

Imperial College London

Action plan 2021: The Concordat to support the career development of researchers

Imperial College London signed up to the [Concordat for the career development of researchers](#) in March 2020. Over the ensuing seven months, the College conducted a gap analysis against the Concordat principles, as well as commissioning an external review into the [provision for postdocs at Imperial College London](#). This review received contributions from over 500 postdocs and other key stakeholders from across the College and the subsequent recommendations have been incorporated into the 2021 Concordat action plan.

The gap analysis and review pointed to five themes that the College has set actions against to ensure that it creates the best culture for its researchers to thrive. These themes are:

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 10 Days development days](#)

This Concordat action plan has a one-year focus (2021) with suggestions in place for 2022-23. This action plan was compiled through consultation with the [Postdoc Reps Network](#) (Reps Network Meeting – 17 November 2020), a thriving community of over 70 reps who represent postdocs from every department across all campuses, and the newly established Researcher Development Committee (Chair: Professor Nick Jennings, Vice-Provost (Research and Enterprise)), which was founded to promote an excellent research culture at Imperial through the support and development of all researchers via the implementation of key external awards/policies.

The Concordat action plan was approved and endorsed by the [Provost's Board](#), which oversees the College's core academic mission of education, research and translation, and the faculties and academic support services that deliver this mission, on 26 January 2021.

The Researcher Development Committee will ensure that the Concordat action plan complements other key initiatives, such as Race Equality Charter and Athena Swan, and will oversee the completion of the actions set out below.

1. Wellbeing of early career researchers (ECRs)

The situation created by Covid-19 and the Wellcome Report into Research Culture has put the wellbeing of all Imperial's Researchers, 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 outcome	Action	Lead	Timeline	Outline success indicators
College-wide evaluation of the provision for mental health and wellbeing	<p>1.1 Mental health and wellbeing provision evaluation</p> <p>The College has an extensive online provision for health and wellbeing.</p> <p>A small project group, including those already working on wellbeing across HR, is meeting to coordinate and consolidate work on wellbeing, so it is comprehensive and easier to access.</p> <p>The goal is to produce a centralised resource for all staff including researchers.</p>	Director (HR)/ LDC/Occupational Health/PFDC	2021	Evaluation to be completed and actions to be drawn up against the perceived gaps by 2022.
Generate ECRs-specific wellbeing resources	<p>1.2 ECR wellbeing resources</p> <p>The external review into postdoc provision at the College identified a gap in the PFDC provision around 'wellbeing, mental health and resilience'.</p> <p>The PFDC has already taken steps to fill this gap by introducing new course provision such as Wellbeing in Research and Resilience in a Research Environment.</p>	PFDC/EDIC/ LDC		Wellbeing resources to be utilised – courses to be well attended, webpages to have consistent hit rates.

	<p>To further increase resources, the PFDC intends to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Commission a suite of video resources on wellbeing, mental health and resilience b) Increase signposting of existing wellbeing services, providing clarity about what services postdocs are eligible for and the processes they need to follow to access them. c) Pilot: Mind your Mate? which is run at the University of Glasgow and covers basic mental health awareness and suicide prevention skills so that ECRs have increased awareness of warning signs. d) Establish better links with EDIC and other services across the College such as the Chaplaincy, ETHOS, Learning and OD and Occupational Health. e) Promote existing staff diversity networks who aim to represent different staff groups at Imperial. Ask the chair of each network to provide a blurb as to why ECRs should be involved, and highlight this in the PFDC Newsletter. 		<p>a - Website live - winter 2021</p> <p>b - Infographic to be generated by autumn 2021</p> <p>c - summer 2021</p> <p>d - 2021</p> <p>e - spring 2021</p>	
Increase awareness of Report and Support	<p>1.3 Communications plan for Report and Support</p> <p>The College has launched a new online reporting tool called Report and Support, which will help build a picture of problems across Imperial.</p>		a – S	<p>Increased awareness of the Report and Support campaign indicated via the PRDP</p> <p>Areas where there are problems at the College identified and addressed.</p>

	<p>a) Decide how best to promote this to both ECRs and PIs</p> <p>b) Communications plan in place</p>	DD(ODI) DD(ODI)/PFDC	spring 2021 b - summer 2021	
Review the use of open-ended contracts for long-serving ECRs to ensure the College adheres to employment practices.	<p>1.4 Open-ended contracts use for ECRs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 review to have a focus 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. 	Head (Reward, Engagement and Policy)	2021	All contracts to be reviewed by end of 2021 and any discrepancies to be addressed.
A strategy in place to support ECRs with hidden disabilities	<p>1.5 How to best support ECRs with hidden disabilities</p> <p>Building on the work already carried out by EDIC and through consultation with advocates, such as Professor Sara Rankin, generate a strategy of how to best support ECRs with hidden disabilities, so that they feel supported by the College.</p>	EDIC/PFDC	2021	Strategy in place by end of 2021, which can be implemented in 2022,
Promote the support that the College offers to ECRs who have a declared disability.	<p>1.6 Promote resources and support available to any ECR who has a declared disability</p> <p>The College has a wide range of support in place for those with declared disabilities. However, these may not be known to ECRs.</p>	EDIC/PFDC	2021	Better signposting and links to relevant networks to be in place by 2022.

2. PI support to deliver the Concordat principles

There are a range of services and support available to PIs. For example, each department at Imperial has [Postdoc and Fellow Champions](#), which meet termly with the PFDC to advocate for their departmental ECRs and to help deliver on the Concordat principles. Action 2.1 aims to gain a better understanding as to how the College's PIs would like to be supported to deliver the Concordat principles. While the College is awaiting the outcome of this review, actions 2.2 to 2.6 are there to start building on the resources that are currently in place.

Intended outcome	Action	Lead	Timeline	Outline success indicators
An evaluation into the support that is offered to PIs by the College, with an emphasis on delivering the Concordat principles.	<p>2.1 Tender to evaluate current provision and scope new provision for PIs</p> <p>Ensure that the tender covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	LDC/PFDC	2021-22	Evaluation completed by January 2022. Recommendations incorporated into the 2022-23 action plan.
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.	<p>2.2 PI induction</p> <p>Working with the recommendations from 2.1 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.</p>	LDC	2022/23	Inductions being attended and best practice being shared – potential to establish cohorts of PIs to form support networks across the College.
Provide PFDC Postdoc Champions with additional training to facilitate	2.3 PFDC Postdoc Champions – Careers training	PFDC/PFDC Champions/	2021	Training to have taken place by 2022.

constructive career conversation with their departmental ECRs.	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.	Careers Service		
Develop a code of practice for PIs, postdocs and departments at Imperial.	<p>2.4 PI/Postdoc roles and responsibilities</p> <p>These expectations should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	PFDC/RD Committee	<p>Expectations to be generated by winter 2021</p> <p>Best practice examples – 2022</p>	<p>Expectations developed and provided to all PIs when recruiting a new postdoc, as well as in the PFDC induction material for postdocs.</p> <p>Expectations to be linked to PI Inductions (Action 2.2).</p> <p>Faculties to generate best practice and case studies in 2022.</p> <p>Establish a similar code of practice for independently funded fellows in 2022.</p>
Department-specific induction for postdocs which can be shared with their PIs before they join their group.	<p>2.5 Departmental postdoc induction packs</p> <p>The PFDC have an extensive induction for ECRs in place, including: welcome email, welcome booklet, welcome webpage and termly inductions, which complement the HR induction materials.</p>	Deans/HoDs PFDC/PFDC Champions/ LDC	2021/22	<p>During 2021, ascertain which departments have an established ECR induction process so that best practice can be shared.</p> <p>2022 – all departments to have an induction process in place for ECRs that is</p>

	<p>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.</p> <p>Through the Postdoc Champions sharing examples of best practice, all departments 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.</p>			tailored and complementary to both the HR and PFDC documents.
Increase the representation of underrepresented researchers at the College	<p>2.6 Bias training for the recruitment of research staff</p> <p>Working with the data that has been generated for the Race Equality Charter, the College needs to boost the number of BAME staff. 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 such as postdocs.</p>	DD(ODI)/ EDIC/LDC/ Head (Recruitment and Promotions)	2021	Piloted in 2021, with full rollout in 2022.

3. Leadership development for ECRs

For Imperial to be successful, the College recognises that we need highly skilled ECRs from a range of different backgrounds and experiences. The actions set out below will enable ECRs to have access to opportunities that will enhance their CVs and succeed in whichever career path they take. These actions include funding opportunities, exposure to senior management and skills development.

Intended outcome	Action	Lead	Timeline	Outline success indicators
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.	<p>3.1 Postdoc collaborative funds</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Roll out this model to offer the same opportunity in all faculties.</p>	PFDC/ Faculty RD Champion	2022	Each faculty has its own annual postdoc collaborative research funding scheme by end of 2022.
Leadership and management training for the next generation of fellows	<p>3.2 Tailored induction and leadership programme for independently funded fellows</p> <p>Building on the successful initiatives developed by the PFDC fellows consultant, the following will be undertaken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Convert the face-to-face induction to a digital format, in consultation with the LDC. b) Generate a tailored welcome pack for fellows like that which has been developed for the postdocs. c) Devise a leadership and management programme which utilised action learning sets to help develop cohorts within the fellows community. 	PFDC	a - spring 2021 b - summer 2021 c - spring 2021	Digital content available and a pilot of the leadership and management programme conducted by end of 2021.

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)	<p>3.3 Scoping project into leadership development of ECRs</p> <p>Although the PFDC does offer some leadership and management training, it is currently oriented towards a research career.</p> <p>The PFDC will carry out a review of what is currently offered by the College through the PFDC and LDC, and also by the wider sector, for example the Managing at Manchester Programme, to devise a programme that will equip ECRs to become the best managers in their chosen field.</p> <p>A goal of this project is to ensure that there is an integrated development journey from PGR to PI.</p>	LDC/PFDC	2021	A programme outline ready by end of 2021. Pilot to be conducted in 2022.
Increase awareness and engagement with Imperial's IMPACT (Imperial Positive About Cultural Talent) development programme amongst ECRs.	<p>3.4 Introduction to IMPACT for ECRs</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	EDIC/PFDC	Spring 2021	Introduction to IMPACT to be piloted in 2021 – see an increase in ECR engagement with the College-wide 2021 IMPACT programme.
Increase representation of underrepresented groups amongst the fellows community	<p>3.5 Review into the Imperial College Research Fellowship (ICRF) to increase the diversity of underrepresented groups</p>	RD Committee (Chair)	Spring 2021	Guidance to be in place as to how the ICRF can increase diversity for the 2022 intake.

	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.	/Research Office/PFDC		
Increase the number of ECRs from underrepresented groups who are reverse mentors, for when the scheme is extended to all senior College leaders.	<p>3.6 ECRs reverse mentoring senior College leaders</p> <p>Building on the success of the reverse mentoring scheme for the senior leadership team, ensure that underrepresented ECRs are aware of the scheme and encouraged to become reverse mentors. This will allow the ECRs to interact directly with senior leaders.</p>	EDIC/ LDC/ RD Champion/ PFDC	Recruitment of ECRs - summer 2021	An increase in ECRs as reverse mentors – aiming for 40% from this community.

4. The Personal Review and Development Plan (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 outcome	Action	Lead	Timeline	Outline success indicators
Full review of the PRDP process for researchers at the College	<p>4.1 PRDP review</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Concordat principles and the recommendations for the PI support tender (Action 2.1) will be incorporated into the reformed process.</p> <p>This review will consider all PRDP forms for the research community: ECRs through to senior management.</p>	DD(ODI)/LDC/PFDC	2021-23	The PRDP process to be evaluated and recommendation to be put in place by 2023.
Postdoc PRDP form guidance documents for both the postdocs and the PIs to be generated.	<p>4.2 Postdoc PRDP guidance notes</p> <p>The postdoc PRDP form was revised in 2018 following consultation with the community.</p> <p>Guidance documents need to be produced to enable both postdocs and PIs to gain the full potential 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.</p>	PFDC/LDC	Summer 2021	<p>Postdoc PRDP guidance documents to be in place for 2022.</p> <p>These guidance notes will be reviewed and updated once the outcomes of Action 4.1 have been published.</p>

<p>An evaluation of how best to log the PRDP process at the College so that meaningful data can be later extracted for evaluation.</p>	<p>4.3 PRDP reporting system</p> <p>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.</p> <p>It would also be desirable to have recall from the previous years' PRDP for comparison and to gauge progress.</p>	<p>Director (HR)</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>The evaluation to be conducted during 2022, so that in 2023 a system is in place to document PRDPs to make extracting meaningful data easier.</p>
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5. How postdocs utilise their 10 development days

For over ten years, all Imperial ECRs have 10 development days allocated in their contracts. However, the College has not monitored how ECRs use these 10 days or compiled evidence-based examples of best practice. The College aims to help ECRs to better utilise these development days, first by gaining a better understanding of what they use their days for, and then develop a series of resources which will enable them to better utilise their development days' entitlement.

Intended outcome	Action	Lead	Timeline	Outline success indicators
A better understanding as to how Imperial ECRs use their 10 development days	<p>5.1 Postdoc-10: How do Imperial postdocs use their 10 development days</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	PFDC	Concluded spring 2021	Study report to be published and shared with the research community - summer 2021
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.	<p>5.2 Postdoc-10: evidence-based examples</p> <p>a) Building on the work carried out in Action 5.1, 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.</p> <p>Include real-life case studies (e.g. brief video interviews or profile stories) of Imperial postdocs discussing the benefits they have taken from engaging with their professional development,</p>	PFDC	Spring to autumn 2021	<p>Web-based guidance to be published autumn 2021.</p> <p>Faculty/departmental case studies to be published 2022.</p>

	<p>particularly those that highlight using additional resources other than courses provided by the College.</p> <p>The case studies to be a regular feature in the monthly PFDC newsletter.</p> <p>b) '10 development day' resources to be incorporated into all PFDC welcome information and an email to be sent to all ECRs who have been at the College for six months, with additional information about how to utilise their day as a resource for their development.</p> <p>c) A resource for PIs to help with the 10 days section in the PRDP form to be generated (Action 4.2).</p> <p>d) Through the study (5.1), identify areas of good practice within each faculty/department, to generate department-specific case studies.</p>	PFDC/ Faculty RD Champion	2022	
Track how many postdocs utilise their 10 development days so that the College is able to generate data to better understand what activities they engage in, and also identify areas within the College where development isn't being undertaken.	<p>5.3 Tracking uptake of 10 development days</p> <p>HR to develop a standard approach for postdocs to log their professional development activity/days in a similar way to booking annual leave. This system to be monitored at department-/College-level so that individuals, via their PIs, can be encouraged to regularly engage with their development.</p>	Director (HR)	2021/22	Have a logging system in place by 2022 which can be used to generate data as to how postdocs are utilising their development days and target areas which may require further interventions.
By highlighting the different career paths that postdocs at Imperial take, there is the potential to inspire	<p>5.4 Increase awareness of Pathways for Postdocs</p>	PFDC		

<p>postdocs to use their 10 days to fill any perceived skills gaps to enable them to enter their next career.</p>	<p>Pathways for Postdocs has been in place since 2016. However, more could be done to promote it to postdocs. To do this, the PFDC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Introduce brand colours and a logo so that any provision publicised under Pathways will be easily identified. b) Develop a new landing page so that it is clear how the PFDC can help postdocs with their career. c) Showcase career paths available to ECRs through careers events and a dedicated webpage. d) Encourage the PFDC postdoc reps to host an annual departmental alumni event to showcase where their postdocs go. 	PFDC PFDC PFDC PFDC/ Postdoc reps	a - winter 2021 b - spring 2021 c - summer 2021 2021	
<p>ECRs to be better aware of the EDI provision at the College.</p>	<p>5.5 ECRs to be encouraged to take part in the EDI at Imperial online courses as part of their 10 development days</p> <p>To increase awareness of the EDI provision at the College, all ECRs to be encouraged to undertake the EDI at Imperial online course. The aim would be to promote online unconscious bias training at the same time.</p>	EDIC/PFDC/ PFDC Champions	2021	80% of ECRs to have completed the general EDI online training by 2022.

6. Researcher Development Committee responsibilities

The Researcher Development Committee wants to ensure that it is representative of all researchers at the College. Therefore, this year it will recruit researchers from all levels to ensure that is truly representative of all the researchers it encompasses. As the committee is new, it has established a communications plan to promote both itself and the Concordat action plan to all staff. All communications will highlight the committee's responsibility to oversee the delivery of the action plan outlined above. This year, the committee will start work to look at ECR representation on committees and identifying a way in which key policies could be more accessible to both ECRs and their managers.

Intended outcome	Action	Lead	Timeline	Outline success indicators
Increase awareness of the Concordat amongst all staff at the College.	<p>6.1 Communications plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Announcement in the College's Staff Briefing: article by Professor Nick Jennings to announce the Researcher Development (RD) Committee, its remit and Concordat action plan b) Concordat webpage to be developed c) RD Committee webpage to be developed and hosted under the Vice-Provost (Research and Enterprise) webpages to signpost to the Concordat d) Researcher Development Champion: Part of their role will be to champion the Concordat within their faculty e) Briefing paper of the Concordat and action plan to be sent to all HoDs to distribute to all staff f) Concordat and action plan to be referenced in academic job family PRDP forms 	RD Committee (Secretary) PFDC RD Committee (Secretary) RD Committee (Faculty) RD Committee (Secretary) LDC/PFDC	a - spring 2021 b - winter 2021 c - winter 2021 d - In place by spring 2021 e - spring 2021 f - 2022	Increase awareness of the Concordat through reporting in the staff survey

Ensure that the Researcher Development Committee is truly representative of all the researchers it covers.	<p>6.2 RD Committee structure</p> <p>For recruitment to the RD Committee, ensure that diversity of view/experience is considered and encouraged.</p> <p>Recruit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PGRs and ECRs representatives as full committee members • Faculty Researcher Development Champions, ideally from lecturer/senior lecturer level, to champion the Concordat and lead on faculty specific actions 	RD Committee (Chair)	All in post - summer 2021	
Ensure there is adequate representation of ECRs on departmental decision-making committees.	<p>6.3 Which departmental committees have ECR representation</p> <p>Gather information, through consultation with the PFDC Reps Network and Postdoc Champions, on ECR representation on departmental committees, to ascertain the proportion of ECR on decision making bodies at department-level.</p>	PFDC	Summer 2021	The list will be shared with the Provost and may form part of a larger review into representation on committees.
Centralised list of all policies that are relevant to PIs and ECRs	<p>6.3 Policies and how they are communicated</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Compile a list of which policies are most relevant to researchers. Use the PFDC Reps Network as a focus group to help generate the list. b) Identify a centralised webpage to store and promote these policies. 	Head (Employee relations)/ PFDC	a - summer 2021 b - autumn 2021	Website live and communications plan in place for 2022

	c) Identify which are the most effective ways to communicate these policies to PIs and Researchers.		c - autumn 2021	
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Reporting schedule:

Internal progress monitoring	Termly RD Committee meetings and full report submitted annually each January to Provost Board
External reporting	Progress report published annually each February

Key:

DD(ODI)	Deputy Director (Organisational Development and Inclusion)
ECRs	Early Career Researchers (postdocs and fellows)
EDIC	Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Centre
HoDs	Heads of Department
IMPACT	Imperial Positive About Cultural Talent
LDC	Learning and Development Centre
PFDC	Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre
PGRs	Post-graduate researchers
PRDP	Personal Review and Development Plan
RD Champion	Researcher Development Champion
RD Committee	Researcher Development Committee
REC	Race Equality Charter