophthalmologists across the globe by the Ophthalmologist.

While not in the research field, one of the more enjoyable achievements during the PhD has been the establishment of the grassroots art exhibition, 'Windows of the Soul'. This venture, co-directed by myself, Caroline Kilduff and Jane Clipston, was initially supported by a 'Train and Engage' award from UCL Culture but also received considerable support from the NIHR BRC at Moorfields and the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology. Since launching our inaugural event at the Bloomsbury Festival in 2021, we have been awarded a Wandsworth Arts Fringe

grant and the project was also recognised through the institute's Public Engagement award. Some of the pieces remain up in the Moorfields Eye Hospital Arts Corridor today.

What aspect of your work most excites you and why?

I am most excited by the interdisciplinary strands running through my research. Not only do I interact daily with computer scientists, statisticians and medics, but also engage members across the medical spectrum. For example, in my PhD alone, I collaborated with cardiologists, neurologists, psychiatrists and even dentists. I am currently working with obstetric clinician-academics to investigate retinal morphology in pregnant women. What I am increasingly discovering is that retinal imaging has special value in teaching us about human biology across the entire landscape of systemic health and disease.

What is oculomics and how is it relevant to global health?

Oculomics refers to the concept of studying the eye as a window into our general health. We have long known that features of systemic disease, such as diabetes, can present in the eye partly because it is the only organ of the body where we can directly see the smaller blood vessels (microvasculature) and nerves non-invasively.

There are several implications of oculomics for global health. Firstly, many of the leading causes of death in the world have known features within the retina, for example heart attack, stroke and dementia. Secondly, retinal imaging is becoming increasingly accessible, not just through high street optometrists, but also smartphone-based cameras hinting at the

potential democratisation and scalability of any technology leveraging eye scans. Thirdly, vision is precious to us and there is consistent survey evidence that members of the public are much more likely to get their eyes checked than go to a general doctor for preventative healthcare.

AI got some bad publicity in 2023 with some claiming it poses a high risk to society and even requesting a halt to advanced AI development. How does the work on oculomics fit into that, and are there any risks that you envision in this developing field?

Undoubtedly, there will be many challenges in implementing AI-based technologies into society. For example, with oculomics as in other healthcare AI developments, there are concerns that certain algorithms may underperform if the preliminary research isn't carried out with safety and standards at the forefront. Initiatives, such as the [STANDING Together](#) project, which examines standards and diversity in health datasets used for AI, will be invaluable in addressing such challenges.

What's next on the research horizon for you?

I struggle to imagine a future role without research embedded but I am a clinician at heart. How I will balance these two passions remains something to be determined!

What advice would you offer to students interested in getting involved in the work oculomics is opening up?

Oculomics is all about collaboration between ophthalmologists/vision scientists and other medical disciplines. Be open-minded about new fields and prepare to learn quickly.

Moorfields Eye Charity

Moorfields Eye Charity, as our linked funder, supports the development of people's expertise, sharing of knowledge and funding of equipment at the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, the charity awarded 21 grants to the institute and sustained 14 early career researchers including 11 PhD students with extended funding through a recent government scheme. The charity was proud to support the annual UCL Institute of Ophthalmology Early Career Researchers (ECRs) Symposium in 2023, awarding prizes for best presentation, poster and lay audience project summary.



Thanks to generous supporters to the Thunder microscope appeal in 2022, the institute was able to purchase the Thunder microscope, a vital piece of equipment helping researchers to work faster than ever towards breakthroughs. Moorfields Eye Charity would like to give special thanks to all their donors for supporting the appeal, and the following for making particularly kind contributions: Kusuma Trust UK, Danya Gluschove Corby and Gideon Corby in memory of Deborah Corby.

Total funding received from Moorfields Eye Charity this year: £4,187,569.



Tenpoint Therapeutics

Tenpoint Therapeutics is a biotechnology company using pioneering cell engineering to replace damaged cells in the eye to tackle age-related or inherited sight loss. The spinout was co-founded by UCL Institute of Ophthalmology's Professor Pete Coffey and Professor Lyndon da Cruz, together with Moorfields Eye Hospital, Institut de la Vision in Paris, and the University of Washington in the US. In July the company announced a £57m re-launch.

Tenpoint Therapeutics was supported in its spinout by UCL Business (UCLB), UCL's commercialisation company. The company's funding round was also supported by the UCL Technology Fund, as well as British Patient Capital, which enables long-term UK investment in highly innovative companies. The technology could potentially restore sight to millions affected.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the image, consisting of a solid dark gray circle partially obscured by a larger, semi-transparent circle filled with a dense, wavy, black line pattern that radiates outwards.

Education

In September 2023 UCL was named University of the Year 2024 for UCL's world-leading performance in multidisciplinary research and education, the enhanced career prospects of UCL's graduates, along with our ambitious work around sustainability.

www.ucl.ac.uk/news



Degree Programmes at UCL Institute of Ophthalmology 2022-2023

Postgraduate Taught Courses

- Bioscience Entrepreneurship
- Bioscience (Research and Development) MSc
- Bioscience (Research and Development) with Practice MSc
- Ophthalmology MSc
- Orthoptics (pre-registration) MSc
- Advanced Clinical Practice in Ophthalmology MSc / Enhanced Clinical Practice in Ophthalmology PG Cert Apprenticeships
- Optometry and Ophthalmology (Advanced Clinical Practice) MSc
- Optometry and Ophthalmology (Enhanced Clinical Practice) PG Cert
- Optometry and Ophthalmology MSc
- Optometry and Ophthalmology PG Cert
- Clinical Ophthalmic Practice PG Cert

Postgraduate Research Degrees

Perspective: Associate Professor Fiona Reid, MSc Bioscience Entrepreneurship Programme Lead

In reviewing the past year in Education at the IoO, one mantra of the entrepreneur comes to mind. “There is no such thing as a problem; there are only problem-shaped opportunities”. Educating in the pandemic had thrown up plenty of these over the past three years. It had taught us, somewhat painfully, how to teach online and even how to launch new programmes online, and to see gradually how this once-scary new mode of delivery had real potential for students.

2022-23 has seen us staring down another problem-shaped opportunity in IoO education: student numbers. This was the year when institute’s student recruitment was hit by a perfect storm. Changes to NHS education funding, and timing, changes to career and training pathways, accreditation, fees, Brexit and more, brought into focus a big challenge - essentially a communications challenge - of

how to raise awareness of our world-leading programmes, out there where it matters.

Marketing education in Ophthalmology is a non-trivial job. There are a dozen or more different courses, most featuring difficult-to-spell long words with lots of consonants all beginning with O, that have to reach scattered professional, clinical and student communities, all over the world that has heard of



Moorfields and UCL.

Every year, in the first lecture of my Bioscience Entrepreneurship module, I ask students to work out the hourly rate they’re paying for tuition - how much is it costing them to sit in this lecture theatre, and what return do they expect from that investment? I get them to list all the ‘investors’ in them being there - parents, health services, governments, and of course themselves, sometimes working two grunt jobs alongside the programme to pay the fees.

It’s uncomfortable for us as educators to think of students as customers. We feel like we’re in the business of creating new knowledge and good people, not in talking Sales or Product-Market fit. Higher Education is increasingly having to operate

in, however inexpertly, the value-for-money business, the accountability game, the career enhancement trajectory. So now we (really) do marketing.

Therein lies the opportunity. To find out in full and focused detail where our potential students are, who they are, at what point in their lives they are, how our educational offer is seen, what exactly our students are investing in. So, we’ve changed programme names, tweaked modules, joined forces, co-taught, set out to conferences, made the offering tighter and more coherent. It’s better.

The Oriel Education space sits there before us, not too far away now. It is possible to look ahead with confidence. And to look back at 2022-23, to learn something good.

Student focus: Jama Suad, Dean's list 2023



What is your current role?

I am senior staff nurse at Moorfields Eye Hospital.

What did being recognised in the Dean's List mean to you?

It was a pleasant surprise. It felt good to be recognised for the hard work I put into my work. Exceeding my study expectations made me set the bar high for future studies.

What made you decide to study for the MSc Clinical Ophthalmic Practice at the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology?

When I first started working at Moorfields Eye Hospital, I did not have ophthalmic background or experience. As I waited to learn more about the field, I was offered the PG Cert that was available at the time for nurses. Once the full MSc became available at the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology, I requested to continue the full programme so I can gain a full qualification which would benefit my career progression.

What would you like to do next?

I would like to continue studying. At present, I am in the process of consolidating my clinical skills. My plan is to maybe do a PhD programme when the time is right.

What did you enjoy most about the programme?

I enjoyed that it was a taught programme and I received lectures from renowned professors with decades of experience in their field.

How did the programme help you in your career?

Having studied the various modules relating to different areas of ophthalmology, it helped me decide the sub-speciality I wanted to specialise in to further my career. I am on a pathway to take up extended roles in my workplace.

What do you think is unique about studying at our institute?

The UCL Institute of Ophthalmology is a fantastic university with a great academic reputation globally, and it offers a wide range of postgraduate programmes. I connected with students from all over the world. Furthermore, UCL is a member of the Russell Group.

Kinga Papp, Thesis Prize for MSc Bioscience Entrepreneurship, 2022-2023

“Looking back on my journey to this moment, I was born and raised in Hungary and later moved to the UK during my teenage years. I completed my undergraduate studies in Biochemistry and earned an award for being “the best Biochemistry student in the final year”. While I’m still fascinated by science and the world of proteins, my initial plan for a career in embryology changed as I couldn’t see myself working in a lab. That’s when I discovered the UCL Bioscience Entrepreneurship

course, a perfect combination of science and business.

Over the past year, I actively participated in networking events and got involved with FemTech Lab, the first FemTech startup-focused accelerator. This experience drew my attention to the gender healthcare gap and its importance. After more research, I reached out to a couple of startups in the field, which led me to write my thesis in collaboration with Womco.

The female health sector is very



close to my heart and this thesis is the demonstration of my passion for addressing the existing gap.”

Aimee Cecil, MSc Orthoptics (pre-registration), 2022-2024

“Studying for the MSc Orthoptics at UCL Institute of Ophthalmology has allowed me to explore a vibrant and exciting city while learning from top healthcare professionals in the field. The content is fascinating and the abundance of skills I have developed are useful in healthcare and beyond. While the two-year fast-track degree is intense, I have been able to push myself and achieved more than I thought I could. This wouldn’t be possible without the continued support of the friendly staff who strive to give us the best possible experience.”

Dominic Wong, MSc Ophthalmology, 2022-2023, AI Co-Creators project

UCL ChangeMakers is an initiative supporting students and staff who want to work together to enhance the learning experience of students at UCL. The AI Co-Creator projects support students and staff exploring current and emerging AI tools collaboratively. The findings and outputs produced from this work will fuel further discussions at UCL and help using AI tools more confidently and effectively.

“I am currently a medical student at King’s College London who studied the MSc Ophthalmology in 2022-2023. I got involved in the AI Co-Creators project after being invited by my personal tutor, Rashmi Mathew. Our project scope was to determine the efficacy of AI for answering PBL questions and ascertaining if and how questions could be rephrased for students to still be adequately challenged. I worked with Neil Roberts, faculty Learning Technology Lead, and Rashmi Mathew (associate professor of ophthalmology at Moorfields Eye Hospital and course lead for the MSc Ophthalmology).

I enjoyed being able to personally ask questions to some of the leading minds in ophthalmology across a wide



breadth of specialisms, as well as the close vicinity to Moorfields Eye Hospital. Gaining an in-depth insight into how world-leading research is conducted at the institute was both educational and inspiring. After completing my clinical years at medical school, I hope to complete foundation training and apply to Ophthalmology ST1.”



Operations

We thank all operations staff for their continued commitment and work at the institute.

Two members, Executive Assistant Cynthia Wilson and Senior HR Administrator Liz Hurst, retired in 2023 after more than 20 years of service. More operations staff took on secondment opportunities across UCL this year to support their career development. The team continued to assist the Research Themes in the organisation and running of many seminars, workshops, and public lectures. Our institute received a gold award again this year for Green Impact (sustainable offices) and LEAF (Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework), for the third consecutive year.



Events, UCL IoO Awards, and social media reach

We continued the UCL IoO Inaugural Lectures series with Professor Omar Mahroo in October and Professor Jacqui van der Spuy in December. We welcomed Professor Krzysztof (Kris) Palczewski from the University of California to deliver a very successful Annual Lecture, followed by the celebration of the annual UCL IoO Awards. We started work to improve the accessibility of our communications, both internally and externally by, among other things, adding captions to our video recordings. We had a 23% increase in our YouTube subscribers, 9% increase in our X (previously Twitter) followers, and 29% increase in our LinkedIn followers.



UCL Institute of Ophthalmology 2023 Awards

Research Excellence Award

The Research Excellence Award recognises excellent peer-reviewed, published, original research by a post-doctoral scientist or early career researcher.

First place:
Siegfried Wagner

Second place:
**Roni Maimon Mor
& Mahtab Farahbakhsh**

Collegiality Award

The Collegiality Award recognises individuals or a team who promote a spirit of culture and encourage cooperation, inclusion, and teamwork at the IoO.

Winner:
IoO SoCo Committee

Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) Award 2023

Now in its fourth year, this award from the NIHR Moorfields Biomedical Research Centre recognises excellent PPIE in research, which is one of the BRC's key objectives.

Winner:
Dr Amanda Carr

Teaching Award

The Teaching Award recognises individuals who have made significant contributions to teaching and education at the IoO.

Winner:
Evgenia Konstantakopoulou

Directors' Award winner for 2023

This award recognises individuals who have provided outstanding service celebrating leadership, success, and achievement.

Winner:
Dr Jill Cowing



Feature: Dr Jill Cowing



What is your current role and what does it involve?

I am currently the Oriel Programme Manager. My role involves acting as a key link between all user groups - wet labs, dry labs & Clinical research Facility (CRF), Biological Services Unit (BSU), education, shared operations, facilities maintenance, and innovation hub - to share and use my expertise and extensive knowledge of the institute to contribute to the design and function of UCL and shared space in Oriel. I will also be working towards ensuring that the institute is operationally ready for the move in the new building in 2027 and new ways of working.

How long have you been at the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology and what was your previous role?

I started working at the institute in 1992 as a Laboratory Manager in what was then the department of Molecular Genetics. 50% of my time was spent managing the department and the other 50% undertaking research, initially into the evolution of colour vision and later in human eye disease. In 2012 I also took on the additional role of Health & Safety Manager. Following some internal reorganisation, my role became redundant, and I moved full time into the job of Environment and Safety Manager. Finally in 2022 I was seconded into the role of Oriel Programme Manager.

What working achievement or initiative at the institute are you most proud of?

My proudest moment was being awarded my PhD. As someone who didn't have a degree it felt like a rather daunting undertaking, especially to do it part-time whilst also having a full-time job. However, with the encouragement and support of someone who believed in me and a wonderful group of colleagues in the lab, I finally submitted it in 2000.

How did you feel about receiving the Director's award in 2023?

When I was strongly encouraged to attend the Awards' Day this year I wondered why. It was a real surprise to receive the Director's award and I'm still unsure why it was given to me in particular! There are some amazing people working within our institute, many of whom also deserve this recognition for their dedication and hard work.

What do you think is the best thing about working at our institute, what makes it a unique place?

As someone who has worked here for a very long time, I have seen many changes both good and bad. I am pleased to say that its now a much fairer and more inclusive place to work and with the many activities taking place, it's also fun again. Through being part of the Oriel team, working closely with colleagues at Moorfields Eye Hospital and meeting patients too, I have come to realise just how essential the work is of everyone. It's good to know that as an organisation we are trying to make a difference to people's lives and that's why I am proud to work here.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at the UCL IoO

- Commissioned report into maternity/paternity (partner's) leave. Following focus groups, this resulted in a suite of recommendations
- Initiated departmental mid-term review of Athena Swan award, the first department to do so in UCL
- Conducted/communicated IoO Survey 2022
- Rashmi Mathew appointed as IoO Race Equity Lead; successfully applied for funding from the FBS Centre for Equality Research to investigate differences in experiences by ethnicity



Sustainable IoO

In last year's Annual Review we highlighted the newly created cycle group for the UCL IoO and Moorfields Eye Hospital staff. The group, called EyeBike, has gone from strength to strength, with 83 members across the two organisations. With two social events, it facilitated communications among cycling staff members, and it organised social rides for anyone interested. The group have discussed cycling provision with the Oriel team and two members have been on Ride Leader Training for an EyeBike outing in 2024. If you ever cycle to work, or if you're keen to try, just sign up at tinyurl.com/eyebike



Oriel

The 2022-2023 academic year has seen some significant steps in bringing together Moorfields Eye Hospital, UCL Institute of Ophthalmology (IoO) and Moorfields Eye Charity under one roof to create a world-class centre of excellence for ophthalmic research and education.

Oriel is a joint initiative to build a new state-of-the-art centre for eye health, research, and education. It will see services move from our current location near Old Street, Islington, to part of the St Pancras Hospital site in Camden. The new centre will enable closer collaborative working between clinicians and researchers to speed up the delivery of the highest quality treatments and therapies for patients.

In January 2023 Oriel received a significant grant from UCL's long-term philanthropic partner the Wolfson Foundation. A £300m contract with building contractors Bouygues UK secured the start of demolition in February 2023.

The start of construction was marked with a breaking ground event in July. Guests at the event included Lord Markham CBE, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Care, key staff involved in the development and design of Oriel, UCL leaders and donors who are supporting the project.

The next few years promise to bring many more exciting developments before the opening in 2027. For more information on the construction progress, please visit the website: oriel-london.org.uk.



Get in touch

Stay in touch and let us know if you have any questions about anything you saw in this publication.

- www.ucl.ac.uk/ioo 
- IoO.Comms@ucl.ac.uk 
- [@UCLeye](https://x.com/UCLeye) 
- [ucl-institute-of-ophthalmology](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ucl-institute-of-ophthalmology) 
- [UCL Institute of Ophthalmology](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUCLeye) 
- [UCL IoO Connect](#) 

Thanks for much of the photography goes to James Tye and David Cotter.
Thanks to Dominik Tyler and the Oriel team for the lab shots.



11-43 Bath Street
London EC1V 9EL