Imperial College London

Enhancing Academic Culture

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POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE
Tailored support and development for postdocs, fellows and clinicians

Imperial College London

ENHANCING ACADEMIC CULTURE

The Role of Teaching Fellows and Learning Technologists

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OVERVIEW

This report was commissioned by Imperial College London's Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC) as part of UKRI Research England's *Enhancing Research Culture* funding allocation (2021-2022), informing broader work around securing and supporting the careers of researchers and associated professions. Between April 2022 and July 2022, an online survey and interviews were conducted with teaching fellows and learning technologists from across Imperial College London to evaluate current provision and potential future provision for these roles.

45 online survey responses and 22 in-depth interviews were analysed and contextualised through reviewing College webpages and informal conversations with staff involved in supporting the professional development of teaching fellows and learning technologists.

The devolved structure of the College means that interviewees' experiences were hugely varied depending on their role, line management, and level of support; some reported extremely positive and fulfilling professional lives with appropriate support, whereas others were relatively isolated in their roles without appropriate support. While survey respondents and participants were largely very positive about the array of professional development opportunities at Imperial, they identified potential new provision, including suggestions for new qualifications, accreditations, and workshops. Additionally, participants identified significant barriers to accessing appropriate professional development, which fell under seven themes:

1. **Lack of time due to heavy workload**

2. **Lack of community**

3. **Lack of appropriate support, particularly from line managers**

4. **Unclear promotions pathways**

5. **Devaluation of learning and teaching roles**

6. **Short-term contracts**

7. **Equality, diversity, and inclusion issues**

A list of recommendations is included at the end of the report, highlighting shorter- and longer-term actions that can be taken at different levels – across College and by Support Services, and within Faculties and Departments.

This report was commissioned by Imperial's Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC) as part of UKRI Research England's *Enhancing Research Culture* funding allocation (2021-2022). It focuses on the experiences of teaching fellows and learning technologists across Imperial College London, evaluating the current and potential future support provision for these roles. This informs broader work around securing and supporting the careers of researchers and associated professions.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, Imperial College London has undergone extensive changes around learning and teaching, including a College-wide **curriculum review** and shifts to **remote online learning** in response to COVID-19. There are also ongoing efforts to fulfil the aims of the College's **Learning and Teaching Strategy**, which states:

"We will build a culture which values learning and teaching highly, rewards staff for their teaching and moves towards greater parity of esteem." (pg. 3)

However, teaching fellows and learning technologists can sometimes fall through gaps in support provision for professional development. As of 1st April 2022[1] the overall College numbers of Teaching fellows and Learning technologists were:

418 Teaching Fellows **67** Learning Technologists

These roles are unevenly distributed across College, with the majority sitting within medicine[2] or in College and Academic Services.[3] Most learning technologists (81%) are full time but only 52% are on open ended contracts. Teaching fellows are largely on open ended contracts (72%) and just over half (61%) are full time.

Most teaching fellows and learning technologists are in the 'Learning and Teaching' job family,[4] including clinician academic staff with teaching-only duties. In October 2018, a new educational research pathway in the learning and teaching job family was **announced**, which would allow learning and teaching-focused staff to be promoted on the basis of their educational research and become a Reader in/ Associate Professor of/Professor of Education. This sits alongside the existing pathway for staff to be promoted based on their learning and teaching – a practitioner pathway.

METHODOLOGY

This report and the underlying research was led by **Dr Órla Meadhbh Murray** and **Dr Jo Horsburgh**, both from the **Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship (CHERS)** at Imperial.

Between April 2022 and July 2022, an online survey[5] and interviews[6] were conducted with teaching fellows and learning technologists[7] from across Imperial College London. This resulted in:

- 45 responses to the online survey
- 22 in-depth interviews[8]
  - 17 with teaching fellows
  - 5 with learning technologists

This was contextualised through informal conversations with colleagues (for example from the PFDC, CHERS, and learning and teaching staff from across College) to understand how teaching fellows and learning technologists fit into the overall college structure, alongside a brief review of relevant College webpages.

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[1] Data supplied by Imperial's HR department. For more information on the demographics of teaching fellows and learning technologists see Appendix One.

[2] 31% of teaching fellows and 45% of learning technologists.

[3] 34% of teaching fellows and 19% of learning technologists.

[4] Imperial College London has 6 '**job families**' for staff.

[5] See Appendix Two for survey questions and more information.

[6] See Appendix Three for interview questions and more information.

[7] Staff self-identified as teaching fellows and learning technologists, which was particularly important for 'learning technologists' as this term covered a wide array of job titles.

[8] For further breakdown of interviewees by faculty and contract status see Appendix Three.

The online survey focused on gathering staff opinions on potential future provision for professional development alongside recruiting interview participants. Interviews were much more in-depth, discussing interviewees' employment history, current job and professional development activities, professional identity as a teaching fellow/learning technologist, and if other identities and forms of inequality impacted their professional life.

Using an Institutional Ethnography approach to analysing the interviews (Smith, 2005; McCoy, 2006; Smith and Griffith, 2022), the focus is on themes that highlight institutional issues or opportunities, specifically how interviewees' experiences were impacted by the College structure or culture. For example, the structure of line management, pay bands, lack of cross-College networks or specialist training for certain roles, alongside a culture of devaluing learning and teaching roles. This focuses the analysis on institutional issues and opportunities for change, rather than the specifics of individuals' experiences, which is particularly important given how devolved the College structure is at Imperial.

KEY FINDINGS

Teaching fellows and learning technologists are essential to learning and teaching at Imperial, with many individuals bringing huge amounts of experience and expertise to the College. With many teaching fellows and learning technologists on open-ended contracts and extensive professional development opportunities, the College is fostering a culture of learning and teaching excellence, from pedagogical and digital innovation to cutting edge educational research and evaluation. All teaching fellow interviewees had decided to focus their academic careers on learning and teaching, bringing research and pedagogical expertise to their teaching. Many learning technologist interviewees had backgrounds in education and/or STEMMB[9] alongside their expertise in learning technology, bringing pedagogical, technical, and sometimes disciplinary-specific knowledge to their roles.

There is a growing cohort of educational researchers emerging from the **MEd in University Learning and Teaching** hosted by the **Educational Development Unit (EDU)**. This high-level training provides individual professional development and facilitates ongoing pedagogical development and evaluation of provision across the College. One interviewee who had done the MEd course described how it helped to validate her decision to pursue a teaching-focused academic career rather than discipline-specific research. Another interviewee described how the MEd had facilitated her "transformation" from a STEM background into an educational researcher which involved a "huge cultural change ... [into] a more social science view" of research. This course was discussed by many interviewees as providing an important community for learning and teaching staff, facilitating cross-College networks, and sharing of good practice. However, there was a need for post-MEd community building to further support this new group of educational researchers.

For those interviewees who were not pursuing an educational research pathway, they were dedicated to ongoing pedagogical development and keeping up-to-date with developments in their field. However, many asked for more opportunities for professional identity development and community building opportunities. While there were cross-College teaching fellow spaces (a Teams network, teaching fellow lunches, and Talking Teaching events), there was a lack of such cross-College events specifically aimed at learning technologists. Many interviewees discussed enjoying professional autonomy and lack of micromanagement at the College, but for some they needed more tailored support, specifically 1-on-1 professional development guidance and support around promotions. For example, **Personal Review and Development Plans (PRDPs)** were not being conducted by all line managers due to lack of time, which left some interviewees without any personalised professional development support. Additionally, some teaching fellows and learning technologists were line managed by academics or professional services staff who did not fully understand their role and promotion pathways, leaving them without appropriate support.

The vast majority of interviewees and survey respondents were positive about the existing level of provision at Imperial, citing workshops and qualifications available through the **EDU**, **PFDC**, and Management and Leadership and Core Skills opportunities through **People and Organisational Development (POD)**. Many interviewees discussed the broader culture of professional development at Imperial, whereby staff often had a lot of autonomy and encouragement, including the availability of funding for external opportunities. While there were gaps in the provision (particularly for learning technologists) these were often filled by the availability of funding to undertake external qualifications, courses, or affiliations. However, such professional development activity often had to be self-directed, and funding was at the discretion of line managers and heads of department, which meant opportunities and uptake were highly varied across College. This speaks to the devolved nature of Imperial's organisational structure, whereby faculties and departments have a lot of autonomy compared to other universities, leading to highly varied experiences across College. While some teaching fellows and learning technologists had vibrant teams and appropriate support from line managers and colleagues, others were isolated and unsupported without clear pathways to community or alternative mentorship. This means that any changes to the support for teaching fellows and learning technologists needs to happen across faculties, departments, and centres, with heads of department, senior management, and more senior teaching fellows and learning technologists championing these roles and their vital work at the College.

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[9] STEMMB – science, technology, engineering, mathematics, medicine, and business.

REQUESTS FOR NEW PROVISION

From the 45 survey responses, 41 provided suggestions of potential new provision for training or professional development opportunities at Imperial for teaching fellows and learning technologists. 4 survey respondents were happy with the available provision and had no further requests for new provision. The requests for new provision were primarily focused on:

1. New Qualifications and Accreditations

2. New Workshops

1. NEW QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS

There was enthusiasm for current provision, with some respondents requesting more spaces on the MEd programme at Imperial and other popular workshops and courses.

Some respondents had already completed extensive training at Imperial or at previous institutions, and so required more advanced and specialised provision, particularly those at senior levels. This included requests for:

- **Principal Fellowship/Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA)** application support
- PhD opportunities post-MEd

Learning technologists needed more specialist provision either at Imperial or through external providers. Survey respondents requested access to:

- Digital Education Masters courses at other universities
- Instructional/learning design support
- Certified Membership of the Association of Learning Technologists **(CMALT)**

Additionally, some teaching fellows wanted access to more learning technology-focused training particularly those whose work focused on digital provision or involved a lot of work with learning technologists.

There was more general discussion of career development, including respondents who wished to do:

- Masters of Business Administration (MBA)
- Leadership qualifications, including **Charter Management Institute (CMI)** apprenticeships
- Project management certification
- **PGCE** training and other further teacher training
- **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)** training and qualifications

Interestingly, many of these requests were already available to all staff through **pre-existing provision**. This demonstrates the need for better signposting of these resources to ensure all staff know what is available, particularly for new teaching fellows and learning technologists.

2. NEW WORKSHOPS

Many respondents suggested new workshops, which fell under three themes:

- Educational research
  - Introduction to educational research prior to committing to longer courses or for line managers
  - Publishing in educational journals
  - Writing educational research papers
  - Presenting at educational conferences
- Promotions and career development
  - Promotion pathways in Teaching and Learning job family (for both line managers and teaching fellows/learning technologists)
  - Teaching-focused careers and professional development
- Learning technology
  - Learning design
  - Advanced Digital Literacy training

Other workshop suggestions followed similar themes to the requests for new qualifications and accreditation provision: leadership and management training, project management training, safety qualifications for outdoor-focused work and fieldwork, and educational research grant writing and management. Interestingly, one respondent suggested a workshop on navigating departmental and institutional politics.

Alongside requests for new provision, survey respondents also asked for:

- opportunities to mentor more junior staff, with particular interest in supporting specific goals such as **HEA membership** or **ALT certification**
- qualitative analysis software should be purchased by the College to facilitate the educational research happening on the MEd and by other educational researchers
- new funding provision for hiring educational research-focused research assistants

These suggestions demonstrate the growing needs of a new cohort of educational researchers within the learning and teaching family who need similar support to researchers in the STEMMB fields. Additionally, survey respondents brought up barriers to professional development, citing lack of sufficient support (particularly around promotions), lack of cross-College networking opportunities (particularly for learning technologists), and lack of time to take up professional development opportunities. These will be addressed in the next section on barriers.

BARRIERS

Seven key barriers to the professional development of teaching fellows and learning technologists were identified based on the interviews and survey responses:

1. **Lack of time due to heavy workload**
2. **Lack of community**
3. **Lack of appropriate support, particularly from line managers**
4. **Unclear promotion pathways**
5. **Devaluation of learning and teaching roles**
6. **Short-term contracts**
7. **Equality, diversity, and inclusion issues**

1. TIME AND WORKLOAD

Most interviewees cited lack of time as the major barrier to their professional development. While almost all interviewees were extremely positive about the range and quality of workshops, courses, and other professional development opportunities at Imperial, these were often impossible to fit into their working hours. Learning technologists reported being able to do more professional development within their contracted working hours, whereas this was much more difficult for teaching fellows. Many interviewees who had completed courses, such as the **EDU's PG Cert, PG Dip or MEd ULT** had to complete the course largely outside of working hours, which could be challenging, especially if also navigating caring responsibilities or chronic illnesses and disabilities. One junior teaching fellow[10] discussed doing the MEd "completely on top of my job". Another said the PG Dip was done "almost entirely in my free time … weekends mostly", but that for the MEd they had support from their line manager to reduce their teaching load to in order to carve out more time for the course. She stated: "I see it as part of my job … professional development. And I think my working hours should allow me to conduct this research."

One junior teaching fellow explained that their department did not have a formal workload allocation model for teaching fellows and thus "you just take on more responsibilities until you're unable to manage". Others also wanted more transparency and discussion around how teaching workloads were distributed. Some teaching fellows mentioned wanted more opportunities to teach in relation to their disciplinary expertise. One interviewee suggested that workload should consider other activities such as equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work, committee positions, and other administrative work. While learning technologists largely did not have the same levels of overwork as teaching fellows, this hugely varied across roles and line managers, with some having much more time to complete professional development within working hours than others.

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[10] To ensure anonymity, seniority and pay grade will be referenced vaguely using the terms 'junior' and 'senior'.

Some survey respondents also mentioned that it was difficult to find time to do training and development at the College, particularly balancing professional development with caring responsibilities or chronic illnesses and disabilities. It is important from an equalities perspective to ensure staff have protected time within their working hours to do at least some professional development in order to make these opportunities (and subsequently promotions) open to all staff, regardless of disability or caring responsibilities.

2. COMMUNITY

There are insufficient opportunities for teaching fellows and learning technologists to meet their colleagues in similar roles across the College. While some interviewees described extremely supportive and vibrant teams of colleagues, most did not. This was compounded by insufficient cross-College community. While Teaching Fellows have a Teams channel – the Teaching Fellow Network – learning technologists do not, which hinders cross-College networking and information sharing. One junior learning technologist said that while they tried to work across departments and faculties, there was often "a tendency to work in silos" and this was reinforced by the lack of opportunities for cross-College community building and networking.

Many survey respondents asked for more community building opportunities, whether it be focused on learning and teaching themes (e.g. assessment and feedback) or spaces for specific roles (e.g. learning technologists or teaching fellows). One survey respondent and three interviewees suggested educational research-focused 'labs' or research groups, which would allow cross-College groupings focused on specific educational research themes. One teaching fellow explained that without a team or a research group, her position had felt "quite lonely". Educational research 'labs' were also discussed by some interviewees as a potential follow-on community from the MEd to support new educational researchers at the College. One teaching fellow commented on the need for further support around professional identity and maintaining a strong educational researcher identity, she asked:

> **"**how can we nurture and give people the opportunity to live the identity as educational researchers... as very educated higher education teachers?**"**

More informal community building spaces are needed for staff in the learning and teaching job family. These would help develop cross-College networks and support professional development, alongside existing opportunities to meet other learning and teaching staff through EDU workshops and courses and other cross-College events like the Festiva of Learning and Teaching.

3. APPROPRIATE SUPPORT

Some interviewees experienced a significant lack of support, particularly from busy line managers without sufficient time to support them. This was particularly difficult for teaching fellows who were supervised by academics, some of whom did not have sufficient time or knowledge of their role to provide mentorship or appropriate support. Two teaching fellows described being line managed by extremely busy academics who only provided a few meetings a year and no support around **Personal Review and Development Plans (PRDPs)**. This meant that professional development was entirely managed by these individuals, without appropriate support or guidance. It is important for Faculties and Departments to consider whether or not academics have sufficient time, knowledge, and inclination to line manage teaching fellows, and instead provide more opportunities for senior teaching fellows to line manage junior teaching fellows. This would also help address the lack of induction processes reported by interviewees, which were seen as particularly important for early career teaching fellows; senior teaching fellows could be given workload allocation/time to run induction processes, alongside opportunities to line manage and support more junior teaching fellows. These opportunities would help support the promotion applications of both senior and junior teaching fellows, the former getting leadership and administrative experience and the latter appropriate support and mentorship. Any additional duties for more senior teaching fellows would need to be matched with a reduction in other teaching/administrative work to allow sufficient time for such responsibilities.

While learning technologists largely reported positive line management experiences, they need access to more specialist training and cross-College support to provide appropriate professional development opportunities. For example, many learning technologists are able to request funding and support within their specific department/centre/school/faculty to undertake external courses or accreditation pathways. However, this relies on individuals making requests and is dependent on the support of individual line managers/heads of department. One interviewee said that they wanted to do a Masters but that "Imperial doesn't

do one for learning technology". While learning technologists can do the MEd ULT, the perception that this was focused more on teaching fellows meant that learning technologists could find it slightly difficult to translate their work to this course. One senior learning technologist explained that the PG Dip/Cert/MEd courses needed to be "made better for learning technologists ... [those] who don't have significant teaching duties".

While learning technologists who had explored the MEd in more detail acknowledged efforts to include them, there is more work to be done here, including possibility of an alternative learning technology Masters course. However, this would require substantial funding and staffing to develop. To ensure that all learning technologists are able to access professional development opportunities requires a more coordinated cross-College provision, whether through the EDU or a new fund aimed at supporting learning technologists' professional development and community building.

4. PROMOTION PATHWAYS

Most interviewees mentioned issues around promotions, citing a lack of information and lack of appropriate support for teaching fellows and learning technologists seeking promotion. Many survey respondents requested support with promotions, including more information on how to access the educational researcher pathway of the learning and teaching job family. There was a general desire for support and guidance from College around how to develop promotions applications in the learning and teaching job family particularly given the highly varied support and mentorship at a local-level within departments and centres.

Some departments are providing more promotions support to teaching fellows, in an attempts to match the support provided to academics. However, this is not the case across all departments and there is a significant gap at the College-level. Even in departments and teams that do provide significant promotions support, this is not always successful due to the lack of clarity around promotions in the learning and teaching job family. For example, one junior teaching fellow described the pathway to more senior teaching fellow roles as "a big mystery" despite significant support from their department; they described getting very vague feedback and the complexity of fulfilling some of the requirements which did not translate well to their role. Another junior teaching fellow explained his desire to follow the educational researcher promotion pathway but said "there is no information" on how to do this. He assumed it would require educational research funding, but there was no support to do this alongside potential issues around who would fund the 'buy-out' from teaching. He explained it would be against a department's interests to support teaching fellows getting educational research-related promotions unless the resulting shortfall in teaching provision was covered by College.

Some teaching fellows described informal restrictions on the types of teaching and administrative responsibilities they were allowed to take on in their departments, e.g. no final year teaching and supervisory opportunities on student research projects. This was sometimes seen as part of a devaluation of teaching fellows vis-à-vis academics, whereby they were being asked to do less-desirable general teaching without opportunities to teach their areas of expertise or provide more specialist teaching. This was discussed as potentially having a knock-on effect on their opportunities for promotion or professional development. It is important for heads of department and line managers to support their staff in pursuing development and promotions. There were many examples of excellent support at a faculty or departmental level, but a lack of support by College HR and promotions panels need to provide greater clarity around what is needed for successful promotions applications in the learning and teaching job family this is crucial to valuing and retaining learning and teaching staff.

5. DEVALUATION OF LEARNING AND TEACHING ROLES

Being a teaching fellow was sometimes seen as "a demotion" from research, and this was a huge problem as it impacted academics' perceptions and valuing of their teaching fellow colleagues. One learning technologist said she had heard from a colleague that "at Imperial teaching is seen as being like a punishment". Another teaching fellow explained that academics sometimes saw teaching as "the easy way out ... the path you chose when you didn't make it in research" and that this was a barrier between academics and teaching fellows. Another teaching fellow argued that amongst academics "teaching output is not rewarded", leading to a devaluation of teaching and by extension learning and teaching staff. Despite the vast majority of interviewees actively and passionately choosing to pursue teaching, often with extensive expertise in teaching, education, and often disciplinary-specific research experience, there was still a sense that some academic colleagues saw teaching as "failing in science". This attitude was mentioned by other interviewees as something that damaged their professional identity as a teaching fellow and their sense of being respected and valued at the College.

One junior learning technologist said she did not think teaching fellows and learning technologists were seen as "on par with academics ... I don't feel valued sometimes by academics". A teaching fellow explained that academics could sometimes 'dump marking' on them in a disrespectful way without appreciation for their pre-existing workload. Another teaching fellow explained that educational research, as a non-STEMM form of research, was sometimes undervalued. In response, she suggested that Imperial should aim for similar excellence in STEMMB focused educational research and pedagogical practices. While most interviewees

felt very valued by their teams or immediate colleagues, many felt devalued by the broader College and some academics. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was discussed by many interviewees as positively impacting how others valued them. One senior learning technologist described the change in culture over time at Imperial, whereby the curriculum review and the pandemic had positively shifted attitudes towards learning and teaching and professional service staff members. They described this shift as College realising "our degrees depend on these people … we can't afford to lose them" and that this had built on an already improved culture of appreciating learning and teaching through the work of the previous Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) and the new learning and teaching strategy.

A number of learning technologists mentioned the different pay scales between teaching fellows and learning technologists, with one commenting on the recent teaching fellow pay negotiations: "it was very, very badly handled … we weren't told that that was happening. It's meant to be a [job] family." This highlights the importance of transparent and participatory decision-making and proper consultation around changes to job families and pay and working conditions, as these are significant markers of value and respect for learning and teaching staff.

6. SHORT-TERM CONTRACTS

The use of short-term or fixed-term contracts has a significant negative impact on teaching fellows and learning technologists. 28% of teaching fellows and 48% of learning technologists are on fixed-term contracts as of 1st April 2022. One junior teaching fellow who had recently shifted from a fixed-term to an open-ended contract explained how it changed her relationship to the job:

> **66** the shift I noticed in myself going from … I have to get everything I can out of this place … compared to actually I'm not moving on in the next few months … I feel very lucky, but I wish other teaching fellows could have that same switch because I think it just takes stress off. **99**

Another junior teaching fellow on a fixed-term contract described loving her job at Imperial but needing to seek out permanent contracts elsewhere due to the lack of job security. She described how being on a temporary contract made her "feel like you're almost always on the job market" which made her reluctant to be critical online and worried about potential discrimination against her if she was ill, pregnant, or asked for adjustments on the basis of disability or chronic illness.

Even those who were on open-ended contracts described the extremely stressful and often last-minute renewal processes after years of fixed-term contracts. Such practices are extremely detrimental to staff wellbeing, learning and teaching quality, and individuals' professional development. Fixed-term staff cannot plan for the future or commit to things (even work within their role at Imperial) due to lack of clarity around whether or not their job will continue. It also means well-qualified and established staff leave, taking with them their relationships, knowledge, and expertise.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of teaching fellows and learning technologists received contract extensions or changed onto open-ended contracts. This shift away from precarious contracts was transformative to their sense of being valued by the College, their ability to invest in their work and professional development, and their levels of stress and anxiety about work. However, this job security has not been equally distributed across Faculties or roles, with a larger number of learning technologists on fixed-term contracts. One senior learning technologist explained that:

> **66** everyone's on a fixed-term post [in] my team, like two posts are permanent … [it's a] really risky approach on college's part … [it] can drive a lot of turnover, which is very frustrating. I have lost good people because of that. **99**

She reflected on her open-ended contract and how it allowed her to develop extensive networks across College and trusting relationships with academic staff and teaching fellows, allowing her to do her job more effectively and take bigger risks around innovation.

For those on open-ended contracts, they can plan for long-term professional development and sustained innovation and evaluation of their work. One senior teaching fellow on an open-ended contract explained that "Imperial is a very good place to be in this kind of role … [because at other universities] it's short-term contracts … one is a physical body to do teaching." He compared this to the job security he and many others had at Imperial alongside the possibilities for professional development, but with this job security came a desire for more support around the question of "how do I develop within the role?" This requires more senior teaching fellow mentorship and clearer promotion pathways to show where teaching fellow careers can go and to highlight the array of professional development options at the College.

7. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) ISSUES

Many interviewees highlighted the impact of EDI issues on their experiences at the College, highlighting that there is ongoing work to be done to address different forms of inequality. One interviewee said "there's a difference between offering [EDI] training and making sure that certain discussions are held" highlighting that while fire safety training was required every year as part of the Imperial Essentials online training, EDI training was not required.

In terms of class and educational background, some interviewees from working class or first generation backgrounds highlighted that Imperial could be an exclusionary environment. One teaching fellow said: "Imperial in general has a huge problem with private school and widening participation". While these discussions often focus on students, there are also staff from working class and first generation backgrounds, and so classism and elitism also affect staff. Another teaching fellow described the impact of "social capital sometimes, you know, that there'll be conversations about things that aren't necessarily to do with the field, but are to do with hobbies … People start talking about, you know, skiing holidays" alongside being surprised at how many academics had parents who were also academics.

Many staff from ethnic minority backgrounds described experiences of microaggressions or some staff being "blasé … they don't realise what they're saying can be offensive" around the history of empire, race and ethnicity, and other forms of inequality and diversity. In general, BAME staff discussed "just getting on with it" but this does not diminish the energy-consuming nature of negotiating discriminatory or exclusionary comments and ignorance from more privileged staff. For many interviewees, Imperial was a much more diverse university environment than their previous jobs or degree programmes, which was an extremely positive experience. Despite this, some interviewees who were not native English speakers highlighted dismissive and discriminatory comments from colleagues about their accents. One interviewee who'd experienced a negative comment about her accent, explained that while this was uncommon it was important to address, particularly as it had come from a more senior member of staff, making it harder to challenge.

One interviewee mentioned that colleagues could be inconsideration around the need for flexibility due to caring responsibilities. Similarly, interviewees with chronic illnesses and disabilities found it difficult to negotiate appropriate access requirements due to potential discriminatory or dismissive engagements from colleagues. While some had very positive and supportive line managers, it was difficult to be open with other colleagues for fear of ableism or judgement about getting "special treatment". Another highlighted that paternity leave needed to be equivalent to maternity leave at the College to encourage a more gender-balanced approach to childcare responsibilities.

One teaching fellow explained that she did a lot of pastoral care for students and that the College, heads of departments, and line managers needed "to be aware of how much of your pastoral support is being provided by women, and that that cannot exclude us from being involved in the... perceived high value activities, like the lecturing". The impact of gender on whether or not students sought out certain teaching staff for emotional and social support is important to consider when acknowledging workload and during promotions processes; this work is crucial to learning and teaching and must be properly valued and evenly distributed.

Lastly, some interviewees mentioned **the bullying scandal at Imperial**, highlighting the ongoing need for senior management to repair trust with staff and ensure that bullying and other forms of harassment were adequately dealt with in the College.

CASE STUDY: TEACHING FELLOWS IN MEDICINE

A teaching fellow academy is being developed in medicine, run by senior teaching fellows, and informed by a consultation process with teaching fellows. This new academy will address a number of issues highlighted by teaching fellows around lack of community, an unclear promotions pathway, and the need for more role models and community building to facilitate teaching fellows' professional development. The academy's support will be arranged around three strands which are consistent with the promotions criteria from the learning and teaching family:

- Innovation in teaching practice
- Educational research and evaluation
- Leadership and management

This comprehensive support package for teaching fellows is particularly important in medicine due to the numbers of teaching fellows and the specificity of medical training. This will supplement existing provision through the EDU, Departments and pre-existing Faculty and College support.

Line management of teaching fellows has changed over time in medicine, with a shift from academics to more senior teaching fellows. This was described as a big improvement by one interviewee:

❝having a line manager who's a teaching fellow is really helpful because I think they understand my needs and my role … much better … and the kind of professional development I need for my role.❞

While a separate teaching fellow academy is not necessarily appropriate or possible within all Faculties and Departments, more support is required for teaching fellows across the College, as issues around promotion pathways, lack of appropriate support, and need for more community building cut across disciplines. This support must be designed and implemented with participation and feedback from teaching fellows to ensure it is responsive to their needs. This would also provide opportunities for leadership and mentorship between teaching fellows, which is crucial for promotions and the wider visibility of teaching fellows' important work at the College.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, interviewees and survey respondents were happy with the professional development provision at Imperial, expressing very positive assessments of the available workshops, accreditation access, and courses. However, there are gaps to address, particularly for learning technologists, as discussed in the section on new provision. Most of this new provision will be relatively straightforward to implement alongside requests to provide more cross-College opportunities to build community and share good practice between teaching fellows and learning technologists. Issues around lack of signposting or information about support is also relatively easy to fix. However, there are longer-term issues to address, particularly around barriers to participation and the ongoing cultural shift happening at Imperial around valuing learning and teaching. More teaching fellows and learning technologists are being recognised for their essential contribution to the College; some have had fixed-term contracts changed to open-ended, teaching fellows have had a pay review process, and there is increasing College-wide recognition. However, this work is unfinished.

Almost all interviewees cited lack of time for professional development due to workload, which speaks to larger issues at the College and in the UK higher education sector around working conditions. To resolve this requires hiring more staff on secure contracts to ensure manageable workloads. Many interviewees reported instances of being devalued or disrespected by academics or more senior managers, which was often attributed to level of seniority (e.g. more senior staff disrespecting or side-lining more junior staff), and elitist attitudes amongst some academics towards staff not in the academic job family. Such devaluing of learning and teaching and professional services staff has no place at Imperial and must be tackled from the top. Similarly, some interviewees reported being disrespected, ignored, or side-lined on the basis of their gender, sexuality, race or ethnicity, and age. Many of these instances of disrespect and discrimination were downplayed or accepted as normal, particularly when they came from more senior or more privileged academics and senior managers, demonstrating that there is still a huge amount of work to be done around inequalities and exclusionary cultures at the College.

This report suggests the following recommendations to address gaps in provision and the barriers to professional development. They are split into shorter-term and longer-term actions that can be taken at different levels – across College and by Support Services or within Faculties and Departments. Some are relatively straightforward to implement, and others will require more sustained funding and commitment, but all of them should involve the participation of current teaching fellows and learning technologists to ensure they meet the needs of these roles.

SHORTER TERM

Cross-College and Support Services

- Learning Technologist Teams Network
    - Set up a learning technologist-focused Teams Network, similar to the Teaching Fellow Network, to share events and news, including professional development opportunities
- Induction handbook/webpages to signpost professional development provision
    - Create two induction handbooks and accompanying webpages signposting all pre-existing professional development support for teaching fellows and learning technologists, including highlighting their access to funding, training, workshops, courses, and events or community spaces (e.g. Teams networks/Slack channels etc)
- Rename **Teaching Fellow Development Fund**
    - Change the name to Teaching Fellow and Learning Technologists Development Fund to reflect that learning technologists are also eligible to apply
- Promotions guidance for the Learning and Teaching job family
    - Provide more guidance on promotions processes within the learning and teaching family to demystify this process for applicants and departments/faculties
- Alternative Personal Review and Development Plan (PRDP) Support
    - Providing 1-on-1 PRDP support for teaching fellows and learning technologists outside of their departments/faculties, particularly for those whose managers are not from the same job family and/or do not have sufficient time to provide appropriate advice and support
- Provide a learning technology focused session at every Learning and Teaching Festival
- Principal Fellowship/Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) applications
    - More support for PFHEA/SFHEA applicants, including connecting applicants with previous successful applicants to provide mentorship

- Certified Membership of the Association of Learning Technologists **(CMALT)**
  - Provide supported and funded opportunities for learning technologists to get the CMALT accreditation alongside funding other opportunities through the Association of Learning Technologists (ALT)
- Promote cross-College mentorship scheme to teaching fellows and learning technologists with commitments to matching them to more senior teaching fellows/learning technologists
- More career planning support for early career teaching fellows and learning technologists
  - This would require additional funding and provision to expand already existing research-focused postdoctoral support, for example, providing professional identity development focused workshops for teaching fellows and learning technologists
  - Pop Up Sessions by the PFDC are potentially a useful format to address some of the gaps in workshop provision, for example, around setting career goals, planning progression and promotion
- Provide more workshops covering the following educational research-focused themes:
  - Introduction to educational research to provide basics prior to committing to longer courses or for line managers to support teaching fellows/learning technologists
  - Publishing support for education journals
  - Educational research writing
  - Educational research conference presenting
- Provide more learning technologist focused training and specialist workshops
- Purchase qualitative analysis software to facilitate educational researchers work, e.g. NVivo

Faculties/Departments

- Workload adjustments for professional development
  - Line managers and heads of departments should proactively suggest workload adjustments for teaching fellows and learning technologists who are pursuing substantial professional development opportunities, such as the PG Dip, PG Cert, and MEd
- Senior academics need to promote and recognise the work of learning and teaching staff to disrupt the devaluation of these roles
- Academic line managers of teaching fellows or learning technologists need to support workload and professional development concerns of their staff
  - Address uneven workload division between teaching fellows
  - Complete PRDPs with staff
  - Pro-actively identify alternative support spaces for staff e.g. mentorship scheme, cross-College professional development opportunities
  - Advocate for more senior teaching fellows/learning technologists to take over line management of junior teaching fellows/ learning technologists to ensure appropriate support and guidance – this additional work would require adjustments to the new line managers' workloads to ensure they have sufficient time to do these roles

LONGER TERM

Cross-College and Support Services

- Address workload and working conditions issues
  - Hire more staff on secure contracts to address unsustainable workloads
  - Convert fixed-term contracts into open-ended contracts where the work is ongoing to retain staff and improve working conditions
  - Meaningful engage with the trade unions to ongoingly address staff concerns around working conditions
  - Continue to rebuild trust after the Imperial bullying scandal, including transparency and robust accountability processes for staff misconduct, particular senior management
- Involve teaching fellows and learning technologists in decision-making around their roles at College, such as around job family changes and pathways to promotion
- Senior managers across-College championing the value of teaching fellows and learning technologists to disrupt devaluation of these roles
- PhD opportunities for educational researchers post-MEd
  - More PhD opportunities, including part-time, for those who have finished the MEd and wish to continue their educational research training
- Set up educational research and learning technology 'lab' groups or research themes across-College focusing on educational research topics or specific areas of work (e.g. specific learning technology tools, the theme of assessment practices, EDI issues in teaching etc) which would help build community, develop educational researcher and educationist identities, and facilitate sharing of good practice across College
- New funding provision for hiring educational research-focused research assistants

Faculties/Departments

- Line management within job families
  - Senior teaching fellows and learning technologists taking on more line management responsibilities for junior teaching fellows and learning technologists as they have a better understanding of the role and promotions and development opportunities
  - Junior teaching fellows could also take on similar line management responsibilities for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to create opportunities for promotable leadership and administrative responsibilities
- Teaching fellows and learning technologists should have professional development time written into their contracts to protect this time and help manage excessive workloads, similarly to the 10 postdoctoral development days per year for early career researchers
  - This time could be spent on EDU workshops, courses, and events, educational research, staying up-to-date with their area of learning and teaching or discipline-specific research, and other activities
- Sabbaticals, secondments, and placements for learning and teaching staff
  - A few interviewees discussed the possibility of learning and teaching staff doing placements, secondments, or having sabbaticals which would give them a substantial period of time to focus on educational research, evaluation, or pedagogical development either at Imperial or at another organisation/university. This was discussed as a route to developing parity of esteem between academics and teaching fellows or learning technologists, alongside an important acknowledgement of the time required to do educational research or evaluation/pedagogical development projects.

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Smith, D.E. (2005) *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Oxford: AltaMira Press.

Smith, D.E. and Griffith, A.I. (2022) *Simply Institutional Ethnography: Creating a Sociology for People*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
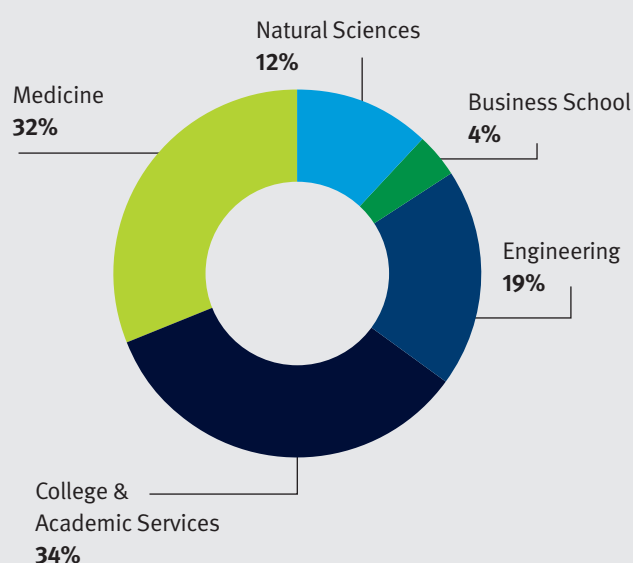
APPENDIX ONE: HR DATA ON TEACHING FELLOWS AND LEARNING TECHNOLOGISTS

As of 1st April 2022, according to Imperial College London's HR department, the overall College numbers of teaching fellows and learning technologists were:
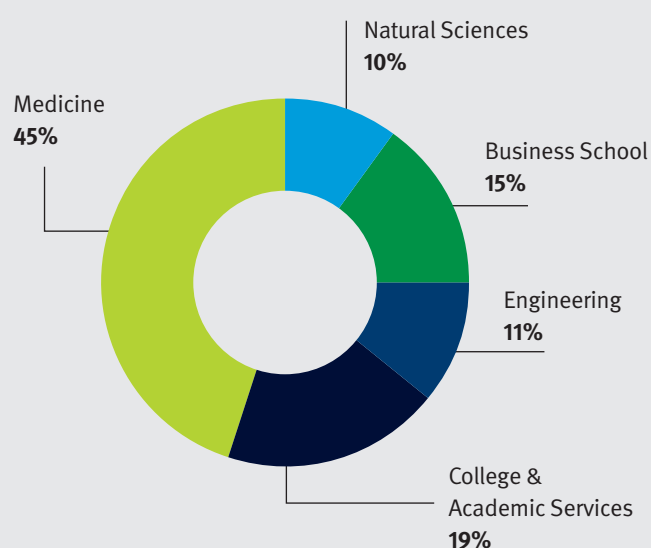
- **418 Teaching Fellows**
- **67 Learning Technologists**

STAFF BREAKDOWN BY FACULTY:

Teaching Fellows

Natural Sciences **12%**
Business School **4%**
Engineering **19%**
College & Academic Services **34%**
Medicine **32%**

Learning Technologists

Natural Sciences **10%**
Business School **15%**
Engineering **11%**
College & Academic Services **19%**
Medicine **45%**

STAFF BREAKDOWN BY GRADE AND CONTRACT TYPE:

Teaching Fellows Across College (418)				
Assistant Teaching Fellow	Teaching Fellow	Senior Teaching Fellow	Principal Teaching Fellow	Teaching Fellow (Level 6)
6	207	137	43	25

Teaching Fellow Contract Status Across College	
• 72% on open ended contracts • 28% on fixed term contracts	• 61% full time • 20% part time • 19% other

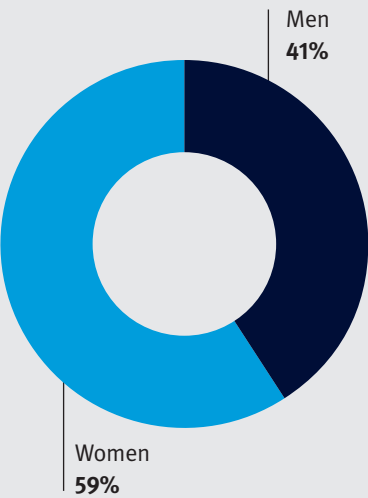| Learning Technologists Across College (67)			
Level 3a	Level 3b	Level 4	Levels 5 & 6
7	27	24	9

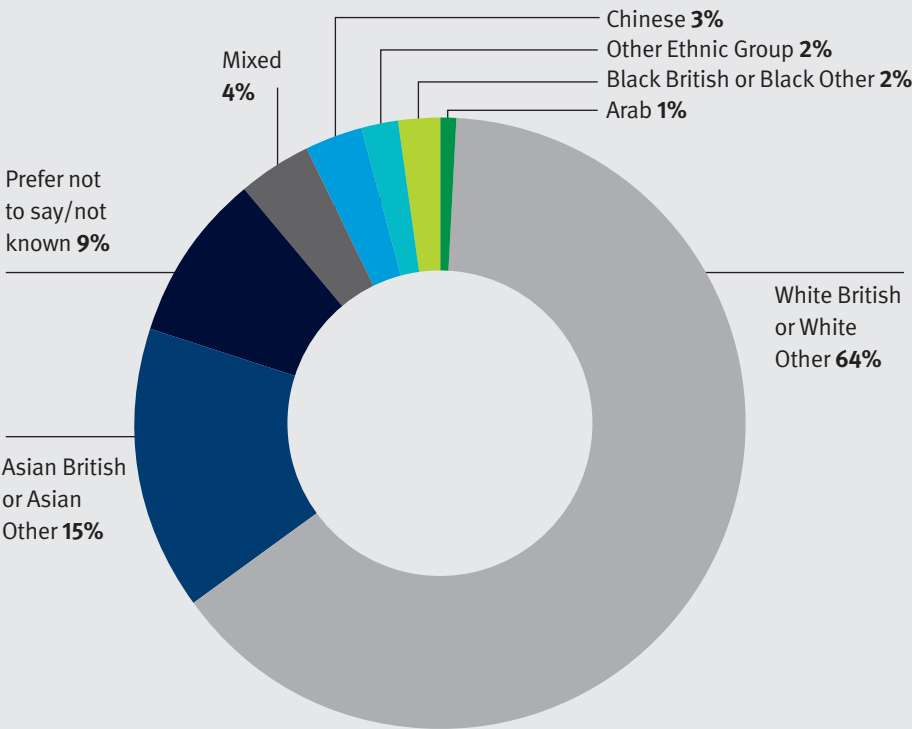| Learning Technologist Contract Status Across College	
• 52% open ended contract • 48% fixed term contract	• 81% full time • 9% part time • 10% other

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

The majority of teaching fellows are women (59%) and white (64%), and the majority of learning technologists are men (57%) and white (66%). The specific gender and ethnicity breakdowns across College are as follows:
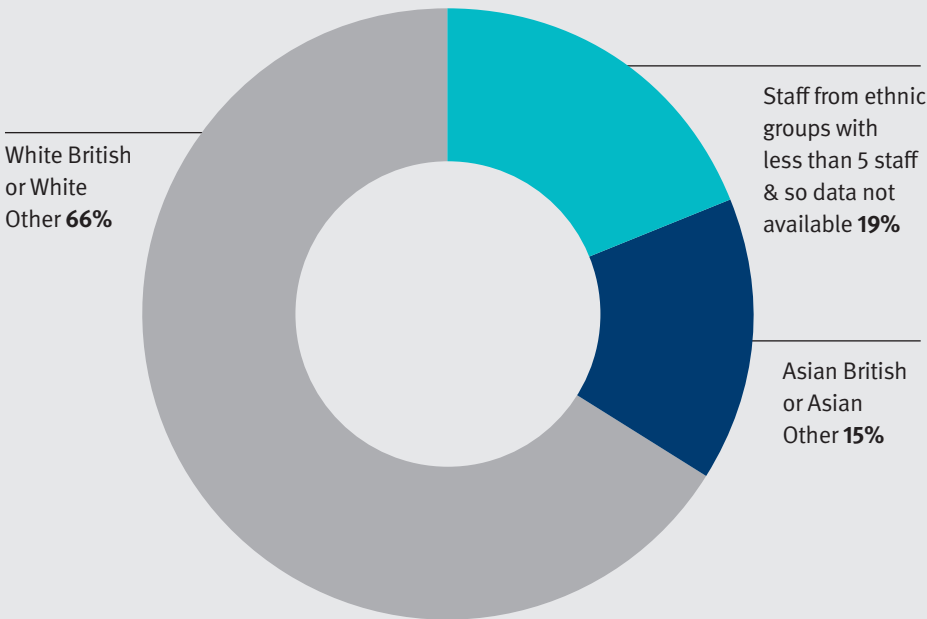
Teaching Fellows - Ethnicity

Chinese **3%**
Other Ethnic Group **2%**
Black British or Black Other **2%**
Arab **1%**

Mixed **4%**

Prefer not to say/not known **9%**

White British or White Other **64%**

Asian British or Asian Other **15%**

Teaching Fellows - Gender

Men **41%**

Women **59%**

Learning Technologists - Gender

Men **57%**

Women **43%**

Learning Technologists - Ethnicity

White British or White Other **66%**

Staff from ethnic groups with less than 5 staff & so data not available **19%**

Asian British or Asian Other **15%**

APPENDIX TWO: SURVEY QUESTIONS

The online survey was conducted via Qualtrics, distributed internally at the College through email, newsletters, and Microsoft Teams groups. It was open from Monday 9th May – Friday 10th June 2022 and largely focused on gathering suggestions for new professional development opportunities for teaching fellows and learning technologists. The survey included information about the research project, an online consent form, and the following questions:

1. Current job title at Imperial College London

2. Department at Imperial College London

3. How long have you worked at Imperial College London?

4. How long have you been in your current job?

5. How long is your current contract? [Permanent, Fixed term, Short-term contract/consultancy]

    a. If fixed term or short-term/consultancy, how long is your current contract?

6. Do you have a PhD? [Yes, No, Not yet - I am currently doing a PhD]

7. Do you require a visa to work in the UK? [Yes, No]

8. Do you currently have any caring responsibilities? For example, children, family members, or friends. [Yes, No]

9. Gender

10. Do you fit into any of the following underrepresented or marginalised groups? [LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other minority sexuality or gender identities), BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), First generation/first in family to go to university (none of your parents or caregivers attended university), Working class, Disabled]

    a. If yes to LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other minority sexuality or gender identities) – How would you describe your gender/sexuality?

    b. If yes to BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) – How would you describe your ethnicity?

    c. If yes to Disabled – How would you describe your disability?

11. Please write any training or professional development opportunities you would like to access through Imperial College London. These opportunities could be to support your current work for Imperial or to support your future career ambitions.

12. Would you like to participate in a follow-up interview for this research project?

APPENDIX THREE: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

All interviews were conducted online between Thursday 12th May and Monday 20th June 2022 via Microsoft Teams. They lasted between 45 and 90 mins each, were audio recorded and the audio sent to an external company to be transcribed. These transcripts were analysed by the researcher 'by hand', reading through interviews, identifying key themes and quotes and summarising into overall findings.

The demographics of the 22 interviewees were as follows:

Interviewees by Faculty (22 overall)				
Faculty of Natural Sciences	Faculty of Engineering	Faculty of Medicine	Business School	College and Academic Services
7	4	8	1	2

Teaching Fellows (17)	
13 open-ended contract	11 more junior (Teaching Fellow or Senior Teaching Fellow
4 fixed-term contract	6 more senior (Principal or Level 6 Teaching Fellow)

Learning Technologists (5)	
2 open-ended contracts	3 more junior
3 fixed-term contracts	2 more senior

The interviews were semi-structured, beginning with the interviewer checking the interviewees' survey responses before discussing the following questions. These questions were largely asked of all interviewees, although the order and precise wording was sometimes slightly different depending on the interviewees' experiences and responses to previous questions.

1. Briefly detail your employment history prior to this contract.

2. Can you briefly describe your current role and what it involves?

3. Do you participate in any research activities as part of your job, including any discipline-specific research, educational/pedagogical research, or other scholarship/evaluation work?

   • If yes, please describe what this entails.

4. Do you participate in any research activities outside of your contracted job, including any discipline-specific research, educational/pedagogical research, or other scholarship/evaluation work?

   • If yes, please describe what this entails.

5. Regardless of your job title or current role, do you consider yourself to be a researcher?

   • If yes, what does being a researcher mean to you? OR why not?

6. Regardless of your job title or current role, do you consider yourself to be an academic?

   • If yes, what does being an academic mean to you? OR why not?

Depending on replies to Questions 3-6, ask a version of this question:

7. Are teaching fellows/learning technologists treated differently to other academics or researchers, for example, in the academic job family?

8. Do you want to continue working in your current post?

   • Why?

9. Do you want to continue working as a teaching fellow/learning technologist?

   • If no, what sort of job would you like to move into?

10. Do you feel supported in your role as a teaching fellow/learning technologist?

    • Where do you get support?

11. Do you feel part of a community of teaching fellows/learning technologists at Imperial?

    • Why?

12. Do you feel like your work is valued and respected at Imperial?

    • Who values it and how do they value it? OR Why not?

13. Have you accessed any career development workshops, events, or other services at Imperial College London? For example, through the Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC), Education Development Unit (EDU), Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship (CHERS), or within your own Faculty/School/Department/Centre.

- If yes, please give a list or more details.

14. Would you like further career development support at Imperial College London?

- If yes, please give details.

15. Do you feel like your career has been affected by your background or any of your identities?

- (Specify different underrepresented identities based on demographic information collected in the online survey). If yes, please explain more.

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POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Tailored support and development for postdocs, fellows and clinicians