

Name: Dr Fiona Watts

Job: Skin Cancer Researcher



Fiona works in research labs studying how skin cancer develops. This is an area of investigation that's become highly relevant with rising incidences of cancer afflicting people exposed to excessive UV radiation from sunlight.

The job involves finding out what controls the normal behaviour of our skin cells. The top layer of skin cells form a protective interface between our body's tissues and the outer environment. When normal patterns are understood, the task is to work out how normal cell functioning breaks down when the cells become cancerous

Benefit of the work: This work increases our knowledge of how to reduce the incidence of skin cancer and how to control its spread and establishment in other tissues.

Think you might be interested? Here are some of the skills you might need.

Personal skills or aptitudes:

- Curiosity, drive and determination
- Patience and persistence
- Imagination

Key skills:

- ICT – to maximise interpretation of masses of raw data
- A methodical approach to problems
- Attention to detail
- Creativity in designing experiments.

Skills Build

First steps – moves you can take now

Read popular science writing in broadsheet newspapers and New Scientist. Visit www.planet-science.com or www.bbc.co.uk/science or www.howstuffworks.org.uk for more ideas. You could also volunteer to work with young people being treated for cancer in hospices – CSV can help those over 16 find a volunteer placement.

Join school science clubs, attend science roadshows and visit your local science centre.

Third floor

Put some A level qualifications together: biology, chemistry and physics or maths are a good combination. A less usual but possible route would be a VCE A level (vocational A level) in science with an additional A level, perhaps in maths. These qualifications can gain a university degree course place.

On to the second level

Get the groundwork in place: GCSE in double science or all three sciences if you can; maths – to calculate quantities and prove your findings are sound; English – to communicate your experimental results in clear plain text or through verbal presentations and modern languages to communicate with other workers in your chosen field.

Fourth floor

To start research work, you need to build from a degree – a BSc Honours in a suitable area. For cancer research, you might choose a course in cell biology, oncology, human physiology or something similar.