

**Imperial College
London**

Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre

Dr Liz Elvidge

POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Helping research staff to succeed

Overview

- Background, who we help and mission
- Tailored support and provision
- Evidence based interventions – scoping projects
 - Example: Fellow's development programme

My background

- PhD -Glacial Geomorphology
- Postdoc -Magnetostratigraphy
- Worked at Imperial since May 2008
- Launched the then Postdoc Development Centre 2009
- Author, College Council, Magistrate, Cancer Research fundraiser

A bit of history in the UK

SET for Success: the Report of Sir Gareth Roberts' Review (2002)

The supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematical skills

“...there are mismatches between the skills of graduates and postgraduates and the skills required by employers (for example, many have difficulty in applying their technical knowledge in a practical environment and are seen to lack strong transferable skills).”

Ring - fenced funding

“It is important for postdoctoral researchers to be able to develop individual career paths, reflecting the different career destinations – Industrial, Academic and Research Associate – open to them, and that funding arrangements reflect the development of these career paths.”

Imperial College London

QS ranking 2nd in the world, 1st in the UK, 1st in Europe

Over £0.5 billion in research income

Four Faculties- no humanities/arts

- Engineering 10 departments
- Medicine 8 departments
- Natural Sciences 5 departments
- Business School

At Imperial, our duty of care...

- 85% research staff on fixed term contracts
- 1/3 move on or change role each year
- Very few will become academics

We provide expertise to research staff to succeed

...by making the hidden rules and agendas of future postdoc employment explicit, giving researchers the tools and skills now for whatever their future career aspirations are.....

Some numbers

- 2,042 Research Associates
- 219 Fellows
- 1,375 Academic Staff

- On average postdocs are with us for about 2.5 years.
- Annual turnover is 30-40%.

Who we support- definitions

- Postdoc = funding from a grant connected to an academic
- Fellow = independent funding awarded to an individual
- Academics who are managers of researchers

Eg. Academic Success Guide

Career transition conversations

Our responsibilities

- To provide sector leading support and development opportunities to our postdocs and fellows
- We are academic experts, agile, flexible and enthusiastic
- Our provision is based on what we know postdocs and fellows need and want to succeed in any direction they choose
- Provision is academic informed via scoping projects

Our mantras

“Being a postdoc is not a career”

“We don’t want any postdoc to leave Imperial unemployed, unless by choice”

“Nationally the chance of becoming an academic is <10%”

Mission and vision

Enabling ownership of their own development

Providing development opportunities

Fostering a sense of community

Advocating for the community

Skills
development

Research
Culture

Wellbeing

Bespoke tailored provision

No 'one size fits all', multiple career paths, different needs.

People may enter at any point – 1:1, workshop, website, recommendation, mock interview, course.



Core development activities

- Short workshops
- Funder briefings
- Panel events
- Career talks
- Courses
- Residentials
- Multi-day programmes

60-70 sessions a year

Averaging total of 1000 attendees

Topics include

- Academic careers
- Non-academic careers
- Communication and presentation skills
- Leadership and management
- Research skills
- Enterprise
- Networking

Individual Support 2022-2023

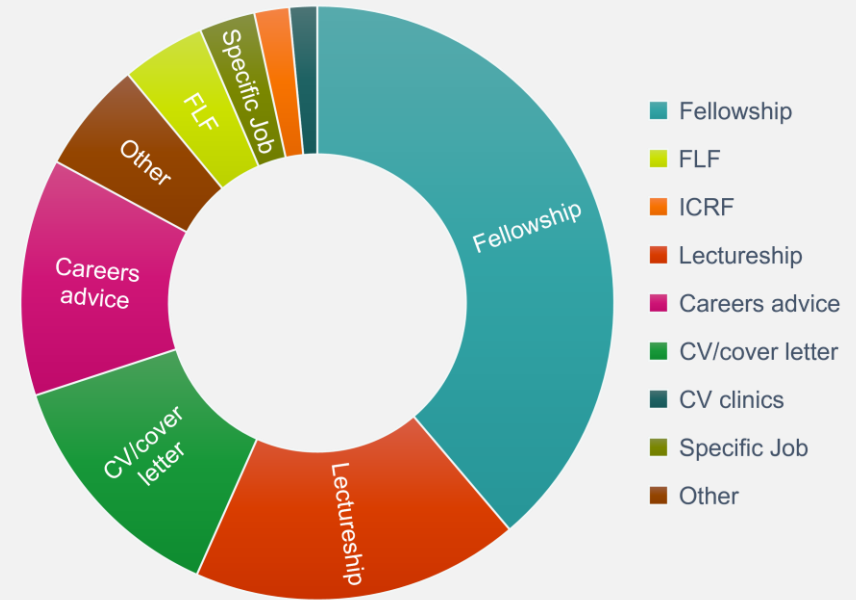
1:1 appointments

- 67% postdocs
- 25% are fellows
- 9% others (lecturers, clinicians, research assistants)

Mock interviews

- 40% applying for postdoc/fellowship
- 45% lectureship/professor
- 5% non-academic research
- 10% outside academia

- 300 individual appointments a year.



- 100 mocks a year
- Opportunity for both candidate and panelists

Resources and recognition

Funds

- Seeds and Wings
- Dame Julia Higgins Collaboration Fund

Online resources

- Academic routes FAQs
- Careers outside academia Networking
- Wellbeing
- The Academic's Success Guide

PFDC Awards

- Creating a Positive Research Environment
- Supporting Research Staff and Students
- The PFDC Reps team Award



PFDC Awards and Celebration 2023

Managing development opportunities

Run the selection process for Imperial candidates put forward for external opportunities:

- Wilbe
- World Economic Forum
- Broadening Horizons Mentoring Scheme Pilot
- Global Young Scientists Symposium

Internal expressions of interest

- Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter SAT
- Specialist Focus Groups

Communications strategy

- New starters and induction programme
- Weekly highlights
- Newsletter
- Mailing lists: including Postdoc and Fellows Reps Network
- Twitter/X
- Leavers' process
- PFDC Contacts Database



We have built it....

- Postdoc reps in every department
- Postdoc Champions (academics) in every department
- 10 days training and development allowance in contracts
- Representation across the College eg University Research and Enterprise Board
- Not compulsory- free- only carrots

Scoping projects

- Assessing and addressing the development needs of early career fellows at Imperial (2015)
- BAME Women Fellowship project (2015)
- Review of the Postdoc provision (2020)
- Evaluation of Support for Probationary Lecturers (2020)

Scoping projects (2021)

- Review of cross-College provision for Principal Investigators
- Improving the wellbeing of early career researchers through tangible actions against bullying and harassment
- The Independent Research Fellows' 'Life-cycle' at Imperial College London
- Understanding ECR Career Perceptions

Scoping projects (2021)

- Quantifying and describing the experiences of long-term researchers (LTRs) at Imperial
- Enhancing academic culture - The Role of Teaching Fellows and Learning Technologists
- What do women need to progress in academia?

Provision for all independent research fellows - overview

What do fellows need?	Research leadership skills	Routes for collaboration and exchange	Establish their independence
<p>Evidence-based approach using recommendations from 3 scoping projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge • Tools • Skills • Confidence • Resilience • Sharing of good practice • Community and belonging <p>Formats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for groups • Individual support • Online resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient Leadership in Action Skills development programme • 3 hours of individual Leadership Coaching with an experienced and accredited leadership coach • The Academic's Success Guide Online resources and toolkit 	<p>Imperial Fellows Peer Mentoring Scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated leadership development sessions • Regular opportunities for networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:1 career consultations • Mock interviews for lectureships • Weekly online writing sessions • Courses on consultancy and entrepreneurship, management of research groups and projects, communicating science, and PhD supervision

The Academic's Success Guide

The Academic's Success Guide

[Navigating induction and probation](#) [Managing yourself and your career](#) [Leading your research group](#) [Managing research projects](#)



Toolkit and resources for probation, promotion, and progress


1. Navigating induction and probation

Insights, perspectives and resources to help you establish yourself as a new PI.

[Explore this resource](#) 

2. Managing yourself and your research career

Take a more strategic and forward-looking approach as you transition into leadership.

[Explore this resource](#) 


3. Leading your own research group

Turn your attention from managing resources to also managing people and teams.

[Explore this resource](#) 

4. Managing research projects

Explore why and how you should invest time and energy to project manage research.


[Explore this resource](#) 

This resource was developed by:

Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre

People and Organisational Development

[Browse our lists of videos, links and templates](#) 

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Mary Ryan, Vice Provost for Research and Enterprise

"As researchers, we understand the importance of being good managers of projects. We also need the right tools and resources to help us to be good managers of people, whether you are just starting out as a new PI or Lecturer or whether you are already more experienced.

Personal development is a continuous process for all of us, and investing time in it leads to growth, learning

Imperial College Research Fellows (2009 -)

Pre-Award

- Information sessions (general and EDI focused ones)
- 1:1 support for applicants
- Mock-interviews

Post-Award

- Welcome Day
- Welcome Dinner with the President
- Development Day
- ICRF Retreat

Thomas Churcher

JRF 2011 – 2023

Now Professor of
Infectious Disease
Dynamics

...pop along to my
inaugural lecture in South
Kensington ...

I really appreciate the
(considerable) support you
have provided over the
years.



Emma Cavan

ICRF July 2020 – Present

I will finish my ICRF in July
.....As you know, I was
successful in a proleptic
lectureship appointment in
2022 Senior Lecturer,
starting at the end of July
2024,

This is because I've been
in 4 NERC/EU grants as
Co-I/work package lead
bringing in ~ £1.3 million



Future Leaders Fellowships

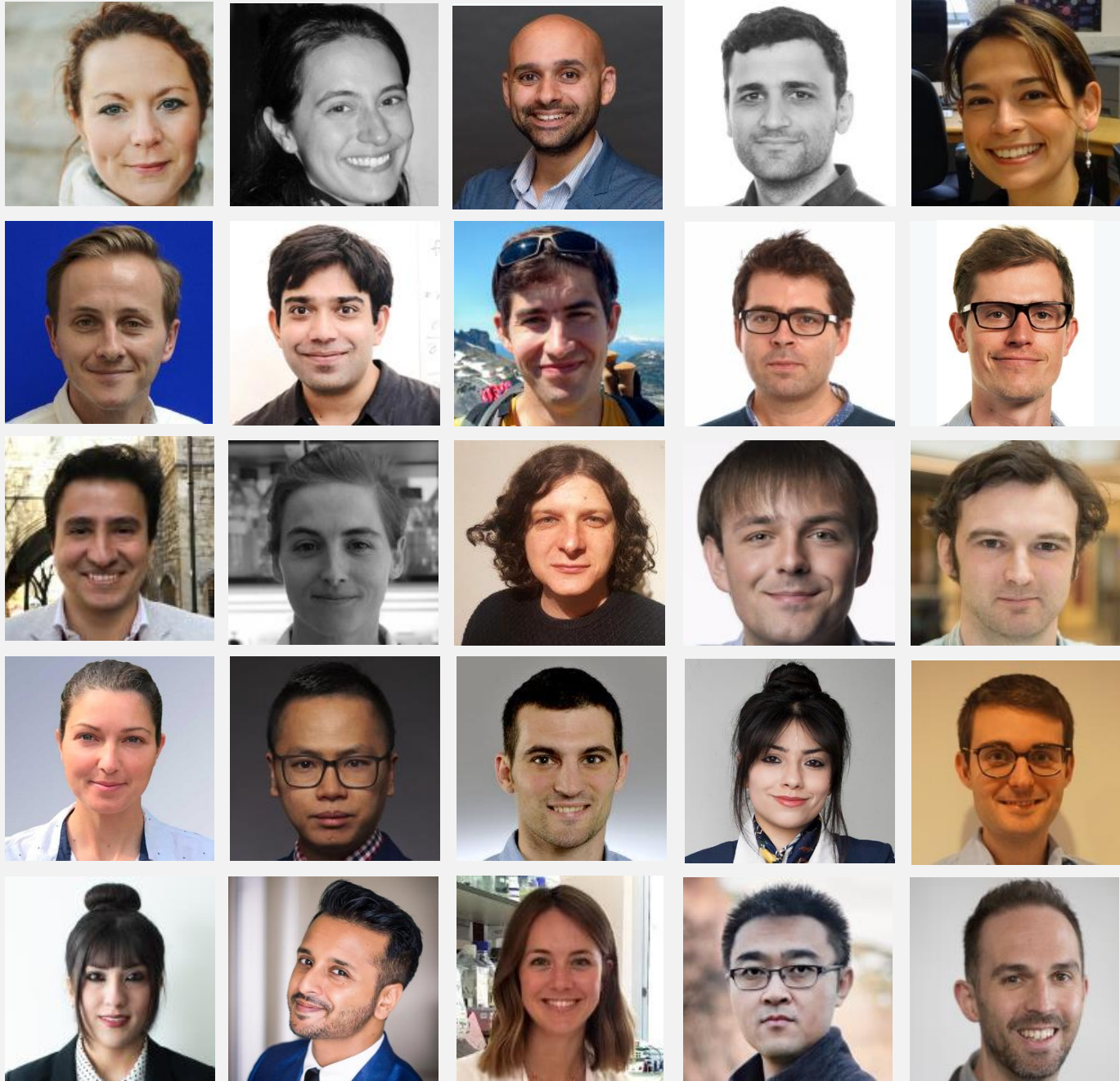
Up to £2m per award 4 + 3 years

“The FLF scheme provides long-term support in order to enable fellows to tackle ambitious programmes or multidisciplinary questions, and new or emerging research and innovation areas and partnerships.”

Pre-Award intense targeted bespoke support:

- FLF briefing (80+ per session)
- Individual draft application feedback
- Response to reviewers
- Presentation slides review
- Mock interviews (general and technical)

30 awardees, per round approx. 50% success rate



25 Future Leader Fellows at Imperial

Providing expertise to the sector

Collaborative delivery

- Resilient Leadership in Action (with London Universities)
- Networking sessions (with Researchers 14)
- European Talent Academy (with TUM, Politecnico Milano)



External (paid) work

- Queens Belfast – bespoke courses for postdocs and fellows
- KAUST – bespoke courses for postdocs and fellows
- Royal Society – bespoke programme for new Royal Society Fellows: Introduction to Leadership and Management
- Schmidt Futures Global – bespoke course
- Brunel University – bespoke course
- Faraday Institution – bespoke course



Some reflections

- Pump priming of resources really helped
- It is both rewarding but really hard work
- I'm plugged in with the President, Provost, Deans, Heads
- Our provision is tailored and bespoke to the researchers needs
- Our provision is excellent

Some reflections

- Started with me and an administrator now have 9
- Very flexible provision- helped by the pandemic
- All the developers have PhD's
- Engineering, Hard Sciences and Medicine focus
- Engagement is probably our biggest challenge

Postdocs!

- Buy the book! Only kidding....
- Take advantage of all the opportunities which are available to you
- Engage with Department of Research Services and Career Development
- Take ownership of your career

The envelopes...

- Write 3 things you are going to do to further your career- in the next 3 months
- Address the envelope to yourself, put in a diary alert and open it in 3 months' time

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