

Spring 2026 Newsletter



Patrons and Supporters Event attended by Visitors from across the UK ...

On Friday 5th Dec 2025, staff and Trustees (current and past) of the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum welcomed Supporters, Patrons and partners from across the UK to a special event to thank them for their help over the previous year, to seek financial and in-kind support for the future, to bring them up to date with progress on the Synergy Project and to share plans for all aspects of Catalyst's future business.

The event had a dual purpose as it also highlighted how our Synergy Project made possible by a recently awarded £1 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) is transforming access to the UK's only museum dedicated to the chemical industry and the chemical sciences.

Nikki Burton-Mallott, CEO of Catalyst, said:

"This £1 million investment allows us to protect and share one of the most important industrial heritage collections in the UK. Through the Synergy Project, we are creating an inspiring, interactive environment that will connect future generations with the science, innovation and people that shaped modern Britain."

Catalyst also used the opportunity afforded by this event to seek financial support to continue our normal STEM educational work and operate a vibrant local Visitor Centre for people of all ages.

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Mayor of Halton, Councillor Martha Lloyd Jones and her Consort Councillor Peter Lloyd Jones met members of the Synergy Project Team, who were able to explain about work that has been completed so far and how local communities are being involved. The exhibition on the Ground Floor portrayed the new gallery designs proposed for the First Floor, the transition spaces and the Fourth Floor Observatory.



Four of our Patrons – Sir Hugo Brunner, Peter Gossage, Hon Dr Paul Zuckerman and Professor Gill Reid CBE (Past President of the Royal Society of Chemistry) joined us. Gill represented, Dr Helen Pain, the CEO of the RSC. Councillors including the Leader, Mike Wharton, and staff from Halton Borough Council also attended.

Representatives from various Trade Associations including the Chemical Business Association (CBA) and scientific Professional Societies such as the Institute of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) were there. Alex Abraitis of Chemicals NorthWest, based at Daresbury, represented the Chemical Industry Association (CIA) and our Patron, Steve Elliott, who is their CEO.

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We were pleased that people from local industrial companies such as INEOS Inovyn, Croda, 2M/Banner Chemicals, Koura, RSCLare, RSK and Nordmann took time out in their busy working days to attend as did the Rachael Owen, CEO of Halton Chamber of Commerce. Some of our users such as the Cheshire Guides and researchers who access our archives from local universities and other organisations were also there.

A Wonderful Donation!

On the day Hon Dr Paul Zuckerman great great grandson of Ludwig Mond the co-founder of Brunner Mond donated an important historic item to the museum: a visitors' book belonging to Alfred Mond, 1st Lord Melchett, Dr Zuckerman's great-grandfather and the creator of ICI Ltd in 1926.



Judith Wilde, Heritage Manager at Catalyst, pictured with Dr Zuckerman, said: "This is a real treasure. It's incredibly special to receive an item of such importance, and I'm looking forward to examining it more closely to uncover the stories it contains. We are excited to share this marvellous piece of history with our visitors."

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During the event there were two donations to Catalyst. Hugh Dowding, Chair of Trustees, received a cheque for £5000 from the West Lancashire Freemasons Charitable Foundation represented by Alan Riley and Kevin Poynton and a cheque for £2,500 from St James's Place Charitable Foundation which was presented to him on their behalf by Peter Gossage. Both of these donations were to support Catalyst's educational work.



We were also delighted to take the opportunity of inviting the Mayor to unveil the 'John and Rona Collins room' in our education suite in the presence of John's daughter, Jean Johnston and other family members. John Collins had been the inspiration behind the founding of Catalyst nearly 39 years ago and the financial support that he and Rona Collins (nee Mottershead) had been giving to Catalyst over the intervening years until their recent deaths. The plaque also recognised their long-standing contribution to education and

heritage in Widnes and Halton, including the creation of Cronton/Riverside College. The Mayor's consort, Councillor Peter Lloyd Jones, gave his own personal tribute to John and Rona as he had worked with John on Halton Borough Council for many years and knew them both well.



DEREK TWIGG, OUR PATRON AND MP FOR WIDNES AND HALEWOOD SUPPORTS THE ASDC CAMPAIGN FOR THE ALLOCATION OF GOVERNMENT MONEY FOR CATALYST



The Association of Science Discovery Centres (ASDC) of which Catalyst is a member has been organizing a campaign for over a year to bring to the attention of the Government the financial challenges being faced by SDCs because of rising costs of utility bills, staff wages, consumables, aging infrastructure and cost of living problems for visitors.

All of these challenges are affecting the ability of SDCs, to provide STEM education to people of all ages and threatening their very existence. A preliminary meeting to discuss the campaign took place in London in Summer 2025 and was attended by our Patron, Peter Gossage, on our behalf.

Following further pressure from ASDC and led by Steve Witherden the MP for Montgomeryshire whose constituency includes the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), ASDC succeeded in getting a Parliamentary Debate “On the impact of Science and Discovery Centres on national science and technology priorities” with a Department for Science, Technology & Innovation (DSIT) Minister and other MPs.

Catalyst was represented at this meeting on 14th Jan 2026 by our local MP and Patron, Derek Twigg. He was allowed to speak for 5 minutes in support of SDCs in general and Catalyst in particular. Derek put forward a very strong case for Catalyst and he had also written to Lord (Patrick) Vallance, Minister of State for Science, Innovation, Research and Nuclear at DSIT, before Christmas bringing the needs of Catalyst to his attention.

Derek has pledged his continuing support for Catalyst at every opportunity. Thank you Derek and we hope the Government listens.

Chemistry at Work Week 2026



Final figures are in!

356 KS3 pupils, 34 Teachers and 13 college students engaged with 72 industry partners from 22 local chemical industries!

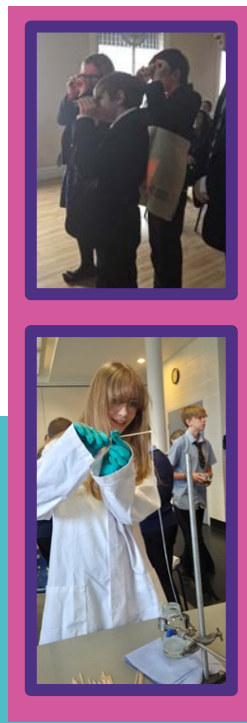
98% of pupils learnt something new at this event.

95% of pupils said the event enabled them to discover a wide range of careers in chemistry.

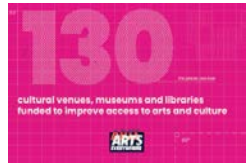
94% of pupils believe that a career in science is attainable for anyone!

We are very proud of all we have accomplished working together with our local industry partners. Made possible with funding from RSC and IChemE.

Education Assistant Shanna McNamee noted that this year's event (27-30 Jan) "the most schools that we've had in four years, from numerous locales in our local area including Runcorn, St Helens, Liverpool, Warrington, Chester, Weaverham, and Manchester."



DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT (DCMS) ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR THE CULTURE SECTOR



A week after the ASDC debate on 14th Jan 2026 there was an announcement from DCMS about £1.5 billion to tackle underfunding across the culture sector. Culture Secretary, Lisa Nandy MP, said the money 'aims to turn a corner on the underfunding the sector has faced in the past 10+ years'. £760million will be invested in museums – this will include £160m for local and regional museums through the Museum Estates Development Fund (Mend). This is welcome news indeed.



We are absolutely honoured that our important archive was consulted in this engaging piece of artwork by Tony Mallon called 'Winds of Change'.

In particular Hurter & Driffield with their advances in photography; John Hutchinson who did such a lot in his relatively short life; Sir John Brunner not least without whom the Transporter Bridge may never have materialised.

And the Vine Gates - who doesn't love the Vine Gates! They have been part of our museum collection for about 35 years and are currently doing sterling work as actual gates!

A wonderful event put on by Halton Borough Council and Cultivate Halton and the artwork was officially opened by Mayor Martha Lloyd-Jones.

Judith Wilde

Board of Trustees Update

On 24 Feb 2026, at the Board of Trustees meeting, James Thomas (Jim) Tiernan was appointed as a Trustee and Director of the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum. Jim is the Operations Director and an Executive Board Member at RS Clare & Co. Ltd. in Liverpool, having previously served as Head of Operations. He brings valuable skills and experience to the Board and continues the long-standing involvement of RS Clare staff with Catalyst.

Founded in 1748 by chemist and dry salter Richard Clare, the company is Liverpool's oldest chemical firm and the longest established manufacturer of specialist lubricants. Several members of RS Clare's leadership team have long supported Catalyst. Roy Coldwell, who served on the Catalyst Board from 2008 to 2024, remains a Director at RS Clare, and the company's Chairman, Iain Meadows CBE, DL, is a Patron of Catalyst.



DEATH OF SIR NEIL CUSSONS

Catalyst Trustees and staff were sorry to hear of the death of Sir Neil Cussons who died on 29th March 2026 at the age of 87. He had been a Patron of Catalyst until recently and was a founder supporter when Catalyst was created in 1987. His heritage knowledge and museum experience was invaluable and he was a great influence on industrial heritage conservation and a great supporter of independent museums such as Catalyst.



THE SYNERGY PROJECT

Update

New gallery build

We've been working closely with gallery designers PLB as they progress the designs for the Birth of an Industry exhibition, the Observatory and the Brunner Gallery, and develop the new exhibits that will go in them. Works are on track to start in mid-September 2026, with some of the exhibits and fixtures in the current Birth of an Industry Gallery due to be removed in the run up to this. We're working with the Science Museum to return some loan objects, and with Gateway Community to reuse some of the wooden fixtures. The works are expected to last around 10 weeks, with the Birth of an Industry Gallery closed throughout this time, and the Observatory and Brunner Gallery partially closed. We will be sharing behind the scenes news as the work goes on, so keep an eye on our socials to keep up to date with our progress!

Quiet Opening for SEND Families

Catalyst recently held its first quiet opening for SEND families, offering early entry and a calmer environment. Sounds from exhibits were reduced, motion-triggered videos were turned off and the Gossage Room became a quiet space with softer lighting, comfortable seating and sensory resources. Sensory bags and ear defenders were freely available for anyone who needed them.

A simple drop-in activity encouraged gentle, self-led exploration. Families shared how valuable the adjustments were and the feedback aligns with plans for the new Synergy Gallery, where videos will be activated by button to support visitors.

Design a Gallery competition

From December - January we ran a 'Design a Gallery' competition, for visitors to share their vision for what a new museum gallery space could look like. From the entrants, 9-year-old Lena's design was chosen as the winner, with Lena receiving an annual pass to the museum as her prize. We're sure she'll be back to see our new gallery spaces when they open early next year.



Hands-on Heritage

On 19th February the Synergy team held a drop-in Hands-on Heritage activity in the Observatory. Over 200 visitors had the chance to get up close with some of the artefacts and documents from our collection, as well as make their own embossed stickers to take home using historic embossing stampers from William Gossage and Son's Soap Company and Nobel Explosives Company. Synergy drop-in activities will be taking place during every school holiday, with soap bookmark making planned for Easter.



Synergy Project at International Women's Day Event



Heather and Heather together attended an event on 6 March for International Women's Day held by Fortuna Female Society at St. Marie's church in Widnes. The stall had information about pioneering women of the chemical industry, who appear in the archives at Catalyst. Profiles from the women of the Portraits of Industry collection were shared, and visitors were able to take away tote bags featuring the portraits. The team also shared details of the Synergy project, and the upcoming events and gallery refurbishment we have planned.

Volunteers Update – Thank You for the Amazing Response

We're delighted to share that our recent call for volunteers received an incredible response from the community. So many people have reached out offering their time, skills and enthusiasm, and our programme is already off to a strong start. New volunteers are settling into their roles, helping enhance visitor experiences, support events and contribute to the stories and collections that make Catalyst special.

We are still open for new Event and Activity Helpers and Science Buskers. Full training is provided — all we need is your energy and enthusiasm.

A heartfelt thank-you to everyone who has contacted us so far. Your support makes a real difference, and we're excited to continue building this momentum as the programme grows. Contact volunteer@catalyst.org.uk to register your interest. *Heather Royle*



Little Wonders meets every Wednesday in Term-Time 9:15-10:30. Cost is £2 per adult.

Little Wonders

Our new weekly toddler session launched in March and is already proving popular. Each Wednesday, under-5s and their grown-ups enjoy themed sensory play, hands-on exploration and a relaxing story and rhyme time in our interactive gallery. With low-cost entry that includes drinks and snacks, the sessions offer an affordable, welcoming way for local families to learn and play together. Early themes like mini-beasts and transport have already brought back returning families, and we're excited to see the programme continue to grow.

Breakfast and Brew Club



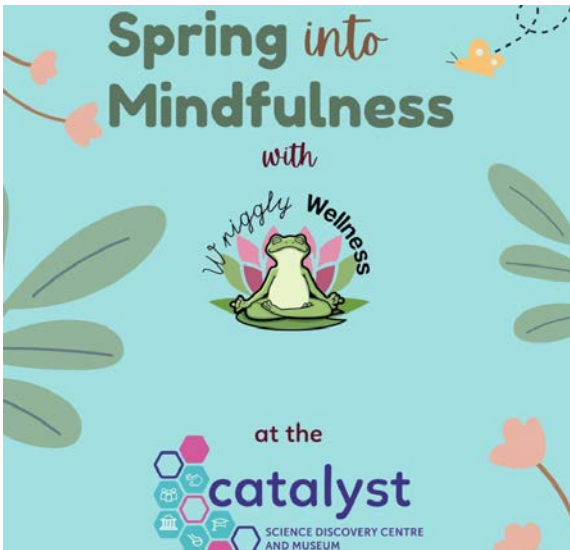
The new Breakfast and Brew club for over 50s has begun, where older members of the community can come along to Catalyst's café for a subsidised cooked breakfast, or tea cake and a hot drink, and share stories of their experiences. Archive material from ICI is made available for guests to view, along with board games, puzzles and friendly volunteers to spark conversations. The club will run every Thursday morning during term time.

ANIMAL TEACH

We were delighted to welcome back Animal Teach on 31 January to our Observatory. They brought animal ambassadors and two tables of heritage activities. We have now signed on to bring them back regularly through the year, so watch our socials for future dates!



Wriggly Wellness joined us for the first time in February Half-Term for a "Cosmic Calm" drop-in yoga and craft session which coordinated thematically with our education shows about space, and we welcomed their return during the Easter holiday for "Spring into Mindfulness" sessions.



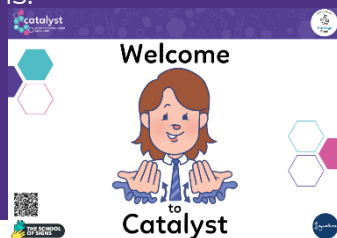


Our Events, Engagement, and Community Coordinator Heather Beisly recently passed her PRINCE2 Foundation Certificate.

Congratulations! She will be using the skills she learned to help manage the many events projects that are launching in the museum.

Sign Language Partnership

We have started working with Signature, a group who create Sign Language content, to produce BSL signage to replace some of our current ones and include more specific and directional signs.



Education Assistant Shanna was invited to present at the Association for Science Education Annual Conference on 8th Jan. She reflected: "I was honoured to be delivering a morning session championing the work of Catalyst and our focus on spotlighting real-life careers within our workshops and shows. Our work was introduced internationally, as attendees to my session included teachers from Norway and Dubai, and they equally provided me with some interesting insights on their curriculum and methods of teaching. As a first-time presenter, it was a daunting experience, but I had a fabulous day and got to meet loads of like-minded people and organisations! I've developed a new confidence in this style of engagement and I hope there will be more opportunities in the future to extend our reach in this way."



During the school holidays we welcomed our friends from Astra Zeneca. Their STEM ambassadors came along with some fabulous drop-in activities for budding scientists!



We're Thrilled to Be Featured in GEM Case Studies!

We're famous for Smelly Science and now our sensory-powered work is being celebrated nationally!

We're incredibly excited to share that an article written by our Education Team (Shanna McNamee and Lucinda Lewis) has been published in the latest edition of GEM Case Studies, produced in partnership with The Sensational Museum project.

Their piece explores our recent collaboration with Unilever and our local community highlighting the science of smell, and also showcasing how sensory learning can create richer, more inclusive experiences for visitors of all ages.



This 35th edition of GEM Case Studies brings together 14 inspiring examples of museums embedding multi-sensory approaches into their practice. We're honoured to be featured alongside so many innovative organisations who are championing accessibility, creativity, and curious exploration.

Great Publicity for Catalyst

Catalyst has recently been highlighted by several scientific and community organisations. The RSC CiCAG Newsletter Distillate (Winter 2025–26) featured an article by Dr Diana Leitch about our work in chemistry education and public engagement, helping to showcase the impact of our programmes more widely.

We also appeared in a piece published by the West Lancashire Freemasons following their donation and visit to the museum.

In addition, the Industrial Heritage Group from Chester U3A shared an article about their visit in Chester Affairs, their monthly newsletter that reaches more than 1,150 members.

We're pleased to see Catalyst's work reflected across scientific, heritage and community networks, and we appreciate every organisation that helps share our mission with a wider audience.

Over the past year Trustee, Diana Leitch, has continued to give talks to Probus, u3a, Local History groups etc which have raised money for Catalyst and helped to publicise its work with school groups, sleepovers etc and to encourage people to visit Catalyst themselves and with their families.

Fifteen talks on subjects as diverse as Chocolate, Pyrex, the Soap Industry, Bramhall Hall have been delivered in Altrincham, Knutsford, Cheadle, Didsbury, Bramhall, Runcorn and at our museum itself. Contact:

bookings@catalyst.org.uk to book a talk for your group!



Visit of Industrial Heritage Groups

Museum Culture Events

Catalyst was thrilled to be awarded a Halton Borough Council Cultivate Aspire grant.

This grant will launch a programme called "Catalyst: After Hours" which has a focus on bringing cultural activities into Halton, and particularly a focus for the museum on inviting adults who may not have recent experience with the museum, back in.

We will be delivering a gig series, a comedy night, and a long-hoped-for mobile escape room which is specific to Catalyst. The first gig was held on 22 Apr and was a music collaboration and Q&A Session and is the first time The Narrative singer songwriter networking event has come to Halton. Check our website for forthcoming events.



Community News



Postnatal Restore: Supporting New Families at Catalyst

With support from Halton Housing's 20 for 20 campaign, Catalyst partnered with postnatal fitness specialist Ginette Rough to launch Postnatal Restore, a wellbeing programme for mums in the early weeks of parenthood. Held in the Observatory, the five-week course offered gentle movement to aid physical recovery, support core and pelvic-floor strength and ease common postnatal aches. The sessions also created space for mums to talk, connect and gain confidence during a time that can feel both rewarding and challenging.

Participants received an annual Catalyst family membership and a complimentary drink in the café, encouraging time to relax and build supportive relationships. The pilot welcomed a small group of local mums and babies, providing a friendly and inclusive environment that supported both wellbeing and early bonding. Many shared that they "weren't ready to say goodbye" at the final session.

Postnatal Restore reflects the shared commitment of Catalyst and Halton Housing to improve lives and strengthen our community, and we are proud to support new families in this way.



December Community Pricing Welcomes Over 200 Guests

Our Community Pricing initiative returned in December 2025 and once again, the response was extraordinary. Designed to make science discovery more accessible during a financially challenging time, the scheme invited local residents to enjoy full general admission at a reduced rate.

Across the month, more than 200 guests joined us to explore, play and learn together. From families visiting for the first time to returning neighbours eager to make the most of the offer, the museum was buzzing with curiosity and connection.

We created Community Pricing to remove barriers and open our doors wider and seeing so many people from our community enjoying Catalyst reminds us exactly why this work matters. Thank you to everyone who visited, shared the initiative with friends, or simply spread a little joy in the museum during the festive season.

We're committed to continuing programmes like this that help make Catalyst welcoming and accessible for all. More to come, so stay tuned!

Thanks to our Patrons and Trustees

Our Current Patrons include:

Royal Patron, George Windsor, Earl of St Andrews

Dame Mary Archer DBE
Dr Tony Bastock OBE
Sir Hugo Brunner KCVO, KStJ
Tom Crotty
Dr Helen Czerski
Steve Elliott
Peter Gossage
Nigel Hirst
R Ian S Meadows OBE DL
Professor David Phillips CBE, FRS
Professor Gill Reid CBE, FRSE
Derek Twigg MP
Hon Dr Paul Zuckerman

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Jim Tiernan
Councillor Kevan Wainwright
Dr Don Westwood
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