

The Magical Power of Discussion and Connection Creates Hope for Research in Challenging Times

Professor Paul Taylor, Chair of BCUR, Professor of Chemical Education, University of Leeds



Professor Paul Taylor

I'm the current Chair of the British Conference of Undergraduate Research's (BCUR) executive committee and I've been involved in BCUR since it was a fledgling conference in 2012. Having worked to encourage students to participate in BCUR at the institutions I've taught in, first at the University of Warwick and now at the University of Leeds, I remain passionate about student research dissemination.

BCUR is an important conference; it provides a reason for student researchers to write and talk about their work to others in a real-world context.

BCUR 2025 welcomed a good number of institutions and students, but it's a small part of the international student research community and we must continue to develop and look to increase the number of students involved. It's important that all students in all universities should have access to research culture and the opportunity for speaking at conferences or writing for publication. We should not withhold these opportunities, they're different learning experiences to submitting a paper purely for assessment, in these contexts the student researchers work is discussed and accepted or not by the world. There is potential to have real impact and connect with other researchers.

BCUR is an opportunity for students to discuss and critically reflect on their work with each other, making valuable research connections. Hearing others discuss their research also provides students with new perspectives to enhance their understanding of their own work. It's a great conference offering students the full academic conference experience, the review process is rigorous and supportive in nature to get students ready to present their work.

The research culture of BCUR is nurturing and supportive and the multidisciplinary nature is remarkable and unusual for undergraduates to experience. Student researchers as

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presenters learn about speaking to people who aren't from their discipline, and this is where the real depth and breadth of connections and development can happen, they start to see where their work matters and why it's important. This is very powerful.

Students who have experienced the conference have realised both the benefits of connecting with other student researchers and that their horizons are expanding. I've noticed this at recent BCUR conferences as well as at BCUR 2025, where people didn't want to leave the room at the end of the poster session and wanted to continue their discussions. The power of these discussions is magical!

BCUR 2025 was a powerful conference and a great success, despite the current difficult financial constraints in higher education many institutions and students found ways to participate, demonstrating a determination and hope for the future of research and an understanding of the importance of research connections and dissemination. Universities need to protect the BCUR which delivers so much to so many.

During such times of high political tensions, supporting and linking student researchers is incredibly important. Enabling connections across disciplines, countries and political cultures can enable them to challenge the negative politics, and we must continue to develop opportunities for connection with our international partner institutions and UG research organisations.

There are already real opportunities for student research connections on an international scale, BCUR is connected with undergraduate research organisations, Council of Undergraduate Research (CUR) in the USA and many European institutions as they develop similar events to the BCUR Posters in Parliament, such as Posters in Brussels and country specific Posters in Parliament events across Europe.

The London Statement of Posters in Brussels (Appendix A), regarding our international connections, is a starting point for developing truly international and student-led activities around student research.

The future is bright, BCUR and its participating institutions remain committed to providing students with the space to communicate about their research and make connections.

BCUR host institutions have already been announced for the next 3 years, starting with BCUR 2026, which will take place at the University of Glasgow, 1st – 2nd April 2026, followed

by Queen Mary University of London in 2027 and then the University of Essex in 2028.
Connect via socials #BCUR for news.

Students who presented at BCUR 2025 commented on their experiences and the impact it's had on them. From LinkedIn April 2025, #bcur2025, #BCUR:

It was an amazing experience connecting with students and professionals from a wide range of disciplines—each passionate about innovation and discovery through research.

Zaw Wunna, University of Leeds

My reflections from my presenting at BCUR 2025:

- 1) I don't have to be an expert: Being asked challenging questions by my co-delegates was nerve inducing at first as I thought I needed to know everything about this topic. However, this opened my mind to new perspectives and insightful follow-up research questions.*
- 2) I have the power to influence changes: Hearing real-life experiences of patients on antidepressants helped me put things into perspective and realise the impact of accessible knowledge.*
- 3) Enjoy the process: Research and academia are about the journey, so this is a reminder to be proud of myself on every step of the way.*

Cindy Wati, University of Lancashire

It was extremely enjoyable to be surrounded by so many students from different universities, countries and subjects. Learning about everyone's research and celebrating their hard work over their time at university was truly motivating.

Lula Le Page, University of Plymouth

From the conversations I had to the inspiring student research being shared, it was such a powerful reminder of why this [my] work matters.... I'll be continuing this [research] journey in my dissertation later this year — pushing for more inclusive legal recognition and policy change.

Kawal Bhimda, University of Warwick

Appendix

Appendix A – London Statement, Posters in Brussels



London Statement on Undergraduate Research

Strengthening Global Support for Undergraduate Research

Undergraduate research—defined as a mentored investigation or creative inquiry conducted by undergraduates that contributes to scholarly or artistic knowledge—is a transformative educational experience with far-reaching benefits. This high-impact, inquiry-based learning practice fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation across disciplines. Engaging in research provides students with clarified career paths, preparation for graduate study, and enhanced workforce readiness for an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Undergraduate research cultivates evidence-based reasoning and experiential learning that is needed more than ever to address increasing global challenges.

Connecting at this year's Posters in Parliament event in London, we met afterwards to explore ways to strengthen our international collaboration. Inspired by our shared commitment to undergraduate research and in recognition of the growing momentum to develop undergraduate research worldwide, we are taking steps to significantly enhance our partnering to support the institutionalization of an undergraduate research network throughout Europe and the fostering of global networks among undergraduate research mentors, institutions, and organizations.

Our next steps will prioritize supporting the establishment of Posters in Parliament events in a growing number of European countries and instituting clear guidelines for research mentoring across diverse educational systems. By working together, we aim to embed undergraduate research as a core academic practice, ensuring that students everywhere benefit from the power of discovery, inquiry, and innovation.

London, 5 March 2025

On behalf of the signatory institutions and networks

The signatory institutions and networks

Posters in Brussels (Erasmus+project, www.postersinbrussels.eu)
Susanne Haberstroh, University of Oldenburg, Germany
Harald Mieg, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany
and colleagues

BCUR British Conference of Undergraduate Research (<https://bcur.org.uk>)
Paul Taylor, BCUR Chair, University of Leeds, UK
and colleagues

BCUR Posters in Parliament (UK)
Emma Barker, Jane Bryan, Caroline Gibson, University of Warwick, UK
and colleagues

CUR Council on Undergraduate Research (www.cur.org), USA
Maria Iacullo-Bird, CUR President, Pace University, USA

AGUR Alliance for Global Undergraduate Research
Maher Khelifa, Spokesperson, Qatar
Julio Rivera, Spokesperson, USA

SURE Science Undergraduate Research Experience Network (<https://sure-network.ie/>), Ireland
Therese Montgomery, SURE Network Chair, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland
Cormac Quigley, Brigid Hooban, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland
and colleagues

AG Forschendes Lernen in der dghd (<https://dghd.link/agfl>), Germany
Susanne Wimmelmann, Tobias Morat, Eileen Lübcke, Members of the Board

ACUR Australasian Council for Undergraduate Research (<https://www.acur.org.au/>)
Denise Wood, Chair, Australia
and Members of the ACUR Executive Committee

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