

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

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Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (*max 500 words*)

Imperial is committed to research excellence, supported by a culture of integrity, good governance and best practice that encourages courageous research with a global outlook.

Imperial's research culture is based on a broad set of values underpinning our commitment to research excellence, which encompass a prioritisation of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through our EDI Strategy for inclusive excellence, research integrity, and researcher wellbeing.

Achieving a positive research culture is the responsibility of all staff and students at the College and is monitored through our staff surveys and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey for research students.

Imperial's commitment to excellence underpins everything, but this is only possible through an approach to ensuring a positive and inclusive research culture is fully embedded in policies, practices and initiatives across the entire College.

The set of College Values and Imperial Expectations play a key role in the College's proactive policy of championing equality, diversity and fulfilling social responsibilities. They embody the commitment to inclusiveness, participation and openness. These are reinforced by the Imperial Together initiative, which strengthens the continued efforts to create the best working environment and culture.

As part of efforts to embed a positive research culture within Imperial, the College has provided all staff with a Research Environment Toolkit to help them implement change both as part of their grant applications and within their own research environment.

Since 2021-22, the College has secured over £3m from Research England's Enhancing Research Culture funding to invest in developing research culture. Initially, the priority for the College was to pump prime scoping projects; as the funding has continued, the focus has shifted to providing ongoing support to those projects that have shown the most potential from the initial pump priming to allow them to be embed within the College.

At Imperial, research culture covers:

Research integrity

Research integrity underpins Imperial's achievements. All staff and students should promote and maintain a culture of honesty, openness and responsibility, enabling research to be conducted with integrity. The College is a signatory of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity and has adopted the Universal Ethical Code for Scientists. The College offers a wide range of eLearning in this area.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Imperial is committed to promoting and embedding equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the College. There are a number of committees and working groups that are focused on different activities and aspects of EDI as highlighted in Imperial's EDI Strategy.

Researcher Wellbeing

Imperial is committed to building a supportive, inclusive, and highly motivated community across all disciplines, functions and activities to help attract and retain the talented and diverse staff and students to achieve its mission. This requires a supportive and considerate community based on diversity, mutual respect and a commitment to excellence.

Initiatives include health and wellbeing with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023) and five-year strategy for physical activity (2023), HR support, professional development, staff recognition, and research evaluation.

Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success *(max 600 words)*

Environment and culture

Imperial recognises that to achieve research excellence, there must be a supportive and inclusive research environment. Our research environment is based on a broad set of College Values underpinning our commitment to research excellence, which encompass a prioritisation of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through our EDI Strategy, as well as upholding research integrity as outlined in our commitment to the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

Good mental health and wellbeing are at the centre of the research environment that we want to create and that is why we are implementing an institutional Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy which is complemented by the Physical Activity and Sports 2022-2027 Strategy.

Imperial strives to ensure that all the policies, practices and initiatives that are managed across the College are inclusive, equitable and transparent. Imperial Essentials, six online induction training modules, are designed to ensure that everyone is equipped with the knowledge and resources which are essential to all Imperial staff.

Imperial regards acts of bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct as unacceptable. The College uses the Report and Support tool for individuals to disclose unwelcoming behaviours. In 2023, there were 161 staff disclosures, 117 of which were anonymous. Of the 44 named reports seven were from research staff and six from academic staff. The tool gives cross-College transparency and allows the College to focus attention on stamping out poor behaviour.

Employment

The College's People Strategy 2022+ continues to be implemented and will form part the wider College Strategy that is currently out for consultation amongst the Imperial Community. The overall objective of the People Strategy is to support the College in delivering its academic mission by finding and developing diverse talent, creating an inclusive culture, and building a resilient workplace. Guidance is in place to assist

with recruitment to ensure that the best person for the role is recruited in line with legislation, best practice principles and the promotion routes available.

The working group to review the Learning and Teaching and Research terms and conditions and the use of fixed term contracts, which reports to University Management Board, has entered phase II of its review. This includes an evaluation of promotion pathways for researchers.

Imperial Insights is a well-established induction process that is open to all staff. The Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre complements Imperial Insights with a welcome package that is tailored to research staff.

Following an extensive consultation in 2022, a new annual review process has been introduced. The Annual Review Conversation (ARC) is an opportunity for staff to have a discussion with their line manager, focusing on everything they need to thrive at work. Building on regular one-to-ones, the conversation is designed to be meaningful and constructive, recognising ongoing contributions and planning for the future based on individual and departmental needs and aspirations.

Professional development of researchers

The Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC) is a dedicated team that supports research staff at Imperial. The PFDC offers a programme of professional skills and career development training, support, and opportunities, which enable research staff to take a proactive approach to developing their skills, potential, and explore their career prospects.

The PFDC continues to grow its provision in response to the community that it supports. New initiatives are introduced annually. Highlights from 2023 include:

- The PFDC launched a revamped website which is easier to navigate. This is part of a wider communications strategy that is being implemented by the Centre.
- Hosting the first PFDC Awards and Celebration, which expanded on the existing PFDC Reps Awards to recognise the contributions research staff make to research culture at Imperial.
- Delivering 42 courses and 21 workshops, with satisfaction rates of over 90% across the board and providing 263 one-to-one consultations and 104 mock interviews, with satisfaction rates of over 89% across the board.
- Continuing to fund individuals to investigate novel research ideas.

- Offered executive leadership coaching to all independently funded fellows and established the Imperial Fellows’ Leadership Network.
- Piloted a cohort-based approach to supporting research staff who are coming to the end of their contract.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]

Environment and Culture (*max 600 words*)

Institution

A College-wide Strategy Consultation begun in 2023 to help shape Imperial’s academic mission over the next 10-20 years. The areas considered were: Education and Student Experience, Research and Enterprise, Societal and Global Engagement. Following a second round of consultation, the new Strategy will be launched in Spring 2024.

During 2022-23, Imperial’s Governance structures were evaluated. The People and Culture Committee has been introduced to consider strategic issues relating to people, culture and EDI. This committee will continue the work of the Imperial Together Action Group which has come to end of its two-year term.

The thriving community of Imperial Values Champions, continue to embedded the Values and Behaviours across the College. The 30+ champions represent staff from all faculties/sections and campuses.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for staff and students was launched in June 2023. The priorities are to:

- build and maintain an inclusive, compassionate Imperial community that enables everyone’s voice and needs to be heard and respected.
- build and maintain a supportive community where colleagues, supervisors and managers are knowledgeable and have the relevant training to

promote mental wellness and prevent factors in the workplace that can trigger mental ill health.

- promote a safe environment that boosts wellbeing, innovation, creativity and productivity.

An action plan is currently being drawn up to ensure that the strategy is embedded in Imperial's culture.

In September 2023, Professor Lesley Cohen and Dr. Wayne Mitchell became a joint appointment to the role of Associate Provost for EDI for a term of two years.

Academic managers of researchers

The Academic's Success Guide was launched in March 2023. The resources, compiled with input from over 500 academics, brings together information on how to promote a healthy working environment for both themselves and the researchers they support, as well as relevant College policies and practices. Since its launch, the resource has been accessed by >1600 users and was featured as a case study in the 2022 Annual Report, Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

The 2022 'What do women need to progress in academia?' project identified 10 key 'facilitating' factors that are important for academic women's progression. In November 2023 a reflection and action planning resource was developed and piloted with group leaders (Action 2.9). The resource aims to support PIs with leadership/management/supervisory responsibilities to integrate the ten facilitating factors into their own groups and teams. It was felt that the resource could be broadened and adapted to other protected characteristics beyond gender identity. The full resource will be available to the wider community during Spring 2024.

Researchers

The PFDC Reps Network continues to work with the PFDC to lead initiatives that will create a positive research environment at Imperial. This year the network has:

- Been consulted on the College Strategy, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Action 1.4b), the PFDC Communications Strategy (Actions 1.1a).
- Fed back to Move Imperial that the Just Move programme should be free to staff as well as students. This suggestion was implemented for the 2023-24 academic year.
- Given feedback on the draft PI/Postdoc expectations (Action 3.3).
- Had a focus group with the new joint Associate Provosts for EDI.
- Inputted their ideas on what should be covered in the video that the President recorded to encourage research staff to undertake professional and personal development (Action 1.3).

The 2022 'What do women need to progress in academia?' project interviewed 60 research and academic staff and identified over 40 examples of sexist/gendered behaviours towards academic women at Imperial. In November 2023 a training course was piloted with research staff to enable staff to explore the themes of sexism and gender-based microaggressions in a supportive and non-judgemental space. It was felt that the training could be broadened and adapted to other protected characteristics beyond gender identity. Staff attending the pilot appreciated the complexity of the issue and provided feedback for the final session to be integrated in the programme by Spring 2024.

Imperial as One, the College's BAME staff network, organised:

- Its annual conference 'No Stone Left Unturned: No obstacles can stand in the way of your success'. The conference focused on identifying barriers that might be holding individuals back in their career and how to find support and resources to break through them. Half of the 80 who were present were research staff.
- The Imperial As One Media Academy (IAOMA) which offers expert media training for minority ethnic staff

	<p>and students. In the 2023 cohort, 12 out of 28 participants are researchers.</p> <p>The <u>Provost's Visiting Professor programme</u> is designed to recruit academics from Black-heritage and other underrepresented backgrounds, with the long-term goal of increasing the number of professorial staff at Imperial from under-represented groups. As part of their time at Imperial, the 2023 visiting professors shared their unique insight with the research staff community (Action 5.5). The online event was well attended and due to its success, it has become an annual fixture in the PFDC calendar of events.</p>
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>The <u>cross-College working group</u> has now entered phase II of its review of <u>Learning and Teaching and Research Terms and Conditions and the use of Fixed Term Contracts</u>. The groups priorities for 2024 are: implementing new role profiles for both job families; evaluating career progression frameworks for both families and reviewing job titles across the College.</p> <p>Academic managers of researchers</p> <p>The HR Policy & Reward team is participating in a review of Academic Titles and Progression with the creation of the <u>Review of Academic Titles and Progression Working Group</u> (May 2023). Recognising that using globally recognised academic titles provides clarity around external recruitment and that titles hold personal importance for our current staff, the working group is taking an open, collaborative and inclusive approach to reviewing job titles, including honorary titles and those for visiting academics. The recommendations of this group will be taken to the Academic Strategy Committee during 2024 with the view of implementation for the 2024-2025 Academic year.</p> <p>People and Organisational Development (POD) has undertaken a review of the leadership and Management provision at the College. To complement the existing support for PIs and Managers, POD has developed <u>the Heads of</u></p>

Department Onboarding Leadership Programme for Academic and Professional, Technical and Operational Staff. This one-year programme is designed to bring both groups of College Heads together to create lifelong learning partnerships, remove silos, and create greater understanding to help consolidate Imperial's position and status. The yearlong initial programme, launched in November 2023, has had 28 participants, of which 10 Academics (Heads of Department, Deans, Chairs and Professors) from across the 4 Faculties.

Leadership development for postdocs and fellows is a priority for the PFDC, with a special focus on supporting the research leadership capabilities of independent research fellows.

Following the successful pilot in 2022 of executive leadership coaching with the UKRI Future Leaders Fellows based at Imperial, coaching is now offered to all independently funded fellows (Action 5.7). Since 2022, 41 individuals have partaken in this opportunity, with participants stating that they have experienced significant improvements relating to interpersonal and communication skills, as well as their work/life balance.

In March 2023, the PFDC launched the Imperial Fellows' Leadership Network (Action 2.13) with a live kick-off event, followed by a series of online workshops that provided fellows with regular opportunities to come together as a group of emerging new leaders who want to lead well, discuss and share knowledge, and build allyship and support. The network meets during the academic year via a programme of one-hour webinars and peer-mentoring support sessions. Two cohorts of 28 Fellows are running, with two more rounds planned for 2024.

Researchers

Research staff representatives continue to voice the views of the community through the workstream group which is supporting the working group to review researcher terms and conditions and the use of fixed-term contracts.

	<p>To increase research staff representation on the College's <u>Athena Swan</u> and <u>Race Equality Charter</u> Self-Assessment Teams (SATs), an open call was sent to all research staff. The SATs required one representative each. These posts were filled during November 2023.</p> <p>To increase reward and recognition for the research staff community, the first <u>PFDC Awards and Celebration</u> took place in June 2023 (Action 2.3a). Two new awards were introduced to recognise the contributions research staff make creating a positive research environment and supporting research staff and students. In total 66 nominations were received which equated to 22 individuals being put forward for an award. The event was well attended with over 35 people present.</p> <p>In 2022 an appreciation board was introduced for Postdoc Appreciation Week, which was replicated in 2023. Over 40 notes of appreciation were submitted matching the 2022 numbers. (Action 2.3b).</p>
<p>Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>The 2022 staff survey made it clear that the annual review process needed reforming and was not meeting needs. Following extensive consultation, and an external review including focus groups, surveys and feedback from Faculties and the People and Culture Committee, a new process, the <u>Annual Review Conversations (ARC)</u> was launched in July 2023. Each department now chooses a time of year when they conduct their ARC process, either July-September or January-April. 1,500 members of staff have been briefed on the new process and 50% of departments took part in the first round. Colleagues who responded to an evaluation survey appreciated the emphasis on the discussion and the flexibility of the process to their needs. ARC is designed to co-evolve with input from the community to ensure that it remains a living process.</p> <p>At Imperial, we are committed to ensuring that all staff can develop and grow both personally and professionally. <u>With the introduction of new resources designed to help</u></p>

researchers make the most of their 10 development days, the President recorded a video that was shared across College to encourage researchers, with support from their managers, to prioritise their development. The video, which was initially shared in the 12 January 2023 bimonthly all staff newsletter, has received over 80 views and will be incorporated into the introduction of the online resource early 2024. This completes Action 1.3 of the 23-25 Concordat Action plan.

To further communicate the support that is available to researchers the following initiatives have taken place:

- The PFDC has reviewed and implemented a new communications strategy (Action 1.1a), updated their email distribution lists (Action 1.1b) and relaunched the PFDC website, following consultation with the community (Action 1.1d).
- Departmental visits by the PFDC are well underway. 12 of the 25 departments across 3 campuses have been visited and >170 researchers and their managers reached (Action 1.1c).
- The inaugural POD Festival took place in September 2023, showcasing the wide range of support that is available to all staff at Imperial.
- Departmental website templates have been created which (1) showcase the support that is available during the fellowship life-cycle (Action 1.5) and (2) the support available via the PFDC. We are currently disseminating the templates across college via Heads of Department.

Academic managers of researchers

The PFDC continues to build upon the resources available for managers of researchers via the Academic Success Guide. This year, a resource on how managers can support their research staff to fully engage in their 10 days of allocated development time was developed.

Researchers

The PFDC delivered an extensive programme of professional skills and career development training, support, and opportunities for >2000 researchers during 2023.

Providing clarity around the 10 Development days entitlement has been a priority this year. The PFDC has curated recommendations and testimonials from researchers into an online resource which will allow research staff to make the most of their contacted 10 development days (Actions 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4). The pages give clarity on why they should undertake 10 days of development activities each year, tools to reflect and take a broad approach to what they may wish to develop or experience to support their career success, and inspiration on how they can use their 10 days in a variety of engaging ways.

The PFDC has continued to add to the opportunities for researchers to investigate their career choices:

- The PhD Careers Fair, run by the Career Service in June 2023, was opened to and publicised to all research staff (Action 5.1c).
- New tipsheets have been curated, covering topics such as informational interviews (Action 5.1a), time management (Action 2.6) and common sections in a lectureship applications.
- Beyond Academia, a development programme which targeted those who were within eight months of their contract, was piloted (Action 5.6). Based on its success, it has become part of the PFDC core offering and was featured as a talk at the 9th Annual Researcher Education and Development Scholarship (REDS) Conference which took place in October 2023.

Building on previous years successes, the PFDC continued to support three funding schemes during 2023:

- Dame Julia Higgins postdoc collaborative fund aims to give researchers the opportunity to develop and deliver a collaborative research project. In total, 44 applications

	<p>were submitted, which resulted in £35,000 being shared between 13 projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Seeds for Success</u> provides funding to work on preliminary data for a fellowship application. Five projects were awarded, totalling £21,584. • <u>Wings for Ideas</u> allow researchers to work on research that might lead to a new venture, a product, or a prototype. Two projects were awarded, totalling £4875.
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Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. (max 500 words)

Engagement

The higher education sector has reported that whilst post-COVID there is a certain element of flexible working, this seems to have resulted in increased pressures on research staff. There are ongoing conversations, with both research staff and researcher developers across the sector, that indicate that researchers are not feeling able to prioritise their own development.

The PFDC saw a reduction in engagement with training activities at the beginning of 2023 but with a return to normal (pre-pandemic levels) during Autumn 2023. Individuals seem to be reactive to short timeframe change as opposed to being proactive in prioritising their development, with last minute cancellations or last-minute bookings being more prevalent than in the previous years (PFDC internal data).

An internal review of the PFDC website and communications (Action1.1a) confirmed that researchers are time constrained and not aware of specific PFDC activities. The PFDC is currently implementing suggestions from this internal review in terms of personalized email recommendations to boost content engagement, as email remains to be the preferred method of communication for researchers.

To increase engagement and presence at the departmental level, the PFDC has developed two initiatives. First, webpage templates with critical minimum information about the Centre’s provision were created to be included in the departmental websites, alongside the departmental support for fellowship applications. Second, the PFDC is organising PFDC Roadshows - drop-in sessions aimed at research staff and their managers where they can learn about how the

Centre can support them (Action1.1c). These have often coincided with all staff departmental meetings where the PFDC has showcased its offer to all present.

Senior leadership support is crucial for fostering proactive development and creating a supportive environment among research and academic Staff. At Imperial, this support was evident in two instances: first, during the implementation of the new annual review process (ARC), where senior sponsorship facilitated academic community engagement; second, Imperial President Hugh Brady recorded a video where he discussed research staff's professional development and the role of Principal Investigators (PIs) in their career planning.

Research England Research Culture Funding

Having access to additional funding outside of the PFDC core budget has allowed many of the projects outlined in the 2023-25 Concordat Action plan, and showcased in this report, to be completed on time or ahead of schedule. The projects supported aligned with the College's strategic priorities regarding research culture which are:

- Improving access to and participation in research, including postgraduate research study, for people from currently underrepresented groups;
- Furthering open research practices;
- Improving research conduct and reproducibility;
- Tackling bullying and harassment;
- Improving research leadership skills across all career stages;
- Creating routes for collaboration and exchange with businesses, third sector organisations and government;
- Securing and supporting the careers of researchers and associated professions;
- Diversifying recruitment, reward and recognition approaches at all career stages;
- Delivering new approaches to public dialogue and community-led research.

This investment has greatly enhanced this year's deliverables and highlights Imperial's investment in the Researcher Development Concordat.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period
(max 500 words)

The key objectives for 2024 are divided into those which are College-wide and those that relate specifically to the fulfilling the remaining actions as shown in the [2023-25 Concordat Action plan](#).

College-wide objectives

Wellbeing: A Wellbeing Strategy Action Planning Group has been convened to turn the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy into a clear, tangible action plan. The action plan was discussed at the [People and Culture committee](#) in November 2023 and will be discussed at University Management Board in early 2024.

EDI: The EDI Strategy is currently under review, with a refreshed version due to be shared with the community mid-2024. An EDI advisory group has been established with representatives from across all faculties.

College Strategy: Consultation is in its final phase and is due to be released Spring 2024.

Staff Survey: Work is underway to launch the next all staff survey in Spring 2024.

Communications campaigns: two communications campaigns will be launched in 2024:

1. POD will be running a campaign to promote the College's Values, to continue to embed the Values into the culture at Imperial.
2. The PFDC and Graduate School are working in partnership with the College's Internal Communications Division to deliver "Tangible Actions to address bullying and harassment – The Research Culture Campaign".

2023-25 Concordat action plan objectives by theme

1. Communications of current and new College provision

Communications will remain a key objective for 2024 with a focus on increasing awareness of the Concordat across Imperial and making the community aware of the wide range of support that is available to them. The PFDC, following their internal comms strategy report, will review its induction materials.

2. Wellbeing of research staff

Build on the success of last year, the focus will be to increase the recognition of the research staff community through the [PFDC Awards and Celebration](#). The PFDC will

continue to offer a range of initiatives where the community can build strong, supportive networks, either within their departments or across College.

3. PI support to deliver the Concordat principles

Work is underway to create the equivalent to the PI code of practice for both research staff and independently funded fellows. A pilot programme of support for probationary lecturers will be developed and run in the Faculty of Medicine. The Academic's Success Guide will continue to be promoted, and the Concordat obligations will be considered during the 2024 review of academic titles and progression at Imperial.

4. How postdocs utilise their ten development days

During 2023, the PFDC compiled case studies and developed resources which will enable researchers to better utilise their 10 development days' entitlement. The focus for 2024 will be promoting these pages to the community and sharing the resources developed for PIs.

5. Supporting talent

In 2024, the PFDC will continue to build upon the support that is offered to independently funded fellows. The Centre will develop a network and tailored support to those who identify as long-term researchers at the College.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (*max 200 words*)

The University Research and Enterprise Board (UREB) promotes Imperial's research profile and the development of a vibrant and inclusive research culture. The Concordat action plan is maintained and monitored by the Researcher Development Committee (RDC), which reports to UREB. The RDC brings together key stakeholders from support services and research. Its aim is to build a supportive, inclusive and highly motivated research community, with a specific focus on the career development of researchers, regardless of career stage or destination.

Progress against the 2023-25 Concordat action plan is monitored by the RDC. Both the PFDC Reps Network, a thriving community of over 70 reps who represent research staff from every department and campus and the Concordat Implementation and Planning Group (CIPG), which is composed of researchers and key service providers and reports to the RDC, are regularly consulted and have

contributed to the delivery of the projects set out in the action plan and highlighted above.

This annual report was agreed upon by the CIPG in November 2023, presented to the RDC in January 2024, UREB in February 2024, University Management Board in February 2024 and ratified by Council, the governing body of the University, in May 2024.

Signature on behalf of governing body:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Banga', is written over a faint, illegible stamp or watermark.

Mr Manvinder Banga (Chair of Council)

Contact for queries: Dr Ines Perpetuo (Concordat Lead), Consultant, Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre.

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk