A successful career begins at Imperial College London
This guide is designed to help you make the most of your time as a postdoc by providing you with information about the support and development opportunities available to you and by introducing you to the Postdoc Development Centre at Imperial College London. Taking advantage of these resources will help you to maximise your chances of succeeding in your chosen career.

**Being a postdoc is not a career!**

Planning for the future is extremely important for postdocs. The majority of lectureships are filled through open competition rather than direct promotion, so you need to build professional skills and a strong research portfolio to prove that you are ready to take the next step. The competitive nature of the academic job market means that you need to take charge of your own career path if you want to succeed.

**Professional development**

Take advantage of all of the resources available to you. Imperial offers a range of services designed to help you plan your career and acquire the skills and experience you need to succeed.

As a postdoc your contract provides you with 10 days per year to allocate to professional development. One way of spending this time is to attend courses and workshops specifically designed by the Postdoc Development Centre (PDC) to help you make the most of your time at Imperial and take the next steps in your career. Popular topics include:

- Developing your career plan
- Developing your research independence
- Project and people management
- Writing for publication
- Communication skills
- Networking and collaborating
- Public engagement and science communication
The Postdoc Development Centre
The PDC provides a programme of support and development services to postdocs and fellows across Imperial. These include:

- Individual support and advice for postdocs
- CV, application and interview preparation
- Mock interviews
- Professional skills training
- Career development training
- Imperial postdoc reps network
- Conversations about leaving academia

To find out more about the services offered by the PDC or to speak to a member of the team, email: pdc-support@imperial.ac.uk or visit www.imperial.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/postdocs

Taking charge of your career: Making the most of your postdoc
Making the most of your postdoc is a three day residential course designed to equip postdocs in the early stages of their career with the skills and resources needed to plan their career and achieve success as a postdoc. Key areas include:

- Examining what makes a successful postdoc
- Strategies to move toward research independence
- Techniques for working successfully with Principal Investigators (PIs)
- Career options and career planning toolkit

Attendance is free of charge, and you can enrol via the PDC website at www.imperial.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/postdocs/workshops/takingchargeofyourcareer/makingthemostofyourpostdoc

Other helpful resources
You can take advantage of a number of services whilst working at Imperial:

Careers Service
www.imperial.ac.uk/careers

Centre for Academic English
www.imperial.ac.uk/academic-english

Educational Development Unit
www.imperial.ac.uk/edudev

Organisational and Staff Development
www.imperial.ac.uk/staffdevelopment
An example of academic pathways in the UK*

**Postdoc**

**Common job titles:**
- Research Assistant (RA)
- Postdoctoral Research Associate (PDRA)

**Fixed term:** one to three years (a number of postdoc positions might be held before moving on)

**Funding:** Principal Investigator’s research grant

**Common duties:**
- Research
- Supervision
- Lab managing
- Assisting grant writing
- Teaching

**Senior Teaching Fellow**

**Fixed term:** usually permanent, following a probationary period. Potential for promotion to Principal Teaching Fellow.

**Common duties:**
- Leading, designing and delivering undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programmes
- Developing departmental teaching strategies
- Administration
- Potentially generating funding for pedagogical initiatives

**Teaching Fellow**

**Fixed term:** from nine months

**Common duties:**
- Designing and delivering undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programmes
- Administration

**Research Fellow**

**Funding:** salary and often consumables funded by fellowship. Usually requires an academic sponsor/mentor.

A fellowship is an opportunity to develop your research independence by managing your own project. It is the transition stage between being a postdoc and being a Principal Investigator in your own right.

**Lecturer**

**Open-ended:** usually permanent, following a probationary period. Potential for promotion to Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor.

**Common duties:**
- Leading a research group
- Generating funding and disseminating research
- Teaching undergraduates and postgraduates
- Supervision of research projects
- Administration

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* Developed in association with Dr Patricia Hunt and Dr Bridgette Duncombe
Embarking on a successful academic career

There are a number of things you can do to give yourself the best chance of progressing your career during your time as a postdoc.

Developing your research profile

Building your profile as a researcher is an important step in developing an academic career:

- Make sure you are seen and known around your department by attending workshops, journal clubs, departmental meetings and events
- Offer to present your research and its impact to your group or department
- Attend key conferences in your field as well as seminars and workshops to gain maximum exposure for yourself and your research. If you can’t present, attend and network
- Get involved in public engagement activities. Explaining your research to non-scientists will hone your communication skills and prove to prospective funders that you can convey the significance of your research to a wider audience

Publishing

If you are planning to pursue an academic career, you need to maximise every opportunity to publish:

- Agree a publication plan with your Principal Investigator or group leader focusing on which journals to target and a time frame for submission
- Make sure that your work is geared toward publication whenever possible
- Write up your work! You can start this whilst completing experiments and analysis. Writing often highlights further work that needs to be done and can clarify your ideas about how your work fits within the field
- Submit your writing for review. Ensure that your work fulfils the guidelines of the journal you are submitting to, and that it is of high quality
- Be persistent! It’s common for papers to be rejected or for reviewers to ask for changes to be made before publishing articles. Be prepared to re-write and re-submit your paper before it is published

Teaching and supervising

Demonstrating that you can teach, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level will help maximise your chances of success when applying for lectureships:

- Enquire about opportunities in your department to give lectures, tutorials or demonstrations
- If teaching opportunities are not available in your department, broaden your search to non-academic teaching opportunities within the College – such as Horizons, the programme of developmental teaching for Imperial undergraduates www.imperial.ac.uk/horizons – or to teaching opportunities available at nearby institutions.
- Find out about opportunities within your group or department to tutor Master’s students through their dissertations
- Ask your Principal Investigator about acting as an assistant supervisor to PhD students in your group or department
Applying for grants and awards

Demonstrating that you can acquire funding is an important step in preparing for an academic job and there are a number of ways that you can do this:

• Whilst some grants are only available to those in permanent academic posts, others are available to researchers on short term contracts. Early career fellowships, in particular, are specifically designed to help postdocs take the next step in achieving research independence and forging an academic career
• Apply for travel grants to attend conferences and small sums to work on short term projects. Obtaining this money will demonstrate that you are familiar with the grant writing process and that you can successfully bid for funding
• Acquire valuable experience of the grant writing process by asking your Principal Investigator if you can get involved in current and future applications
• Find out where your department receives the bulk of its funding and see if the research councils, non-governmental organisations or charities fund research fellowships you are eligible to apply for

Use Research Professional, an online resource that provides information about grants, fellowships and other funding currently available in your field. To access Research Professional, log on to www.researchprofessional.com from a computer linked to the College network.

Personal Review and Development Plan (PRDP, appraisal)

All postdocs should have an annual PRDP with their Principal Investigator. This process is designed to:

• Recognise and praise your achievements
• Review your performance
• Receive constructive feedback to enhance future performance
• Plan and agree a future program of work
• Assist in developing your career
• Identify development needs and have your own Personal Development Plan

www.imperial.ac.uk/hr/workingatimperial/career/promotion/prdp

Good luck with your career at Imperial. Please remember to get in touch with the Postdoc Development Centre for support and development opportunities.