

IMPERIAL

Early Career
Researcher Institute

Early Career Researcher Institute (ECRI) Support for Institutional and Programme Level Grant Applications

The purpose of this document is to provide PIs with an overview of ECRI and the provision and support offered. This includes support for PGRs that is relevant to applications for doctoral training programmes, and also for research staff that is relevant to large research grants that would recruit several ECRs. It is divided into different sections so that PIs can take what they need to tailor their applications accordingly.

There are also opportunities for co-creating bespoke activities through collaboration between ECRI and PIs on larger grants. Please make sure to discuss these well in advance of your deadline to allow for planning and budgeting.

We recommend that PIs send their final wording of their application for review by ECRI. Enquiries can be sent to [Professor Vahid Shahrezaei](#) (ECRI Director of Academic Affairs) and [Dr Liz Elvidge](#) (ECRI Director of Development and Engagement).

Purpose of ECRI

The mission of the [Early Career Researcher Institute \(ECRI\)](#) is to attract, develop, empower and advocate for the next generation of outstanding Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine, and Business (STEMB) research talent. Established in October 2024, ECRI brought together the Graduate School and the Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC), forming a single institute for the support of all early career researchers (postgraduate research degree students through to Postdocs, Fellows and junior academics) at Imperial College London. ECRI is guided by an External Advisory Board and a stakeholder group and reports to the Research and Enterprise Committee (REC). ECRI services Imperial's CDT DTP Governance Committee, which provides oversight and opportunity for Directors to share best practice, discuss challenges and monitors the quality of the training provided.

Learning and development opportunities

Developed in partnership with Early Career Researcher Programme Partners, and informed by a user-driven Governance structure, ECRI delivers a wide range of learning and development opportunities for early career researchers. To support inclusivity and accessibility, ECRI's provision is delivered through a mixture of self-paced learning, live online and in-person delivery, as well as short courses and multi-day programmes. Each course and programme available to research degree students is assigned one or more ECRI credits.

All PhD students are required to achieve a minimum of four ECRI credits (two by the Early-Stage Assessment (ESA) and two by the Late-Stage Review (LSR)). Additionally, students must complete the ECRI online Plagiarism Awareness course before the ESA. This requirement is called the Professional Skills Attendance Requirement.

To support postdocs and fellows with their career ambitions, and in line with Imperial's commitment to the [Concordat to support the career development of researchers, 10 days per year of development](#)

time has been written into their employment contracts. ECRI's learning and development provision can be used as part of these allocated developmental days.

ECRI collaborates with expert services across Imperial to ensure all ECRs have the opportunity to access key underpinning skills training, including professional, technical and research computing skills, as well as the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial and commercial acumen and ethical awareness. ECRI also partners with Imperial experts to deliver bespoke and tailored personal and interpersonal skills training.

ECRI's learning and development offer is grouped into the following areas:

- Career development and planning
- Funding
- Research communication
- Research impact and knowledge exchange
- Research integrity, ethics and sustainability
- Research management
- Teaching and supervision
- Transitions and wider opportunities
- Working smart and wellbeing
- Working with people
- Data Science
- Programming
- Software engineering
- HPC and computing environments
- AI-assisted research

Additionally, ECRs have the opportunity to develop their global leadership skills and intercultural awareness by attending one of ECRI's [Global Fellows Programmes](#), delivered with Imperial's international partners.

PIs can name specific current course offerings from our website in their application (please check their expected availability for the academic years these are required).

Supporting ECR community and connections

ECRI delivers a range of opportunities for research degree students to connect with their community at an institutional level. For example, ECRI hosts the Early Career Researcher Conference, as well as regular informal "coffee, cake and conversations" networking events. Moving forward, ECRI will also be establishing new links with Imperial's [School of Convergence Science](#) to provide opportunities for ECRs to establish cross-disciplinary connections and links with industry.

Funding opportunities include the [ECR Community Development Fund](#), designed to enhance research culture by providing ECRs with access to a grant with which to develop community networks.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

As part of its “attract” mission, ECRI is committed to advocating for recruitment and selection processes that widen participation to the broadest talent pool of ECRs, including those from non-traditional backgrounds, those from outside the research environment, those from under-represented groups, and those returning from career breaks.

ECRI currently offers the Activate Mentoring Programme which supports minority ethnic and disabled PhD students. Additionally, ECRI delivers an annual event for undergraduate minority ethnic students interested in PG education.

ECRI works closely with the Black Doctoral and Postdoctoral Networks, and has established a Student Parents and Carers Network, and a PhD Women’s Network, part of the Imperial Women’s Network Alliance. Additionally, ECRI signposts PhD students to Imperial’s Able Network which supports disability in the workplace, Imperial As One which supports race equality and Imperial’s and the Student Union’s networks to support the LGBTQ+ community. Find out more here:

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/early-career-researcher-institute/networks-events-and-funds/staff-and-student-networks/>

There are also specific learning and development opportunities available to support research students such as “unconscious bias” and “diversity and inclusion in research”.

Wellbeing and Support

Any research degree student with specific development and/or wellbeing needs may request support through ECRI’s coaching programme. We also offer learning and development opportunities to support mental health awareness and academic resilience.

ECRI has a website for students who need advice and support with respect to supervision:

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/early-career-researcher-institute/individual-support-and-wellbeing/supervision-support/>

We also have staff trained to undertake mediation to support students and supervisors who are experiencing challenges with their relationship.

Career Development

ECRI works in partnership with expert teams across Imperial to develop distinct and bespoke career development opportunities for ECRs and effective signposting to complementary provision provided by these services.

Recognising the essential skills required to navigate increasingly nonlinear career paths and transitions between career levels, ECRI will collaborate with ECRs and key partners across Imperial to identify specific development and support needs at critical points in career pathways. ECRI will deepen its collaboration with the Alumni Office, enabling ECRs to access a wide range of career routes through initiatives such as alumni career events and through showcasing the careers of Imperial PGR alumni and former research staff now working in different sectors.

As well as dedicated learning and development opportunities, ECRI is enhancing its one-to-one career development support for research degree students.

Supervisor Support and Development

ECRI has established Cornerstone, Imperial's dedicated training and development programme for research degree supervisors. Cornerstone includes both mandatory training for new supervisors, as well as continuing professional development for existing supervisors. Find out more: [Cornerstone | Current students | Imperial College London](#)

Cornerstone brings together information about training and support available across Imperial to help Main, Co- and Assistant supervisors to best support and guide their doctoral students. Through its [dedicated hub](#) it provides details on mandatory and optional training.

Beyond basic training on doctoral regulations and requirements, Cornerstone also offers courses aiming to enhance the student experience, such as the self-paced courses 'Supervising Students from Diverse Backgrounds', and 'Supporting the wellbeing of PGRs through good supervisory practice'.

Developing bespoke support and models of costing ECRI's support

ECRI's standard learning and development programme and the support for ECRs, as outlined above and detailed in our website, can be described as appropriate in grant applications and ECRI is able to review this and provide advice for certain big grant applications. It maybe more appropriate to include a bespoke development support with ECRI and these need to be costed on the grants. Bespoke training and development interventions may include a mentoring provision, peer mentoring, coaching, action learning sets, or networking opportunities, to learn to navigate large trans-disciplinary and multi-institutional projects. We recommend approaching ECRI well in advance for this to be discussed. We provide a couple of examples below of some recent collaborations between ECRI and big grant applications. The funding model could be based on internal consulting fees or costing the gross percentage FTE of ECRI staff.

Case Study I: Schmidt AI in Science programme at IX

The AI in Science Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme, supported by Schmidt Science, is a significant grant awarded to Imperial in 2022/2023. The application was led by Nick Jones, Professor of Mathematical Science at Imperial and the Director of the IX Centre for AI in Science. The grant supports 130 postdoc years over a seven-year time frame. Participating fellows are all using AI to forward their scientific research.

Part of the grant application included a request for 0.5 FTE of career and professional development support, specifically designed for participating fellows. The application also involved a 0.5 FTE request for a Senior Teaching Fellow to support participating fellows in learning and developing their AI skills. Both requests were met, with current and future fellows receiving personalised, tailored support for both their technical and professional skills development.

Dr Tracy Bussoli, who is a member of ECRI staff, provides ongoing, individual coaching sessions to support the career and leadership development of fellows. There is also a suite of small group

workshops offered each year, depending on the needs and experience of the incoming fellows. The workshops, which complement the workshops provided by ECRI, are provided locally at I-X where the fellows are co-located. They include topics such as 'Creating your research vision' and 'What are academic panels really looking for at Lectureship interviews?'

Case Study II: RCDS involvement in doctoral training grants:

The Research Computing and Data Science (RCDS) staff have been supporting CDTs since 2015. For some, we have provided cohort delivery, including tailoring the materials to their specific needs. We also co-designed the training for the incoming cohorts with the CDT leadership. We have been involved in the funding proposal stage for a CDT and for a BBSRC Focal Doctoral Award. We co-designed the master's year, and RCDS staff were invited as the training lead for a proposal.

The RCDS programmes have matured, and we now offer a whole range of other opportunities for our doctoral students and early career researchers. The CDT and Focal award proposals expect a high-quality training plan for cohorts, including a clear pedagogical aspect. The RCDS team provides an ideal combination of expertise – we are all trained as scientists in various disciplines, have extensive teaching experience, and hold qualifications in teaching in higher education. We invite anyone considering a proposal with research computing and data science training aspects to reach out to [Katerina Michalickova](#), the Head of RCDS.