Brain Research UK

Brain Research UK
Annual Review 2025/26

Our vision is a world where everyone with a neurological condition lives better, longer.

The brain is the most complex organ in our body. It weighs just 1.5 kg, yet it controls our emotions, senses and actions, every single one of them. It is how we process the world around us. So when it breaks down, we break down.

It doesn't have to be this way.

There are hundreds of neurological conditions. We fund research to discover the causes, develop new treatments and improve the lives of those affected.

Let's unite to accelerate the progress of brain research. Today.

1 in 6 of us
has a neurological condition

12,500
people are diagnosed with a primary brain tumour every year

2.6 million
people live with the effects of traumatic brain injury or stroke

65,000
people suffer from cluster headache, the 'suicide headache'

Note: all neurological facts in this report are for the UK.

Welcome to our Annual Review

Brain Research UK is a leading dedicated funder of neurological research in the UK. We support outstanding research that delivers the greatest possible impact for people living with neurological conditions, helping them to live better, longer.

Throughout the year, we awarded grants totalling £2,403,000. This included six new project grants amounting to £1,389,000 in two of our priority areas: brain tumours and brain and spinal cord injury. We also awarded endowment funding of over £1 million to the UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology, from the Graeme Watts Fund to support ALS/MND research into restoring lost muscle function and from the Sobell Fund to support the post of Sobell Chair of Neuroscience. Details of all our funding awards can be found on the following pages.

We were also pleased to continue our three-year partnership with the RFU Injured Players Foundation, England Rugby's official charity, supporting research into brain and spinal cord injury.

It is thanks to the commitment and generosity of our extraordinary supporters that this vital research can be funded. From regular donations to overseas challenges to corporate partnerships, we are indebted to all those who give in so many different ways. Standout fundraising achievements this year include the London Marathon 2025, where our team of 286 humbling and inspiring runners raised £985, 018, and the remarkable amount of £180,000 raised through our corporate partnership with Acrisure, thanks to the hard work and engagement of their staff and friends.

Our thanks go to each and every one of our supporters and volunteers who help deliver our mission. I extend thanks to our Syon Committee members for their continued work to ensure two exceptional fundraising evenings. We are indebted to the members of our Scientific Advisory Panel who give so generously of their time on our behalf, as well as the many reviewers who assess our funding applications to ensure that the best research continues to be funded.

In the following pages, we highlight some of the research that has been funded this year and share stories from a few of our remarkable supporters, without whom this vital neurological research would not be possible.

Too many lives are affected by devastating neurological conditions. On behalf of everyone at the charity, I extend my heartfelt and profound thanks to all those who continue to support our work.

Jim Gollan
Chair of Trustees

Our research

Our aim is to improve the lives of people living with neurological conditions, to help them live better, longer.

Neurological conditions encompass a wide and complex range of conditions. There are hundreds of neurological conditions including acute conditions such as stroke; progressive, degenerative diseases such as motor neuron disease; and episodic conditions including epilepsy and migraine. Together, these conditions affect approximately one in six of us.

Priority research areas

Whilst our charitable objectives allow us to fund research across all neurological conditions, we focus our resources on three priority areas where there is a clear disconnect between research investment and patient need:

- **Brain tumours**
- **Brain and spinal cord injury**
- **Headache and facial pain**

Each of these areas is associated with a high level of unmet clinical need and continues to face a challenging funding environment. By concentrating our funding in these areas, we aim to drive meaningful progress where it is most urgently required.

During the year, through our national calls, we invested £1.39 million in new research across these priority areas.

How we fund research

Research is funded primarily through open, competitive national calls for applications. These calls are targeted at researchers working within our priority areas and are designed to support high-quality, innovative projects.

All applications undergo rigorous assessment through peer review, involving both our Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) and independent external experts to ensure scientific excellence and potential patient benefit.

In addition, we continue to manage a number of endowment funds that are restricted to supporting research into neurodegenerative conditions at the UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology. During the year, £1.01 million was awarded through these funds, supporting both the Sobell Chair of Neuroscience and the Graeme Watts Programme Grant.

Project grant funding

Our annual project grant call continues to attract strong interest from the research community. In November 2025, we completed the assessment of 82 eligible preliminary applications.

Following detailed review by our SAP and independent external expert reviewers, six projects were selected for funding. These awards support research led by Dr Aida Rodrigo Albors, Dr Lucy Brookes, Dr Elizabeth Cooper, Dr Ali Gooya, Professor Ester Hammond and Dr Stephen Ray. The projects reflect the breadth and ambition of research being undertaken across our priority areas, from fundamental biological discovery to clinically focused innovation. Information about their specific research projects can be found on the following pages.

Endowment funding

Graeme Watts Programme Grant

The Graeme Watts Laboratories at the UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology were established in 1999 through an endowment in memory of Graeme Watts, who died from motor neuron disease (MND). The fund was created to support research into the underlying mechanisms of MND and the development of new therapeutic approaches. The laboratories are now internationally recognised for their contribution to the field, with multiple research outputs progressing into clinical development.

This year, following a comprehensive review process, we awarded £599,984 to Professor Linda Greensmith to support the next phase of the Graeme Watts Programme Grant. Information about this award can be found on page 18.

Sobell Chair of Neuroscience

The Sobell endowment was established in 1975 following a donation from Sir Michael Sobell to support a new Chair of Neurophysiology at UCL Queens Square Institute of Neurology. Funds from the Sobell endowment have played a foundational role in supporting neuroscience research at the IoN, including the creation of one of the Institute's first departments dedicated to basic and discovery science.

During the year, following a comprehensive review process, £408,127 was awarded to support Professor Linda Greensmith in her role as Sobell Chair of Neuroscience. In addition, in recognition of this longstanding support, a suite of laboratories in UCL's new Gray's Inn Road building will be named the Sobell Neurophysiology Laboratories.

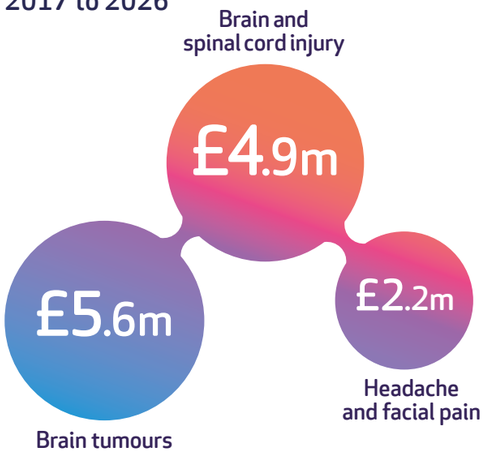
Partnership funding

British Neuro-Oncology Society partnership

As part of a new strategic partnership with the British Neuro-Oncology Society (BNOS), we awarded funding of £5,000 to co-sponsor a pump-prime award at the BNOS early career researcher grant workshop.

The recipients of our award were Dr Alina Pandele and Sophie McCann, from the Children's Brain Tumour Research Centre at the University of Nottingham, who used these funds to carry out pilot work focused on paediatric brain tumours. The findings from this work will contribute to future grant applications and peer-reviewed publications, helping to build capacity within the neuro-oncology research community.

Breakdown of awards by disease area, 2017 to 2026



Brain tumours

Every year in the UK, around 12,500 people are diagnosed with a primary brain tumour – that's 34 people every day.

Research into brain tumours has been underfunded for many years, which has slowed progress in treatment and survival: only 48% of adults survive for one year after diagnosis and only 25% survive for five years. In contrast, more than 95% of prostate and breast cancer patients survive for one year after diagnosis, and more than 85% survive for more than five years. **This is why more research into brain tumours is needed urgently.**

Funding research in brain tumours

We want to improve both how long and how well people live after diagnosis. To do this, we fund research to increase understanding of how brain tumours develop and to find more effective ways to diagnose and treat them.

Since making this a research priority in 2016, we have invested £5.6 million in this important area. This includes four new projects funded this year in Cambridge, Glasgow and Oxford; which focus on glioblastoma, paediatric high-grade gliomas and other childhood brain tumours.

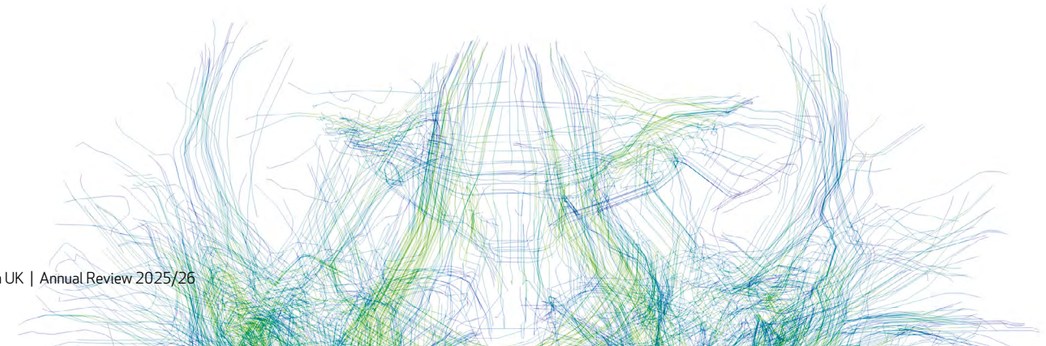
Spotlight on childhood brain tumours

Brain tumours are the leading cause of cancer-related death in children. Despite advances in surgery and radiotherapy, survival remains poor for many children, and survivors often face lasting cognitive and physical impairments.

Childhood brain tumours can trick the body's immune system, helping the cancer grow unchecked. However, it is not yet fully understood how the immature immune environment and the tumours interact to suppress the immune system.

Radiotherapy is the mainstay of treatment but cure is rare, and recent UK treatment guidelines have emphasised the urgent need for new therapies.

Greater understanding and new treatments are desperately needed.



Ross's story

In April 2025, Ross took on the TCS London Marathon as part of #TeamBrainResearchUK. He was inspired to run after his son, George, was diagnosed with a cyst on the brain in December 2023, at just 6 years old.

George had faced a number of health challenges from birth, mainly linked to ongoing sickness and complications with his growth. He had always been in the lower percentiles for height and weight, and had never been a good eater. For a long time, the family believed he may have been lactose intolerant, so they adapted as best they could, and carried on with daily life.

In July 2023, just two days after the birth of his younger brother, George became seriously unwell due to a weakened immune system.

This led doctors to carry out further investigations, including a CT scan and MRI scan, which revealed a benign intraventricular cyst on his brain. Their doctors explained that George's cyst was likely the underlying cause of many of the health issues he had experienced over the years.

In April 2024, George underwent surgery to have a monitoring device inserted into his skull. The device is used to monitor pressure on the cyst and assess any irregular activity, helping doctors to better understand George's condition and determine the next steps in his treatment.

'As a family, we continue to monitor the cyst, but with more research and a better understanding of the brain, we hope we may get more answers in the future. George is a healthy and mostly happy little boy and, more than anything, is upset about missing his football training and matches for the appointments and procedures.'

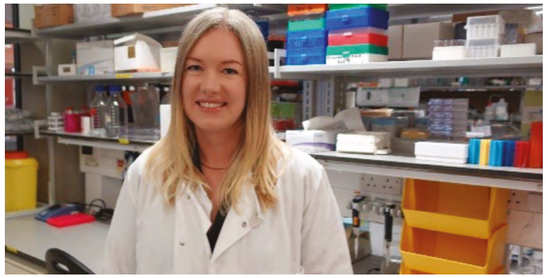
Ross completed the marathon and raised an incredible £5,200, because neurological research is a cause so close to him and his family. Through fundraising and greater investment in brain research, he hopes that more can be understood about conditions like George's, helping children like him live better, longer.

Brain tumours

New project grant

Exposing weaknesses in resistant cells to improve brain cancer therapies

Dr Lucy Brooks, University of Oxford



Glioblastoma is a devastating brain tumour that kills three quarters of patients within a year of diagnosis. Current treatments can prolong survival but are not curative.

In this project, to find new ways to treat brain cancer by targeting resistant cells, Dr Brooks is studying a special group of cancer cells called 'polyploid cells'. These cells have extra DNA and can form after radiotherapy, which is a common treatment. They are thought to help the tumour survive and grow back after treatment.

The goal of this research is to find ways to target and destroy these stubborn cells, so treatments work better and the cancer is less likely to return.

What the research team will do

- First, they will look at certain genes that seem to help these cells survive. They will switch these genes off in cancer cells grown in the lab to see if the cells die more easily after radiation.
- Next, they will film individual cancer cells over time. This helps them understand how these cells behave after treatment and identify the exact moments when they are weakest and easiest to attack.
- Finally, they will test new treatments on tiny 'mini tumours' grown in the lab from patients' own cancer cells. These models act like real tumours and help show whether the new approach could work in patients.

Why this matters

- By finding and targeting the weak points in these tough cancer cells, this research could lead to more effective treatments for glioblastoma and reduce the chances of the tumour coming back.

'This is an extremely well designed and relevant proposal tackling an unmet cancer need… this is the type of research that is needed to advance knowledge and therapeutic potential.'
Independent external expert reviewer

New project grant

Understanding and predicting brain tumour treatment response using AI

Dr Ali Gooya, University of Glasgow

This project is looking at better ways to treat glioblastoma and to predict how each patient will respond to treatment.

Dr Gooya is studying whether combining radiotherapy with a drug called Olaparib works better than current standard treatments. Olaparib is already used to treat several other cancers and has shown early promise for brain tumours.

At the same time, the team is using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and MRI brain scans to create detailed, personalised pictures of each patient's tumour.

What the research team will do

- Build computer models that show how tumours grow, spread and respond to treatment.
- Use AI to analyse MRI scans and patient data.
- Create personalised 'maps' of each tumour, showing where it is most active and how it changes over time.

Why this matters

These personalised tumour maps could help doctors:

- Predict how a patient's cancer will develop.
- Spot early signs of whether treatment is working.
- Identify where the tumour might come back.

In the future, this approach could help doctors choose the best treatment for each individual patient and improve outcomes for people with glioblastoma.

'This project is important, original and relevant, and can have a clinical impact for many patients as personalised models can substantially improve treatment.'
Independent external expert reviewer

Brain tumours

New project grant

Mapping immune defences in the developing brain

Dr Elizabeth Cooper, University of Cambridge

Childhood brain tumours are the leading cause of cancer-related death in children and are difficult to treat without long-term side effects.

We know that childhood brain tumours can trick the body's immune system, helping the cancer grow unchecked. More specifically, tumours may take advantage of the 'immature' immune environment of the brain in early childhood to avoid being attacked by the body's usual immune defences. However, it is not yet fully understood how the immature immune environment and the tumours interact to suppress the immune system.

What the research team will do

- First, they will use special lab models that mimic how the brain develops in children and how tumours form at the same time.
- Next, they will compare healthy brain tissue with tissue containing tumours at different stages of development. This will help them identify what changes in normal brain development might allow tumours to go unnoticed by the immune system.
- Finally, they will test whether adjusting these processes can slow or prevent tumour growth.

Why this matters

- By understanding how brain tumours avoid the immune system, the team hopes to find new ways to boost the immune system against tumours.
- In the long term, this could lead to better survival rates for children with brain tumours and reduce the side effects of current therapies, to the benefit of patients and their families.

'This proposal addresses an entirely understudied area of immune mediated regulation and paediatric brain tumour initiation.'
Independent external expert reviewer

New project grant

A new approach to treat childhood brain cancer by combining radiotherapy with a silver-based drug

Professor Ester Hammond, University of Oxford

Paediatric high-grade gliomas are aggressive brain and spinal cord tumours that are the leading cause of cancer-related death in children. Radiotherapy is the mainstay of treatment, but cure is rare. This is why new and better treatments are needed urgently.

Prof Hammond's previous studies have shown that combing Ag5, a small silver-based drug, with radiotherapy increases the damage done by radiotherapy to cancer cells. This project will explore whether combining Ag5 with radiotherapy can safely and effectively improve outcomes for children with paediatric high-grade gliomas.

What the research team will do

- First, they will study how Ag5 works on cancer cells in the lab. They'll check if it helps radiotherapy cause more damage to the cancer, and whether it makes the cells die, stop growing, or become easier to treat.
- Next, they will test this combination in advanced lab models that closely mimic children's brain tumours. They'll track how the tumours grow and compare results with radiotherapy alone.
- They will also carefully check that the treatment does not harm healthy brain tissue, to make sure it is safe.

Why this matters

- The goal is to gather strong evidence to support future clinical trials using Ag5 alongside radiotherapy to improve treatment for children with these devastating cancers.

'The proposed work has the potential to address an extremely important unmet clinical need in neuro-oncology, and may lead to improved therapies for paediatric high-grade gliomas in the longer term.'
Independent external expert reviewer

Brain and spinal cord injury

Every 90 seconds someone is admitted to hospital with a brain injury. This includes injuries caused by accidents, assaults and falls as well as stroke and other non-traumatic causes.

However, advances in emergency care mean that many more people are now surviving such injuries: more than 2.6 million people now live with the effects of traumatic brain injury or stroke.

It also means that more people are living with the long-term effects of these injuries. Many of them experience a reduced quality of life due to problems with speech, thinking and basic bodily functions, so more research is urgently needed to help them regain as much independence as possible.

Funding research in brain and spinal cord injury

We aim to improve quality of life after injury by funding research that helps us understand what causes non-traumatic brain injury and how the brain and spinal cord can be repaired following all kinds of injury. This will help people recover as fully as possible.

Since making this a research priority in 2016, we have invested £4.9 million in research to improve understanding of brain injury and explore ways to repair the brain and spinal cord.

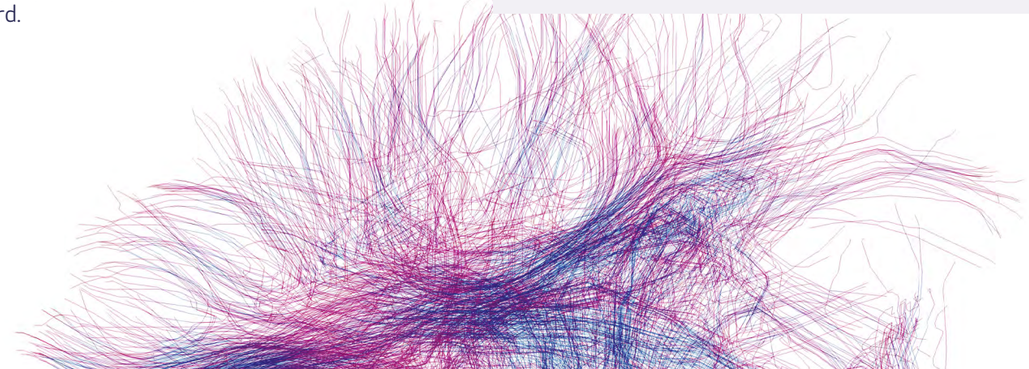
Spotlight on non-traumatic brain injury

Around 335,000 people in the UK are admitted to hospital every year with an acquired brain injury. This includes approximately 68,000 people who have a non-traumatic brain injury other than stroke.

Non-traumatic brain injuries have a wide variety of causes including oxygen starvation, kidney or liver failure, and infections such as encephalitis and meningitis, both of which can be caused by either a virus or bacteria.

The day-to-day impact of such injuries varies enormously from person to person and can include impaired movement or cognition, communication difficulties, fatigue and constant pain.

Greater understanding of the causes, processes and consequences of non-traumatic brain injury is needed urgently to help improve the lives of all those affected.



Shannon's story

In February 2024, Shannon's brother found their Dad, Steve, unconscious on the kitchen floor. He performed CPR immediately and saved their dad's life. He was rushed to hospital, where scans revealed a catastrophic brain bleed. Shannon recalls the trauma of that morning, *'I have never in my life felt shock and pain like it… to think the night before was possibly the last time I'd see Dad well again.'*

At the hospital, the family were given just minutes to decide whether to proceed with life-saving surgery, knowing he might not survive or could wake up with severe impairments.

They chose to give him a chance. Despite being told to prepare for the worst, Steve pulled through.

More than two years later, after five brain surgeries, his recovery has been remarkable. He is now conscious, able to communicate and is relearning to walk with the support of a neurorehabilitation team.

Shannon describes him as 'our miracle,' adding that rehabilitation and research have played a vital role in his progress.

Motivated by her dad's strength, Shannon took on the London Marathon despite never having been a runner. Training became both a coping mechanism and a source of purpose. 'Running has honestly helped me to cope. I know that while I'm running, I'm one step closer to making Dad proud.'

On marathon day, the emotion of her journey came full circle. *'This was never just a race – it was a promise to myself, and to Dad,' Shannon reflected. 'I cried, I laughed, I ran with my whole heart.'*

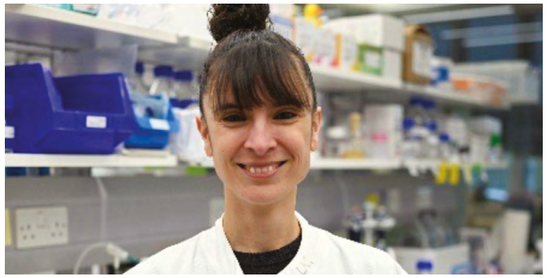
Inspired by her Dad's life changing brain injury, Shannon raised a wonderful £10,982. Her achievement stands as a powerful tribute to resilience, family and the life-changing impact of brain research.

Brain and spinal cord injury

New project grant

Exploring brain regeneration to help treat Multiple Sclerosis

Dr Aida Rodrigo Albors, University of Edinburgh



Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a long-term condition where the immune system damages the brain and spinal cord. In the UK, it is the second most common cause of neurological disability in young adults. While treatments have improved, there is currently no way to repair the damage once it has happened.

This project is trying to find ways the brain might be encouraged to heal itself.

The research focuses on a special type of mouse called the spiny mouse (Acomys), which is unusual because it can regenerate damaged tissues, including parts of its brain. Most mammals, including humans, cannot do this.

What the research team will do

- Study how the spiny mouse is able to repair brain damage that is similar to what happens in MS.
- Use advanced technology to examine individual brain cells and see which genes they switch on and off.
- Map how different brain cells (including stem cells) behave in both healthy and injured brains.
- Compare what happens in spiny mice with what happens in human and normal lab mouse brains, which do not regenerate well.

Why this matters

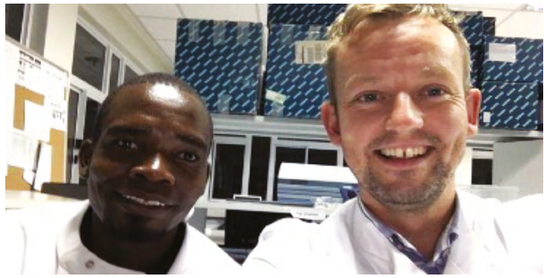
- By understanding how the spiny mouse can repair its brain, scientists hope to uncover why humans cannot do the same.
- In the long term, this could help lead to new treatments that encourage the human brain to repair itself after injury or diseases like MS.

'The proposal addresses a major unmet need in regenerative neurology. It is highly original and… the potential impact on translational approaches is substantial.'
Independent external expert reviewer

New project grant

Understanding, predicting and improving brain injury in Malawian children with fever and coma

Dr Stephen Ray, University of Oxford



In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, many children are admitted to hospital with serious illnesses that cause both fever and coma. These conditions often lead to brain damage, lifelong disability or death. In Malawi, research shows that about 1 in 3 children with these illnesses dies. Of those who survive, around half are left with long-term disabilities.

A major problem is that, often, doctors cannot quickly or accurately identify the exact cause of the illness. It is usually one of two conditions:

- Cerebral malaria (a severe brain infection caused by malaria parasites).
- Bacterial brain infections, such as meningitis.

These conditions can look very similar, and sometimes a child may have both at once. In many hospitals, especially in low-income countries, there is limited equipment to tell the conditions apart so treatment is often based on educated guesswork.

What the research team will do

- Analyse biological samples already collected from Malawian children admitted to hospital with these conditions.
- Study what is causing brain injury in these cases.
- Try to identify patterns that could help doctors understand which illness a child has and how severe it may become.

Why this matters

Better understanding of these illnesses could help doctors:

- Choose the right treatments faster.
- Identify which children are most at risk.
- Ultimately reduce brain damage, disability, and deaths.

The long-term goal is to improve care for children with severe brain infections in low-resource settings.

'This novel research is important and is expected to have high impact.'
Independent external expert reviewer

Headache and facial pain

Headaches are very common and most people experience them from time to time. When they happen often, they may be part of a headache disorder. In the UK, more than 20 million people – around two in five adults – live with headache or facial pain disorders.

Due to their prevalence, headaches are also one of the leading burdens on society. Migraine costs the NHS around £1 billion per year, and it costs the UK economy around £10 billion per year. New treatment approaches are desperately needed if we are to lift this burden.

Research into headache and facial pain has been limited in the past, which has slowed progress in developing better treatments. This is why we are prioritising this area.

Funding research in headache and facial pain

We fund research to improve understanding of what causes these conditions, as well as to improve diagnosis and treatment.

Since making this a research priority in 2016, we have invested £2.2 million in research to improve understanding and care. This includes three awards that completed this year, which are outlined opposite.

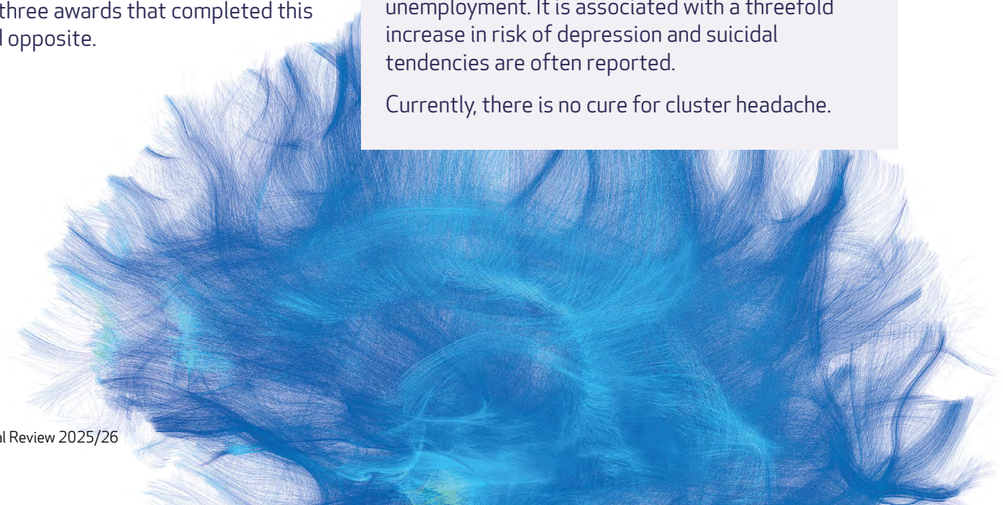
Spotlight on cluster headache

Cluster headache is a rare but highly debilitating condition, characterised by recurrent episodes of severe pain on one side of the head. It is widely regarded as one of the most painful conditions in clinical medicine.

Cluster headache affects about one in 1,000 people, which equates to around 65,000 people in the UK. It usually onsets after the age of 30 and is more common in men than women by a ratio of approximately 6:1.

Cluster headache impacts heavily on the lives of patients, causing multiple admissions to hospital, restricting people's lifestyles and often leading to unemployment. It is associated with a threefold increase in risk of depression and suicidal tendencies are often reported.

Currently, there is no cure for cluster headache.



Completed awards

Clarissa Rocca,
University College London

Dr Anna Andreou,
King's College London

Dr Megan Crawford,
University of Strathclyde

Cluster headache

Clarissa Rocca was awarded a PhD studentship in 2021 to enable her to undertake research into the genetics of cluster headache.

Clarissa's PhD delivered two key insights: that a specific gene is linked to cluster headache, and that screening for a specific type of genetic change can uncover important genetic causes of neurological disease, even if these are not directly tied to cluster headache.

Dr Anna Andreou was awarded a project grant in 2021 to study links between cluster headache and an area of the brain called the hypothalamus.

Dr Andreou showed that specific proteins involved in inflammatory and immune reactions in the hypothalamus are very likely to play a role in cluster headache, and that targeting these proteins can be a future avenue for the treatment of cluster headache.

Together, these findings provide new understanding of cluster headache and point to better ways of diagnosing and eventually treating this debilitating condition.

Migraine

People with migraine often have problems falling or staying asleep; they suffer from insomnia.

In 2020, **Dr Megan Crawford** was awarded a project grant to evaluate a digital form of cognitive behaviour therapy for insomnia (CBT-I), to see whether this could also help people with migraine.

Dr Crawford found that digital CBT-I can indeed reduce insomnia in some cases of migraine. In addition, her project provided valuable insight into how to design a larger clinical trial that could enable digital CBT-I to be offered as a treatment to patients with migraine, potentially improving their quality of life significantly.

Endowment funding

Graeme Watts Fund

Overcoming Paralysis using a Therapeutic Interface to Control muscles in Amotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) (OPTICALS)

Prof Linda Greensmith and Dr Barney Bryson

This year, Professor Greensmith and Dr Bryson were awarded funding of £599,984 for this programme grant to help people with ALS regain muscle control using light-based therapy.

ALS, the most common form of Motor Neuron Disease (MND), is a condition where the nerve cells that control muscles gradually stop working. This leads to muscle weakness, wasting, paralysis, and usually death within two to five years. Currently, there are no treatments that can stop or reverse the disease in the majority of patients. The research team is therefore developing a completely new way to restore muscle function that, if successful, will benefit all ALS patients.

In earlier research, the team showed that in mice, specially modified nerve cells called motor neurons, created from stem cells and made sensitive to light can be transplanted into nerves where they can grow and reconnect with muscles that have lost their nerve supply. As these cells are sensitive to light, these neurons can be activated by light, causing the muscles they connect with to contract and produce force.

The team has now created similar light-sensitive human nerve cells and shown that they can survive in a mouse model of ALS.

They also found a way to prevent the body from rejecting these transplanted cells, which means it may be possible to create a ready-made treatment that could work for many patients.

However, more work is needed before this can be tested in people.

This programme grant will

- Improve the human nerve cells so they can be tested more efficiently with different light-based methods.
- Make the donor cells suitable for any patient, so a universal 'off-the-shelf' treatment can be developed.
- Test the treatment in detail to see how well it works and compare different ways of activating the cells, directly or through the skin.

This research could lead to a completely new type of therapy for people with paralysis, not only ALS patients, but also patients paralysed for other reasons, for example following spinal cord injury.

'I consider this work highly original and of utmost priority.'

'There are only two approved therapies for ALS, and they provide only a minor reduction in disease progression. Thus, there is an urgent need to find better treatments for this patient population.'
Independent external expert reviewers

Brain Research UK Chair of Neurosurgery 10-year report

In June 2013, Brain Research UK awarded funding of £1,684,556 to UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology to support the establishment of a new Chair of Neurosurgery. Our funds were combined with funds of around £1.1m from the Gough Cooper Fund, held by UCL, to create an endowment expected to fund this new Chair for at least 10 years.

Professor Robert Brownstone was appointed to this new position and took up the role in 2015.

This year, Prof Brownstone reported on progress made.

The Division of Neurosurgery at the UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology works closely with the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery to improve neurosurgical care. Their goal is to benefit both current and future patients through excellent research training and clinical care.

Key achievements over the past 10 years

- More neurosurgeons are now involved in research, from early-career doctors to senior professors.
- An increase in published research papers and research funding (reaching around £5.8 million in 2024).
- Regular national and international lectures, including the annual Victor Horsley Lecture.
- An annual Neurosurgery Research Day, where trainees present their work and compete for the Lindsay Symon Research Award.
- A successful Master's-level (MRes) Neurosurgery programme, currently in its fourth year.
- Greater participation in clinical trials to turn research discoveries into real treatments.

'I would like to thank Brain Research UK for its support. I would also like to think that we are witnessing the rebirth of academic neurosurgery in the UK, and I hope that I have contributed at least a little to that.'
Prof Robert Brownstone

Our geographic reach

When we broadened our objectives in 2015, we extended our funding to research institutes UK-wide beyond our historic restriction to UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology. This has enabled us to fund the very best research, wherever in the UK it is taking place.

Since 2015, we have successfully attracted funding applications from around the UK. The geographical spread of the institutes whose researchers we have funded is highlighted below.

1 University of Dundee
2 University of Glasgow
3 University of Strathclyde
4 University of Edinburgh
5 Newcastle University
6 The Walton Centre
7 University of Manchester
8 University of Leeds
9 University of Hull
10 Nottingham Trent University
11 University of Nottingham
12 University of Birmingham
13 University of Oxford
14 University of Cambridge
15 Cardiff University
16 Imperial College London
17 King's College London
18 University College London
19 The Institute for Cancer Research
20 Plymouth University

Research awards 2025/26

Project grants

Dr Lucy Brookes, University of Oxford (Early Career Researcher, PhD 2015) Brain tumours: Investigating vulnerabilities of polyploid tumour cells to disrupt therapy resistance in glioblastoma	£299,872
Dr Ali Gooya, University of Glasgow Brain tumours: BIOGRAPH – Biophysical Tumour Growth Modelling for Novel GBM Treatment Response Assessment: Harnessing Physics-Informed Deep Learning	£196,079
Dr Elizabeth Cooper, University of Cambridge (Early Career Researcher, PhD 2023) Brain tumours: Adaptive immune responses in establishing immune privilege in the normal and malignant developing brain	£298,753
Professor Ester Hammond, University of Oxford Brain tumours: Improving radiation response in paediatric High-Grade Glioma through modulation of reactive oxygen species	£226,513
Dr Aida Rodrigo Albors, University of Edinburgh Brain & spinal cord injury: Deconstructing the neural stem cell niche in a mammalian model of brain regeneration	£300,000
Dr Stephen Ray, University of Oxford (Early Career Researcher, PhD 2022) Brain & spinal cord injury: Identifying the mechanisms, biomarkers and pathogenic causes of brain injury in febrile comatose Malawian children	£68,371
Total project grant funding	**£1,389,588**

Endowment fund awards

Graeme Watts Programme Grant	£599,984
Sobell Chair of Neuroscience	£408,127
Total endowment funding	**£1,008,111**

Other awards

British Neuro-Oncology Society early career researcher pump-priming award	£5,000
Total other awards funding	**£5,000**

Total funding awarded	**£2,402,699**

Fundraising highlights

We are deeply grateful for the wide range of support we receive… from running and challenge events to special events, community fundraising, regular giving, appeals, legacy gifts, trusts and foundations and tribute and in-memory donations. Every contribution, from every supporter, plays a vital role in advancing brain research and we are truly thankful for this generosity. In the following pages, we are proud to highlight just a small selection of the many thousands of supporters who make such a meaningful difference.

Opera at Syon

▲ On the 11th and 12th June 2025, we held our fourth Opera at Syon evenings in the beautiful setting of the Great Conservatory at Syon Park.

Guests enjoyed superb performances of Mozart's 'The Marriage of Figaro' and Donizetti's 'Don Pasquale', on the 11th and 12th respectively, by the renowned Diva Opera company, together with a champagne reception and sumptuous picnic dinner.

Thanks to the kindness of members of the Opera at Syon Committee, we were able to offer superb auction items including beautiful jewellery designed by Nada Le Cavelier, a weekend at Churburg Castle in Italy, a week's use of a four-bedroom apartment in the Swiss resort of Klosters, and three magnums of the very finest Chateau Pichon Longueville, Comtesse de Lalande Vintage 2000.

We are extremely grateful to Professor Kevin Talbot and Dr Susana Ingram who spoke on the evenings to help emphasise the urgent need to fund neurological research.

We are so grateful for the ongoing support of the members of the Opera at Syon Committee who, together with their guests and auctioneer Adrian Biddell, helped to raise £136,141.

'It was a wonderful evening… everyone loved it. The performance was spectacular, champagne in the sun was magical and food and wine were delicious.'

Corporate partnerships

Acrisure

Acrisure chose Brain Research UK as its Charity of the Year in memory of their much-loved colleague, Ian, who tragically died from a brain aneurysm in April 2024.

◀ Ian was thoughtful, kind and empathetic with an infectious sense of humour that lit up every room. A passionate musician and talented guitarist, he devoted much of his free time to rehearsing and performing. He was also an enthusiastic golfer who treasured time on the course with friends. Intelligent, witty and generous, Ian had a natural ability to lift those around him.

Professionally, Ian was respected for his integrity, expertise and warmth. A highly regarded broker within the Acrisure family and the London Insurance Market, he was equally known for mentoring younger colleagues with patience, encouragement and good humour. He was deeply valued by clients and colleagues alike.

Throughout 2025, Acrisure honoured Ian's memory with an inspiring programme of fundraising activities including quiz nights, step challenges, bake sales and festive events.

Colleagues also took on some extraordinary challenges: four runners completed the 2025 TCS London Marathon, ten employees conquered the Three Peaks Challenge and a football tournament was held at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge. During the summer, there was even an abseil down the Lloyds of London building.

We are profoundly grateful for this extraordinary and remarkable support, which succeeded in raising £180,000.

The dedication and passion shown by everyone at Acrisure has been truly moving and the impact of this funding on neurological research will be significant. It was a privilege to work in partnership throughout the year and to witness so many people unite behind our mission, making a meaningful difference to the lives of those affected by neurological conditions.

Thank you for your commitment and for being such an exceptional partner.

London Marathon 2025

While working as an oncology consultant, in December 2023, Leonie suffered from partial seizures affecting her ability to smell. These lead to scans and diagnosis of an incurable brain tumour. Despite being used to delivering difficult news, Leonie said she felt *'initially numb as if the news… was not aimed at me.'* She underwent extensive treatment, including an awake craniotomy, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, describing the surgery as *'an incredibly scary experience.'* Recovery brought further challenges, including sepsis, fatigue and relearning basic skills. Despite this, Leonie remains determined and committed to supporting research. She said, *'I believe that research holds the key to better outcomes… I am making the most of every moment,'* a mindset that inspired her determination to complete the London Marathon while raising a staggering £35,455.

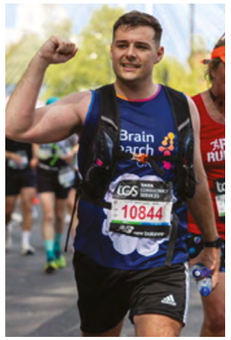
Charlotte took on the London Marathon to support vital research into brain injuries and to honour the memory of her best friend Chris, who passed away after suffering severe brain damage following a car accident. *'Thank you to everyone who donated to this amazing charity. I truly hope the money raised will help support anyone facing a similar situation. Sadly, Chris passed away, but I hope that in the future no one else has to go through this.'* Charlotte raised an amazing £6,469.

In 2008, Paul's mother survived a brain aneurysm, which he describes as making her 'one of the lucky ones,' though it left lasting effects on her confidence and health. His wife's mother tragically died from the same condition in 1994. As a result of his deeply personal experience, Paul decided to run the London Marathon to raise awareness and funds to support others affected by aneurysms. He raised an impressive £8,310.

In June 2021, shortly after her 25th birthday, Rachel was diagnosed with a benign brain tumour. A keen runner, she first noticed double vision during a run, which led to hospital scans and the diagnosis of a tumour pressing on her optic nerve. In August 2021, she underwent a 12-hour surgery followed by radiotherapy. Recovery has been challenging and has left her with permanent double vision, but support from loved ones has helped keep Rachel motivated and determined. Reflecting on her journey, Rachel said, *'Running the London Marathon feels like a full circle moment.'* She raised a stunning £5,131 and is looking forward to her next challenge, when she takes on the Great North Run.

At 24, Anna's best friend suffered a brain aneurysm caused by a grade 3 anaplastic astrocytoma. She was given a maximum of three years to live and, heartbreakingly, passed away the day before her wedding in 2016. Then, six years later in October 2022, another close friend suffered a brain aneurysm. He was placed on life support. With no sign of brain activity and lasting damage, his organs were donated and saved multiple lives. Committed to making a difference for others, Anna took on the challenge of the marathon and raised a marvellous £5,589.

In 2023, Jon was in a restaurant when he got up from the table… and remembers nothing for the next three weeks. During that time, he suffered a fall that fractured the back of his skull and caused significant brain damage. After four major surgeries, which included the removal of his left bone flap and two cranioplasties, he decided to run the marathon to raise funds for brain research and to support others facing similar challenges. Jon's resilience and determination helped him raise a wonderful £3,712.



Daf ran in memory of his uncle, who bravely fought a brain tumour for over three years. Sadly, he passed away in early May 2024. Daf took on the challenge to honour his uncle's strength and resilience, while helping to raise funds for research into brain tumours and improve outcomes for others facing similar diagnoses. He raised an incredible £11,488.

Having recently been diagnosed, aged 25, with fibromyalgia and having lived with tension headaches for many years, Ellie understands first-hand the profound impact neurological conditions can have on daily life. Her family has also been affected by serious neurological illness: one of her grandfathers died shortly after being diagnosed with a brain tumour, and the other suffered a stroke. *'By supporting Brain Research UK, I hope to contribute to the vital research that advances our understanding of these conditions and improves outcomes for those affected. Through continued investment in research, we can help bring hope and progress to the millions of people living with neurological conditions.'* Ellie raised a fabulous £2,684.

Other runs and challenges

During a medical research trial, an abnormal brain scan led to Amber's dad's diagnosis of Dural Arteriovenous Fistulas. He underwent surgery, which was initially successful, but complications followed when he lost feeling in his left arm and suffered a seizure due to swelling in the brain. After a challenging year of recovery, he was finally discharged from hospital and is now leading a normal life again. In a deeply meaningful moment, his recovery came just in time for him to walk Amber down the aisle. Inspired by her dad's remarkable recovery from a serious brain condition, she wanted to help raise funds for vital research and took on the challenge of the Paris Marathon 2025. Amber raised an excellent £2,360.

To celebrate her 30th birthday, Rachel ran the EMF Half Marathon alongside friends and family, to celebrate her birthday in a meaningful way. She dedicated the challenge to the memory of her godfather, Andy, who passed away from a brain tumour. The run became both a celebration of life and a tribute, bringing loved ones together to honour Andy whilst raising much needed funds to support research into brain tumours. Rachel, together with her friends and family, raised an incredible £5,575.

Eimear ran The Big Half marathon in memory of her father. Taking on the challenge was a heartfelt and personal way to honour his life and legacy and raise much needed funds for research. Eimear raised an impressive £2,540.

Inspired by her grandmother's resilience and the care she received at various stages throughout her life, Georgina took on the Manchester Marathon 2025. As a young woman, her granny, an avid runner, suffered a brain haemorrhage but made a full recovery, going on to live an active and fulfilling life. Decades later, in 2023 at the age of 84, she experienced a stroke, 37 years after her original haemorrhage. Thanks to the care and support she received, Georgina was able to spend more precious time with her granny. To help others and in admiration for her grandmother's strength as well as appreciation of the medical care that made those extra years and memories possible, she raised a wonderful £1,231.

Motivated by his wife and teenage girls' experience with menstrual migraines, often dealing with severe pain and disruption to their daily lives, Will took on the Great North Run 2025.

Wanting to make a difference, he took on the challenge to raise awareness and support brain research, turning a personal struggle into a positive effort to help others facing similar experiences. Will raised an admirable £625.

Orod ran the Lisbon Half Marathon 2025 and is now preparing to take on the Royal Parks Half Marathon. He was inspired by the loss of his father, Fazoul, who passed away from a stroke two years ago. Through running, Orod has found a renewed sense of purpose, using each challenge as a way to honour his father's memory while supporting research to help others affected by neurological conditions. Orod raised a fantastic £510.

Inspired by her sister Anita's battle with a brain tumour, Casey ran the Manchester 10K in 2025. Watching Anita go through diagnosis and treatment was an extremely difficult time for their family but, thanks to the skill and dedication of surgeons and medical experts, she is now recovering. Casey describes these professionals as 'superheroes' in her family's eyes, recognising the life-changing impact of their work. Motivated by pride in her sister's strength and resilience, Casey and her friend Kate took on the 10k as a way to give back and make a difference to future research. They raised a brilliant £1,612.

Community fundraising

▲ Sisters Amy and Lucy and their Dad, Adrian, chose to raise funds in tribute to the memory of Karen, Amy and Lucy's mum and Adrian's partner. In 2024, Karen had passed away suddenly as a result of a brain aneurysm. To mark the one-year anniversary of her death, they organised a powerful tribute ride through Bristol, bringing together 50 motorcyclists to honour her memory: 'Karen's Ride'. The event was both emotional and uplifting as friends, family, and the wider community came together to celebrate Karen's life and raise much needed funds to support others affected by brain conditions. Both daughters Amy and Lucy described the day as being exactly the kind of day their mum would have loved, saying *'she lived for her family and gathering everyone together.'* Karen's ride raised an amazing £2,500.

▶ In 2025, Andy decided to take on a demanding endurance challenge to support neurological research. His motivation was deeply personal, shaped by knowing several people affected by a range of conditions. Rather than focusing on a single story, he wanted to highlight the wider impact these conditions have on individuals and families. Andy cycled the length of Malaysia, North to South, raising awareness and funding for research to improve understanding, treatment and outcomes. The challenge took him 10 days, cycling between 100-130km each day, often in 30+ degree heat, before finishing with a mammoth 203km on the final day. Through this remarkable effort, Andy raised a staggering £7,665.

▶ Kira, aged 12, has been fundraising for us for a number of years inspired by her Mum, Helen, who had brain surgery. In December 2025, she took on another challenge and, this time, she rollerbladed 10km backwards around a tennis court over the course of the month. We are so proud of Kira and grateful for the wonderful £325 she raised this year, taking her fundraising total to almost £1,500.

▶ Whilst living with cerebellar dysfunction, a condition that affects balance and speech, Chris took on the challenge of cycling over 1,000 miles from Land's End to John O'Groats. Determined to succeed, he pushed himself with incredible resilience and perseverance to raise funds for research and support for others living with similar conditions. Chris completed the challenge in 14 days, raising an amazing £2,515 in the process.

▲ Aaron and his charity rugby team, the Forest of Dean Bog Trotters, organised and played five rugby matches fundraisers. The team is a passionate group of rugby players, united through their love for rugby.

With several team members and their families and friends having been affected by neurological conditions, including dementia, the team united to raise funds. Through teamwork and determination, they raised a wonderful £1,500.

Supporter charter

Brain Research UK is enormously grateful to all our supporters and donors for their generosity. Our promise to you:

Your support is greatly valued and recognised

- All your gifts are valued; without them vital research could not be funded.
- You will be thanked in a timely, meaningful and genuine manner.
- Your donations will be spent wisely to have the best impact for people affected by neurological conditions.
- We will keep you updated on how your gifts are put to work. We also report annually on where your gifts have been spent.

Your feedback will be welcome

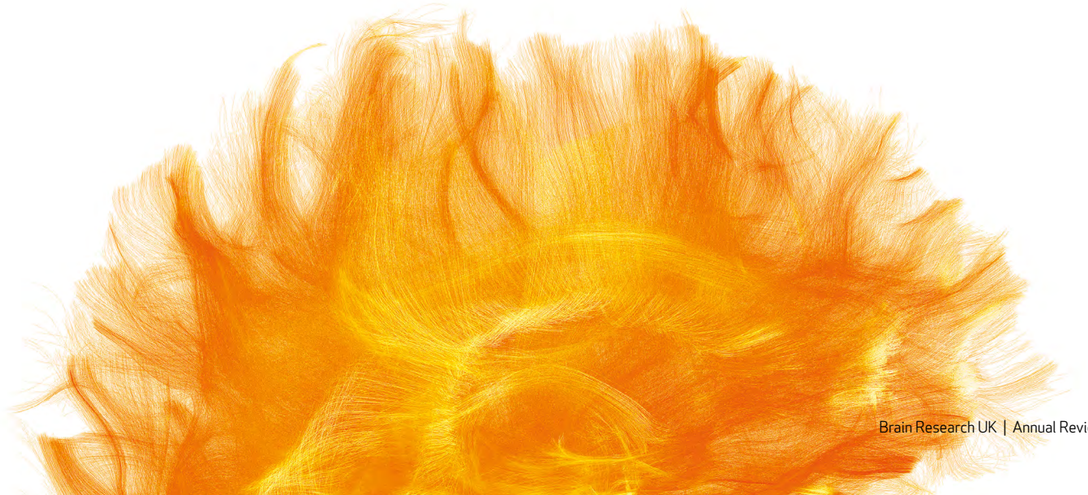
- All your feedback, good or bad, will be treated with respect.
- Any complaints will be treated seriously and will be acknowledged by a member of staff within three working days of receipt.
- Your personal data and privacy will be respected and handled with utmost care.
- Your contact preferences will be honoured.
- Your data will be held in a secure environment.
- Your data will never be sold or shared with other charities.
- We will never sell or share your personal information to third parties for marketing purposes.
- Your data will be held in accordance with GDPR and data protection regulation.
- We are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office, the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals.

We will always be honest and open with you

- We will treat you with honesty, professionalism and warmth.
- We are transparent about our work and publish clear, detailed accounts annually.
- We undertake regular governance reviews.
- We are held to account by our Board of Trustees.
- We fund the best research as recommended by our Scientific Advisory Panel.
- We follow strict Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) guidelines when assessing and reviewing all research applications.

We work to the highest fundraising standards

- We are a member of the Chartered Institute of Fundraising (CIoF) and follow its recommendations; the CIoF is the professional membership body for UK fundraising.
- We are a member of the Fundraising Regulator, the UK's independent regulator of charitable fundraising, and follow its Fundraising Promise and Code of Fundraising Practice.
- We comply with charity and fundraising law.



Thank you

A sincere and heartfelt thank you to each and every one of the thousands of people who have so kindly supported us.

Whether you donated, gave a gift, supported with a regular monthly gift, ran a marathon, took part in an event, volunteered your time or shared your story… for all that you have done so generously, thank you.

It is thanks to your valued support that we are able to fund vital research to help those with a neurological condition live better, longer.

With special thanks to the following for their much-valued support:

Professor Khuloud Al-Jamal
Dr Faisal Amin
Dr Anish Bahra
Alex Ball
Anthony Ball
Roger Bayliss
The Blackford Trust
Professor Elizabeth Bradbury
Dr Harry Bulstrode
Professor Anthony Chalmers
Soumya Chattopadhyay
Dr Franziska Denk
Leonie Eastlake
Janet Ellis
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Professor Liam Gray
Sarah Gray
Mr Adel Helmy
Dr Harpreet Hyare
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Professor Silvia Marino
Dr Barry McColl
The Opera at Syon Committee
The P F Charitable Trust
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Our performance

The Charity received income of £4,359,000 during the financial year to 31st March 2026 (2024/25: £3,347,000). Against the backdrop of economic and political turbulence, the fundraising environment has again remained challenging, but we are pleased to report increased income this year.

The Charity's income comes from a number of diverse sources and this has been vital in safeguarding the sustainability of our income. Our flagship fundraising event is the London Marathon, and along with other events, we have been able to raise income of £1,353,000 (2024/25: £1,370,000) during the year, representing a third of our overall fundraising income. This income stream has been supplemented by individual giving income of £544,000 (2024/25: £540,000), legacies £1,380,000 (2024/25: £869,000) and trusts, corporates and major donors £293,000 (2024/25 £131,000).

This year, we have benefitted once more from grant funding from the Medical Research Charities Support Fund for Early-Career Researchers. In the year to 31st March 2026 this was £416,000 (2024/25: nil) and this, along with legacy income, represents the main increase in fundraising in the year.

Our net income this year was £2,695,000 (after taking into account the expenditure on raising funds) compared to £1,771,000 last year. This increase has been driven by the Charity being the beneficiary of sustained London Marathon donations, significant corporate partnership income and several meaningful legacies during the year.

Our objectives for 2026/27

Research activities

- To launch our national calls and continue to award funding of at least £1 million for project grants and at least £600,000 for Post-doctoral Fellowships.
- To award two Miriam Marks Post-doctoral Fellowships to support research into brain degeneration.
- To publish our updated Impact Report.

Fundraising activities

- To build further on the success of our London Marathon activity to achieve income of over £1 million.
- To develop further major relationship fundraising activities.
- To enhance and extend our community fundraising events.

Our finances

Our accounts reflect a 12-month financial period from April 2025 to March 2026.

Our income	2026 £'000	2025 £'000
Individuals	544	540
Trusts, corporates and major donors	293	131
Income from events	1,353	1,370
Legacies	1,380	869
Grants	446	30
Total donations income	**4,016**	**2,940**
Investment income	343	407
Total donations and investment income	**4,359**	**3,347**

Our expenditure		
Raising funds	1,664	1,576
Charitable activities	2,752	2,035
Total expenditure	**4,416**	**3,611**

This summarised financial statement has been extracted from the full trustees' annual report and financial statement as approved by the trustees on 4th June 2026. The full financial statements, which our auditors Haysmcintyre have given an unqualified audit report, will be submitted to the Charity Commission and to the Registrar of Companies.

The auditors have confirmed that, in their opinion, this summarised statement is consistent with the full statement for the year ended 31st March 2026.

The full trustees' annual report and financial statement and auditors report may be obtained from Brain Research UK, Fifth Floor, Holborn Gate, 330 High Holborn, London WC1V 7QH or brainresearchuk.org.uk.

Together we can accelerate the progress of brain research.
Please support us by donating, volunteering or fundraising.

Brain Research UK

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