**IMPERIAL**
Early Career
Researcher Institute

Quality Assurance Framework
Version 2.0
ECRI

# Quality Assurance Framework

## Introduction

1. An **Early Career Researcher (ECR)** at Imperial is defined as anyone whose daily activity is primarily research and who is not fully established as a research group leader.  This includes research degree students (PhD, MPhil, MD[Res], EngD) and research staff such as research assistants, research associates, most research fellows and may also include proleptic and probationary lecturers (see **Appendix 1**).

2. The **Early Career Researcher Institute (ECRI)** primarily supports ECRs, but there are other stakeholders who are part of the research ecosystem at Imperial who can access its provision.  These include research degree supervisors, principal investigators (PIs), line managers of research staff, research technology professionals, MRes students and taught master's students wishing to explore research and/or move into research (see **Appendix 1**)

3. With the exception of the online plagiarism awareness course (point 5 below) ECRI does not typically offer learning and development opportunities wholly to master's students, unless the content relates to or supports the transition into research.  However, master's students are free to explore the ECRI learning and development offer and enrol on provision, as appropriate.

4. The university requires all PhD, MD[Res] and EngD students to achieve a minimum of **four ECRI credits** (two by the Early-Stage Assessment (ESA) and two by the Late-Stage Review (LSR)).   In addition, the online plagiarism awareness course must be completed by the ESA.  Students who are direct-entry MPhil, or those being awarded with an MPhil degree having first registered for a PhD, must complete a minimum of two ECRI credits and the Plagiarism Awareness Course before Examination Entry. ECRI credits are gained through completion of ECRI courses which generally range from one or two credits per course.  Additionally, students must complete the ECRI online Plagiarism Awareness course by the Early-Stage Review (ESA).  This is called the **Professional Skills Attendance Requirement**.

5. The university also requires all master's students to complete the ECRI online plagiarism awareness course at a time determined by master's programme leaders.

6. Imperial is committed to ensuring that all research staff can develop and grow both personally and professionally.  With that in mind, all postdocs and fellows have **10 days per year of development time written into their contracts**.  This is part of Imperial's long-standing commitment to the [Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers](#).

## Objectives for the quality assurance framework

7. ECRI's quality assurance framework and procedures are a vital component in maintaining the integrity and overall quality of its provision.  The objectives of the quality assurance framework are to ensure that:

a. ECRI delivers provision which aligns with its **strategic objectives.**

b. ECRI **stakeholder needs** are met.

c. ECRI staff and non-staff **resource is effectively deployed**.

d. A culture of **continuous improvement** is fostered through regular review and monitoring.

e. ECRI is **accountable and transparent**, providing evidence of and commitment to high-quality provision.

## Governance

8. The ECRI **Innovation, Identification and Monitoring Group (IIM)** has overall responsibility for the quality assurance of ECRI's <u>regular</u> provision.  IIM receives proposals to enhance provision, it commissions work, and it monitors and evaluates provision.  It is the key interface between ECRI and its main stakeholders, ensuring that ECRI is meeting the needs of the Imperial community.   Further information, including meeting dates for the IIM are published on the ECRI website or are available by contacting [ecri@ic.ac.uk](mailto:ecri@ic.ac.uk).

9. The ECRI **Stakeholder Group** and the **Specialist/Technical Advisory Groups** report to the IIM.  The Stakeholder Group enables direct opportunity for Imperial departments[1] and ECRs to provide feedback on any aspect of ECRI provision and to recommend new regular provision.  The Specialist/Technical Advisory Groups bring together Imperial experts working within specialist fields/areas, to help scope and shape the provision provided by ECRI.  The Specialist/Technical Advisory Groups can also recommend new regular provision.

## Terminology

10.  The following terminology should be used when describing provision delivered by ECRI.  **Appendix 2** provides examples of each.

a) **Course**:  A structured and interactive learning and development activity, with defined learning outcomes which can be repeated on multiple occasions.  Courses range in duration from a few hours to a full day, or they can extend across multiple days.

b) **Programme**: A group of separate courses focusing on a similar topic/theme, or courses grouped together with a long-term overarching aim/learning objective for a specific group of stakeholders. Programmes will usually be managed by a Programme Leader and/or Co Programme Leaders. Some programmes will also have one or more appointed ECR Programme Partners.

c) **Recognised course/programme**:  Where the material/content is not "owned" and/or delivered by ECRI but is part of ECRI's regular provision.

d) **Tailored support**:  Activities which support individuals or small groups to learn through effective questioning and facilitated discussions.

e) **Event**:  A planned and organised activity, primarily information giving, which may include participant interaction.

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[1] Including academic and central departments, institutes, centres and schools

f) **Resource (online or physical)**: Information giving material.

g) **Provision**: To be used when collectively describing all ECRI activities.

h) **Internal consultancy**: Where ECRI carries out work commissioned and funded internally within the university (e.g. a special request from a department or a cohort delivery of a course).

i) **External consultancy**: Where ECRI carries out work commissioned and funded by an external organisation.

11. The following terminology should be used when describing individuals with quality assurance roles and responsibilities in ECRI:

j) **External tutor/facilitator**: An individual who is engaged by ECRI to design, develop and/or deliver provision on behalf of ECRI.

k) **Course tutor/facilitator**: An individual (external or internal) who delivers a course or tailored support for ECRI.

l) **Programme Leader /Programme Co- Leader**: A member of ECRI staff with responsibility for overseeing the quality and management of courses within an assigned programme.

m) **ECRI Programme Partners (EPPs)**: Student and postdocs/fellows appointed to work with the relevant Programme Leader / Programme Co- Leaders to co-design, co-evaluate and co-deliver (where appropriate) a programme.

n) **Peer Reviewers**: individuals who support the development of a new course or programme by providing constructive and supportive feedback on the design and content of new provision. Peer reviewers can be EPPs, and members of the ECRI Learning and Development Team.

12. A **participant** is an individual who attends ECRI provision.

## Modes of delivery

13. ECRI uses the following categories to describe the delivery mode of its provision

a) Live (in person, South Kensington (or other campus)

b) Live (online, MS Teams)

c) Live (online, Zoom)

d) Self-study (Blackboard)

e) Self-study (web-based course)

# Approval of new regular provision

14. This section covers the process for the approval of <u>new regular</u> ECRI provision. It does <u>not</u> include internal or external consultancy which is covered by the *Procedures for the Management of Internal and External Consultancy)*.

The process for the approval of new regular ECR provision follows these steps:

| Proposal | ➡ | Associate Directors | ➡ | IIM Commissoning | ➡ | Develop | ➡ | Pilot and Review | ➡ | IIM Ratification |

**Stage one: Identification and Innovation**

15. Any member of the Imperial community can propose an idea for new regular ECRI provision. This would usually happen through the ECRI Stakeholder Group and the Specialist/Technical Advisory Groups. However, proposers who are not members of these groups can also submit a proposal for new regular provision using this procedure.

16. To initiate an idea/proposal, the proposer should complete part A of the *proposal form* (**Appendix 3**) which will be automatically submitted to the Associate Director (ECR Development). Where a proposer has submitted an idea which is already an existing component of ECRI's provision, the Associate Director (ECR Development) will reply to the proposer, thanking them for their suggestion and directing them to ECRI's existing provision.

17. The Associate Director (ECR Development) will review the proposal and add their comments to the form, including whether there are any concerns.

18. If the proposer is not the tutor/facilitator intending to develop and deliver the course/programme/event, the Associate Director (ECR Development) will identify a member of ECRI staff, with knowledge/expertise in the topic area, who can oversee the development of the provision. For courses and programmes, this would normally be the relevant Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leader and for events, this would usually be the Manager of ECRI Administration.

19. The Associate Director (ECR Development) may also recommend other experts within Imperial and externally who could usefully contribute towards the development of the new provision.

20. The *proposal form* then passes to the Associate Director (Strategy & Operations) for a resource and operational check before it is passed to the Secretary of the IIM.

21. The IIM will consider the proposal and take a view on whether to commission the provision.

22. Where a new course or programme is being proposed, the IIM will also confirm the Peer Reviewers. For each new course/programme being developed, in addition to the Head of Pedagogy, there should be at least one EPP and at least one member of the ECRI Learning and Development Team appointed as Peer Reviewers.

23. The cycle of Peer Reviewers will be actively maintained and reviewed by the IIM to ensure fair distribution of workload across the team.

24. For each proposal, the IIM can decide to:

    a. Approve

b. Approve with minor amendments

c. Approve with major amendments (re-submission to IIM required)

d. Not approve.

25. Where new regular provision is dependent upon funding being secured (either external or internal), the IIM may take a view on the timing of its development.

## Stage two: Develop

26. Once approved by IIM, work on the development of the new provision can begin.

27. If an external tutor/facilitator is to be engaged, ECRI Admin (ecri@imperial.ac.uk) will raise a contract.

28. Throughout the development of a course or programme, Peer Reviewers may be called upon to serve as "critical friends," providing constructive and supportive guidance, as needed by the developer.

## Stage three: Pilot and Review

29. Once the new provision is ready to be piloted, the first iteration can be scheduled.

30. For new courses/programmes, the Peer Reviewers may attend part or all of the pilot and provide their feedback on the design and content by completing Part A of the *Peer Reviewers' Feedback Form*. After the pilot has concluded, the course tutor/facilitator together with the Programme Leader/Programme Co-Leaders (where relevant) will consider the Peer Reviewers' feedback, together with participant course/programme evaluation, and respond by completing Part B of the *Peer Reviewer's Feedback Form*.

31. For all other new ECRI provision, the nature of the pilot and its evaluation process should be discussed and agreed with the Associate Directors, as appropriate.

## Stage four: Ratification

**Stage four: ratification**

32. The IIM will consider the outcome of pilots, including the *peer reviewers feedback form and response*, and participant evaluation data. The IIM will provide any final reflections. The approval process concludes.

# Exemption from the Professional Skills Attendance Requirement

33. This section covers the procedure which can be used by individual research degree students or departments seeking partial exemption from the university's *Professional Skills Attendance Requirement*.

**Individual exemption**

34. Where a student completes an external course/programme as part of their research degree (either at Imperial or externally), which aligns with ECRI's provision, they can use this procedure to apply for a partial exemption of up to two ECRI credits.

35. Before initiating the process, students should discuss their intention to seek partial exemption with their supervisor.  If their supervisor is supportive, then a request can be made to ECRI by completion of the *individual exemption form*.

36. Once received, the form will be submitted to the Head of Pedagogy, who will make a decision.

37. If approved, the Head of Pedagogy will inform ECRI Admin who will update the student's records accordingly.

38. The Head of Pedagogy will submit an annual report to the IIM of all individual exemptions approved.

**Cohort exemption**

39. Imperial's departments, centres, schools, institutes and the CDTs/DTPs, make available local courses and/or programmes to their research degree students.  Where these align with ECRI's provision, departments can apply to ECRI for cohorts of students to receive partial exemption for up to two ECRI credits.

40. To initiate this process, departments should complete the *cohort exemption form*.

41. Once received, the form will be submitted to the Head of Pedagogy, who will make a decision.

42. If approved, the Head of Pedagogy will inform ECRI Admin who will update the students' records accordingly.  IMPORTANT:  To enable ECRI Admin to update student records and apply the partial exemption to a cohort on an annual basis, departments must ensure that they provide ECRI Admin with the full name, CID and Imperial email address for each student who should receive partial exemption from the Professional Skills Requirement.

43. The Head of Pedagogy will submit an annual report to the IIM of all cohort exemptions approved.

# Recognition of courses/programmes "owned" by others

44. This section of the procedure is used by ECRI to enhance its regular provision by "recognising" new courses and/or programmes "owned" by other departments, centres, institutions, etc. within the university, and by external organisations or trainers.

45. To initiate this process the Programme Leader / Programme Co- Leaders will review the course materials and work with the content owner to complete the *course/programme recognition application form* which should be submitted to the Head of Pedagogy upon completion.

46. The Head of Pedagogy will review the proposal and add their comments to the form, including whether there are any concerns.  The form is then submitted to the Secretary of the IIM.

47. The IIM will consider the proposal for recognition and will decide to:

    a.  Approve

      b.   Not approve.

48. If approved, the Head of Pedagogy will attend all or part of the first iteration of the course/programme and provide feedback to the course tutor/facilitator and to the IIM to conclude the recognition process.  It may not be necessary for the Head of Pedagogy to attend the first iteration of the course/programme if the Programme Leader/ Programme Co-Leader has attended prior and provided their feedback.

# Evaluation and Monitoring

49. All regular ECRI provision is monitored and evaluated.  The nature of the evaluation depends upon the provision.  For tailored, events and other support, the type of evaluation is to be agreed by the Head of Pedagogy, in consultation with ECRI Programme Leaders / Programme Co-Leaders and ECRI Admin, as appropriate.  .

### Regular participant course/programme evaluation

50. All course tutor/facilitators (external and internal) are strongly encouraged to review participant evaluation data regularly throughout the year.  This could be after each iteration of the course/programme or at other appropriate point(s).  This approach is designed to avoid build-up of work during peak times, especially in the summer, which is typically operationally heavy, and to enable swift action to address issues highlighted by participants.

### Course tutor/facilitator annual review – "light touch"

51. In addition to regular review of participant course evaluation (point 50), course tutor/facilitators should carry out a light-touch annual review of their courses.  The purpose of the annual review is to encourage and support course tutor/facilitators to continuously reflect and enhance their courses, as appropriate.  *The Annual Course Review template* is used to support this.

52. The timing of the annual course review is determined by the course tutor/facilitator.  Once the review is completed, the course tutor/facilitator will submit a copy to the Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leaders and together they will have an informal discussion about the course(s), as needed.  Where the Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leader is also the course tutor/facilitator, they should submit a copy of the review template to the Head of Pedagogy and together have an informal discussion, as needed.

53. If the course tutor/facilitator, Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leaders or the Head of Pedagogy have any concerns about a course, then they can seek advice and support from the ECRI ECR Development Group and/or the IIM.

54. Where ECRI has "recognised" (points 44-49) internal or external courses, there is an expectation that the course tutor/facilitator (including external trainers, where appropriate) will engage in the annual course review process.

55. As a result of annual course review, any changes to the title, wording of learning outcomes, objectives, website descriptions etc. should all be submitted by the Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leaders to ECRI Admin who will ensure that the website and Inkpath are updated accordingly.

**Annual course/programme/tailored support evaluation overview by IIM**

56. Each year, normally in January or February, but prior to Planning Round, the IIM will take a "snap-shot" review of all quantitative course evaluation and participant attendance data for the previous year.

57. The IIM will review the data and, in consultation with course tutor/facilitators and Programme Leaders/Programme Co-Leaders, confirm which courses should continue to remain part of ECRI provision, consider which, if any, should be paused or discontinued and whether the number of iterations of a course needs to be adjusted.

58. There are a number of strategic reasons why a course/programme/tailored support/events might be paused or discontinued, or the number of iterations adjusted, and a holistic approach will be taken.  Reasons might include, but are not limited to:

    a.  Lack of demand, an alternative might be to offer 1-2-1 support in this topic

    b.  The topic no longer aligns with ECRI's strategic objectives

    c.  Changes to drivers in the sector

    d.  Duplication of course content either within ECRI or elsewhere within the university

    e.  Course tutor/facilitator workload/capacity

    f.  Poor feedback from participants in relation to the course material/content.

59. Where courses/programmes/tailored support/events have been paused and IIM would like to re-instate these, the approval process should be followed (see section on approval of new regular provision).

**Programme Review – "deep dive"**

60. At least once every three years, each Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leaders will undertake a "deep dive" programme review in partnership with Peer Reviewers.

61. The schedule and timing of programme review will be determined by the IIM in consultation with ECRI staff, noting that any changes to programme resource requirements will need to be considered at the following Planning Round.  The IIM will also appoint the Peer Reviewers.

62. The purpose of Programme review is to take a holistic view across all provision - within the programme, drawing on the outcomes of recent annual course/programmes/tailored support/reviews, strategic changes, sector alignment and resource deployment.  The *Programme Review form* is available to support this process.

63. Once the Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leaders have completed the Programme Review form, which should be completed in consultation with all tutors/facilitators who contribute towards the programme, it is submitted to the Peer Reviewers (which includes the Head of Pedagogy) who will consider the report and add their feedback/comments to the form.

64. The completed form is then submitted to the IIM for consideration where the Programme Leader/Programme Co- Leaders and the Peer Reviewers will present the outcome of the review and their recommendations. The IIM can also make recommendations in response to the review.

65. ECRI admin should be consulted with respect to any major organisational changes to programmes so that these can be operationally implemented in good time.

**Evaluation of other ECRI regular provision**

66. For ECRI events, regular review would normally be through participant evaluation.  ECRI Admin will prepare an annual report of events for the IIM.

67. ECRI resources are typically reviewed and updated when the need arises.

# Peer observation of facilitated learning and development opportunities

68. All members of ECRI staff who deliver courses and programmes should participate in a review of their teaching practice/facilitated learning delivery at least once every two years.  The process is developmental and constructive in nature and is designed to highlight best practice across the ECRI Learning and Development Team.

69. The cycle of review is maintained by the ECR Development Group.

70. The *peer observation review form* is available to support this process and is only shared between the member of ECRI staff and the individual reviewer.

| Date approved original document: | 20.03.25 - Innovation, Identification and Monitoring Group (IIM) |
|---|---|
| Version | 2.0:  Amendments approved to take immediate effect by the IIM 07.07.25 <br> - updated with amendments to title of ECRI Programme Partner and title of Programme Co-Leader <br> - updated with amendments to the proposal process whereby ECRI already has provision in place. <br> - updates to the recognition process <br> - updates to course tutor/facilitator <br> - new section on modes of delivery added |
| Next review date: | July 2026 |
| Owner: | ECRI Innovation, Identification and Monitoring Group (IIM) |

**Appendix 1**

| Part A: Primary participants of ECRI Learning and Development Opportunities | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Students (including clinicians) | Research Degree | PhD, EngD, MPhil and MD[Res] |
| Research Staff (including clinicians) | Postdocs | Research Assistants |
| | | Research Associates |
| | Fellows, including proleptic | Research Fellow |
| | | Advanced Research Fellow |
| | | Senior Research Fellow |
| | | Principal Research Fellow |
| Academic staff (including clinicians) | Lecturers | Probationary Lecturers |
| Other primary participants of ECRI learning and development opportunities include staff within the academic, research and teaching job families who supervise research degree students and/or who line manage research staff. | | |
| **Part B:  Secondary participants of ECRI Learning and Development Opportunities** | | |
| Students | Master's | MRes, MSc, MBA, MPH, MEd, PG Cert, PG Dip |
| Staff | Technical | Research technicians and research software engineers, Professional Research Investment Strategy Manager |
| | Teaching | Assistant Teaching Fellow, Teaching Fellow, Senior Teaching Fellow, Principal Teaching Fellow and Principal Lecturer/Professor in Teaching |

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## Appendix 2: Examples of each type of ECRI Provision

| Type of provision | Examples | Approval Process | Evaluation Process |
|---|---|---|---|
| Course | Presentation skills<br>Preparing successful fellowship applications<br>Multi-part courses<br>Global Fellows<br>Thesis Writing Retreats<br>RCDS Summer School<br>Online self-paced and Coursera courses | Approval of New Regular Provision | Course evaluation |
| Programme | Research Impact programme<br>Activate mentoring programme<br>Fellows Development programme | Approval of New Regular Provision | Programme Review |
| Tailored support | Coaching<br>1-2-1s<br>Mock interviews<br>Writing sessions (protected time for writing)<br>Hackathon | Approval of New Regular Provision | Review of participant feedback |
| Accredited courses/ programmes | Resilient leadership in action programme<br>Springboard<br>Public Engagement Masterclass | Accreditation | Review of participant feedback |
| Events | Panel Q&A<br>Events (ECR Showcase and ECRI Awards)<br>Staff induction<br>Research computing service & research software engineering service<br>Assistant supervisor information session and Q&A | Approval of New Regular Provision | Review of participant feedback |
| Resources (online or physical) | Videos<br>Podcasts<br>Tip sheets<br>Wellbeing and networking resources<br>ReCoDE | Approval of New Regular Provision | No evaluation, regular review at an appropriate time. |
| Internal consultancy | Cohort delivery<br>Schmidt programme<br>Bespoke delivery | Procedures for the management of internal and external consultancy | Review of participant feedback |
| External consultancy | Bespoke delivery requested by external organisations | Procedures for the management of internal and external consultancy | Review of participant feedback |

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## Appendix 3: Proposal Form

| Proposal to establish new Early Career Researcher Institute (ECRI) Provision |
|---|

| Part A: to be completed by the proposer |
|---|

| **Proposer name:** | [insert text] | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Proposer email:** | [insert text] | | |
| **Department:** | [insert text] | Staff (yes/no) | Student (yes/no) |
| **(For staff only) Job title:** | [insert text] | | |
| **(For students only):** | **What is your degree programme/area of research** [insert text] | | |
| | **What year of study are you?** [insert text] | | |

| **Please provide a short description/overview of the new provision and indicative title (if you have one in mind) (max 300 words).** **Title**: [insert text] |
|---|
| **What will be the format/structure/duration?** [insert text] |
| **Who are the target participants?** [insert text] |

**What is the proposed mode of delivery (in-person, online, hybrid/both, self-paced, not yet decided)**

[insert text]

**Please provide draft goals, or if you have them, draft learning outcome/aims or objectives**.

[insert text]

**Please provide the rationale/need for your proposal.  What is the driver (max 200 words)?**

[insert text]

**If you are proposing a new coursera course, please provide the relevant market data (seek advice from the Associate Director (Strategy and Operations)).**

[insert text]

**How does it align with ECRI's strategic objectives (if known)?**

[insert text]

**Please describe how the provision you are proposing is this different from other provision offered elsewhere in ECRI or at Imperial (if known)? (max 200 words)**

[insert text]

| Part b:  To be completed by the Associate Director (ECR Development) |
|---|

**Comments and feedback on the proposal:**

[insert text]

**Confirmation of ECRI Programme Leader/Co Programme Leaders or Manager of ECRI Administration appointed to oversee the development of the provision**:

[insert text]

**Recommended individuals within the Imperial community / external community who could contribute towards development of this proposed provision.**

[insert text]

**Where there is a gap in ECRI expertise, should ECRI consider making a case for additional FTE?**

[insert text]

| Part c:  To be completed by the Associate Director (Strategy & Operations) |
|---|

**Comments and feedback on resource and operational considerations (staff / non-staff):**

[insert text]

| Part d:  Following discussion of the proposal at the IIM, this final section of the form is to be completed by the Secretary of the IIM |
|---|
| At the IIM, members are invited to review the strategic alignment and any resource implications.  If a new course/programme is being proposed, the IIM is invited to agree the peer reviewers who will be at least one student and/or postdoc partner, plus two other members of the ECRI Learning and Development team |

**Feedback and comments from IIM** (extract from minutes, as appropriate):

[insert text]:

**IIM decision** (select as appropriate):

- a. Approve

- b. Approve with minor amendments/subject to resources

- c. Approve with major amendments (re-submission to IIM required)

- d. Not approve (feedback should be provided to the proposer if not in attendance at the IIM

**If approved by IIM, confirmation of Peer Reviewers (at least one ECR Programme Partner and at least one member of the ECRI Learning and Development team)**

[insert names]

**Where the provision results in ECRI credits for research degree students, confirmation of the proposed number of credits for the provision (note that this number is subject to change following development):**

| Course Length | Number of Credits |
|---|---|
| Up to 1 day | 1 |

| | Over 1 day, up to 2 days | 2 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Over 2 days | 3 | |

**Agreed number of credits**……………………………