

# Imperial College London



Research  
England

## Improving the wellbeing of early career researchers through tangible actions against bullying and harassment

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## POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Tailored support and development for postdocs, fellows and clinicians

## Improving the wellbeing of early career researchers through tangible actions against bullying and harassment

Elizabeth Adams, (Scafell Coaching) and Katie Farrell (University of Glasgow), June 2022

With acknowledgements to: Stefanie Wollstein-Edler, Elena Virlan, Jenna Collinson (PFDC), the Advisory group (Appendix 2) and all participants and interviewees.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides background and context of current literature relating to bullying and harassment in Higher Education (HE) research environments, as well as reviewing practice intended to tackle these or lessen their likelihood, by promoting more positive research cultures. Imperial-specific information has been included wherever possible, drawing on a range of sources (focus groups; HR data; departmental surveys) as outlined in the methodology section below.

A version of this report informed the work of an advisory board, who considered where actions might be prioritised to improve the research environment and ultimately the wellbeing of early-career researchers (ECRs).

Actions for the PFDC or wider Imperial community were identified in the following areas:

1. PI development and accountability
2. Broadening the success criteria beyond publications
3. Community, connection and visibility of support
4. Examples, definitions and scenarios to improve understanding of what behaviour is (un)acceptable
5. Leadership standing behind the values
6. Supporting complaints

It should be acknowledged that the current academic system of short-term contracts and precarity lead to power dynamics and cultures which make bullying much more likely, and reporting of bullying to be felt to be a career-ending move.

### BACKGROUND

In response to the Government's R&D People and Culture Strategy, Research England awarded Imperial £950K to support efforts to enhance research culture. This initiative particularly sought to address bullying and harassment in the research environment; an issue which has also been highlighted as a priority by the [2020 Wellcome Report into Research Culture](#). This study found that a poor research culture leads to bullying and harassment, as well as resulting in mental health issues: Nearly two-thirds of researchers (61%) have witnessed bullying or harassment, and 43% have

experienced it themselves. At the same time, just one in three (37%) feel comfortable speaking up, with many doubting appropriate action will be taken.

The Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre ([PFDC](#)) contracted Elizabeth Adams (an independent consultant, Scafell Coaching) to undertake a project in Spring 2022 with the aim of improving the wellbeing of ECRs through tangible actions that tackle bullying and harassment and help to strengthen and maintain wellbeing and good mental health. The project sought to explore and understand the elements of the research environment which might perpetuate bullying cultures at Imperial, as well as the barriers or enablers to addressing bullying behaviours (either through formal or informal routes).

## PROJECT SCOPE AND TERMINOLOGY

The project aimed to identify, explore and understand:

- the elements of the research environment at Imperial which contribute to or facilitate bullying and impact on ECRs
- the barriers or enablers to addressing bullying behaviours in the research environment, either through formal or informal routes
- where practical steps or actions might be taken, either by the Postdoc and Fellow Development Centre (PFDC) or by other specific groups in Imperial, to improve research environments for ECRs or to tackle bullying and harassment in relation to ECRs.

This project is running in parallel with anti-bullying initiatives led by HR, the Graduate School and Departments within Imperial. Findings will be shared across the College to enable and support a joined-up approach, but also maintain a clear focus on the specific factors which are relevant to ECRs.

**Research environment:** is used to encompass the day-to-day running and activities of research groups, labs and fieldwork, as well as publication and grant-writing practices, seminars, conferences and other events.

**Early Career Researchers (ECRs):** is intended in this project to encompass postdocs and fellows (staff, generally on fixed term contracts or funding), as being the core group of interest. However, it should be noted that survey responses and focus groups also included mention of research students and the term is often used as a catch-all for both research students and staff.

## 1 BULLYING IN THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

### 1.1 Introduction

Over the past 5 years there has been an increasing focus on research culture in Higher Education, prompting consideration of the eco-system surrounding research, and the structures, systems,

incentives and environments which lead to high quality, creative and rigorous research whilst also safeguarding the researcher. Research culture work is often focussed on actions to build a positive culture, for example, approaches to reproducible and open science, authorship practices, approaches to inclusion, pre-publication of studies and roles within studies. It is hoped that increased transparency and accountability in research may lead to the reduction of power imbalances. Many institutions have appointed senior champions for culture and engaged in writing action plans and running surveys or other projects to understand their culture. However, this positive approach will sometimes be met with frustration by researchers on the ground as it appears blind to the issue that bullies exist in leadership positions, and staff often perceive a lack of urgency in institutional approaches to tackling bullying and harassment head-on.

One of the key issues is siloed working within institutions, where promoting a positive 'research culture' is the domain of one unit or senior leader, whilst tackling bullying and harassment is led by another unit within the organisation, each with their own disconnected set of policies, drivers, communication methods and indeed understanding of the needs and context of researchers and ECRs.

In reality, to build trust and long-term sustainability of culture change, it is likely that both approaches are needed; addressing the bad practice and tackling bullying at the same time as ensuring drivers for good practice are aligned, visible and understood.

Research funders are increasingly taking an interest in how institutions are addressing bullying as part of research culture efforts. A [2020 UK landscape study of research integrity](#) (UKRI/ Vitae) identified bullying and harassment as the top factor negatively impacting research integrity. This might manifest itself as encouragement to cut corners or ignore data points which don't correlate with the desired result, both of which lower the quality of research. Both UKRI and [Wellcome](#) acknowledge their own role in the research eco-system and have embedded expectations within their grant funding processes that applicants will take a holistic view of research culture and tackling bullying within that.

## **1.2 Which aspects of the research environment might contribute to bullying and harassment?**

A 2019 [UKRI evidence review of bullying and harassment](#) identified that *certain characteristics of the higher education research environment can act as enablers of bullying and harassment, such as strong hierarchies and incentive structures – significant workloads, competitive behaviours and job insecurity.*

The 'superstar' researcher model, whereby one lead researcher holds the funding, surrounded by ECRs (often on short term contracts) who carry out the project, leads to a huge imbalance of power. Academic promotions and recruitment are normally linked to metrics such as grant income or publications and academic careers are often built on patronage (for example, letters of references, invitations to collaborate or speak at conferences). This scenario compounds the barriers to an ECR to speaking out against their PI; their own career success hinges on this one individual, whilst they are simultaneously aware of the 'value' placed on that individual by the institution:

*The funding and grants that result from having high-profile names publishing cutting edge research means institutions are incentivised to preserve their most lucrative employees. ([The Lancet, Power and Bullying in Research](#)).*

ECRs are often very isolated, with limited contact with others in the institution beyond their immediate PI and research group (where one exists). This isolation may have been exacerbated by the pandemic and home working. Conferences or fieldwork scenarios, away from the day to day of the institution may also provide opportunities for toxic situations, misconduct or power imbalances to be intensified.

A [2020 Nature survey of over 7000 postdocs from 93 countries across the world](#) identified that many postdocs are at 'tipping' point and considering leaving academia due to mental health reasons; vulnerable to insecure contracts and bullying and harassment. Impacts of the pressured environment and insecure contracts were more profound for women than men and for disabled respondents. 74% of respondents reported observing power imbalances or bullying and many had observed discrimination against a variety of characteristics – 24% reported actually experiencing discrimination or harassment during their current postdoc. The article notes that Postdocs are an internationally mobile group, with over 60% working outside of their home countries. Postdocs are often at risk of 'falling through the cracks' between staff and student structures at many institutions. They may be unsure of employee rights, status and support systems as they move between countries and institutions, perhaps not even knowing counselling or mental health support exists, because it didn't at their previous institution or because they don't know the right terminology to search for it. Not all will be directly employed by their host institution and may not be certain about employment structures. Again, this may have been made worse during the pandemic, with informal networking opportunities to gain insights into these structures being limited, or perhaps there being less of a 'transition' for those moving from PhD student to postdoc roles.

### 1.3 Policy and practice towards a more positive culture

The Wellcome survey and 2019/20 research culture townhall meetings shone a spotlight on the UK research culture. However, these were against the backdrop of a raft of other organisations and reports, including:

- The Academy of Medical Sciences team science report
- The Royal Society of Chemistry [reports on diversity and inclusion, belonging and recognition](#)
- Nuffield Council of Bioethics
- UKRIO and Vitae landscape review of research integrity
- The Technician Commitment, Athena Swan and an increase in the number of [UUK Research Concordats](#) (e.g. career development of researchers, open science and research integrity) as well as requirements for reporting on their implementation.

Increasingly, funders are setting expectations in grants around positive cultures, as well as through reporting requirements for allegations of bullying. At an international level, [DoRA](#), use of the [CReDIT](#)

[taxonomy](#) and the introduction of narrative CVs have all sought to broaden academic success criteria, [make both direct and indirect contributions to research more transparent](#) and move away from uncontextualized metrics (such as journal impact factors) in research assessment. Imperial itself signed up to DoRA in 2017. The intentions of these efforts is not only to create a better working environment but also to [improve the reproducibility and rigour of the research itself](#), by aligning incentives.

The majority of UK institutions have introduced large scale initiatives relating to diversity and inclusion or to wider research culture. As part of these, there are likely to be specific projects which relate to bullying or harassment, such as building minority staff networks or introducing specific training (e.g. active bystander interventions or understanding microaggressions).

UCU have also made a [bullying checklist](#) and other resources available.

However, institution-wide initiatives such as Athena Swan may be used as a proxy for action, whilst the reality is that Bronze awards can be granted for simply reviewing and understanding the culture to achieve a baseline, and then writing a plan, rather than taking action.

The 2019 UKRI review of bullying and harassment specifically mentions that a policy in isolation is not enough and that *'the culture of the organisation must be supportive of the policy'*, going on to stipulate that institutions should: *adopt preventative strategies by developing codes of conduct on expected conduct and delivering training programmes that clarify and re-set norms of inclusive, supportive and respectful behaviour.*

Many open access tools, including [team charters](#), [lab manuals](#), [new researcher induction guides](#) and [conference codes of conduct](#) are now available for researchers to adapt and use within their own context, prompting constructive conversations around expectations and behaviours.

## 1.4 Reporting bullying

Both the Wellcome survey and [UKRI review](#) noted the lack of a clear definition of bullying and appropriate behaviours as a barrier to reporting:

*Some thought that such behaviour could be hard to accurately identify and considered there to be a grey area between a management style that appropriately challenged staff to perform well and one that was bullying (Wellcome)*

Institutional staff surveys may use awareness of policies as a sign of progress in tackling bullying and harassment. However, the Wellcome survey underlined that many respondents were aware of such policies and procedures but still hesitate to make a report. In her book [Complaint!](#) Sarah Ahmed highlights the 'non-performative' nature of many university policies relating to complaints. The gap between what the university says it will do and what is actually done.

The complex nature of universities means they are likely to have a diverse array of policies which relate to research but are authored and implemented by individual departments or champions,



including safeguarding, bullying and harassment, good research practice, research misconduct, staff-student personal relationships and many others. If no efforts are made to bring these together, there could be gaps, overlaps or even contradictions in the policy. It is also extremely difficult for new staff (such as postdocs, who typically move between institutions for multiple contracts and may not have English as a first language) to be aware of and navigate the relevant policies, or to [understand the evidence](#) that they might be required to gather in order to make a report (which in itself is an additional burden on someone in a precarious situation). For anyone who does want to make a report, this can feel overwhelming, particularly as many such policies have a senior person listed as the main contact, which can be off-putting to more junior individuals who may also feel disempowered by their membership of underrepresented or minoritized groups (e.g. women in STEM etc.).

The 1752 group is a UK-based research, consultancy and campaign organisation which aims to end staff sexual misconduct in HE. Their [research on the barriers and catalysts for students and ECRs to report sexual misconduct](#) identified that catalysts or triggers to making a report included: leaving the institution; finding out that others have been targeted by the same individual and reporting in a group; needing an extension on their assignment, protecting their own safety or being validated by a third party that the behaviour was not acceptable. Their underpinning rationales for reporting were complex, diverse and individual with the main one being to stop it happening to others and with career reasons being another major factor. They suggest that it is ethically questionable for institutions to focus on encouraging high levels of reporting if there is no evidence that complaints processes are 'fit for purposes' or that the individual will not suffer career-limiting or personal impacts. The group goes on to make a series of recommendations which may be relevant to policy and practice to support allegations of bullying and harassment. These include:

- Allowing reporting as part of a group
- Reviewing time limits for reporting and allowing former staff to make a report (to accommodate for a report made after the end of a short-term contract)
- Risk assessments to be carried out as soon as complaint received and ensuring survivor-centred approaches to complaints processes.

Many UK institutions have implemented the Report + Support tool to allow anonymous reporting and identify trends or patterns (e.g. department, location) and reasons for anonymous reporting, as well as allow them to tailor interventions (e.g. [poster campaigns](#)).

### 1.5 The context at Imperial

In 2016, Imperial published [an independent review of its institutional culture and gender equality](#), highlighting concerns over how the culture of research excellence creates an environment of competition and pressure which is lacking empathy and impacts negatively on wellbeing, collaboration and community. The review found a fear of speaking up against misconduct or bullying, contributed to by siloed working practices, power dynamics and precarious contracts (common to postdocs) and a perception that *the institution would turn a blind eye to poor behaviour if the individual involved was of value to the College*. In commissioning the current study, the PFDC

are seeking to understand whether the issues highlighted in this report are still present in the research culture in 2022.

More recently, Imperial and its leadership have been criticised for a culture of disrespect, favouritism and exclusion, outlined in a [2020 independent review of bullying allegations](#). There is likely to be a time-limited window in which the Imperial leadership can demonstrate a clear commitment to action which addresses not only bullying and harassment but also the wider issues of race and gender discrimination within the report. Governance of initiatives which address bullying and harassment at Imperial fall under the remit of HR, led by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre (EDIC) and the Assistant Provost for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Work is currently underway to update the College's bullying and harassment policy, including providing a comprehensive definition of bullying. Whilst many positive steps have been taken at Imperial to address bullying and harassment, such as the [introduction of the 'report and support tool'](#), [active bystander training](#) and the [Imperial values and expectations](#), these initiatives are still new and may not be widely known or have had time to make an impact.

#### ONGOING WORK TO ADDRESS BULLYING AT IMPERIAL

##### Resolution Policy

- Effective from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021
- Aims to restore and protect working relationships by facilitating constructive resolution to disputes and conflicts before they become formal
- Based on the principles of mediation, the process aims to encourage all individuals to take personal responsibilities to address issues of conflict through facilitated conversation
- It is a solutions focused process – both parties must agree to a facilitated conversation (it is not compulsory)
- Local HR partners may recommend this process, or it might be suggested for issues submitted through the Report & Support tool. Whether the process is recommended will depend on the complexity of the issue and previous action taken. If it is a very serious bullying and harassment claim this process will not be suitable.

##### Report & Support

- [Culture shift](#) worked with Imperial to implement Report & Support for staff in 2020
- There are two ways of disclosing an issue: anonymously or being put in contact with someone
- The disclosure form invites the reasons to be provided for anonymous reporting. Anonymous disclosures cannot be investigated, and the College cannot identify or make contact with the individual.
- Where a staff member gives their name, they are contacted by a member of the Employee Relations team. They can discuss their concerns and receive support, advice, and guidance on how they wish to take the matter forward. This does not initiate a formal complaint process or investigation. The individual decides how they wish to take the issue forward.
- From the data collected by Report & Support, trends/patterns can be identified so that the College can then implement preventative strategies and inform the College's approach to harassment and bullying. Traditionally data was reviewed annually, and this has now moved to every 6 months, with reporting to staff by email.



- The disclosure forms include a list of behaviours/incidents (e.g. sexual harassment, bullying) and whether the person submitting the complaint believes any personal factors (e.g. race, gender) contributed to the incident.

#### Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre (EDIC)

- Offers anti-harassment training for staff ([confronting inappropriate behaviour](#))
- Supports individuals and triages accordingly
- Provides individual support relating to disability and workplace adjustments
- Manages the [Staff supporter scheme](#): signposting to informal and formal options, keeping all discussions confidential
- [Harassment and bullying support webpage](#)

## 2. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Data for this project was collected via two ECR focus groups, workshops with Heads of Department and PFDC Champions, a survey of Departmental practice and conversations with HR and the PFDC.

### ECR Focus groups

Two 1.5hr focus groups took place with 8 Imperial postdocs and fellows (and with one email response provided) to elicit views on:

- Where Imperial sits with regards to the Wellcome survey on bullying and harassment.
- The extent to which existing measures to tackle bullying and harassment at Imperial work for the College ECR community.
- Whether there are any specific issues that affect Imperial's ECR community that need to be addressed as a priority.

### Heads of Department (HoDs) and Postdoc and Fellows (PFDC) Champion workshops

High level themes from the ECR focus groups were shared at two 1hr workshops with HoDs and PFDC Champions (academics with a remit to champion postdocs and fellows within their department). The purpose of these was to gain insights and perspectives on where to prioritise actions to address bullying and harassment in the research environment, in support of ECR wellbeing, particularly focusing on how practically workable these might be on the ground. The workshops also explored what support they might need as leaders to address issues of research culture, and how these themes overlapped with other thinking around Team Science cultures.

In parallel, a **departmental survey** was sent to operational heads to collect examples of good practice from across the College, where departments or research groups are already taking practical steps to tackle bullying and harassment in the research environment (e.g. research groups, fieldwork, conferences, seminars or other research activities such as publication or grant-writing). This included:

- Resources (e.g. induction materials, handbooks, webpages, codes of conduct – including ones developed for specific conferences or events)
- Workshops, training, away days, discussions

- Local policy or other practice, such as mentoring or a neutral point of contact
- Communications, engagement, or other visible commitment in this area

The literature review and findings from the focus groups, workshops, survey and departmental practice were shared with an advisory board (See Appendix 2 for membership) to inform discussion and identification of actions.

### 3. ECR FOCUS GROUP THEMES

Within the focus groups, ECRs highlighted a range of factors in the research environment which might contribute to or facilitate bullying cultures. Some of these were systemic issues for Higher Education, whilst others were felt to be more about the culture of Imperial. Participants also outlined the risks of raising an issue and overall a sense that ECRs would be unlikely to do so. As discussions progressed, more than one participant remarked that they were starting to realise that they or colleagues might have been bullied.

The following key themes may provide opportunity for specific actions to tackle bullying and harassment in the research environment.

- 1. Lack of a shared definition of bullying:** It was generally agreed that ‘un/acceptable behaviours’ within the research environment are not clearly articulated and more could be done on this area, particularly (but not solely) at induction, or when one is new to leading a research group, perhaps aligning to the Imperial values. So-called ‘Dinosaurs’ may not realise that times and behavioural expectations have evolved or may believe that they are ‘building resilience’ and being constructively critical or challenging. Discipline-relevant vignettes with quotes may be beneficial for both those who need to self-reflect on their behaviours and also to those who may be getting bullied. One example shared was that neglect of Masters students can be considered to be bullying (as well as damaging to research rigour).
- 2. Isolation and moving around for postdoc positions:** postdocs with very short-term contracts, new to Imperial and experiencing a ‘cauldron of stress’ may not have time to fully understand or navigate the system (i.e. constant pressure to spend time doing the project, clock ticking, rather than focussing on culture). They may be far from family support or friends and start to lose sight of what’s normal in working cultures (hours, holidays etc.). The pandemic may have made isolation worse and collaboration between different groups was felt to be limited. Participants felt that they might benefit from informal opportunities (and neutral space on campus) to meet other postdocs for lunch. It was felt that short contract lengths and the inherent power imbalances make the issue worse.
- 3. Lack of a neutral point of contact for postdocs:** Positive mentions of models used to support PGRs (annual review time where Supervisor steps out and you can raise any issues, or PGR senior tutor). It was felt that even if the point of contact is a PI from another area, it’s very political – better to have someone who isn’t a researcher but more neutral, with no agenda.

4. **Navigating the system, context and jargon:** policies are not simple to read for non-native English speakers and may need explanation ('translation') by a neutral party. There was also a request for employment terms and conditions to be made more transparent (e.g. institutionally funded ICRF Fellowships versus others) or provision of guidance for who is able to be a PI or Co-I on a grant to HR, Research Office, Postdocs, PIs and HoDs.
5. **PI support and management for culture and the careers of others:** Support, mentoring and training for PIs could be improved: including how to seek feedback; managing with empathy; ownership of ideas and how they share out the 'vision' for their research within their group (i.e. who is leading on different aspects of the work – this is often unspoken). Importance of positive PI behaviours being encouraged and supported by the department (recognition of time spent working on culture and careers: is this recognised in grant applications and promotions?). Positive comments were made on Supervisor development and other mandatory courses (in terms of awareness of policies and good practice).
6. **Risks and issues with reporting bullying:** These included a lack of belief that anything would be done about it (or that it's possible to do anything) as well as discussion of potential current and future career consequences for ECRs who raise issues, due to the power dynamics inherent within precarious employment ('not given good projects' 'no reference' 'can't get a future job').

Some more senior researchers felt caught in the middle, with ECRs preferring to come to them with issues, but that they are unable to do much about them, still having to work with the people that are being complained about, and potentially themselves being turned on, or seen as 'the problem'. It was felt that the institutional response to recent events didn't clearly demonstrate a commitment to acting on bullying, setting a tone for future and that bullies are often known, but nothing is done.

#### 4. HEADS OF DEPARTMENT AND POSTDOC AND FELLOWS CHAMPIONS WORKSHOPS

Focus group themes were shared with HoDs and PFDC Champions for reflection and discussion in two workshops. The groups were also asked what support would be useful to them in tackling bullying and harassment and what Imperial might do to support improved collaboration and a culture of 'Team Science'. Issues raised by the groups included:

- Tackling isolation, particularly with the increase in agile and remote working. Reduced opportunity for informal social interaction might be particularly challenging for those joining Imperial from outside of the UK. This leads to a lack of informal support networks for both personal and professional issues, as well as for navigating the research culture and institutional norms, structures, and support.

- The need for clarity and agreement around ownership of ideas that are generated out of group discussion and roles in future funding bids in accordance with funder rules and group understanding/consensus.
- The need to mentor and support postdocs from Day 1 towards an academic role can be time-consuming and demanding and includes opening up contacts and networks etc. Participants were not clear that culture awards (as currently in place in one department) would be motivating for this but felt that embedding reward for such mentorship is important.
- HR have a crucial role to play: both in relation to coaching PIs or leaders through investigations and complaints, as well as in implementing support policies, guidance, training, and other initiatives (such as facilitation/mediation).

## 5. AREAS FOR ACTION

An advisory group, comprising of external and internal representation with expertise in EDI, bullying and Higher Education, met to review project findings and put forward some suggested actions, as below. Some actions are for the PFDC to implement, whilst others must be led by other parts of the College. Imperial, as a leading institution in the UK, also has a clear leadership role in influencing the wider eco-system around many of these issues.

The advisory group advised careful consideration of the following, prior to any actions being implemented.

- Seeing a complaint through to completion is an incredibly emotionally demanding and lengthy process. Emphasis should be placed on removing the burden on the individual who has been bullied and focus more on improving the system that is allowing the bullying to happen.
- Many issues are systemic. It was felt to be almost certainly academic career-limiting for a postdoc to make a report of bullying, due to precarity, short term contracts and power imbalances. A fundamental shift in power and contract lengths is required to address that.
- Emotional intelligence will be key to tackling bullying. Being an organisation which demonstrably values and cares about its staff requires depth of thought and consideration of the intersectional issues which surround and enable bullying. Academic staff workloads, high pressure environments and burnout are central to this discussion and Imperial's leadership have a responsibility to ensure that PIs have time for this thinking and to demonstrate appropriate care for wellbeing.
- There are already many good policies and practices in place at Imperial. Often, the most useful action would be to build trust across the organisation by ensuring awareness and consistent implementation of these policies. 300+ new ECRs start each year and therefore communications of positive initiatives, such as active bystander training, needs to be more visible, consistent, and persistent.

- Throughout the project, many researchers talked about the importance and value of the PFDC as a neutral party who 'has their backs' and fully understands the complexity of the issues faced. It was felt that the PFDC's role could be strengthened and appropriately resourced to ensure they are able to:
  - Act as a voice on behalf of ECRs, feeding into College decision making and ensuring that action is taken as a result of this piece of work.
  - Ensuring the impact of this work and any resulting actions are communicated to ECRs, building trust in the College's commitment to addressing bullying and harassment.
  - Build communities and ECR networks, moving away from isolation and sole dependence on the culture set by their PI.

### Suggested actions

1. **PI development and accountability** PIs are pivotal in setting the culture for ECRs and require support at individual level as well as collectively. This support might include mentoring and coaching and also communities of mutual learning on topics such as what being a good PI looks like and how to have challenging conversations. The aim would be to enable a shift in skillset, from the research skills that were required up until now, to the skills needed to be a good people manager. HoDs should ensure PI accountability for pastoral care and safeguarding of ECRs.

#### Actions for PFDC:

- To work with People and Organisational Development (POD) to input to leadership development and support PI communities of practice (e.g. sharing resources and templates such as Laboratory Charters, [Codes of Conduct](#) or [wellbeing conversation checklists](#)). This support should be provided for all PIs, including senior fellows with line management responsibilities and new Lecturers.
- To work with research integrity specialists to ensure a holistic approach to discussing cultures of team science and how research should be done in the College, ensuring consistency of messages across training and resources (e.g. relating to codes of conduct and attribution of credit or having conversations at the outset of projects relating to ownership of ideas).

#### Actions for the College:

- Supporting the development of a culture with regular feedback and wellbeing conversations, exploring tools to embed wellbeing surveys as part of PRDP, with the HoD gaining access to overview data, to hold PIs accountable for their role in feedback and wellbeing conversations.
2. **Broadening the success criteria beyond publications:** Ensuring expectations for people management are embedded consistently across recruitment, promotions and appraisal.

#### **Actions for the PFDC:**

- To introduce a mechanism for postdocs to recognise, thank and celebrate individuals or teams who promote a positive research culture, emotional intelligence and care for wellbeing, noting that this doesn't need to be an 'award' in the traditional sense (see the [people make research](#) campaign at the University of Glasgow)

#### **Actions for the College:**

- Explore measures to incorporate anonymous feedback, including from alumni who have moved to a range of different career roles, in appraisal and promotions process.
- Build a culture of feedback and set a clear expectation that this is the norm, for example, encourage uptake of 360' feedback tools.
- Equip recruitment and promotions panels to explore research leadership and people management skills.

3. **Community, connection, and visibility of support** Many postdocs are new to Imperial<sup>1</sup> (and often new to the UK). Providing communities of support will help ECRs feel less isolated and understand the values and expectations at Imperial, thus allowing them to seek support in challenging times.

#### **Actions for PFDC:**

- To continue to act as a neutral point of contact for ECRs, to signpost to relevant policies and support, such as harassment or wellbeing advisers. Practice and expert knowledge should be shared between PFDC and harassment advisers, with annual discussions or an exchange of briefing notes to ensure harassment advisers are aware of the work context of postdocs and the PFDC are up to date on policies and support.
- Support development of staff networks and enable postdoc reps or Champions to operate to their full potential via access to up-to-date mailing lists or other tools.

#### **Actions for College:**

- Persistent and consistent communications via HoDs and PFDC champions to ECRs on expectations, values, training, and support available.

4. **Examples, definitions and scenarios to improve understanding of what behaviour is (un)acceptable.** Imperial is currently developing its definition of bullying, via a community consultation. Many excellent resources and workshops are already in existence to support [active by-standing](#) or understanding of microaggressions.

#### **Actions for PFDC:**

- To work with ECRs to understand the Imperial values and what they mean / what ECRs can expect from Imperial

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<sup>1</sup> 339 new starts in academic year 2020/21



- To provide input into tailored resources, examples, case studies and scenarios appropriate to ECRs and also embed these within existing workshops (e.g. relating to Imperial values, Supervision, active bystanders or microaggressions).

#### Action for College:

- Regular and consistent communications on expectations, values, training and support available.
  - Training and support tailored to leadership at all levels, aligned to the Imperial values, which clearly sets out expectations around bullying, such as being aware of different forms of bullying (e.g. continuum of behaviours, online communications) and on how to actively challenge bullying.
  - Department workshops should ask postdocs what 'respect' looks like in how they are managed. This would likely lead to discussion of involvement in decision making, careers support, expectations around working hours and allocation of supervision or teaching, to allow exploration of norms.
5. **Leadership standing behind the values.** Support and accountability are needed for HoDs and other leaders to address thorny issues of culture and create space for in-depth thinking on this. Leaders should be active in role modelling and celebrating good practice, setting a tone and clear expectations and then holding PIs to account through challenging conversations to address the intensive culture where ECRs (as described by one participant) feel they are '*tested to destruction*'.

#### Actions for the College:

- Providing coaching and communities of practice for HoDs as well as opportunities to share practice (for example, on how to address negative behaviours or set clear expectations).
- Provide clear expectations to HoDs that they will be visible role models for this agenda. This might include encouraging participation in training or spending time with ECRs, to understand their perspectives and concerns and establish themselves as a port of call outside of the PI.
- Hold HoDs accountable for culture – providing them with relevant data to understand their culture and also with the right specialist support from HR on challenging behaviours or investigating informal claims.
- Test the commitment of leaders towards positive cultures at recruitment via incorporation of Imperial values into the Recruitment and Selection processes, including specific questions and training of recruitment panels.

*"I feel strongly that everyone within our community deserves to be treated with Respect. Poor behaviour, including bullying and harassment, has not, and will not be tolerated within the Faculty of Engineering. I am asking for your help in using the Active Bystander training to challenge any behaviours that go against our Values, so that together we can create a*

*positive working environment. In return, you can count on my support when you take action against poor behaviours using the 4Ds.”*

EXAMPLE PROVIDED OF LEADERSHIP STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF IMPERIAL VALUES

6. **Supporting complaints** Any action in this area must acknowledge that it is currently potentially career-ending for ECRs to report bullying, due to the power dynamics in play. Work must be done to address the current low-trust culture, which has been contributed to by the recent bullying scandal.

**Actions for the PFDC**

- Working with HR and Departments to ensure visibility of the complaints process and different routes to reporting. This could include sharing anonymised case studies which demonstrate that different routes to resolution are possible, and it doesn't always have to be a lengthy process.
- Although not in their remit, staff within the PFDC may find disclosures being shared with them and are likely to benefit from introductory level training on how to handle these or address behaviour in workshops which may come across as reinforcing bullying cultures or victim blaming.
- Explore the PFDC's own capacity to support 'temperature checking' of Departmental culture via the information they already collect (e.g. through exit surveys, events or one to one consultations) which might be connected with data from other Imperial services and used to support HoDs in their role.

**Action for the College**

- To ensure that if a disclosure is made towards the end of someone's contract (or after it has ended) the individual still has access to confidential care.
- To ensure availability of well-trained investigators with adequate time to carry out the role, equipping them with appropriate templates and clear role descriptions.
- To ensure there is a policy for re-assigning of grants, should a bullying accusation be upheld against a PI.<sup>2</sup>
- To consider ways to enable more joined up and transparent use of data already being captured, to enable early identification potential issues with culture via confidential care, Occupational Health, wellbeing advisors, report and support, harassment support contacts, staff supporters, staff survey, wellbeing survey, staff networks.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that Wellcome explicitly mention this as part of their bullying and harassment policy, [Bullying and Harassment Policy - Grant Funding | Wellcome](#) and UKRI does allow changes to the grant holder: [7.3 – changes to grant holder](#). This might mean that potential complainants feel less worried over an Institutional conflict of interest between investigating bullying and fear of lost grant income.

## Appendix 1: EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FROM DEPARTMENTS

Operational heads of each Department were invited to share good practice in relation to supporting ECR wellbeing and tackling bullying and harassment, with a summary of responses below. Although only 7 Departments responded, there are many areas of good practice which might be adopted elsewhere. Many were already drawing on Imperial-wide resources and initiatives (one explicitly noting that they did not wish to confuse people by creating local policies or guidance) and one mentioned hoping to improve webpages to direct more clearly to useful information.

What local resources do researchers have access to, to help them understand norms and expectations around appropriate behaviour and what to do if they experience bullying or harassment?

- [Department-focused handbooks](#) (online and in physical form) for bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination.
- Bullying and harassment are topics of facilitated discussion during MSc and PhD inductions
- We have a Senior Tutor and a Women's Tutor, both of whom have substantial training and experience in dealing with bullying and harassment.
- Annual PRDPs include discussion about participation in College harassment and bullying training, and any issues of harassment or bullying they may have experienced or witnessed.
- I direct Postdocs to the bullying and harassment page [as part of their induction](#). I also mention our postdoc champion and say they are available in case the Postdoc feels they can't talk to their manager
- We send a welcome e-mail to all new research staff, which is a handbook of essential information, including: your first days; Who's who; NHLI Postdoc Committee; College support for postdocs and fellows; the PRDP; Personal Web page; Athena SWAN; EDI; open access; your health, safety and wellbeing. We have developed a bespoke PRDP form for postdocs, which includes questions on EDI learning and on wellbeing.
- Signpost the college policies in our [induction materials](#) and highlight the routes to reporting bullying and harassment.
- We have a very [active Post Doc group](#) that advocate for their colleagues.
- We regularly remind researchers of Report and Support. We are working on department level support on this including training anti-bullying advisors and leaflets. We have reviewed our induction material and included links to EDI resources.
- We don't have department specific materials but refer all staff to the guidance on the IC website. We are in process of promoting the Values and working with all staff to embed positive behaviours in their interactions with students and colleagues. We will be reviewing and promoting the PI code of conduct recently published by PDFC.
- Induction packs link to Imperial Values and Imperial Essentials training
- Dept EDI webpage links to B&H network, Mental Health First Aid and other resources
- Postdoc/ECR departmental champion providing guidance and advice.

Over the last two years, has your department held any specific workshops, training, away days or other meetings, discussions, communications, or engagement exercises relating to bullying and harassment in the research environment?

- Active bystander training x 3
- Training on PhD supervision, with a special focus on bullying in the context of PhD supervision.
- Departmental seminar presented by two staff members on gender bias, professional inequities and the prevalence of harassment in research environments
- Coaching for staff who struggle to manage research students effectively. One-on-one mentoring of students and staff who report instances of bullying, for both complainants and respondents.
- We have organised locally delivered training for all our staff on 'Bullying and Harassment for Managers'.
- Our Bullying and Harassment SAT working group developed a 'Science and Culture' seminar series to enhance departmental culture by bringing all groups of staff together. Some of these have been research focused but they have also provided a platform for discussing EDI issues, including the following: 'I didn't mean any offence: an introduction to the concept of microaggressions' (Kani Kamara) 'Neurodiversity in Higher Education' (Prof Sara Rankin) 'Mentoring - a personal perspective' (Prof Edwin Chilvers and Fiona Richmond) 'Mental health at NHLI - where to seek help and how to help others' (Dr Anita Hall) We also run biennial 'Postdoc days' where a range of speakers present their diverse career experiences to this group of staff.
- We have covered Bullying and Harassment as part of our Weekly webinar series including when Prof Gast came to speak to the Department.
- We have had discussions in staff meetings, held EDI training in the department and encouraged attendance of EDI training by launching a Gold/Silver/Bronze award scheme for this.
- We held an all Dept staff/students' town hall meeting to allow individuals to share/discuss their views on the College Bullying investigations and its outcomes. We are promoting HR and POD training around communication, line management, EDI etc and working with staff to embed College values in their daily activities.
- Dept comms encouraging staff of all levels to attend sessions on, and engage with, Imperial Values & how to address behaviour that is not in line with them

Do you have any other local policy, guidance or practice which seeks to promote a more positive research environment or challenge poor practice?

- We have a dedicated Wellbeing and Resilience counsellor, who provides workshops accessible to all students and staff.
- We have an active EDI Committee whose mission statement is *"We are committed to actively creating and sustaining an inclusive and happy culture and working environment where we respect and value all employees, irrespective of background, class, financial*

*circumstances, gender identity, sexual orientation, family status, religion, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, language, physical ability, age or other life challenges. We believe our differences generate deeper insights that better serve our students, community and research aspirations, and we will monitor our experiences to ensure we improve continuously."*

- We have Department policies on flexible working arrangements, inclusive recruitment practices, support for ECRs, and workshops on managing academic careers together with a family.
- We expect all Postdocs to attend Active Bystander training when they join
- We have run a '[Speak up, Speak out' campaign in NHLI](#)
- We have a strong team of Mental Health First Aiders in NHLI.  
<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/nhli/for-staff/culture-and-wellbeing/mental-health-first-aid/>
- Dept [mission statement](#) includes our four guiding principles: Transparency and consistency  
Equality and diversity Professional behaviour Scientific integrity

**What one thing could the College do to support departments in tackling bullying and harassment and ensure a more positive research environment locally?**

- Engage with incoming students to enhance their understanding of basic issues such as the definition of what is (and what is not) sexual harassment and bullying, and what 'consent' means.
- Put posters up throughout the college on how to report bullying and harassment.
- There have been some good initiatives from College recently including Values rollout and the Resolution policy. However, these have been introduced 'top down' and it would be good to run some sessions on these aimed particularly at the postdoc community.
- Demonstrate that bullying is taken seriously at all levels as the examples given by the Exec in recent years have hugely undermined our efforts at Departmental level. There is a perception still that high achievers can be immune to allegations of bullying.
- Provide in house HR support.
- Work with College management to hold those who behave badly accountable for their actions. All too often the feedback we receive relates to individuals not wanting to report incidents as they feel there is no action taken or consequence. We recognise that it is not always possible to disclose the findings of a case but closing the feedback loop to those who raised the issue in the first place is important, so that they feel they were heard and something was done.
- Lead by example - we've all got to address behaviour that falls short of our expectations and mission statements, and do so visibly (as far as is appropriate)

## Appendix 2: ADVISORY GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- Sarah Rouse, UKRI Future Leaders Fellow, Department of Life Sciences, Imperial College
- Christian Chuquitaype Malaga, Senior Lecturer, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Imperial College (and Postdoc and Fellows Champion)
- Vahid Shahrezaei, Reader Biomathematics, Department of Mathematics, Imperial College
- Ireti Webb, Senior HR Manager, Imperial College
- Kani Kamara, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre, Imperial College
- Mark Friddin, Imperial College Research Fellow, Dyson School of Design Engineering, Imperial College
- Steve Hutchinson, Hutchinson Training and Development Ltd
- Liz McDonnell, Senior Lecturer, Sociology, School of Law, University of Sussex
- Aneela McKenna, Founder, Mòr Diversity Consulting
- Hayley Moulding, Strategy Adviser, ED&I, UKRI
- Nik Ogryzko, Talent Programme Manager, UKRI
- Kay Guccione, Head of Researcher Development, University of Glasgow
- Katie Farrell, Gender Equality Officer, University of Glasgow





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**POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE**

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