Imperial Coaching Strategy

External Context

Dealing with change and uncertainty are a constant that all institutions are currently facing. Imperial recognises that this will call on the resilience of its staff in managing their roles and responsibilities and that the quality and nature of what is expected is becoming ever more challenging. College staff are offered a range of development and support options and it is within this context that the Imperial Coaching Academy sits.

Imperial College London launched its Coaching Academy in 2009 and at the time Imperial’s internal coaching offer was unique within the HE sector and available only in a few other organisations – the BBC ran a very successful scheme, training up staff in a range of roles to take on coaching assignments. A few corporates such as PWC were starting down this route but their model tended to be to employ full time coaches as staff.

A number of universities have since developed internal coaching capability but the Imperial approach has been seen as a flagship within the sector since 2009 and the Coaching Academy has provided information and support to a range of other universities setting up their own provision. Most recently a one-day Coaching Conference was held at Imperial for the HE sector in September 2016, showcasing best practice across the sector.

The College Strategy 2015-2020 and the HR Strategy focus on the importance of quality conversations between staff and their managers, while Imperial Expectations has become increasingly accepted as a baseline for management and leadership best practice.

Between 2009 and 2017, coaching has evolved to such an extent that there needs to be a more explicit statement about the benefits that coaching will continue to bring to Imperial in the future, and the ways in which the Coaching Academy can best be supported and promoted by the College. This Strategy sets out the purpose, benefits and future direction of coaching within Imperial.

Rationale for Setting up the Coaching Academy

The Coaching Academy was set up in 2009 with the following aims:

• To widen the coaching offer to all Imperial staff subject to coach availability.

• To create a pool of talent coaches to support participants on the talent programmes.

• To offer follow-up and practical support to participants who have completed other leadership and professional development programmes available within the College.

• To recognise the potential of staff outside HR and L and D to support and develop others.

• To offer an innovative form of personal and professional development to those staff who, whatever their job role, and however demanding, welcome the opportunity to develop their own capability as coaches, and in many cases, as managers.

Coaching is now widely available as support to development for College staff at all levels and across all job roles. Imperial has 40 coaches who have all taken part in a rigorous training programme, most recently the Institute of Leadership and Management Level 5 in Coaching and Mentoring. All
coaches go through an application process for the coaching course and carry out the coaching sessions on top of their usual jobs. Imperial also offers the coaches continuing professional development (CPD) two or three times a year and ongoing coaching supervision. Each coach is carefully matched to the client or coachee and they have up to four meetings over six months.

Information about the Impact and Benefits of coaching at Imperial can be found in Appendix 1.

**Developing and sustaining a Coaching Culture at Imperial – Future Direction**

In order to identify how best to develop and embed coaching at Imperial, we need to learn both from our experience of developing coaching within College and from best practice in other organisations. Understanding what contributes to an effective coaching culture will help clarify what our focus should be going forward, and what additional resource requirements there may be.

**Creating a Coaching Culture**

The key elements of a coaching culture are recognised to be:

- A pool of external coaches available to particular groups eg senior managers and leaders
- 1-1 coaching support available to all staff and/or targeted for key groups eg those new to manager roles, those recently promoted to a more senior role/ those on talent programmes
- Leader as Coach programmes as a core part of leadership development
- Identifying opportunities for shared goals and collaboration with colleagues who are developing coaching initiatives in other parts of the organisation.

**Coaching needs to be AGILE**

- It can be an agent for change, used to support management and leadership change initiatives – coaching can provide staff with the skills to stay relevant in times of change and uncertainty
- It links to succession, enabling people to gain the confidence and credibility to step up to management and leadership roles at the next level

**Benchmarking**

The 2016 Ridler Report analyses strategic trends in the use of coaching, using data exclusively from organisational sponsors of coaching (rather than external coaching providers) found that 72% of organisations expect to increase their spending on coaching in the next two years, for both external and internal coaching. While external coaching is widely favoured for senior leaders, where internal coaching was employed, the main drivers are:

- To contribute to the broader development of a ‘coaching culture’ (88%)
- To make coaching more easily accessible when it is needed (81%)
- To act as an accessible centre of excellence which the organisation can draw on (76%)
- To widen the availability of coaching to less senior executives who have not traditionally had access to coaching (73%)
- To be able to coach more individuals for a given budget (64%)
Next steps for Imperial

- The pool of external coaches needs to be enhanced and extended as a response to increasing interest at more senior levels within the organisation to the option of coaching. This will have resource implications.
- The current pool of 40 coaches appears to be the right kind of number to meet current demand and for the purposes of continuing coach development support and supervision. To keep numbers at this level requires training a new cohort of coaches approximately every 2 years. However, were demand to increase significantly it might be necessary to review this position.
- The interest in, and impact of, recent Leader as Coach initiatives indicates that more targeted effort is required to extend this provision to more College managers and leaders.
- The Coaching Academy needs to build on opportunities for collaborative work with colleagues who are building more of a coaching culture within the Imperial educational community. This may include for example co-development of courses and digital learning resources.

Resourcing
While the current level of budget support will support the training of new coaches and the CPD and supervision of existing coaches, there will be an additional budget requirement to extend the use of external coaches and the Leader as Coach initiatives.

One of the principles of the coaching offer is that it is open to all College staff, but at times when resources are stretched, the need to prioritise coaching support in line with College priorities may be required.

The Coaching Academy will explore and engage with new cross-College initiatives, and seek appropriate resourcing in future Planning Rounds.

August 2017
Supporting the College Strategy and the HR Strategy

Uptake of coaching between 2009 and 2015 remained steady at around 80 coaching arrangements a year. However, uptake since 2016 has increased significantly and in 2017 is likely to be double that of earlier years. Coaching has already made a significant contribution to quality conversations between staff and their colleagues, as well as between staff and their managers.

The 3 charts below, taken from the recent Evaluation report carried out in March 2017, indicate the range of issues that individual coachees bring, and show how coaching has enabled them to reflect on their range of options and to enhance their ability to deal constructively with peers, managers and direct reports.
2 recent coachees state the benefits they experienced:
*Coaching encouraged me to look at, and think about things in new and different ways, to consider a variety of opportunities as well as to closely examine my current situation. It was also useful just to have a focal point and an incentive to take action from one meeting to the next.*

*I found it really helpful to be able to articulate my challenges and concerns to another person who works in Imperial and has a lot of expertise, but yet someone with whom I do not have a formal relationship (i.e., manager/colleague). I also found it really helpful to have my assumptions questioned and able to talk issue through, seeing things from a different perspective, without feeling judged, or criticised.*

The benefits of coaching as a 2-way process extend to the trained coaches.
As one coach put it:
*I have applied my coaching skills not only in working with my clients but also in developing my staff. I also see my clients, who are managers, starting to use the principles of coaching to improve relationships and effectiveness of their teams. It is a virtuous circle.*

At a broader, organisational level, there has also been an increased awareness of the value and benefits of coaching as a leadership style through Leader as Coach programmes since 2016, which have been offered to a range of middle and senior managers and leaders and will continue to be developed.

**Accountability and Scrutiny**
- Coaches acknowledge the need to be accountable:
  Imperial coaches are trained to work within a legal and ethical framework, recognising their duty of care both to individual coachees and to the wider organisation. They are bound by the International Coach federation (ICF) and the European Coaching and Mentoring Council (EMCC) Codes of Conduct
- Evaluation of impact is regularly carried out through a bi-annual survey of coachees as well as coaches, to explore the extent to which coaching has been effective. This data-driven evidence-based approach both demonstrates the effectiveness of coaching provision and indicates where re-direction is required.
- The Coaching Academy is accountable to the Head of HR and to its Stakeholders