Imperial College London

UKRI Research England

The Independent Research Fellows' 'Life-cycle' at Imperial College London

A review of fellows' experience of processes across departments

Stefanie Edler-Wollstein & Dr Muhsincan Sesen (Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre, Imperial College London)

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

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Executive Summary

"Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture. This Principle recognises that a proactive and collaborative approach is required between all stakeholders, to create and develop positive environments and cultures in which all researchers can flourish and achieve their full potential."[1]

Imperial College London is fully committed to fulfilling the expectations of the *Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers* [2] to regularly review and report on the quality of the institutional research environment and culture. The Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC) works closely with departments to use outcomes to continue to provide a sector-leading programme of support and development for all fellows as they transition from research fellows to established academics.

This scoping project sought feedback from prospective and current fellows on their experiences of current processes in the departments throughout the fellowship 'life-cycle', pre- and post-award. The findings were mapped to Concordat Principles, to assess how postdocs and fellows experience the ways in which departments at Imperial put the Concordat expectations into practice. The report highlights best practice as well as gaps in provision to help improve institutional practices and build upon the existing programme of support in the departments.

Summary of key findings and best practice guidance

1. **Postdocs and fellows' experience of the recruitment and selection processes within the departments at Imperial**

Key findings:
- Researchers at Imperial are self-directed and agentive in seeking out institutional resources on fellowship options and processes. Their main sources of information are the departmental websites and key contacts in the departments.
- The availability, quantity, and quality of information and resources on departmental websites varies significantly.
- PIs are generally supportive and give encouragement to postdocs who wish to apply for fellowships.
- Prospective applicants often feel much less encouraged by their departments and would like departmental support and advice to be offered more explicitly and proactively.
- Departmental selection and appointment practices are not always transparent. Most postdocs and fellows felt unable to comment on whether they thought their department's selection and appointment practice is fair and inclusive.

Best practice guidance:
Information and support are key for prospective applicants. Departments are encouraged to review their communications relating to:
- Explicit encouragement of fellowship applications from internal and external candidates.

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[1] First Principle of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Sept. 2019.
[2] See Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Sept 2019

- Links to relevant information and to the PFDC.
- Information about the application and selection process.

For detailed guidance see pages 8-9 of this report.

2. Fellows' experience of induction processes in the departments at Imperial

Key findings:
- Only one third of the surveyed current fellows had a departmental induction, and for many of them the induction fell short of the expectations of the Imperial guidance.
- Whilst most fellows got to know the facilities and processes in the department, only half of them were introduced to the people, and only one in five found out about their department's strategy and about their own career development options in the department.

Best practice guidance:
Effective departmental inductions ensure that new fellows know about processes and become integrated into the community. Departments are encouraged to implement the Imperial guidance and to review their induction process for fellows with view to:
- Introducing new fellows to the people in the department.
- Providing information and support with managing finances.
- Communicating the department's strategy.
- Career development planning and signposting to the PFDC.

3. Fellows' perceptions of the departmental culture in terms of their roles and their status

Key findings:
- Fellows don't see themselves as a homogenous group, acknowledging that depending on the type and seniority of their fellowship, they are at different stages of their careers.
- At individual level, fellows across all departments and faculties said that their role in the department is not clearly defined and that expectations on them need to be better communicated.
- Some departments operate in a truly inclusive way, that makes fellows feel part of the community as academic members of staff, regardless of whether they hold a junior or a more senior level fellowship. In other departments, fellows felt they have the same status as postdocs (but more pressure) and experienced a lack of community and visibility.

Best practice guidance:
As part of maintaining a positive culture, departments are encouraged to review:
- How they make fellows feel respected and appreciated.
- How they communicate their expectations of individuals and whether they are clear and explicit about what fellows can expect from the department.
- How they can increase the visibility of fellows in the department and beyond.
- How they can provide regular networking opportunities.

4. Fellows' experience of departmental expectations relating to non-research related activities

Key findings:
- A third of fellows said their fellowship award letter from their funder was not clear about how much time they can spend on non-research related work. From a contractual point of view, except for one fellow, neither teaching nor administrative tasks are part of their contracts.
- 60% of surveyed fellows said that their departments do expect them to engage in non-research related work. They spend between 5 and 15 hours per week supporting the department with administrative tasks. The numbers of hours that fellows spend teaching (not including supervision of undergrads and post-grads) varies between departments and amounts to between 5 and 200 hours per semester, with most fellows spending an average of 40-50 hours on teaching per semester.
- Overall, very few fellows felt that there were unreasonable demands on their time on part of their department and stated that they expect that volunteering their time will prepare them for a lectureship position.

Best practice guidance:
Departments that expect fellows to contribute to teaching and administrative tasks are encouraged to review:
- Their induction process for fellows to include clear expectations in terms of what the responsibilities
- How much time the individual fellow should allocate to non-research related activities (in line with expectations from their funder)
- The ways in which the fellows' contributions will be beneficial to them for their career development.

5. Fellows' experience of career development support in the departments

Key findings:
- Most fellows welcome career development activities and opportunities to gain experience.
- In addition to the PFDC provision, they selectively use departmental support, such as specialist and technical support with grant applications, or training on new techniques. However, according to the survey, only one third of departments offer this kind of support.
- Fellows who had a positive mentoring experience greatly appreciated this support and saw it as effective in terms of helping them to become more independent.

Best practice guidance:
To support fellows during this time of intense personal and professional development towards research independence, departments are encouraged to explore:
- In what areas specialist and/ or technical support to fellows could be introduced or improved.
- How they can introduce or improve departmental mentorship programmes.
- If there is scope for group sessions with a career coach.

Purpose and objectives of the study

Imperial currently hosts approximately 250 independent research fellows (HR data July 2022). They are members of research staff who have successfully secured individual funding to conduct an independent programme of research, including their salary.

Due to the nature of their particular fellowship[3] and the ways in which the departments at Imperial follow their own processes around the 'life-cycle' of independent research fellows, individuals' experience of being a fellow at Imperial can differ greatly.

As part of Imperial's commitment to promoting a positive research culture and to providing sector-leading support and professional development to all fellows at the College, the PFDC sought to better understand the experiences of fellows in the departments throughout the fellowship 'life-cycle'.

The objective of the review was to map current processes across the departments and faculties, with view to building upon the existing programme of support and development to meet the unique needs of fellows as they transition from research fellows to established academics, as well as to deliver on Imperial's commitment to fulfilling the expectations of the *Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers* to regularly review and report on the quality of the research environment and culture, including seeking feedback from researchers, and use the outcomes to improve institutional practices. [4]

Methodology

This scoping project was led 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 supporting the careers of researchers. The research for the project was conducted by Dr Muhsincan Sesen, with analysis and advice contributed by Stefanie Edler-Wollstein, Dr Ines Perpetuo, and Dr Karen Hinxman, at the Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre at Imperial. The report was led by Stefanie Edler-Wollstein, with analysis contributed by Dr Muhsincan Sesen.

Between February and July 2022, two online surveys were conducted, one with postdocs and one with current fellows from across Imperial College London, followed by in-depths interviews with fellows.[5] The survey for postdocs – as prospective applicants for fellowships - focused on the pre-award stage, assessing the postdocs' experience of recruitment and selection processes. The survey for fellows covered the pre-award, as well as the post-award period of the fellowship, including the fellows' experience of departmental induction, their perceptions of the departmental cultures in terms of the role and status of fellows and the expectations relating to non-research related activities that are placed on them by the departments, and career development support during the fellowship. The interviews with fellows followed up in more in-depth on the surveys, discussing the

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[3] There are significant differences between the various fellowships in terms of expectations on the host institution and requirements from fellows. For an overview of the expectations of selected funders see [Appendix 1](#).

[4] See [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), Sept 2019

[5] This resulted in 88 responses to the survey for postdocs, 24 responses to the survey for fellows, and 6 in-depths follow-up interviews with fellows. The survey and interview questions are detailed in [Appendix 2](#).

specifics of the interviewees' experiences in the departments with the practicalities of applying for grants and managing their fellowship budgets, as well as aspects of their professional identity in the departments and their perceptions of their work-life balance.

Alongside the surveys and interviews, a review of the departmental websites was carried out in relation to information and resources that are available to prospective and current fellows. [6]

The study is qualitative in nature and intended to highlight issues and gaps in provision and help identify potential interventions by providing best practice examples. The number of survey and interview responses was sufficient for these purposes, but the outcomes have been treated with caution, as participation was self-selective, and respondents do not always map on to the wider demographics within Imperial in terms of gender and representation of faculties and departments. As such, the review makes no claim to provide an accurate picture of fellows' experiences in the departments but aims to draw attention to wider issues of how individual experiences can be impacted by departmental structures, processes, and the prevailing departmental culture.

Each of the following five sections looks at one of the aspects set out by the Concordat Principles, to assess how postdocs and fellows experience the ways in which departments at Imperial put the Concordat expectations into practice. The quotes at the beginning of each sections are taken from the interviews with fellows and from free text answers in the surveys.

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[6] The website review includes the 23 departments across the Faculties of Engineering (FoE), Medicine (FoM), and Natural Sciences (FoNS) at Imperial. The Imperial College Business School website has no dedicated area on fellowships.

The Independent Research Fellows' 'Life-cycle' at Imperial College London: A review of fellows' experience of processes across departments

Full report

Postdocs and fellows' experience of the recruitment and selection processes within the departments at Imperial

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"The academics in the department were really friendly and reached out to me and were like: do you want to have a chat about your application?"

"The department offers a practice mock with the head of department and some senior people, which is really helpful."

"There is nothing. I had to set up a peer review group myself where we looked at each other's proposals."

The expectation of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers is for institutions '*to ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices*.'[7]

Assessing the experience of postdocs and fellows of the departmental recruitment and selection processes, we looked at how departments at Imperial put this into practice.

The study confirmed that researchers at Imperial are self-directed and agentive in seeking out institutional resources on fellowship options and processes. However, a general issue that was raised by both internal and external prospective applicants is that they have difficulties finding and accessing relevant information. For internal candidates, the main barrier to asking for support is a sense that the culture at the department does not invite requests on people's time. For external applicants the challenge is that they often don't know who to contact within the departments. However, those who do approach people in the departments report that the departments' response was positive, that their questions were answered and that they received the information they needed.

In this initial stage of the fellowship life-cycle, departmental websites are one of the main sources of information for both internal and external prospective applicants, and our review has found significant differences between departments in terms of quantity and quality of resources.[8] This is also mirrored by the survey results: The perception of the availability and the usefulness of the resources that are provided by the departments varies significantly between departments, with postdocs from the same departments making similar observations. Over half of the surveyed postdocs provided detailed responses as to what could be done differently in the departments to better support those who wish to apply for fellowships.

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[7] Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Sept 2019
[8] For an overview and links to the departmental websites see Appendix 3.

Their 'wishlist' includes:
- More encouragement, guidance, and general advice on fellowships from senior academics in the department, not only from their Principal Investigator (PI) [9], and for this support to be more forthcoming and proactive.
- More clarity and transparency within departments in terms of:
  - Which fellowships are available/ encouraged [10]
  - Which fellowships fall under departmental assessment and pre-selection[11]
  - Timelines, deadlines, and details of selection processes
  - What other support is available
  - Support with budgeting/ finance. A number of fellows felt that this part of the application felt like a black box, out of the applicants' control

Best practice examples of departmental websites include:

Explicit encouragement of fellowship applications from internal and external candidates: *"Independent research fellowships are of enormous value to the Department of Materials in enabling us to recruit and retain outstanding researchers, especially at an early stage of their careers, and in facilitating the introduction and development of complementary research to that already carried out within the Department. Prestigious research fellowships are also of significant benefit to the Department in terms of renewal, prestige, and academic impact and are, therefore, positively and enthusiastically supported."*
Links to**:** - Websites of relevant funders for the discipline - Specific funding opportunities (e.g. the Imperial College Research Fellowships) - External links such as IDOX GrantFinder - College websites that contain relevant information (e.g. Research Office Funding Opportunities) - the Postdocs and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC)
Detailed information about the application process including: - Eligibility criteria - Internal deadlines (if applicable) - The Departmental Assessment process (DAP) and/or pre-selection process (where applicable) to assess the suitability of an application with regards to the department's ability to support the fellowship and to ensure that it fits the department's research strategy. For some fellowships this is organised College-

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[9] 69% of all surveyed postdocs and 74% of women stated that their Principal Investigator (PI) encourages them to apply for fellowships.

[10] Almost half of all surveyed postdocs said they don't know whether or not their department generally encourages fellowship applications. Numbers vary between faculties. 64% of FoE postdocs felt directly encouraged by their department to apply for fellowships, in FoNS it was 44% and in FoM it was 31%. These number do not change significantly when controlled for gender.

[11] For certain fellowships, departments require prospective applicants to submit a brief proposal (usually one page) which goes through a departmental pre-selection process, and sometimes an interview. At the end of this process, successful candidates are eligible to apply for the respective fellowships.
The surveys indicate that 50% of postdocs and 42% of fellows don't know if their department has an internal selection process.

> wide because some funders cap the number of applications that can be submitted from each institution.
> - Detailed explanations of the various steps of an application
> - Pre-application contacts (e.g. Research Manager/ Research Finance Manager)

> **Resources** including:
> - The department's research portfolio
> - Profiles of previous awardees
> - Short videos from successful fellows with tips
> - Recorded seminars on how to prepare fellowship applications
> - Examples of successful research proposals
> - Information on costing, project management, data management
> - Information on departmental 'support packages' in terms of Master/PhD students, lab space, access to equipment, etc.

Best practice examples of additional departmental support for prospective applicants include:

> - Senior academics being pro-active and explicitly and frequently communicating that questions and requests for support are welcome
> - Timely replies to questions and requests for support, with signposting to relevant information
> - Research Managers supporting application planning
> - Support with finances and budgeting
> - Help with application writing
> - Proposal review
> - List of FAQs and tip sheets with 'things to consider'
> - Mentoring offer
> - Mock interviews with senior academics in the departments

Are departments' selection and appointment practices seen as fair and inclusive?

"The problem is the numbers. Due to costs our department cannot support every postdoc who wishes to apply."

Departmental selection and appointment practices are not always transparent. Therefore, most postdocs and fellows felt unable to comment on whether they thought their department's selection and appointment practice is fair and inclusive. Some see the submission of a one-page proposal as a formalised and fair process, but as this form is not anonymised and the criteria for selection are not made explicit, there is room for selection bias.

In terms of how much support is given to individuals, there appears to be a consensus that this is non-discriminatory. In general, those who ask for support feel that they get help.

Fellows' experience of induction processes in the departments at Imperial

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"The department treated me like any joining academic, which is really nice. They introduced me to all the other academics in a departmental meeting. And then I was assigned a research support officer. And I have a career mentor and a research mentor."

"I had a safety induction and welcome email, that was it."

The expectation of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers is for institutions '*to provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position*.'[12]

This is implemented at Imperial via the [guidance for onboarding and induction](#) for all new members of staff. Line managers are expected to follow a step-by-step process and timeline for day-one, week one, the first month induction, the first six months, and an ensuing development plan.

The experience of nearly two thirds of the surveyed current fellows falls short of the expectations of the Imperial guidance. Only just over a third had a departmental induction at the start of their fellowship, and there is an almost even divide between departments that do offer inductions versus those that do not.[13] For the majority of fellows who had an induction, this took place within their first month, which indicates that inductions are organised on the individual level.

With view to assessing what is covered during the induction, we focused on information and processes that are department specific:

1. **Getting to know the people in the department**
    -   Both the Concordat and the Imperial guidance emphasise the importance of the induction for building connections and a sense of belonging to the community. However, only slightly more than half of fellows were introduced to the people in the department (55%) during their induction.
    -   Those who were able to meet different people said this helped them greatly to better understand the structure of the department.

2. **Getting to know the facilities, equipment, and resources in the department**
    -   The large majority (88%) of fellows said they're expectations were fully met in terms of getting to know the facilities, equipment, and resources in the department during their induction.
    -   Some fellows suggested the provision of more online materials in addition to being shown round and being talked through things.

3. **Learning about processes in the department**
    -   Two thirds of fellows said that they learned about the processes in the department and that they found this background information helpful.

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[12] [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), Sept. 2019

[13] It is worth noting that the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic will have disrupted the induction process. However, only a small percentage of respondents started during that time.

- Several holders of junior fellowships said that they found themselves ill-prepared for managing financial processes and felt that would have benefitted from learning about managing the fellowship budget and how to obtain further funding at the start of their fellowship.
- Some fellows said they expected a clearer introduction to the teaching responsibilities and the workload model.

4. **Finding out about the department's strategy**
   - A big gap between expectations and reality exists with view to learning what the department is trying to achieve. Only one fifth of fellows said that they found out about the department's strategy during their induction.

5. **Finding out about career development planning and opportunities within the department**
   - Only one fifth of fellows said that career development opportunities were covered in their induction.
   - Some junior fellowship holders said they were not aware that they would need to apply for further funding very soon after the start of their fellowship.
   - Senior fellowship holders experienced similar challenges with expectations to apply for bigger grants right from the start of their fellowships.

Fellows' perceptions of the departmental culture in terms of their roles and their status

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"I feel like I'm just a glorified postdoc."

"This a really difficult one, because there's a sliding scale between postdocs and junior fellows. You've got ICRFs in the middle and then you've got the senior ones. And we're all at completely different stages of our career. Mushing them into one group is tricky."

"I wish fellows had more visibility within the department. Letting people know who we are and what we work on."

Following on from the expectation of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers on institutions to ensure '*that researchers are integrated into the community*"[14] beyond the induction period, we asked the fellows about their perceptions of the departmental cultures in terms of their role and status within their departments.

Across all departments and faculties, fellows said that their role in the department is not clearly defined.[15] Most fellows said they would find it helpful if departments communicated better what they expect from the individuals and what, in turn, the fellows can expect of the department. There is a sense that some fellows within the department may have a different role and may get more support than others, but fellows see these as individual cases, not as a hierarchical pattern.

As an indicator of inclusiveness of departmental cultures, we asked about how fellows experience their own status, and how their department ensures that they feel part of the community. Replies ranged from "I'm treated just like a postdoc" to "I'm a full member of the academic community". One half of the surveyed fellows said that they are invited to all academic staff meetings and can attend relevant committees, the other half is unsure if they are invited. In some departments, fellows are offered their own office, in others they are expected to share office space with other fellows or with postdocs. [16]

In many departments, the Postdoc and Fellows Champions play an important role in that fellows feel represented beyond their departments as a staff group through their departmental champion. Within the departments, however, only very few fellows felt represented as a group. Some called for the introduction of a fellows network, similar to the existing structures of the postdocs representatives network. The benefits they see relate to spending time together socially, increasing their visibility and growing their connections. However, it is also acknowledged that despite best attempts by the departments to organise regular network meetings, engagement from fellows is generally very low.

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[14] [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](), Sept. 2019
[15] The median rating on how well defined the role of a fellow in the department is 3 out of 5, with no one giving a 5 out of 5 rating.
[16] It is worth noting that replies did not always correlate with whether they hold a junior fellowship or a more senior one. Having to share an office is not seen as negative by some fellows, as they find this fosters working collaboratively.

Fellows' experience of departmental expectations relating to non-research related activities

"I'm not asked to do anything."

"We have an agreement that if you use a lab, you contribute and manage that lab. I think that's fair."

"I help with teaching, That's all voluntary, but I think it's important to have the experience when you apply for lectureships."

The Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers strongly emphasises the importance of a good work-life balance. The expectation on institutions is that they foster departmental cultures that provide '*good employment conditions for researchers that [have] positive impacts on researcher wellbeing*'.[17]

Funders of fellowships, such as UKRI, are very clear about the percentage of time that a fellow can spend on non-research related work, and in most cases a fellow is expected to spend their working time exclusively on their fellowship and associated activities.[18]

Against the background of these expectations and conditions from the Concordat and funders, we asked Imperial fellows about their departments' expectations on them to engage in non-research related activities and the potential impact on their work-life balance.

A third of fellows said their fellowship award letter from their funder was not clear about how much time they can spend on non-research related work. However, from a contractual point of view, only one of the surveyed fellows has a contractual obligation to teach. For everyone else, neither teaching nor administrative tasks are part of their contracts.

40% of fellows said that there is no expectation from their department to teach, but many of them volunteer to supervise or support lectures to gain more experience and build their academic profile. 60% said that their department does expect them to teach and in some departments this expectation is formalised (e.g. 1/3 of the teaching load of a lecturer). The numbers of hours that fellows spend teaching (not including supervision of undergrads and post-grads) varies between departments and amounts to between 5 and 200 hours per semester, with most fellows spending an average of 40-50 hours on teaching per semester.

With regard to administrative tasks, 60% of current fellows stated that their department expects fellows to contribute, and that they spend between 5 and 15 hours per week on supporting the department with student related administrative tasks and pastoral care of students.

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[17] [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), Sept. 2019

[18] See, for example, UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships, Round 7 Guidance for Academic-hosted Applicants, Version 1.0 June 2022. UKRI specify that Future Leader Fellows "may spend up to six hours a week during the initial phase of the award on other commitments and related activities which will enhance their career development (for example, teaching, demonstrating, peer-review, other funded projects). Clinically active applicants (including veterinarians) can work up to 20% of their time (on average over the lifetime of the grant) on their clinical commitments."

Despite the fact that for the majority the time spent on non-research related activities exceeds funders' expectations, most fellows said that, overall, they are happy with how much time they spend on non-research activities. Very few felt that there were unreasonable demands on their time on part of their department and stated that they expect that volunteering their time will prepare them for a lectureship position.

Fellows' experience of career development support in the departments

"It should be communicated clearly at the fellowship outset what the fellow is expected to achieve in order to progress their career at Imperial or elsewhere."

"Give fellows more responsibilities in line with permanent academics!"

The Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers expects organisations to '*recognise the importance of continuous professional and career development*' and to '*provide opportunities, structured support, [and] encouragement.*' [19]

Recognising that for most fellows this important career step towards establishing themselves as independent researchers and academics is a period of intense personal and professional development, the Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre (PFDC) works closely together with departments. Whilst all fellows at Imperial have access to the full range of the PFDC programme of support[20], the departments play an important role in supporting fellows throughout the 'life-cycle' of their fellowship.

According to the survey with fellows, only one third of departments offer additional career development support, and fellows use this provision selectively[21]. The areas where the departmental support was most effective and appreciated were:
- Support with grant applications
- Training on new techniques
- Introduction to the UK funding landscape (for fellows that join from overseas)
- Financial support to go to conferences

Departmental mentorship programmes
As another source of support for fellows to become integrated in the academic community and to help them to develop their independence, many funders request that fellows are given a mentor. We asked fellows about the role of their mentor in the departments. Two thirds of the surveyed fellows have a mentor and have clear expectations as to what they would like to get out of the mentoring relationship. Those who had positive mentoring experiences referred to the role of their mentor as helping them to develop their independence. Most of them benefitted from having regular conversations, learning from their mentor's experience, and being able to draw on their expertise and general advice. Those who were critical of their mentoring experience mainly cited lack of contact.

Group sessions with a career coach
Fellows raised strong concerns over their job security at the end of their fellowship. They wanted expectations to be communicated clearly and transparent discussions about what is required to progress their career, be it at Imperial or at another institution. A significant number of fellows called for more career coaching to help them navigate options for career progression, and activities to pursue during the fellowship to maximise their chances of securing a permanent position at the end of the fellowship.

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[19] Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Sept. 2019
[20] This comprehensive programme includes a wide range of courses and development events for groups, as well as one-to-one support sessions and leadership coaching with PFDC consultants.
[21] 30% of fellows said that they have engaged in departmental career development opportunities.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview of selected funders' expectations on host institutions

	UKRI Future Leader Fellows (FLF)[22]	Royal Society[23]	Wellcome Trust	Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng)[24]
Expectations regarding time allocation	A fellow is expected to spend 100% of their working time on their fellowship. Academic-hosted applicants may spend up to six hours a week on activities which will enhance their career development (e.g. teaching, demonstrating, peer-review, other funded projects).			Research Fellows are required to devote all their working time to the Research Fellowship programme of work. The Academy wants to support applicants to achieve a balance between their personal and work demands, and is happy to discuss individual requirements.
Expectations regarding the working environment and support	Organisations will be expected to provide an appropriate working environment for the fellow, including an office/laboratory space as applicable, and relevant training and mentoring. The Host Organisation is expected to have an annual review process in place to assess the fellow's progression.	Successful applicants are expected to be strong candidates for permanent posts in institutions at the end of their fellowships. Host departments are expected to have conversations with fellows regarding the fellow's future and the resources that they will commit to them.	"Wellcome is committed to meeting the obligations for funders, as set out in the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers. We expect anyone with Wellcome funding, who is based in the UK, to meet the responsibilities required by the Concordat for institutions, managers and researchers." [25]	

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[22] Future Leaders Fellowships, Round 7 Guidance for Academic-hosted Applicants, Version 1.0 June 2022.
[23] The Royal Society, University Research Fellowships 2022, Scheme Notes
[24] RAEng Research Fellowships 2021/22 Applicant guidance notes
[25] https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/supporting-career-development-researchers

Appendix 2: Online surveys and interviews

Online surveys
Between February and July 2022, two online surveys were conducted, one with postdocs and one with current fellows from across the College. The surveys were conducted via Microsoft Forms, distributed internally at the College through email, newsletters, and Microsoft Teams groups.

The survey for postdocs – as prospective applicants for fellowships - focused on the pre-award stage, assessing the postdocs' experience of recruitment and selection processes.

The survey included information about the research project, an online consent form, and the following questions:
Application and selection
1) Does your PI encourage you to apply for fellowships?
2) Are postdocs encouraged by your department to apply for fellowships?
3) Does the department give all fellowships equal weighting?
4) Does your department have an internal selection process for fellowship applications?
5) What support is given to postdocs who wish to apply for fellowships by the department?
6) Overall, how well does the department support postdocs who wish to apply for fellowships?
7) What could the department do better?

The survey for fellows covered the pre-award, as well as the post-award period of the fellowship, including the fellows' experience of departmental induction, their perceptions of the departmental cultures in terms of the role and status of fellows and the expectations relating to non-research related activities that are placed on them by the departments, and career development support during the fellowship.

The survey included information about the research project, an online consent form, and the following questions:
Application and selection
8) Did you have a postdoc position at Imperial before your fellowship?
9) Did your PI encourage you to apply for fellowships?
10) Are postdocs encouraged by your department to apply for fellowships?
11) Does the department give all fellowships equal weighting?
12) Does your department have an internal selection process for fellowship applications?
13) What support is given to postdocs who wish to apply for fellowships by the department?
14) Overall, how well does the department support postdocs who wish to apply for fellowships?
15) What could the department do better?
Induction
16) Do fellows receive a departmental induction?
17) When does the induction take place?
18) What is covered in the induction?
19) How useful is the departmental induction?
The role of fellows in the department
20) How clearly defined is the role of a fellow in the department?
21) Is your fellowship letter clear about how much time (percentage) you can spend on non-research related work?
22) Does the role include teaching?
23) How many hours of teaching are stated in the contract?
24) How many hours per semester are you spending on teaching (not including supervision of undergrads and post-grads)?

25) Does the role include conducting (non-research related) administrative tasks?
26) How many hours per semester you spending on (non-research related) administrative tasks?
27) How satisfied are you with how much time you are spending on non-research related activities?

Career development support
28) What is the role of the fellow's departmental sponsor/ mentor?
29) How does the department ensure that fellows feel part of the community?
30) Does your department provide career development support?
31) What type of career development support does the department provide?
32) Have you engaged with career development support by your department?
33) How could career development support be improved?
34) Does your department provide mentoring support?
35) Have you engaged with mentoring support provided by your department?

Interviews with fellows

The online survey for fellows was followed by structured interviews with fellows. The focus of the interviews was to the fellows' experiences in the departments with the practicalities of applying for grants and managing their fellowship budgets, as well as aspects of their professional identity in the departments and their perceptions of their work-life balance.

All interviews were conducted online between April and July 2022 via Microsoft Teams. They were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed by the researcher 'by hand', reading through interviews, identifying key themes and quotes and summarising them into overall findings. The interviews began with the interviewer checking the interviewees' survey responses before discussing the following questions:

1. We would like to hear about your experience in the pre-award stage.
   a. How did you go about finding information about fellowships?
   b. Did you go through a (departmental/faculty?) selection process?
   c. Do you feel that the department ensured diversity in the process? [If not, please explain.]
   d. What help did you get from the department while preparing the application?
   e. How could the process be improved?

2. We are interested to hear about your experience of your first six months as a new fellow.
   f. Was there a departmental induction?
   g. What were the processes and timelines?
   h. What kind of support were you offered in your department?
   i. What additional support would you have liked?

3. The next questions are about how you perceive the role and status of fellows in your department.
   j. Are you invited to attend academic staff meetings and committees? For example, Research Committee, Equality & Diversity, Health & Safety, Teaching Committee or any others?
   k. Are you represented as a staff group in the department?
   l. How are fellows' offices arranged?
   m. How does the department support your relationship with your sponsor? What could be done differently?
   n. What single thing would improve the situation for fellows in the department?

      o.   How much time is allocated for teaching activities, administrative tasks, and pastoral care?

      p.   Are there any other non-research-related responsibilities that your department assigns to fellows? If yes, what activities are they?

      q.   How does this balance work for you?

4. Career development support in the department:
   r. What specific career development support is available in your department?
   b. Do you or other fellows engage with it?
   c. What is particularly useful?
   d. What is missing?
   e. What support is available for fellows towards the end of their fellowship when they transition to the next career stage?
   f. What other support have you engaged with that is offered by the College?
   g. What single thing would be most helpful in terms of support?
   h. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Links to departmental websites and overview of available information for applicants

Links to departmental websites	Overview of available information on fellowships to applicants (Note that some of the websites have limited access, so only internal applicants in the departments will be able to access them in full.)
Faculty of Engineering	
Aeronautics	• Links to fellowship providers
Bioengineering	• Links to fellowship providers • Information on application process
Chemical Engineering	Very little information, redirects to PFDC
Civil and Environmental Engineering	No information on fellowships found
Computing	Fellowship guidance (March 2016): • Overview of relevant funding sources • Contacts in the departments • Information on processes and on available departmental support
Dyson School of Design Engineering	No information on fellowships found
Earth Science and Engineering	• Links to fellowship providers • Contacts in the departments
Electrical and Electronic Engineering	• Links to PFDC and Research Office in brochure from the DoEEE Postdoc and Fellow Committee
Materials	• Welcome message encouraging applications • Information on relevant schemes • Links to fellowship providers, eligibility and deadlines • Link to PFDC • Pre-application contact in the department • Comprehensive information on Department Assessment Process (DAP) • Department's research portfolio
Mechanical Engineering	• Welcome message encouraging applications • Information on relevant schemes • Links to fellowship providers, eligibility and deadlines • Link to PFDC • Pre-application contact in the department • Information on academic sponsors • Comprehensive information on Department Assessment Process (DAP) • Department's research portfolio • Online application form for external candidates
Faculty of Medicine	
Brain Sciences	• Link to Research Office • Seminar series - 'The How's and Whys of Writing Research Grants and Fellowship Applications' organised by the department's Early Career Researchers Group

Immunology and Inflammation	Research Committee page: • Contacts in the department • Grant application guidance (pdf)
Infectious Disease	Fellowship advice page: • Fellow profiles and short videos Research Committee page: • Contacts in the department • Comprehensive information on available departmental support
Institute of Clinical Sciences	No information on fellowships found
Metabolism, Digestion and Reproduction	Research Committee page: • Contacts in the departments • Contacts for proposal reviews and feedback • Grant application guidance (pdf)
National Heart and Lung Institute	• Contact in the department • Information on application process • Funding sources • Information on developing the science and on costings • FAQs
School of Public Health	No information on fellowships found
Surgery and Cancer	Research Committee page: • Contacts in the departments • Links to funding opportunities • Deadlines for submission • Peer review process • Grant application guidance (pdf) • Information on costings
Faculty of Natural Sciences	
Chemistry	• Contacts of current fellows • Detailed information on application process • Profiles of fellows in the department and advice
Mathematics	• Detailed information on relevant fellowships • Contacts in the department • Information on application process • Link to Research Services • Examples of successful applications
Physics	• Comprehensive and detailed information on fellowship internal and external opportunities • Information on fellowship process • Application guidance webpage • Links to PFDC • Tips and things to remember for applicants • Contacts in the department
Life Sciences	• Information on fellowship opportunities for applicants and sponsors • Information on application processes • Contacts in department Fellowship & Honours Committee page:

	• Contacts of internal assessors • Application review and feedback • Mentorship
Centre for Environmental Policy	No information on fellowships found

pfdc-support@imperial.ac.uk
www.imperial.ac.uk/pfdc
@ImperialPFDC

POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Tailored support and development for postdocs, fellows and clinicians