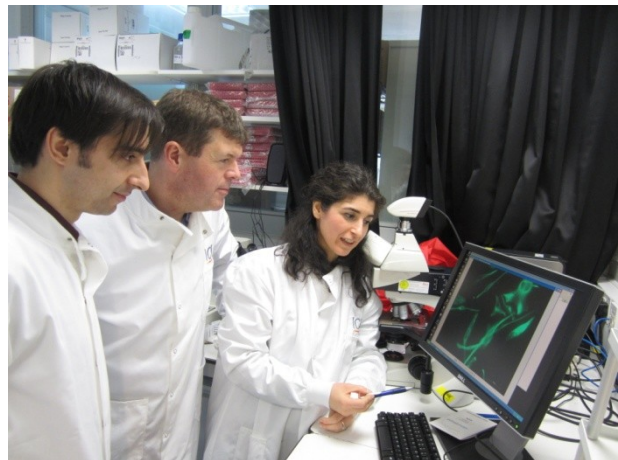


## Learning about Politics and Cancer Research: Dr Maria Vinci and Dr Lorenzo Melchor with Paul Burstow MP

*"I learned that if we want to be more "visible" and get a stronger image, we should engage more with policy makers" (Maria Vinci, The Institute of Cancer Research)*

For the first time in 2013, two scientists agreed to share their place in the Royal Society Pairing scheme and to shadow their Westminster partner together: Dr Maria Vinci and Dr Lorenzo Melchor, both post-doctoral researchers at The Institute of Cancer Research, London, were paired with their local MP Paul Burstow, MP for Sutton and Cheam. Maria's research focuses on understanding the diverse biology of a group of devastating childhood brain tumours, with the long term aim of translating this knowledge into better outcomes for young patients. She has also developed three-dimensional tumour models to improve predictability of therapeutic responses in cancer patients. Her colleague, Lorenzo, studies the cancer cells that cause an incurable disease located in the bone marrow, known as multiple myeloma. Lorenzo hopes that his research will lead to improved treatments for this disease.

For four days Maria and Lorenzo swapped their labs for Westminster Hall. During their shadowing time in the House of Commons they followed their MP to a meeting on Legislation on Martial Court as well as to a meeting to the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Other activities included a tour of the Palace of Westminster where they learned about the history of the British Parliament. They also attended various seminars on science in parliament and government, debates in the House of Commons and Prime Ministers Question (PMQ) time. Maria commented: "I particularly enjoyed Professor Sir Mark Walport's report on the Science Annual Review and finding out how he is progressing with his job of advising the Government about science. It seems to me that communicating science in Parliament is very different from what a scientist working in a laboratory might imagine! Scientists and politicians use different languages and working to bridge that gap is fundamental." Lorenzo described his experience in Westminster as follows: "I now understand how science policy is developed in parliament and



**From left to right: Dr Lorenzo Melchor, Paul Burstow and Dr Maria Vinci looking at immunofluorescent images of paediatric primary brain tumour cells stained for a stem cell marker (nestin), during a lab tour at the ICR.**

government due to an outstanding seminar series, attending scientific committees and several House of Lords and Commons sessions”.

At the reciprocal visit to The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR), Maria and Lorenzo took Paul on a tour around the childhood cancer and myeloma labs, where he learned about their research. They also arranged several meetings with other members of staff, including Deputy Chief Executive of the ICR, Professor Paul Workman. They raised different scientific issues affecting the ICR and Maria and Lorenzo were really pleased when, as a result, Paul Burstow asked the Prime Minister a question on how he would support the ICR’s plans to expand.

Lorenzo said about their time in the scheme: “Both Mara and I feel fortunate to have had this experience because it has allowed us to learn more about policy-making and how scientists could influence the process. Additionally, the experience has provided us with the chance to see our research in a different light. Reflecting on our experiences has allowed us to consider new angles for our research projects and we are considering collaborating on new research together.”