

Imperial College  
London



# PFDC ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21



**POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE**

Tailored support and development for postdocs, fellows and clinicians

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## 1. Introduction

The [Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre](#) (PFDC) has been providing support for early career researchers at Imperial College London since 2009. The PFDC offers an extensive programme of professional skills and career development training, support, and opportunities, which enable postdocs, fellows, and clinicians to succeed in their current position while planning their next steps.

Most provisions provided by the PFDC have traditionally centered around face-to-face interactions. In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the PFDC team transitioned the programme of support to a virtual format and continued to deliver this online throughout the 2020-2021 academic year. Additionally, early career researchers are now able to access PFDC services up to six months from the date their position at the College ends.

## 2. External representation

### 2.1 Concordat to support the career development of researchers

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. It aims to set the “gold standard of researcher development” by committing funders, institutions, researchers, and managers of researchers to create a healthy and supportive research environment and culture for researchers to realise their potential.

The PFDC conducted a gap analysis of its current offering against the Concordat principles and commissioned an external review into the [provision for postdocs at Imperial](#). In setting actions against the identified gaps, the PFDC sought continuous input from [HR](#), the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre](#), [People and Organisational Development](#), senior academics, and consulted with researchers from the [Postdoc Reps Network](#).

The PFDC has incorporated the subsequent recommendations into its [2021 Concordat action plan](#). The action plan was endorsed by Provost’s Board in January 2021 and its implementation is being 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 the [PFDC newsletter](#).

## 3. Courses and workshops

### 3.1 Courses

The PFDC offers a [wide range of courses](#) grouped under the following themes: “Postdoc essentials”, “Communication and presentation skills”, “Leadership and management”, “Succeeding now”, “Planning for success”, and “Next steps”. The courses provided, including residential courses lasting two to three days, are free of charge to all Imperial postdocs, fellows, and clinicians. This year, all courses were delivered virtually.

## Summary of provision:

From August 2020 to the end of July 2021, the PFDC ran **59 courses with 799 participants**. The PFDC introduced a number of new courses, which include: “Introduction to great design”, “Becoming a science founder”, “Mind your mate” and “Leadership in action”.

## 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%.** Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2020 and July 2021:

Q1. **91%** strongly agree or agree they found the course they attended useful

Q2. **88%** strongly agree or agree they know more about the subject having attended the course

Q3. **87%** strongly agree or agree they learned things that will help improve the way they work

Q4. **91%** strongly agree or agree they will apply what they learned

Q5. **97%** strongly agree or agree they were satisfied with the trainer(s)

Q6. **89%** strongly agree or agree they were satisfied with the course materials

A notable course run by the PFDC 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 for their professional and personal development, 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, goals, networking, 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 lives.

The programme is open to all members of staff who identify as women and consists of four development days set over four months.

### Summary of provision:

The PFDC ran the Springboard programme **twice** in 2020-21, with a total of **57 participants**.

### Participant satisfaction:

42 participants from the 2020-21 Springboard cohorts completed the programme evaluation survey. Highlights include:

Question	Answer: Yes
I feel more confident in the area of: Personal development	90%
I feel more confident in the area of: Goal setting	74%
I feel more confident in the area of: Own development needs	85%
I feel more confident in the area of: Understanding own values	85%
I feel more confident in the area of: Assertiveness	79%
I feel more confident in the area of: Managing change	74%

## 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 focusing on skills and goals development, to hosting guest speakers from across the College and exploring relevant external initiatives, such as industry and funders. They are open to all postdocs, fellows, and clinicians from across the College. All PFDC pop-ups were online in the 2020-21 academic year.

### Summary of provision:

From August 2020 to the end of July 2021, the PFDC ran **46 pop-up workshops for 917 attendees**.

Pop-up topics included (but were not limited to): preparing for fellowship applications and interviews, lectureship applications, LinkedIn and career talks from people with non-academic research careers.

### 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	⑤ Strongly agree
Q2. I know more about the subject having attended the pop-up	④ Agree
Q3. The pop-up content was relevant to me	③ Neither agree nor disagree
Q4. I am likely to apply what I learned on this pop-up	② Disagree
Q5. I am satisfied with the delivery	① Strongly disagree

**Overall satisfaction is 95%.** Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2020 and July 2021:

Q1. **94%** strongly agree or agree they found the pop-up useful

Q2. **94%** strongly agree or agree they knew more about the subject having attended the pop-up

Q3. **95%** strongly agree or agree they thought the pop-up content was relevant to them

Q4. **97%** strongly agree or agree they were likely to apply what they learned on the pop-up

Q5. **94%** strongly agree or agree they were satisfied with the delivery

## 3.2 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 **11 funder showcases with a total of 399 attendees**. Funder showcases included: [URKI Future Leaders Fellowships](#), [Royal Commission 1851](#), [UKRI Catalyst Awards \(Healthy Ageing\)](#), [L’Oreal-UNESCO for Women in Science](#), [BBSRC](#), [BHF](#), [EPSRC](#) and [Imperial College Research Fellowships](#).

## 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, fellowships, 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 **399 one-to-ones** from August 2020 to July 2021, this is a 4.72% increase from last year. All one-to-ones were online this academic year.

General area of advice	Total	Percentage
Fellowship application	195	49%
Lectureship application	42	11%
Careers advice	34	9%
CVs/Cover letters	90	23%
Job application	18	5%
Other	20	5%

Faculty	Total	Percentage
Engineering	176	44%
Medicine	138	35%
Natural Science	70	18%
Business School	8	2%
External	8	2%

Title	Total	Percentage
Postdocs	226	57%
Fellows and clinicians	11	27%
Lecturer	30	8%
Other	33	9%

### Participant satisfaction:

Having completed a one-to-one consultation session, participants are asked to evaluate their experience via an online survey. 209 participants (52%) filled in this survey.

#### One-to-one survey questions

- Q1. I found the one-to-one useful and informative ⑤ Strongly agree
- Q2. The advice I received during my one-to-one was helpful and relevant to my concerns ④ Agree  
③ Neither agree nor disagree
- Q3. I learned more about the resources and opportunities ② Disagree

available to me as a postdoc or fellow during my one-to-one (1) Strongly disagree

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

**Overall satisfaction is 94%.** Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2020 and July 2021:

Q1. **99%** strongly agree or agree they found the one to one useful and informative

Q2. **99%** strongly agree or agree they found the advice helpful and relevant to their concerns

Q3. **83%** strongly agree or agree they learnt about resources and opportunities available

Q4. **96%** strongly agree or agree they were more positive about issues addressed in the one-to-one

Q5. **94%** strongly agree or agree they have used the information and advice given to make positive changes

## 4.2 Mock interviews

The PFDC arranges non-technical [mock interviews](#) for postdocs, fellows and clinicians who have been shortlisted for fellowships, academic positions, and positions outside of higher education.

### Summary of provision:

There were **109 mock interviews** from August 2020 to July 2021. All mock interviews were online this academic year.

Type of roles applied for	Total	Percentage
Fellowship	39	36%
Lectureship/Professor	52	48%
Scientist/Research	6	6%
Non-academic	6	6%

### 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. 53 participants (49%) 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. ⑤ Strongly agree  
④ Agree
- Q2. I was more prepared for the questions that I was asked as a result of the mock interview. ③ Neither agree nor disagree  
② Disagree
- Q3. I received constructive feedback from the mock interview panel. ① Strongly disagree
- Q4. I was more prepared for my interview as a result of the mock interview.

**Overall satisfaction is 96%.** Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2020 and July 2021:

Q1. **96%** had a better idea of what to expect from an interview as a result of the mock interview.

Q2. **93%** were more prepared for the questions they were asked as a result of the mock interview.

Q3. **94%** received constructive feedback from the mock interview panel.

Q4. **94%** were more prepared for the interview as a result of the mock interview.

Interview outcome		
Result	Total	Percentage
Successful	34	31%
Unsuccessful	35	32%
Unknown/other	41	38%

To obtain interview outcomes, the PFDC admin team requests this information from the candidates in the mock interview evaluation survey. When a survey has not been completed, the PFDC team emails the candidate four months after the mock interview date to ask for their outcome.

## 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 **73 reps** who now represent postdocs from every

department across all campuses. Their hard work, commitment and creativity has resulted in a 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 this year's virtual awards ceremony taking place on 30 June. The winners of this year's PFDC Reps Awards were:

- **Individual award** – Dr Rob Bradley, Department of Life Sciences
- **Team award** – The PAW (Postdoc Appreciation Week) Committee: Dr Nina Moderau, Dr Maria Paraskevaidi and Dr Martine Nurek

During this academic year, the Reps Network meetings took place in November, March and May:

- Tuesday 17 November 2020
- Friday 3 March 2021
- Tuesday 4 May 2021

## 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, the Champions meetings took place in November, March and July.

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

## 5.3 Networks

The [PFDC Parents Network](#) 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. The PFDC Parent Network meetings were held in September, November, February and May.

The [Imperial Postdocs and Fellows Enterprise Network \(IPFEN\)](#) delivered 13 events in 2020-2021, including a four-week Hackathon in collaboration with Imperial Launch students with a successful final event in February 2021. During the Hackathon, Entrepreneur First (external trainers) provided a Pitching workshop for the participants.

From continued communication with specific E-Lab members, some E-Lab events (such as the WE Innovate for women founders, and the Pitch 'n mix events) are now open to postdocs and fellows and three postdoc teams entered the WE Innovate competition.

IPFEN and the PFDC have also participated in the first Imperial Entrepreneurship Forum (IEF) where the members from the full spectrum of Imperial's entrepreneurship ecosystem (Enterprise, Academics, Support services and external sponsors) presented updates. This Forum will meet termly and serve as a networking platform, as well as a place where everyone can share updates and ask for support in all things Enterprise.

## 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:

- Fellowship panel – Wednesday 23 June 2021
- Chemistry Career Day – Monday 28 June 2021
- Career development seminar series, Chemical Engineering – Postdoc fellowship panel discussion – Wednesday 21 July 2021

## 5.5 Funding Calls

Due to the difficulties created by the pandemic, the [Dame Julia Higgins Postdoc Collaborative Research Fund](#) did not run this academic year. However, the PFDC introduced two funds to support the postdoc and fellows' community at Imperial after a year of uncertainty.

### Seeds for Success

The aim of this fund was to allow postdocs to gather preliminary data for a fellowship application. There was a total of £30,000 available to fund projects (up to £5,000/project).

The Centre received 72 applications (approx. £350,000 requested) and analysed 58 projects (approx. £290,000). The PFDC and reviewer panel **awarded seven projects** with the full funds totaling £30,650. **Winners and their projects can be found on the [PFDC website – Seeds for Success](#)**. Further to this call, the department of Chemical Engineering funded two further projects with £10,000.

### Wings for Ideas

The aim of this fund was to allow postdocs and fellows to work on research that might lead to a new venture, a product, or a prototype. There was a total of £10,000 available to fund projects (up to £2,500/project).

The Centre received and reviewed 14 applications (approx. £31,000 requested) and **funded five projects** with the full funds totaling £9,311. **Winners and their projects can be found on the [PFDC Website – Wings for Ideas](#)**. This call was supported by Enterprise, with the Techcelerate team funding a further three projects for £7,500.

## 5.6 Expressions of Interest

From August 2020 to March 2021, the PFDC managed six expressions of interest from internal and external contacts. A total of 171 expressions of interest were received and over 50 people were put forward for the following programmes:

- Wilbe: Becoming a Science Founder pilot course – August 2020
- Broadening Horizons mentoring programme (sponsored by Wellcome) – September 2020
- Imperial International Seed Fund Reviewers – October 2020
- European Talent Academy (Imperial College London and Technical University Munich partnership) – October 2020
- Global Young Scientists Summit 2021 – December 2020
- UKRI Peer Review College – March 2021

## 6. Programme of support for fellows

A [pilot programme of support](#) consisting of informal networking conversations, Q&As with College professionals and peer action learning sets took place in the 2020-21 academic year for [UKRI Future Leaders Fellows \(FLFs\)](#).

The programme is designed to help FLFs at the start of their fellowship with their leadership skills and navigating an academic career, as well as building a community of fellows who can be accessed for support and sharing of experiences.

Topics covered in the programme include:

- Recruitment and how to select the best people (17 February 2021)
- Budget and finance (18 March 2021)
- Next steps (14 April 2021)
- Working with students (13 May 2021)
- Publicising your research (16 June 2021)

**The PFDC aims to roll out the programme of development support to all independent research fellows at the College.** Updates on the rollout of the programme in the 2021-22 academic year will be provided in the [PFDC newsletter](#) and on the [fellows programme webpage](#).

A CPD day was also provided on Wednesday 21 April 2021 for Imperial College Research Fellows in the first year of their fellowship. Topics covered included: reviewing the first six months, working with students and action planning.

## 7. Events

From August 2020 to July 2021, the PFDC held a variety of events. Notable events included two that were organised as part of [Women@Imperial week](#):

- Panel discussion: In Conversation with academic women – Tuesday 9 March
- Springboard taster session – Wednesday 10 March

The Centre also hosted the annual 'Q&A with the Provost' on Tuesday 8 September 2020. This session offered postdocs 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.

Additionally, the PFDC organised and delivered sessions during [Postdoc Appreciation Week](#) (PAW), which was held between 21 and 25 September 2020. PAW is an annual event taking place at Universities in the UK and US. PAW events at Imperial included:

- Panel discussion and Q&A – Transition to independence and leadership
- Panel discussion and Q&A – Postdoc life in a pandemic
- Workshop: How to build, maintain and make the most of your network

More information can be found on our [PAW webpages](#).

To build on PAW, a [committee](#) was formed in February 2021 to ensure postdocs at Imperial benefit all year round from a programme of support from postdocs for postdocs. The committee is currently comprised of three postdoc reps from the Faculty of Medicine: Dr Nina Moderau, Dr Maria Paraskevaidi and Dr Martine Nurek. In a short time, the committee organised the following events:

- Transition to independence and leadership – Thursday 25 March
- Webinar: Perfectionism and imposter syndrome – Thursday 15 April
- Webinar: Strategies for managing your mental health during Covid times – Tuesday 11 May

Finally, the PFDC hosted a series of CV clinics for postdocs seeking careers outside of academia. 62 postdocs attended the clinics which took place on:

- Friday 4 September 2020
- Friday 20 November 2020
- Friday 29 January 2021
- Wednesday 31 March 2021
- Wednesday 26 May 2021

## 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 2020-2021, there were three welcome inductions held on:

- Monday 28 September 2020
- Monday 18 January 2021
- Monday 24 May 2021

A PFDC welcome induction for fellows was also held on Monday 7 December 2020.

## 8. External work

The PFDC undertakes work for external organisations, accepting requests for training, talks, and other services.

The PFDC delivered the following sessions:

- Lectureships: Ready, Set, Go! – Queen’s University Belfast – Wednesday 16 December 2020
- Time management – King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) – Wednesday 31 March 2021
- Preparing successful fellowship applications – King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) – Tuesday 11 May 2021
- Lectureship applications: What you need to know to be successful – King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) – Wednesday 9 June 2021
- Lectureship CVs: What you need to be working towards to succeed in five years – King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) - Monday 21 June 2021

### 8.1 Additional projects

The PFDC carries out various projects throughout the year. The additional projects this year were:

- [Preparing for your fellowship interview booklet](#)
- [Pathways for postdocs booklet](#)
- [PFDC welcome video](#) (available on the PFDC website landing page)
- [Wellbeing resources for researchers](#)
- [ECR wellbeing webpages](#)

The PFDC and [People and Organisational Development](#) also commissioned three reviews into the provisions for postdocs, probationary lecturers, and PIs at Imperial. The key findings from the review of provisions for postdocs, carried out by [Research Coach Ltd](#), can be found [here on Box](#). The key findings from the review of provisions for probationary lecturers, carried out by [My Consultants](#), can be found [here on Box](#). The report on provisions for PIs will be complete in the next academic year.

The findings and recommendations from each report will inform improvements for the support provided to postdocs, probationary lecturers, and PIs at Imperial.

## 9. Summary

In the 2020-2021 academic year, the PFDC organised 118 courses, pop-ups and funder showcases for approximately 2,172 participants. Additionally, 399 one-to-one meetings and 109 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.

