

Imperial College
London



PFDC ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24



POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Tailored support and development for postdocs, fellows and clinicians

PFDC ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

Executive summary

The [Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre](#) (PFDC) has been providing an extensive programme of support for research staff at Imperial College London since 2009. This report highlights both new and continuing activities that were delivered from August 2023 to July 2024.

1. **Projects** | With funding from both Research England and core funding, we delivered several new projects. Focusing on master's student supervision, leaving academia, research culture, 10 development days, continuing to strengthen our Champions Network and more.
2. **Events** | We delivered a variety of events during Postdoc Appreciation Week (PAW), Women@Imperial Week and Mental Health Awareness Week, as well as multiple welcome inductions, and a networking retreat.
3. **Courses and Workshops** | We delivered 36 courses and 23 workshops, with satisfaction rates of over 95% across the board.
4. **Individual Support** | We provided 309 one-to-one consultations and 119 mock interviews, with satisfaction rates of over 97% across the board.
5. **Fellows Support** | There has been a continuous increase in the uptake of our support for independent fellows.
6. **Working Collaboratively** | We met regularly and worked with the Postdoc and Fellows Reps and Champions networks to keep improving the ECR experience at Imperial.
7. **Funding** | We ran the Seeds for Success and Wings for Ideas funds, supporting collaborative research projects and career development.
8. **External Work** | We provided training, talks, and courses for a variety of external organizations.

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1. Projects

1.1 Projects facilitated by Research England funding

In 2023-2024, we received a total of £152,000 from Research England to deliver projects addressing the following goals:

- How researchers are supported and permitted to be MSc/MRes supervisors, and how Imperial can support them.
- Supporting researchers with potential emotional responses to leaving academia.
- Increasing collaborations between Imperial, Politecnico Milano and Technical University Munich and increasing secured collaborative funding.
- Building positive connections and networks for researchers.
- Tackling bullying and harassment to improve the wellbeing of all Imperial's researchers.

These were derived from the College's obligations to the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), and recommendations from previous scoping projects facilitated by another round of Research England funding in the previous year.

The project activities delivered before the end of July 2024 were:

Masters Student Supervision

Initial conversations about how researchers are supported and permitted to be MSc/MRes supervisors have taken place with Academics, Researchers and the Graduate School. The remaining objectives of the project will be delivered in early 2025.

The Change Project

Early career researchers (ECRs) that are considering a career change are often faced with a series of challenges, both emotional and practical. This project has provided a resource for anyone that is working with and supporting ECRs going through a career change. It's particularly helpful for ECRs that are moving from academia to a role beyond academia.

The project provides 10 tools to be used by people supporting ECRs. These resources will be launched shortly.

The European Talent Academy

The [European Talent Academy](#) is a networking and career development programme for early career researchers that brings together Imperial College London, Politecnico Milano, and Technical University Munich. It aims to increase collaborations between

these universities and increase secured collaborative funding (Horizon Europe, European Innovation Councils, and beyond).

24 participants enrolled on this cohort, 8 for each institution. Participants fed back that the programme allowed them to “connect and build a collaborative network”, “work with talented and driven ECRs” and work on submitting proposals for interdisciplinary research.

Postdocs Networking Retreat

This retreat took place between 10 and 12 July 2024. This event aimed to bring together one postdoc from each department at Imperial, to foster inter-department collaborations and reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. The retreat took place at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor with 23 participants.

The event received very positive feedback, with a satisfaction rate of 4.8 out of 5. Notably 95% of participants felt they created connections with other participants which will last beyond the retreat and 91% felt very motivated to collaborate with postdocs across departments and faculties.

Research Culture Campaign

A project has been underway to develop a research culture campaign highlighting that bullying and harassment is unacceptable, that it is okay to call it out if it happens, and that it requires allyship and community-wide action to help solve. The campaign will run from October 2024 with the slogan THINK. LEARN. CONNECT, and aims to deliver tailored messaging to HoDs, PIs, ECRs, PGR supervisors and PGRs about their role in a healthy and productive research culture, with a particular focus on combating bullying and harassment; and to improve awareness and visibility of the existing support and resources to help should bullying and harassment occur.

1.2 Projects facilitated by core funding

10 Development Days Resource

Postdocs and Fellows at Imperial have 10 days per year of development time written into their contracts. To support ECRs in making the most of their 10 development days, a core funded project focused on developing resources for the PFDC website. These [resources](#) were added to our website in December 2023, and as of 31st July 2024 they have had 504 new users.

PFDC Champions Project

A project was commissioned to look at our network of [Postdocs and Fellows Champions](#) – including exploring what works well and how we can continue to strengthen. 1-2-1s have taken place with Champions alongside focus groups with Postdocs. A report with the findings is being created and next steps outlined.

1.3 PFDC, College and Nation-Wide Events

1.4 Postdoc Appreciation Week (PAW)

Between 18 and 22 September 2023, the PFDC organized and delivered several sessions during [Postdoc Appreciation Week \(PAW\)](#). PAW is celebrated annually across universities in the UK and US. The 2023 PAW events at Imperial included:

- A welcome event: What the PFDC can do to support you
- A Q&A with the Associate Provosts (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion)
- Panel Event: Transition to Careers Beyond Academia
- Panel Event: Transition to Independence
- A session on Taming your Inner Critic.
- A workshop on Crafting your Professional Narrative & Increasing your Visibility
- Games with Move Imperial.

1.5 Women@Imperial week

At the PFDC we contributed to [Women at Imperial Week](#) (Monday 4 to Friday 8 March 2024) with the following events:

- Panel discussion: In conversation with academic women – Monday 4 March.
- Springboard taster session – Thursday 7 March

1.6 Mental Health Awareness Week

We also delivered an event during Mental Health Awareness Week (Monday 13 – Friday 17 May 2024):

- Wellbeing in Research course – Monday 13 May

1.7 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 2023-2024, there were three welcome inductions:

- **Wednesday 15th November 2023** – attended by 27 participants.
- **Wednesday 13th March 2024** - attended by 31 participants.
- **Thursday 4th July 2024** - attended by 16 participants.

2. Courses and workshops

At the PFDC we offer a wide range of [courses and workshops](#) that are all free of charge to Imperial postdocs and fellows.

2.1 Courses

In 2023-2024, **75% of our courses were delivered online and 25% were in person.**

Summary of provision:

From August 2023 to the end of July 2024, we ran **36 courses with 528 participants.**

Participant satisfaction:

At the end of each course, participants are requested to fill in a survey. **Overall satisfaction is 95%.** Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2023 and July 2024:

- **95%** strongly agree or agree they found the course they attended useful.
- **97%** strongly agree or agree they know more about the subject having attended the course.
- **94%** strongly agree or agree they learned things that will help improve the way they work.
- **95%** strongly agree or agree they will apply what they learned.
- **96%** strongly agree or agree they were satisfied with the trainer(s).
- **92%** strongly agree or agree they were satisfied with the course materials.

This year also saw the introduction of regular PFDC online writing sessions, taking place every Friday morning from 10am-12pm. These sessions enable early career researchers to schedule two hours of protected writing time and work in a focused way with like-minded peers, using the established Pomodoro technique. From April to the end of July 2024, there were over 70 participants at these writing sessions.

2.2 Development programmes

Springboard Women's Development Programme

The [Springboard Women's Development Programme](#) is open to all women employed by the College and consists of four development days set over four months. This is an award-winning international programme which enables participants 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 two members of the PFDC team being qualified as Springboard tutors.

Summary of provision:

In 2023-24, we ran the Springboard programme twice, with a total of **71 participants**. The first programme ran online, September-December 2023, and the second programme was held in person, February-May 2024.

Participant satisfaction:

24 participants from the 2023-24 Springboard cohorts completed the programme evaluation survey. Feedback highlights include:

- **97.35%** feel more confident in the area of: Personal development
- **94.74%** feel more confident in the area of: Goal setting
- **86.60%** feel more confident in the area of: Own development needs
- **82.1%** feel more confident in the area of: Understanding own values
- **92.1%** feel more confident in the area of: Assertiveness
- **76.84%** feel more confident in the area of: Managing change

Beyond Academia

We delivered this online programme for postdocs and fellows approaching the end of their contracts, who are considering making a transition in their careers. It consisted of four 90-minute sessions and a series of online activities via Zoom and LinkedIn. The programme took place from January to March 2024 and was completed by approximately 20 participants.

2.3 Workshops

[Our 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. Most workshops were held online in the 2023-24 academic year.

Summary of provision:

From August 2023 to the end of July 2024, we ran **23 workshops for 549 attendees**.

Workshop topics included (but were not limited to): academic CVs and cover letters, 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 workshop, participants are requested to fill in a survey. **Overall satisfaction is 98%**. Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2023 and July 2024:

- **100%** strongly agree or agree they found the workshop useful.
- **96%** strongly agree or agree they knew more about the subject having attended the workshop.
- **96%** strongly agree or agree they thought the workshop content was relevant to them.
- **98%** strongly agree or agree they were likely to apply what they learned on the workshop.
- **100%** strongly agree or agree they were satisfied with the delivery.

3. Individual support

3.1 One-to-ones

As part of our individual support provision, we provide [one-to-one consultations](#) to postdocs and fellows. 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 **309 one-to-ones** from August 2023 to July 2024. 99% of all one-to-ones were online this academic year.

General area of advice	Total	Percentage
Fellowship application	127	41%
Lectureship application	54	17%
Careers advice	55	18%
CVs/Cover letters	41	13%
Job application	27	9%
Other	6	2%

Faculty	Total	Percentage
Engineering	124	40%
Medicine	113	36%
Natural Sciences	58	19%
Business School	9	3%
External	6	2%

Title	Total	Percentage
Postdocs	208	67%
Fellows and clinicians	71	23%
Lecturer	8	3%
Other	22	7%

Participant satisfaction:

Having completed a one-to-one consultation, participants are asked to evaluate their experience via an online survey. **119** participants (**39%**) filled in this survey and **overall satisfaction is 97%**.

Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2023 and July 2024:

- **99%** strongly agree or agree they found the one-to-one useful and informative.
- **97%** strongly agree or agree they found the advice helpful and relevant to their concerns.
- **93%** strongly agree or agree they learnt about resources and opportunities available.
- **96%** strongly agree or agree they were more positive about issues addressed in the one-to-one.
- **99%** strongly agree or agree they have used the information and advice given to make positive changes.

3.2 Mock interviews

We organize and facilitate 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 **119 mock interviews** from August 2023 to July 2024. All mock interviews were online this academic year.

Type of roles applied for	Total	Percentage
Fellowship	68	57%
Lectureship/Professor	36	30%
Scientist/Research	7	6%
Non-academic	8	7%

Participant satisfaction:

After the candidates have completed the mock interview and attended their formal interview, they are asked to evaluate their mock interview via an online survey and inform us if they have been successful. **55 participants (46%)** filled in this survey.

Overall satisfaction is 99%. Of all participants who responded to the survey between August 2023 and July 2024:

- **98%** had a better idea of what to expect from an interview as a result of the mock interview.
- **96%** were more prepared for the questions they were asked as a result of the mock interview.
- **100%** received constructive feedback from the mock interview panel.
- **100%** were more prepared for the interview as a result of the mock interview.

Interview outcome		
Result	Total	Percentage
Successful	34	29%
Unsuccessful	21	17%
Unknown/other	66	54%

4. Leadership development for postdocs and fellows

We're delighted to have seen a continuous increase in the uptake of our bespoke leadership development programmes for early career researchers. These opportunities are designed to actively contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace culture, hone leadership skills, and advance their academic careers.

a. The Imperial Leadership Development and Peer Mentoring Programme

In the academic year 2023/24, nearly 50 fellows and new lecturers took part in the successful pilot cohorts of our sector-wide, unique, Imperial Leadership Development and Peer Mentoring programme. This bespoke new programme was conceived by fellows within the Imperial Fellows Leadership Network and co-developed by the PFDC and an experienced external academic leadership coach.

Over six-months, participants explored their own leadership style and learned about the theory and practice of coaching and mentoring. As peer mentors, they built valuable connections to share ideas, collaborate, and support each other in various aspects of academic life. The programme is structured around the four themes of the '[Narrative CV for Researchers](#)'. Using insights from peer discussions and structured reflection, participants produced a draft narrative CV that can be used for future fellowship or promotion applications and other academic gateways.

Evaluation data from the pilot shows increased networking has led to better peer relationships and emerging new collaborations. Based on the success of the programme, we have expanded the offering for upcoming cohorts in the academic year 2024/25 with a workshop on team dynamics and exclusive access to bespoke masterclasses on topics such as wellbeing and resilience, and funding strategies.

b. Leadership Coaching for Independent Research Fellows

Independent research fellows are eligible to sign up for up to three confidential one-to-one coaching sessions with an executive leadership coach. This offer has seen an increase in uptake of over 50% in the academic year 2023-24 compared to the previous year. Since the introduction of the programme in 2022, a total of 56 fellows have made use of the opportunity to work through current and general challenges they face and to find sustainable and motivating ways forward. Participants noted significant improvements relating to interpersonal and communication skills, as well as their work/life balance.

As a result, **94% say they have gained confidence and insights and have implemented plans for improvements**. The leadership coaching offer is ongoing, and fellows can apply at any point of their fellowship.

c. Resilient Leadership in Action Programme

Resilient Leadership in Action (RLiA) is a national flagship programme through which participants gain hands-on leadership experience and get the opportunity to explore their leadership qualities through group activities and expert coaching.

Since the start of the programme in 2021, **96 Imperial postdocs and fellows successfully took part**. In 2023-24, **18** Imperial postdocs and fellows joined their peers from five other UK universities on the online and in-person versions of the programme. Participants greatly enjoyed these excellent networking opportunities, working with colleagues across institutions and disciplines. The course evaluations evidence significant individual growth in the areas of self-awareness, leadership presence, resilient decision making, and gaining clarity of direction. The programme continues in 2024-25.

5. Support for Eric and Wendy Schmidt Fellows

The Eric and Wendy Schmidt Professional Development Consultant has now been in post for 15 months and provides support to approximately 25 Schmidt Fellows at Imperial. The Consultant works closely with the PFDC and Imperial-X, drawing on their expertise and resources.

a. Professional Development Appointments

The Eric and Wendy Schmidt Fellows have access to 60-minute one-to-one consultations, which they can book to discuss any career and professional development issue.

As of 27 August 2024, **75 one-to-one consultations** were delivered. These covered the following themes: Time management, grant writing and job applications, developing independence from PI (leadership), networking, career options and securing opportunities in industry. **9 workshops** have been piloted with fellows with good feedback and 50% attendance.

Of the 26 fellows so far, 6 have secured academic positions (3 fellowships and 3 lectureships) and 4 have secured industry positions. The remainder are still on the fellowship scheme.

In August 2024, Schmidt Science who fund the fellowship scheme, asked Imperial to showcase their professional development support as an exemplar to other Schmidt – funded institutions as part of a 3-day program design workshop.

6. Working collaboratively

a. Research staff reps

Our [PFDC Reps Network](#) is a thriving community of over **90 Reps** who represent research staff from every department across all campuses. The [list of PFDC postdoc Reps](#) can be found on our website. The Reps continue to ensure that we stay well-informed about the needs and issues facing researchers at Imperial. They influence the nature of what we offer by being involved in planning and decision-making processes via the termly Reps Network Meetings, which took place in October, March and July this academic year.

Examples of activities the Reps have organized are Q&As with HoDs, career talks, seminar series, symposiums, social events and much more.

b. Postdoc and Fellows Champions

We work 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 October, March and July.

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

7. Funding

a. Seeds for Success

In 2023, we ran the Seeds for Success and Wings for Ideas funds to support the career development of postdocs and fellows at Imperial.

The aim of the Seeds for Success fund is to allow postdocs to gather preliminary data for a fellowship application. Four projects were awarded up to £5,000 each, with a total

of £18,297 being awarded. More information about the fund and its winners can be found on our website: [Seeds for Success Fund](#)

b. Wings for Ideas

The aim of this fund is to allow postdocs and fellows to work on research that might lead to a new venture, product, or prototype. There was a total of £7,500 available to fund projects, with up to £2,500 per project. This year, three projects were awarded. More information about the fund and its winners can be found on our website: [Wings for Ideas Fund](#).

8. External work

We undertake work for external organisations, accepting requests for training, talks, and other services.

From August 2023 to July 2024 we delivered the following sessions:

August 2023 to April 2024 | 7 courses on Lectureship CVs, Time Management, Fellowship Applications, Leadership in Research and Planning for Success Beyond your Postdoc for KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology).

August & October 2023 | 2 Introduction to Management programs for fellows at The Royal Society.

November 2023 | Lectureships course at Queen's University Belfast.

November 2023 | SECTG Workshop.

March 2024 | Fellowships workshop for The Faraday Institution.

April 2024 | Fellowship Application workshop at Brunel.