

**Imperial College  
London**



# **PFDC Annual Report 2019-20**



**POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE**

Tailored support and development for postdocs, fellows and clinicians

# PFDC Annual Report 2019-2020

## 1. Introduction

The Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC) has been providing support for research staff at Imperial College London since 2009. The PFDC provides multiple opportunities for early career researchers to appraise their skills and further develop these for the workforce.

Most provisions provided by the PFDC have traditionally centred around face-to-face interactions. In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, from 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the PFDC team began to transition the programme of support to a virtual format. The team converted courses and pop up workshops to a virtual format, created new online resources and provided individual support services virtually. In addition to these changes, for early career researchers with contracts ending between March and December 2020, access to PFDC services was extended for 3 months from the date their position at the College ended.

## 2. External Representation

### 2.1 HR Excellence in Research Award

In April 2020 Imperial was awarded the [HR Excellence in Research Award](#). This was following the external peer review of the College's renewal documents by the European Commission in March 2020. Imperial has been committed to the HR Excellence in Research since 2012, a College-wide initiative bringing together colleagues and researchers from across the College to ensure that researchers are recognised, consulted, supported and rewarded. The award is a recognition that Imperial is committed to supporting all its researchers and ensuring they can maximise their potential for their future career while at Imperial.

With the renewal of the award, the College has set out new actions and targets to progress our commitment under the 'European Charter and Code' and the ['UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers'](#) to ensure Imperial is a welcoming and attractive place to do research. The College strives to attract, develop, reward and retain a diverse community of the highest calibre of staff and students. As part of the renewal process, Imperial has established a new Committee to oversee and progress the actions over the next period of implementation, chaired by Vice Provost of Research, Professor Nick Jennings.

## 3. Courses and Workshops

### 3.1 Courses

The PFDC offers a wide range of courses grouped under the themes: Postdoc Essentials, Communication and Presentation Skills, Leadership and Management, Succeeding Now, Planning for Success, and Next Steps. The courses provided are free of charge to all Imperial postdocs, fellows and clinicians, including residential courses lasting two to three days. This year many of the courses were adapted and delivered online.

#### Summary of provision:

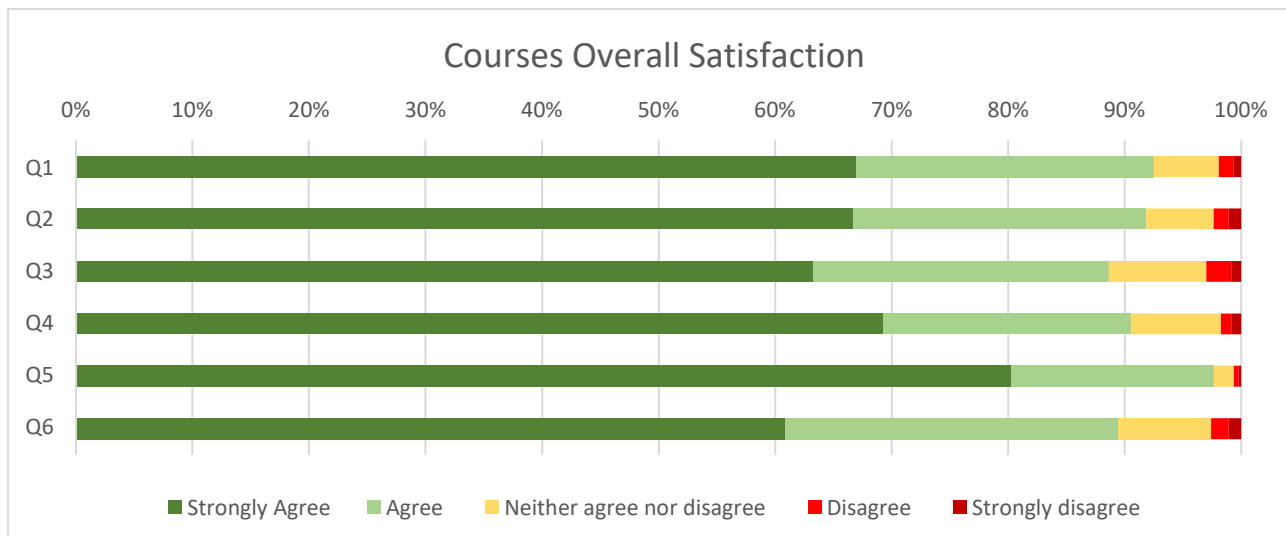
From August 2019 to the end of July 2020, the PFDC ran **41 courses with 541 participants**. 259 of the participants, making up 47.8% of all participants across the academic year, attended courses which were converted to an virtual format. 20 participants attended the new virtual 'Wellbeing in Research' course, which was incorporated into the programme of support to ensure health and wellbeing is adequately covered. The PFDC usually runs 5 residential courses, however due to government-imposed restrictions in the United Kingdom only 2 residential were held. Those cancelled were; 'Managing your first research group' in April, 'Making the most of your postdoc' in May, and 'Leadership in research' in June.

#### Participant satisfaction:

At the end of each course, participants are requested to fill in a survey asking the following questions:

#### Course survey questions

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| Q1. I found this course useful                                | ⑤ Strongly agree             |
| Q2. I know more about the subject having attended the course  | ④ Agree                      |
| Q3. I learned things that will help me improve the way I work | ③ Neither agree nor disagree |
| Q4. I will apply what I learned on this course                | ② Disagree                   |
| Q5. I am satisfied with the trainer/s                         | ① Strongly disagree          |
| Q6. I am satisfied with the course materials                  |                              |



Overall satisfaction is 91.77%. Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2019 and July 2020:

- Q1. 92.49% found the course they attended useful
- Q2. 91.85% knew more about the subject having attended the course
- Q3. 88.63% learned things that will help improve the way they work
- Q4. 90.56% will apply what they learned
- Q5. 97.64% were satisfied with the trainer/s
- Q6. 89.46% were satisfied with the course materials

A notable course run by the PFDC for all female staff at Imperial is the *Springboard Women's Development Programme*. This is an award-winning international programme which allows women to identify the clear, practical and realistic steps they want to take, and allows them to develop the skills and self-confidence to take those steps. The programme is an important part of the College's commitment to the Athena SWAN charter, with three members of the PFDC team being qualified as Springboard tutors.

During the programme participants review topics such as qualities, strengths, networking, goals, assertiveness, dealing with pressure and managing image and visibility. As well as the opportunity to network with other colleagues, participants have the chance to hear women from across the College speak of the challenges they have faced during their personal and professional life.

The programme is open to all female members of staff and consists of four development days set over four months.

**Summary of provision:**

Two Springboard cohorts were offered in 2019-20, with a total of 60 participants.

Due to government-imposed restrictions coming into effect in March 2020, the first Springboard cohort did not complete their programme, and will be finishing the remaining two days of the course in the 2020-21 academic year.

**Participant satisfaction:**

26 participants from the first 2019-20 Springboard cohort completed the programme evaluation survey. Highlights include:

Question	Answer: Yes
I feel more confident in the area of: Personal development	84.62%
I feel more confident in the area of: Goal setting	92.31%
I feel more confident in the area of: Own development needs	92.31%
I feel more confident in the area of: Understanding own values	96.15%
I feel more confident in the area of: assertiveness	84.62%
I feel more confident in the area of: managing change	84.62%

3.2 Pop Ups

Pop up workshops are brief, informal and interactive sessions designed to deliver timely, targeted information on a range of themes that will be helpful for personal and professional development. They range from skills and goals development sessions to guest speakers from across the College and relevant external initiatives – i.e. industry and funders. They are open to all postdocs, fellows and clinicians from across the College. PFDC pop ups were provided remotely following restrictions due to COVID-19.

**Summary of provision:**

From August 2019 to the end of July 2020, the PFDC ran **43 pop up workshops for 934 attendees**. 13 of the pop ups were held virtually with a total of 389 attendees.

Pop up topics included (but were not limited to): Skills Analysis; Career Goals; Assertiveness; What's your Research Vision; Science Visualisation; Lay Summary; Non-academic CVs and Cover Letters; Academic CVs; Pathways for Postdocs CV Clinic; LinkedIn; Lectureship Applications; Fellowship Interviews; Enterprise Talks and Networking Lunch; Assistant Supervisor Q&A; Employers' Response to Covid-19 Online Q&A.

**Participant satisfaction:**

At the end of each pop up, participants are requested to fill in a survey asking the following questions:

### Pop up survey questions

Q1. I found this pop up useful

Q2. I know more about the subject having attended the pop up

Q3. The pop up content was relevant to me

Q4. I am likely to apply what I learned on this pop up

Q5. I am satisfied with the delivery

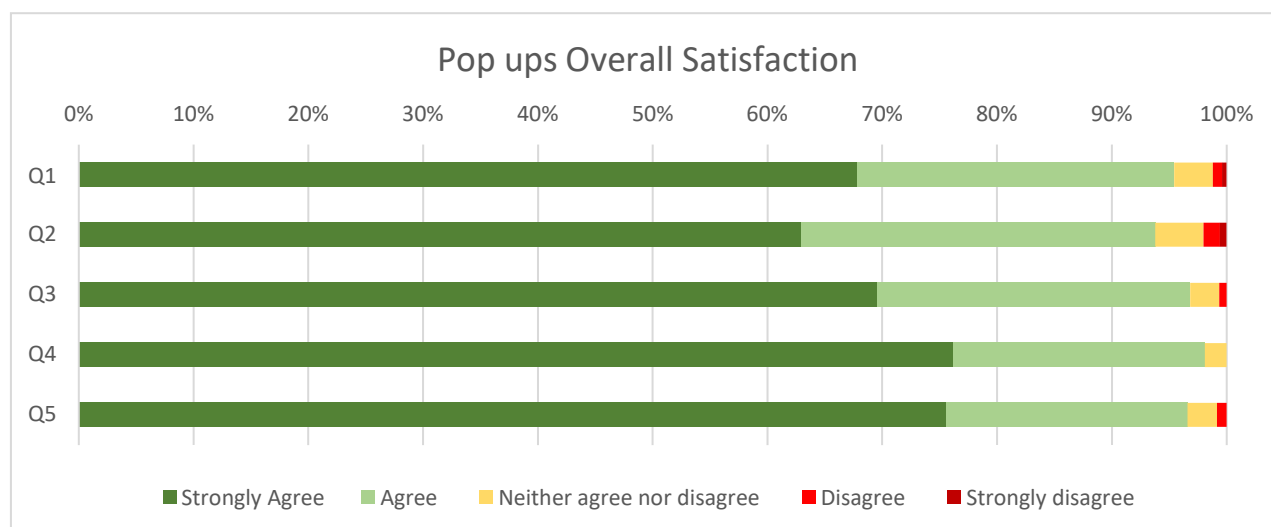
⑤ Strongly agree

④ Agree

③ Neither agree nor disagree

② Disagree

① Strongly disagree



Overall satisfaction is 96.14%. Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2019 and July 2020:

Q1. 95.41% found the pop up useful

Q2. 93.79% knew more about the subject having attended the pop up

Q3. 96.81% thought the pop up content was relevant to them

Q4. 98.09% were likely to apply what they learned on the pop up

Q5. 96.60% were satisfied with the delivery

### 3.3 Funder Showcases

The PFDC organises a series of funder showcases which highlight the fellowship opportunities individual funders have to offer, as well as providing the opportunity for current fellowship holders to share their expertise and experiences of the fellowship application process through to interview top tips.

#### Summary of provision

This year the PFDC held **3 funder showcases with a total of 81 attendees:**

- 14/01/2020 - Funder Showcase: Wellcome: 26 attendees

- 21/11/2019 - Funder Showcase: RC 1851: 22 attendees
- 28/07/2020 - Funder Showcase: MRC: 33 attendees

In March 2020 funders were contacted to enquire about delivering virtual talks and Q&As to replace the sessions normally held on campus. The first virtual funder showcase was held on the 28 July 2020 with 33 attendees.

## 4. Individual Support

### 4.1 One-to-ones

PFDC advisors and consultants provide coaching and advice to postdocs and fellows on an individual basis. These 45-minute sessions cover topics such as CVs, fellowship and job applications, moving out of academia, issues relating to working in a lab/team, development opportunities, networking opportunities, career-related issues, and concerns relating to life as a postdoc at Imperial.

#### Summary of provision:

There were **381 one-to-ones** from August 2019 to July 2020, this is a 7% increase from last year. 242 of the one-to-ones were face-to-face, 142 delivered remotely and 1 via telephone.

General area of advice	Total	Percentage
Fellowship Application	184	48%
Lectureship Application	40	10%
Careers advice	48	13%
CVs/cover letters	56	15%
Job Application	26	7%
other	27	7%

Faculty	Total	Percentage
Engineering	157	41%
Medicine	123	32%
Natural Science	84	22%
Business School	11	3%
External	7	2%

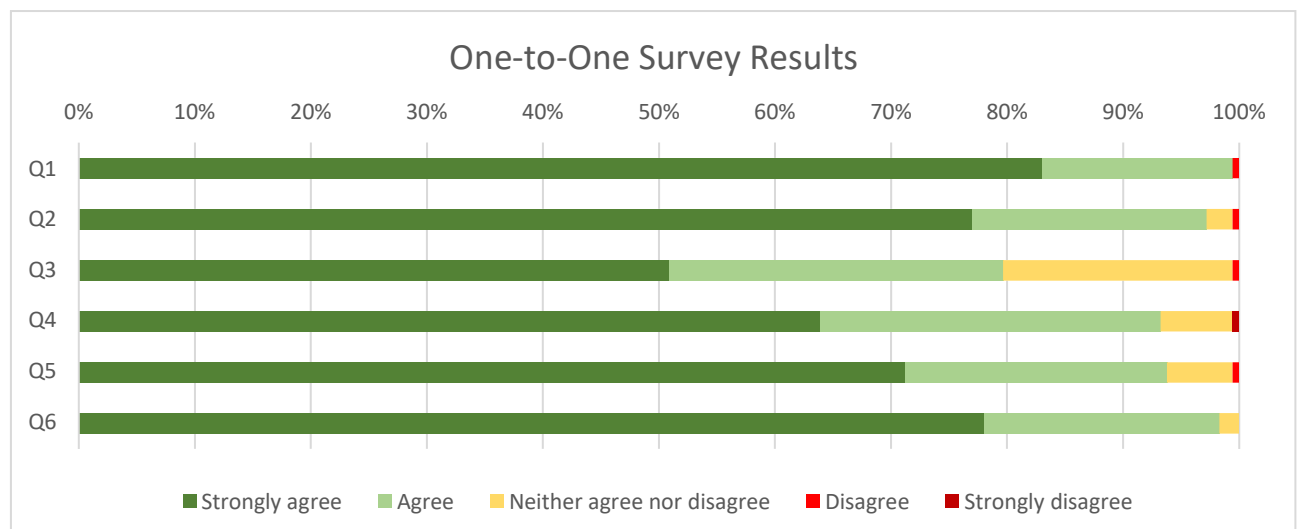
Title	Total	Percentage
Postdocs	254	67%
Fellows & Clinicians	98	26%
Lecturer	16	4%
Other	13	3%

## Participant satisfaction:

Having completed a one-to-one consultation session, participants are asked to evaluate their experience via an online survey. 177 participants (46% of participants) filled in this survey.

### One-to-one survey questions

- Q1. I found the one to one useful and informative
- Q2. The advice I received during my one-to-one was helpful and relevant to my concerns
- Q3. I learned more about the resources and opportunities available to me as a postdoc or fellow during my one-to-one
- Q4. As a result of my one-to-one, I feel more positive about the issues(s) addressed
- Q5. I have used the information and advice I was given to make positive changes
- ⑤ Strongly agree  
④ Agree  
③ Neither agree nor disagree  
② Disagree  
① Strongly disagree



Overall satisfaction is 93.69%. Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2019 and July 2020:

- Q1. 99.44% found the one to one useful
- Q2. 97.74% found the advice helpful and relevant
- Q3. 79.66% learnt about resources and opportunities available
- Q4. 93.22% were more positive about issues addressed in one-to-one
- Q5. 93.79% used information and advice given
- Q6. 98.31% Will continue to use information and advice given

## 4.2 Mock interviews

The PFDC arranges mock interviews for postdocs, fellows and clinicians who have been shortlisted for fellowships, academic positions, and positions outside of higher education. When remote mock interviews first began in March 2020, the PFDC hosted these with only



the chair and the candidate present. In June the PFDC reintroduced panel members to the virtual process. Guidance was created for panellists which was specific for virtual mock interviews. The guidance is sent to all panellists before the mock interview takes place.

### Summary of provision:

There were 165 mock interviews from August 2019 to July 2020, a 22% increase from last year. 122 of these were conducted face-to-face and the remaining 43 were hosted remotely.

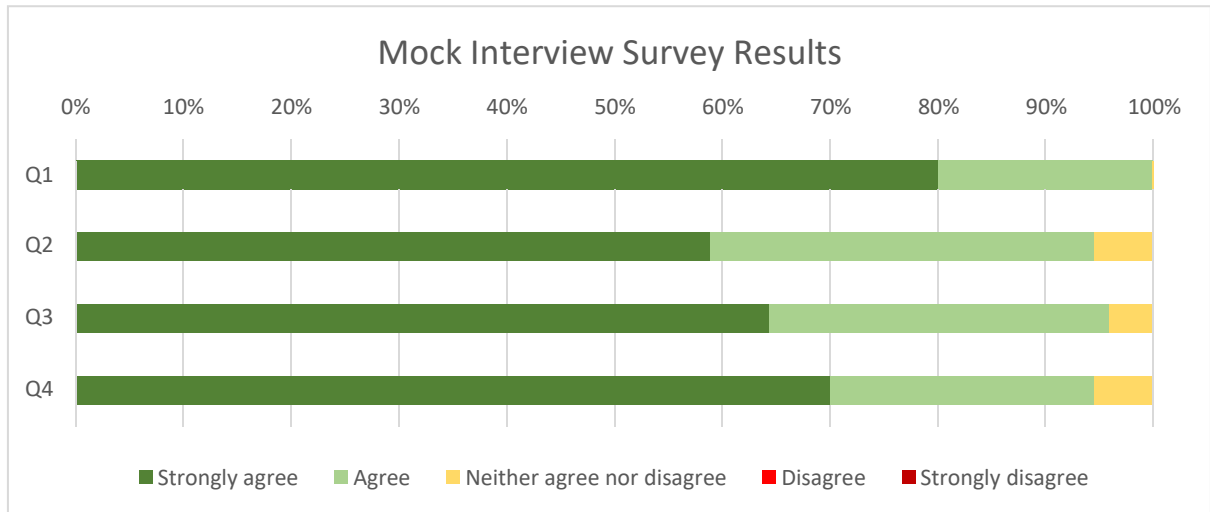
Type of roles applied for	Total	Percentage
Fellowship	75	45%
Lectureship/Professor	63	38%
Scientist/Research	18	11%
Non-academic	9	5%

### Participant satisfaction:

After the candidates have completed the mock interview and attended their formal interview, participants are asked to evaluate the mock interview via an online survey and inform the PFDC if they have been successful. 73 participants (44%) filled in this survey.

#### Mock interview survey questions

- Q1. I had a better idea of what to expect from an interview as a result of the mock interview.
- Q2. I was more prepared for the questions that I was asked as a result of the mock interview.
- Q3. I received constructive feedback from the mock interview panel.
- Q4. I was more prepared for my interview as a result of the mock interview.
- ⑤ Strongly agree  
④ Agree  
③ Neither agree nor disagree  
② Disagree  
① Strongly disagree



Overall satisfaction is 95.89%. Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2019 and July 2020:

Q1. 98.63% had a better idea of what to expect from an interview as a result of the mock interview.

Q2. 94.52% were more prepared for the questions they were asked as a result of the mock interview.

Q3. 95.89% received constructive feedback from the mock interview panel.

Q4. 94.52% were more prepared for the interview as a result of the mock interview.

Interview Outcome		
Result	Total	Percentage
Successful	59	36%
Unsuccessful	37	22%
Unknown/other	69	42%

To obtain interview outcomes, the PFDC admin team request this information from the candidates in the mock interview evaluation survey. When a survey has not been completed the candidate is re-sent the survey 6 months after the mock interview date. The team are seeking to increase the response rate in the next academic year.

## 5. Working with departments

### 5.1 Postdoc reps

The PFDC Postdoc Reps Network has grown significantly over the last decade from a handful of postdocs, to a thriving community of over 70 reps who now represent postdocs from every department across all campuses. Their hard work, commitment and creativity has resulted in significant culture change, not just in their own departments but across the College.

The reps are key to ensuring that the PFDC stays well-informed about the needs and issues facing postdocs in departments at Imperial. They form a crucial bridge between the PFDC and the postdocs. The reps can influence the nature of what the PFDC offers by being involved in planning and decision-making processes via the termly Reps Network Meetings and by also taking part in voluntary focus groups to discuss a range of topics and provide opinions and feedback. The [list of PFDC postdoc reps](#) can be found on the PFDC website.

The [PFDC Reps Awards](#) were introduced to thank and recognise all PFDC Postdoc Reps for their significant contribution through their role within their departments. The awards are run annually with nominations being announced in May and the Award Dinner taking place in June each year. Unfortunately, the PFDC Reps Awards could not happen this year due to ongoing restrictions in the United Kingdom.

Reps Network meetings were held termly on the following dates:

- 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019
- 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020
- 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## 5.2 Postdoc and Fellows Champions

The PFDC works closely with departments to ensure that the voices of postdocs and fellows are well-represented at the departmental level. Postdoc and Fellows Champions are integral to this effort.

During this academic year two Champions meetings took place on the following dates:

- 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019
- 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020

The Centre usually holds termly meetings; however, the third meeting was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meetings will resume in the 2020/21 academic year.

The [list of Champions](#) can be found on the PFDC website.

## 5.3 Networks

A highlight this year was the launch of two networks. The [PFDC Parents Network](#), which held three meetings on 24 February, 30 April and 14 July 2020, is a network for parents with children of all ages to meet other postdocs and fellows. A member of HR is usually present at the meetings to answer questions in relation to maternity, paternity, shared parental leave, adoption and flexible working.

In September 2019, the PFDC and a committee of postdocs established the [Imperial Postdocs and Fellows Enterprise Network \(IPFEN\)](#). The network aims to support both early career researchers ready to explore the commercial potential of their ideas, discoveries, technologies and inventions, and those who are starting out and want to learn more about what falls under the enterprise umbrella and develop entrepreneurial skills. The network is run by a committee of 8 early career researchers with support from PFDC and Enterprise, and additional support is provided by an Advisory Board. The first advisory board meeting

took place in August 2020. This academic year the network promoted a total of 6 events from February to August 2020, both face to face and online, including Imperial Enterprise and external speaker/networking events, and a consultancy series where consultancy companies are invited to talk to postdocs about the work they do.

#### 5.4 Departmental events

The PFDC works extensively with departments in a variety of different ways, including delivering bespoke training courses for postdocs, fellows and clinicians. Bespoke training can either be requested directly by individual departments or through the departmental reps that make up the Postdoc Reps Network.

The PFDC supported the following events this academic year:

- Postdoc Knowledge Symposium – 20/09/2019
- Lectureship CVs workshop – 19/02/2020
- Life Sciences: Speed Networking – 20/02/2020
- Fellowship Application Symposium – 23/06/2020

The Centre also hosted the annual 'Q&A with the Provost' on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2019. This session offered Postdoc Reps the opportunity to hear from the Provost, [Professor Ian Walmsley](#), about his vision for Early Career Researchers at Imperial and provided an opportunity to ask questions.

#### 5.5 Dame Julia Higgins Postdoc Collaborative Research Fund

The Faculty of Engineering Research Committee, together with the PFDC, is committed to promoting opportunities to aid postdocs. In 2017 the Dame Julia Higgins Postdoc Collaborative Research Fund was introduced to give engineering postdocs the opportunity to apply for and be awarded their own research funding, develop and deliver a collaborative research project and become independent from the research of their PI.

A total of £19,500 has been made available each year to fund collaborative research projects. This fund aims to promote collaboration between postdocs in the Faculty of Engineering, whereby funding applications submitted must involve a minimum of two postdocs from different departments in Engineering. To facilitate the interaction between the departments, an Engineering-wide networking event precedes the proposal deadline. The fund is run annually and on average 30-40 applications are submitted, with 5-8 proposals receiving funding.

Nine proposals were funded during the 2019/20 Dame Julia Higgins Postdoc Collaborative Fund, a total of £19,150 was awarded.

## 6. Fellows and Clinicians Programme of support

Launched in 2018 and funded by the Faculties of Engineering, Medicine, Natural Sciences and the Vice-Provost (Research and Enterprise), a bespoke programme of support, including

comprehensive induction and cohort building events, has been in place for independent research fellows and clinicians actively pursuing careers at Imperial.

### **Summary of provision:**

From August 2019 to July 2020, the PFDC offered 7 sessions as part of the Fellows and Clinicians Programme of support. Of these, 2 were writing retreats and 2 were writing away days with a total of 55 participants. A Welcome Induction, Pre-writing Retreat One to One Sessions, and the women's only event 'In Conversation with Academic Women' were also held.

Complementing the programme of support, the annual Imperial College Research Fellows (ICRF) Welcome Dinner and Development Day were hosted on Thursday 3 and Friday 4 October by the PFDC for the 2019 cohort. A further CPD day was held virtually for the new cohort on Wednesday 29 April 2020. Additionally, the PFDC ran the bi-annual ICRF Retreat

on Thursday 7 and Friday 8 November 2019 for 24 participants. All current ICRFs were eligible to attend. The retreat aimed to develop the skills needed to describe research through a longer and broader vision, and to present to non-specialist panels.

## 7. Events

From August 2019 to July 2020 the PFDC held a large variety of events including the PFDC Q&A, the PFDC roadshow, CV clinics and more. Notable events include two live events for future leader fellowships and two postdoc specific sessions delivered by the Careers Service on 'Employer's response to Covid-19'.

### 7.1 Welcome Inductions

To help postdocs integrate into their new role, the Centre invites all new postdocs to PFDC Welcome Inductions. During the meeting postdocs learn about the support and opportunities available to them at Imperial and have an opportunity to meet other recent joiners at the College. In 2019-2020 there were four welcome inductions held on:

- Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019
- Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2020
- Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020 - (held virtually)
- Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020 - (held virtually)

## 8. External Work

The PFDC also undertakes work for external organisations, accepting requests for training, talks, and other services. The PFDC delivered the following sessions:

- Development Course - National University of Ireland Galway - August 2019
- Leadership in Research Course – Versus Arthritis Fellows - September 2019
- Networking and Visibility Workshop – Heilbronn Institute - October 2019
- VISTA Career Development Workshop – IAVI- September 2019
- Lectureship Applications and CVs Course– Queen's University Belfast - January 2020
- Consultancy work - European Respiratory Society - March 2020

## 8.1 Additional Projects

In addition to external work, the PFDC carries out various projects throughout the year. The additional projects this year were:

- The creation of a variety of [online resources](#):
  - **Online booklets:** 'Pathways for postdocs' and 'How to be successful at a fellowship interview'
  - **Videos:** 'What's your research vision', 'Goal setting', and 'LinkedIn profile'
  - **New database:** PFDC contacts database
  - **New online resources:** 'Top tips resource for video interviews' and a 'Skills analysis tipsheet'
  - **New webpages:** Wellbeing webpages
  - **Revised webpages:** Pathways for postdocs
- Two independent evaluations focusing on the provisions provided to postdocs and probationary lecturers at Imperial College:
  - From June 2020, [Research Coach](#) began **evaluating the current postdoc provision and scoping new provision for postdocs at Imperial**. Building on the successful renewal of Imperial's HR Excellence in Research Award, the College's commitment to the European Charter and Code and the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the PFDC commissioned this project to conduct an independent review of College-wide provision for postdocs. The project is ongoing.
  - From June 2020, [My Consultants](#) began **evaluating the provision of probationary lecturer support at Imperial**. As part of the HR Excellence in Research Award renewal, the College committed to conducting a needs assessment of its provision for all its researchers. This scoping project is a joint venture with the Learning and Development Centre at Imperial, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the development needs of probationary lecturers, which fall under the College's definition of early career researchers. The project is ongoing.

## 9. Summary

In the 2019-20 academic year the PFDC organised 83 courses, pop ups and funder showcases for approximately 1,613 participants. Additionally, 381 one to one meetings and 165 mock interviews were provided. Further funds, resources, networks and events were also created and hosted by the PFDC, which together made up the tailored programme of support for early career researchers and clinicians.