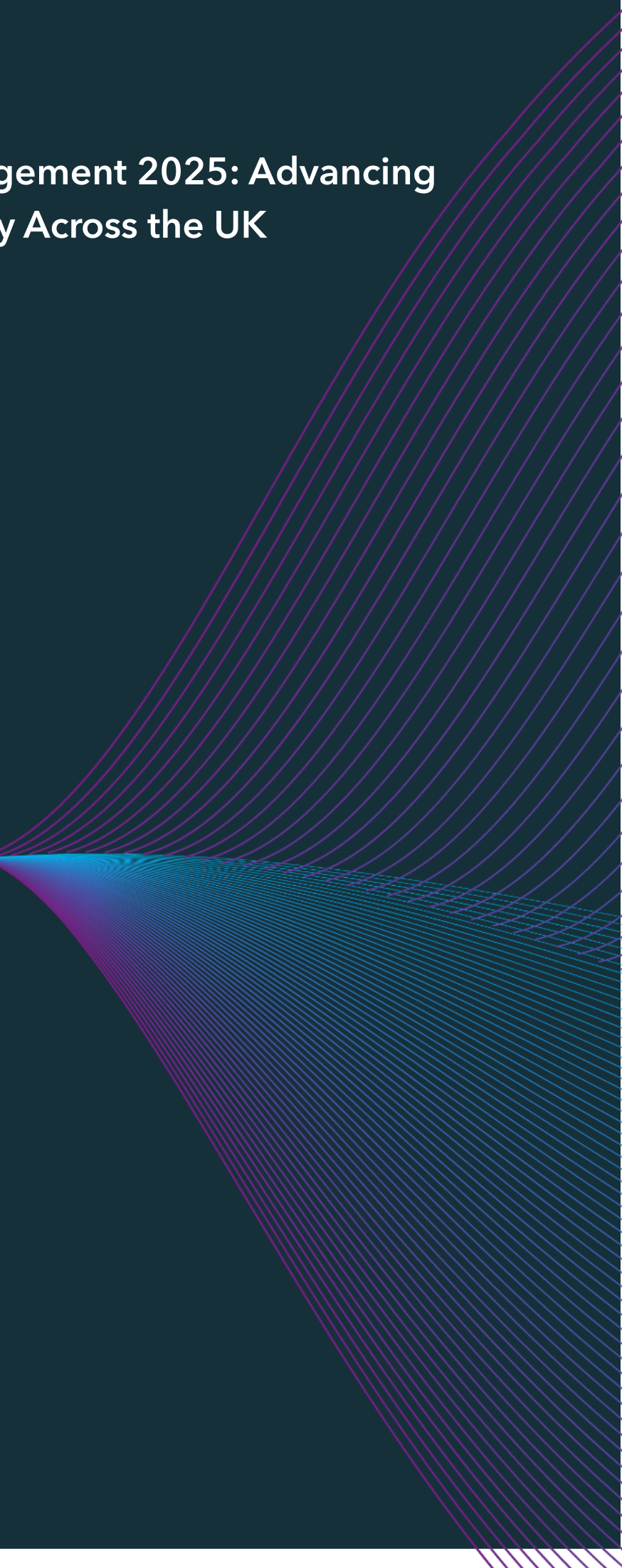


# ECMC Industry Engagement 2025: Advancing Early-Phase Oncology Across the UK

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## Executive Summary

In 2025, the ECMC Network strengthened its role as a key driver of the UK's attractiveness for early phase oncology research. Against a backdrop of [renewed momentum in national commercial trial activity](#), the Programme Office focused on earlier and more strategic engagement with industry partners, supporting companies at the pipeline planning stage and providing a coordinated national route into early phase capability across adult, paediatric and haematology communities.

This year saw strong levels of activity across the Network, with over 50 early interactions and more than 30 opportunities entering the ECMC engagement platform from a diverse mix of pharmaceutical companies, CROs, biotech's and emerging innovators. These engagements enabled the delivery of strategic webinars and portfolio overview sessions, fostering scientific and clinical trial design dialogue and helping companies navigate feasibility and trial delivery more effectively. ECMC's visibility was further amplified through participation at six national and international conferences, including highly productive meetings at ESMO and ASCO, where interest in UK early-phase oncology was particularly strong.

A major highlight of 2025 was the Network's enhanced impact in national conversations on research delivery particularly through its contributions to the [UKCRD Programme](#). In addition, the Programme Office convened a dedicated MHRA roundtable, bringing together regulators, investigators, patients and other key stakeholders to address challenges and co-develop solutions aimed at creating a more efficient and transparent regulatory environment, while leveraging the expertise of the ECMC Network. MHRA's positive response and early alignment work with NICE signalled growing confidence in the UK's regulatory environment and reinforced the UK's attractiveness for innovative oncology trials.

The ECMC PO invested in education, capability building and patient facing resources. This included delivering and hosting a radiopharmaceutical educational webinar which enabled our Junior Investigator Network Group (JING) and other staff groups from across the network to strengthen their knowledge in the science and delivery of these trials and share best practice. We also advanced the creation of a patient information tool, co funded by industry partners, to help patients better understand early phase trials.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Network will continue to deepen early strategic engagement, build on strengthened regulatory partnerships, broaden international visibility, and maintain a unified UK offer through close collaboration with [NIHR](#) and other partners. With growing interest from global companies and an increasingly



supportive national environment, ECMC is well positioned to help secure, design and deliver the next generation of early phase oncology trials that benefit UK patients, sponsors and the wider UK research system.



## Introduction

In 2025, the ECMC Network continued to play a central role in strengthening the UK's position as a leading destination for early-phase oncology research. As global competition for innovative trial placement increases, industry engagement has become increasingly focused on the need for strategic, coordinated partnerships that help companies navigate feasibility, identify specialist expertise, and deliver studies efficiently. With the ECMC Network's unique national infrastructure and a centralised Programme Office, we are able to coordinate these efforts and help position the UK at its strongest for early-phase oncology trials.

This year, the UK's wider clinical research environment also showed encouraging signs of recovery, with renewed momentum in commercial trial activity. Building on this positive backdrop, the ECMC Programme Office centred its industry engagement strategy on earlier and more strategic conversations - supporting companies at the point where pipeline planning begins, not only once formal site selection is underway. This shift has enabled us to showcase the UK's strengths sooner, align opportunities with the unique capabilities of our Network (which includes a dedicated haematology group, trial operational delivery forum, translational research forum, and clinical trial advisory group for paediatric opportunities etc.), and highlight how ECMC centres are integrated within the broader early-phase research ecosystem.

As part of a coordinated national infrastructure, the ECMC Network offers industry a clear and confident route into UK early-phase oncology, working in partnership with NIHR facilities, UKCRFs, the VIP and contributing directly to the UKCRD programme. Our clinical and operational leadership, experienced trial centres and collaborative approach remain key to ensuring that the UK is seen as not just capable, but competitive, in delivering complex and innovative oncology studies.

## Analysis and insights

### A strengthening environment for early-phase oncology in the UK

Industry sentiment toward the UK continued to improve throughout 2025. National indicators show [increasing commercial trial activity](#), particularly in early-phase development, reinforcing the UK's relevance in global oncology R&D. The level and consistency of engagement we saw this year reflect this renewed interest, with over 30 opportunities entering the Network across a broad mix of company types and therapeutic areas, underpinned by 45 active Master NDAs that allow us to engage meaningfully with industry and explore early-pipeline assets with confidence. Within this context, ECMC plays a critical role in offering companies early scientific input, access to experienced investigators, and a coordinated approach to feasibility.



### Diverse and expanding industry relationships

Companies are now approaching ECMC much earlier, often before feasibility formally begins, allowing the Network to help shape discussions, identify suitable centres and support trial readiness at a stage that can meaningfully influence delivery. This shift was demonstrated by over 50 early interactions across the year, supported by two pre-clinical portfolio overview sessions in which companies presented their pipelines directly to ECMC clinicians for deeper scientific exchange. Together, these touchpoints helped generate more aligned opportunities across adult, paediatric and haematology communities and strengthened understanding of where ECMC capabilities can best support trial requirements

In addition to these early engagements, our presence at six national and international conferences further strengthened this pipeline of opportunities. We held particularly productive meetings with industry at ESMO and ASCO, where interest in UK early-phase oncology was especially strong leading to several companies initiating follow-up discussions with the Network. The UK conferences we attended also played an important role, providing valuable touchpoints with both new and existing partners and reinforcing the UK's broader research offer across different stakeholder groups.

### A supportive national infrastructure

Throughout 2025, ECMC worked closely with the NIHR and other national partners to provide industry with an integrated and credible route into UK early-phase oncology. The breadth of opportunities channelled through the Network this year highlights the importance of this wider infrastructure. This alignment continues to strengthen the overall UK offer and contributes to more predictable and coordinated engagement, particularly for companies exploring complex oncology modalities.

### Strengthening the regulatory environment – MHRA engagement

A noteworthy development this year was our increased engagement with the MHRA. The ECMC Programme Office convened dedicated roundtable with MHRA colleagues, bringing together insights from patients and ECMC clinicians from across the Network. We shared feedback informed by the experiences of multiple centres and a wide range of companies, helping MHRA understand challenges and opportunities to support more efficient early-phase oncology delivery. The MHRA's willingness to engage with this evidence and integrate learning reflects a positive shift toward a more collaborative, agile and industry-aware regulatory environment.



Early signals of greater alignment between MHRA and NICE, along with a growing emphasis on proportionate, innovation-friendly regulation, were well received by companies we engaged with. These developments contributed to the broader positive sentiment about the UK as a location for early-phase studies and represent a constructive step toward a more predictable research landscape.

### Enhancing education, capability-building and patient-facing resources

Alongside direct engagement with companies, 2025 also saw significant progress in strengthening educational and capability-building activities across the Network. Working with one of our sites and an industry partner, we supported the delivery of a dedicated radiopharmaceutical educational webinar, enabling clinicians, operational staff, and research nurses across the Network to deepen their understanding of an increasingly important shift in early-phase oncology. This was complemented by several additional educational sessions throughout the year, including with our junior investigator network group (JING) helping to broaden scientific awareness and support operational readiness for novel therapies.

In parallel, we continued developing and expanding our patient information tool, designed to help patients better understand early-phase oncology trials and access more tailored information on rarer cancer types. This initiative has been made possible through support from several industry partners, reflecting their commitment to enhancing patient understanding and improving the transparency of early-phase research. Their collaboration demonstrates the value of industry working with the ECMC Network in multiple ways beyond individual studies, contributing to broader improvements in research readiness and patient engagement.

### 2025 overview and outlook for 2026

The achievements and engagement trends of 2025 reflect both the growing maturity of ECMC's industry-facing work and the wider improvements taking place across the UK research landscape. As companies increasingly seek early scientific dialogue and coordinated national pathways, the ECMC Network is well positioned to support and attract high-value early-phase oncology opportunities.

In 2026, we will continue to build on this progress by:

- **Deepening early strategic engagement**, especially for first-in-human, first-in-child and complex oncology assets
- **Building on our strengthened relationship with MHRA**, supporting continued dialogue and improvements that benefit early-phase delivery



- **Expanding international presence**, targeting markets and conferences aligned to emerging cancer modalities
- **Increasing the consistency of opportunities across adult, paediatric and haematology ECMCs**
- **Enhancing collaboration with NIHR, UKCRFs and UKCRD**, ensuring a unified UK offer for industry

With a strengthening national environment, a positively evolving regulatory system, and increasing international interest, the ECMC Network is well positioned to help secure, design, and deliver the next generation of innovative early phase oncology trials for the benefit of patients and industry partners.