



Young Photonics Congress 2026: inspiring future scientists at ICFO

The Young Photonics Congress continues to inspire the next generation of scientists and innovators, highlighting the transformative impact of photonics in research, technology and society.

March 23, 2026

On March 13, 2026, ICFO hosted the eleventh edition of the Young Photonics Congress, welcoming high school students to experience a scientific congress in which they take an active and leading role.

The congress, led by Dr. **Lucia Castillo Garcia** from ICFO's Outreach team, offered participants the opportunity to present their work in a professional research environment and to engage directly with ICFO researchers and fellow students. Following the institutional opening by the Head of Outreach, Dr. **Lydia Sanmarti-Vila**, ICFO researchers Dr. **Gustavo Castro**, **Martina Berglund Sole** and **Nuria Rego Falagan** shared insights into their research and career paths, providing students with a first-hand perspective on scientific work.

For the first time, the congress featured an interactive activity on photonics facilitated by

ICONS, the ICFO Organization and Network of Students, offering participants an additional opportunity to engage with scientific concepts through a hands-on approach. Attendees also heard from former participants **Carla Caro Vilanova**, **Jordi Pinyol** and **Nicolas Atanes Santos**, who reflected on their experiences and their journeys towards scientific careers.

The central highlight of the event was the poster session, where twenty-five student projects were presented at ICFO's NEST Hall. This session fostered exchange of ideas and peer learning, creating an inclusive environment that promotes curiosity and scientific interest. The projects addressed a broad range of topics aligned with ICFO research, including light and its applications, advanced materials, nanotechnology, quantum science and technologies, and the use of light in fields such as health, communications, energy and the environment.

This year, the Young Photonics Congress introduced two distinctions recognising outstanding student contributions. The YPC 2026 Best Poster Award was granted to **Lucia Escobar Arco** from Institut Ramon Berenguer IV for her project *Information is power: Classic Cryptography and the Revolution of Quantum Technology through the One Time Pad and BB84 Protocols*. The award acknowledges scientific excellence, creativity and communication skills, and includes a two-week research stay within an ICFO group, offering a unique opportunity to experience research in a leading scientific environment. In addition, the YPC 2026 People's Choice Award, based on votes from the audience, was presented to **Nicolas Elias Alonso** from La Ginesta School for his project *Desxifrant l'indexifrible: criptografia i mecanica quantica*. Both awards were presented by ICFO's Vice Director of Innovation, Sponsored Research and Public Engagement, Dr. **Silvia Carrasco**. ICFO warmly congratulates the awardees and all participants, who once again filled the congress with talent, curiosity and enthusiasm for photonics.

By recreating the experience of a scientific conference and placing students at its core, the Young Photonics Congress continues to inspire the next generation of scientists and innovators, highlighting the transformative impact of photonics in research, technology and society.



Dr. Silvia Carrasco, Dr. Lucia Castillo Garcia and Lucia Escobar Arco.



Dr. Silvia Carrasco, Dr. Lucia Castillo Garcia and Nicolas Elias Alonso

