

Imperial College London



Concordat to Support the
Career Development of
Researchers: Imperial
College London - Action Plan

CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS

Imperial is dedicated to creating a positive research culture and to providing sector leading support and professional development to all its researchers. Following our ambition to equip and empower all researchers at Imperial to succeed in their chosen careers, the College became a signatory of the new [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) in March 2020.

The Concordat is an agreement between funders and employers of researchers in the UK. Its principles aim to set the “gold standard of researcher development” by committing funders, institutions, researchers, and managers of researchers to creating a healthy and supportive research environment and culture for researchers to realise their potential.

We conducted a gap analysis of our current offering against the Concordat principles, as well as commissioning an external review into the [Provision for Postdocs at Imperial](#), to which over 500 postdocs and other key stakeholders from across the College contributed.

The gap analysis and review have identified five main themes:

1. Wellbeing of early career researchers (ECRs)
2. PI support to deliver the Concordat principles
3. Leadership development for ECRs
4. The personal review and development plan (PRDP) process
5. How postdocs utilise their 10 days development

Wellbeing of
Early Career
Researchers

PI Support to
deliver the
Concordat
Principles

Leadership
development
for ECRs

The Personal
Review and
Development
Plan Process

How postdocs
utilise their
10 days
development

CONCORDAT ACTION PLAN

In setting actions against the identified gaps, we sought continuous input from [HR](#), the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre](#) (EDIC), the [Learning and Development Centre](#) and Senior Academics, and consulted with researchers from the [Postdoc Reps Network](#).

The subsequent recommendations have been incorporated into our [Concordat Action Plan](#). The action plan was endorsed by Provost Board in January 2021 and its implementation will be overseen and promoted by the Researcher Development Committee.

Regular updates on the progress of the implementation will be published on the [College's Concordat webpages](#) and in the [Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre \(PFDC\) newsletter](#).

The following pages set out the measures and intended outcomes of our Concordat Action Plan based on the five themes. The action plan has a one-year focus (2021) with suggestions in place for 2022-23.



Wellbeing of early career researchers (ECRs)

Wellbeing: The situation created by Covid-19 and the findings of the [Wellcome Report into Research Culture](#) have put the wellbeing of all Imperial's Researchers, and particularly that of ECRs, at the forefront of this action plan. The actions, which incorporate the recommendations of the external review, include taking stock of the current practices and provision at the College, as well as generating tailored resources for ECRs on wellbeing. The College wants to ensure that it supports all ECRs, particularly those with hidden or declared disabilities, and has set out a series of actions to empower these groups.

Intended outcomes:

- College-wide evaluation of the provision for mental health and wellbeing.
- Generate ECR-specific wellbeing resources.
- Increase awareness of [Report and Support](#).
- Review the use of open-ended contracts for long-serving ECRs to ensure the College adheres to employment practices.
- A strategy in place to support ECRs with hidden disabilities.
- Promote the support that the College offers to ECRs who have a declared disability.

Actions

1. Mental health and wellbeing provision evaluation:

- The College is working to coordinate and consolidate the extensive existing online provision for health and wellbeing for all staff. A project group across HR is working to produce a centralised resource that is comprehensive and easier to access.

2. ECR wellbeing resources:

- The [Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre](#) (PFDC) has taken steps to fill a gap in its provision around 'wellbeing, mental health and resilience' by introducing new courses such as [Wellbeing in Research](#) and [Resilience in a Research Environment](#). To further increase resources, the PFDC intends to deploy various resources that can be found on page 3 of the full [action plan](#).

3. Communications plan for report and support:

- The College has launched a new online reporting tool called [Report and Support](#), which will help build a picture of problems across Imperial. The College will put a communications plan in place to promote this reporting tool to ECRs and PIs.

4. Open-ended contracts use for ECRs:

- The College will undertake a review of fixed-term contract (FTCs) employment practices of postdoc staff with a view to reducing the use of FTCs wherever possible. The focus of the review will be on employees with over four years' service on two or more successive contracts, to ensure that all eligible staff are offered an open-ended contract in accordance with UK legislation.

5. How to best support ECRs with hidden disabilities:

- Building on the work already carried out by EDIC and through consultation with advocates, we will generate a strategy of how to best support ECRs with hidden disabilities, so that they feel supported by the College.

6. Promote resources and support available to any ECR who has a declared disability:

- The College has a wide range of support in place for those with declared disabilities. However, these may not be known to ECRs. The PFDC will promote these resources and services to new ECRs at the College and will increase signposting.



PI support to deliver the Concordat principles

PI Support: The Concordat places strong expectations on PIs as the managers of researchers in terms of creating opportunities to nurture the careers of ECRs. This includes ensuring an inclusive culture, and effective policies and processes. As one of the first actions, we have commissioned an external evaluation of the provision that is offered to PIs by the College, with an emphasis on what support PIs would like to help them deliver on the Concordat principles. While the College is awaiting the outcome of this review, other actions are building on the resources that are currently in place.



Intended outcomes:

- An evaluation into the support that is offered to PIs by the College, with an emphasis on delivering the Concordat principles.
- Establish a PI induction so that all new PIs who employ researchers are made aware of the support that is available to them at the College, as well as relevant employment legislation and codes of practice, institutional policies, and the terms and conditions of grant funding.
- Provide [PFDC Postdoc and Fellows Champions](#) with additional training to facilitate constructive conversation with their departmental ECRs.
- Develop a code of practice for PIs, postdocs and departments at Imperial.
- Department-specific induction for postdocs which can be shared with their PIs before they join their group.
- Increase the representation of underrepresented researchers at the College.

Actions

1. Tender to evaluate current provision and scope new provision for PIs. Ensure that the tender covers:

- Equality, diversity and inclusion, in particular drawing in the recommendations from the Race Equality Charter.
- Wellbeing and mental health.
- How to be an effective manager and fulfil their duty of care.
- Sharing best practice in regard to group management, particularly examples from senior management as to how they support their PIs to support their ECRs in turn.

2. PI induction:

- Working with the recommendations from the tender discussed above and those from the recent evaluation into the provision for probationary lecturers, establish a PI-specific induction for all new PIs, ensuring that the Concordat is at the heart of the induction.

3. PFDC Postdoc Champions – Careers training:

- Offer the PFDC Postdoc Champions training on career guidance to enable them to give an honest appraisal of an ECR's CV and point them in the direction of where to find career resources. This would potentially help to remove the PI/Postdoc conflict that can happen when discussing career objectives.

4. PI/Postdoc roles and responsibilities: These expectations should:

- Outline their respective roles and responsibilities in the domains of the research project, working relationship and career development.
- Be based on examples of best practice, such as those developed by Civil and Environmental Engineering or at other Russell Group Universities.
- Be complemented with guidance, best practice examples and case studies, and links to further information about the provision for postdocs and training/support available for PI management development.

5. Departmental postdoc induction packs:

- The PFDC have an extensive induction for ECRs in place, including: a welcome email, welcome booklet, welcome webpage and termly inductions, which complement the HR induction materials. All PFDC Reps and Champions are now made aware of any new starters who join their department each month. Some departments have developed ECR-tailored welcome packs/induction materials, but not all. Through sharing examples of best practice, all departments are to generate a postdoc-specific induction pack to complement those that are already available. These will provide a valuable resource for PIs when they are inducting new ECRs into their group.

6. Bias training for the recruitment of research staff:

- The data that has been generated for the Race Equality Charter highlights the need for the College to increase the number of BAME staff at all levels. An initiative put in place to do this is to introduce bias training for all recruitment panels, with an initial focus on the recruitment of research staff.

Leadership development for ECRs

Leadership Development: Imperial's ECRs are highly skilled in their subject areas. The actions set out under this theme aim to ensure that ECRs are equipped with the personal skills and knowledge to be successful in whichever career path they take, to have access to opportunities that will develop their leadership potential and to enhance their CVs.



Intended outcomes:

- Extend the postdoc collaborative funding model in the Faculty of Engineering to other faculties to provide opportunities for ECRs to form new cross-faculty research networks and collaborations, and bid for research funding separate from their main project so that they can start to show research independence.
- Leadership and management training for the next generation of fellows.
- Identify what the College needs to put in place to equip ECRs to fully realise their potential as managers in their chosen field (academic or otherwise).
- Increase awareness and engagement with Imperial's [IMPACT development programme](#) amongst ECRs.
- Increase representation of underrepresented groups amongst the fellows community.
- Increase the number of ECRs from underrepresented groups who are reverse mentors, for when the scheme is extended to all senior College leaders.

Actions

1. Postdoc collaborative funds:

- The Dame Julia Higgins Postdoc Collaborative Research Fund in the Faculty of Engineering allows postdocs to start building their evidence of independence by working on their own research ideas. We are looking to facilitate the wider rollout of the model to offer the same opportunity in all faculties.

2. Tailored induction and leadership programme for independently funded fellows:

- Building on the successful initiatives developed by the PFDC fellows' consultant, our next actions include generating a tailored welcome pack for fellows. In consultation with the Learning and Development Centre (LDC) we seek to convert the face-to-face induction to a digital format and to devise a leadership and management programme which utilises small group action learning sets for the fellow's community.

3. Scoping project into leadership development of ECRs:

- The current PFDC leadership and management training is mainly oriented towards a research career. We will carry out a review of what is currently offered by the College through the PFDC and LDC and by the wider sector, to devise a tailored programme that will equip ECRs with leadership skills in any chosen field.

4. Introduction to IMPACT for ECRs:

- Imperial hosted the fourth National Conference for BAME Early Career Researchers in September 2020. A part of this conference was to run an abridged version of Imperial's [IMPACT development programme](#) tailored to ECRs. Building on this success, this taster session to IMPACT will be offered to ECRs at the College to encourage more participants from the researcher community.

5. Review into the Imperial College Research Fellowship (ICRF) to increase the diversity of underrepresented groups:

- The 2021 ICRF was suspended and is now undergoing a review, including how the fellowship could best be used to increase the diversity of underrepresented groups.

6. ECRs reverse mentoring senior College leaders:

- Building on the success of the reverse mentoring scheme for the senior leadership team, we aim to ensure that underrepresented ECRs are aware of the scheme and are encouraged to become reverse mentors. This will allow the ECRs to interact directly with senior leaders.

The Personal Review and Development Plan (PRDP) process

PRDP process: For career and personal progression to occur, there needs to be a time to reflect on past experiences. Imperial has a well-established PRDP process, but the College is taking this opportunity to review the current systems that are in place to make sure they fit the needs of the community going forward, and that there is a uniformed way of extracting data to ensure that meaningful conversations are taking place.

Intended outcomes:

- Full review of the PRDP process for researchers at the College.
- Postdoc PRDP form guidance documents for both the postdocs and the PIs to be generated.
- An evaluation of how best to log the PRDP process at the College so that meaningful data can be later extracted for evaluation.

Actions

1. PRDP review:

- A comprehensive review of the PRDP process for researchers will be undertaken to ensure that the PRDP is fit for purpose and is implemented consistently across all departments. Concordat principles and the recommendations for the PI support tender will be incorporated into the reformed process. This review will consider all PRDP forms for the research community: ECRs through to senior management.

2. Postdoc PRDP guidance notes:

- The postdoc PRDP form was revised in 2018 following consultation with the community. We aim to produce guidance documents to support both postdocs and PIs to make full use of the career development element of the PRDP process. This guidance will include a clear definition of the responsibilities that each party has in the process and will also include further information on how ECRs can utilise their 10 days.

3. PRDP reporting system:

- The way in which PRDPs are logged at the College needs to be evaluated to identify a way in which the College can ensure that quality conversations are taking place. This is also to ensure that key data are being recorded, such as discussion around how ECRs utilise their 10 days or how PIs are supporting their group member development. It would also be desirable to have recall from the previous years' PRDP for comparison and to gauge progress.

How postdocs utilise their 10 development days

10 Development Days: For over a decade, all Imperial ECRs have benefited from 10 development days allocated in their contracts. However, the College has not monitored how ECRs use this entitlement. Gaining a better understanding of how ECRs actually use that time will allow us to establish evidence-based examples of best practice and to develop a series of resources which will enable ECRs to make the best use of their development days.



Intended outcomes:

- A better understanding as to how Imperial ECRs use their 10 development days.
- Increase awareness of the 10 development days in all postdoc contracts: resources made available to both postdocs and PIs to inform discussions on how to use the 10 development days.
- Track how many postdocs utilise their 10 development days so that the College is able to generate data to better understand what activities they within the College where development isn't being undertaken.
- By highlighting the different career paths that postdocs at Imperial take, there is the potential to inspire postdocs to use their 10 days to fill any perceived skills gaps to enable them to enter their next career.
- ECRs to be better aware of the EDI provision at the College.

Action

1. How do postdocs use 10 development days:

- Over the course of seven months, 20 postdocs from across the College will be interviewed monthly to see how they utilise their 10 development days to achieve their career goals. The aim of this study is to get past the idea that the 10 days can be used just for courses, and to identify other ways in which the days could be utilised to allow the ECRs to achieve their career goals.

2. Postdoc-10: Evidence based examples:

- We will develop web-based guidance about the wide range of activities that postdocs can spend their professional development entitlement on, that goes beyond workshops and courses. This will include real-life case studies of Imperial postdocs discussing the benefits they have taken from engaging with their professional development. The case studies will be published as regular feature in the monthly PFDC newsletter.
- The '10 development day' resources will be incorporated into all PFDC welcome information for new starters. After 6 months all ECRs will receive an email containing additional information about how to utilise their day as a resource for their development.
- We will create a resource for PIs to help with the 10 days section in the PRDP form.
- Using the outcomes of the review, we will identify areas of good practice within each faculty/department, to generate department-specific case studies.

3. Tracking uptake of 10 development days:

- HR are to develop a standard approach for postdocs to log their professional development activity/days in a similar way to booking annual leave. This system will then be monitored at department-/College-level so that individuals, via their PIs, can be encouraged to regularly engage with their development.

4. Increase awareness of Pathways for Postdocs:

- Not all postdocs are aware of Pathways for Postdocs, which has been in place since 2016. The PFDC will introduce brand colours and a logo so that any provision publicised under Pathways can be easily identified. We will develop a new landing page so that it is clear how the PFDC can help postdocs with their career and we will highlight the career paths that are available to ECRs through careers events and a dedicated webpage. The PFDC postdoc reps will be encouraged to host an annual departmental alumni event to showcase where their postdocs go.

5. ECRs to be encouraged to take part in the EDI at Imperial online courses as part of their 10 development days:

- To increase awareness of the EDI provision at the College, all ECRs are to be encouraged to undertake the [EDI at Imperial online course](#). We aim to promote online unconscious bias training at the same time.

WHAT DOES THE CONCORDAT ACTION PLAN MEAN FOR IMPERIAL RESEARCHERS?

The College's [Concordat Action Plan](#) aims to create a positive research culture at Imperial by providing sector leading support and professional development to its researchers. The creation of the action plan and endorsement by Provost Board is an important step that confirms the College's commitment to creating a healthy and supportive culture that is needed for researchers to thrive and realise their potential.

The [Concordat Action Plan](#) will drive initiatives to support the personal, professional and career development of all Imperial researchers. A key aim of the action plan is to equip and empower Imperial's ECRs to succeed in their chosen career. This includes providing professional development opportunities for talented researchers who will move outside of academia and apply their skills in highly-valued careers across a wide range of employment sectors.

The action plan will be implemented by the Researcher Development Committee, with progress on the implementation of actions being monitored termly.

Regular updates will be published in the [PFDC newsletter](#), and an annual progress report and updated action plan will be published on the [College's Concordat webpages](#).

