

Getting Started Guide IHC/NIHR Imperial BRC Research Fellows

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1. Adjusting to the world of research

First of all, congratulations on winning your award! This is an exciting moment in your career, and we are here to support and help you succeed. However, before getting started on the logistics of starting your project here are some quick tips to help you shift your thinking into the world of research.

- Take a look at the '*Guidance and Tips for starting your Fellowship Journey*' in the appendix. These notes were prepared by a current fellow and offer some practical tips on things to think about when you are getting started.
- Remember that research moves at a different pace to clinical work and requires a general change in mindset. It can be a hugely enjoyable and rewarding experience, but at times can be frustrating at first when you have your clinical hat on and expect more immediate results. Be prepared that everything takes longer (planning/learning techniques/recruitment/generating results), often things fail and rarely are there any instant results. You also move from an environment where, as a clinician, you feel generally competent and capable to one where you may feel very much like a novice. Do not be discouraged by this, enjoy the training, anticipate no immediate results, and draw on the skills/expertise of those around you.
- You will probably move from a structured and familiar daily routine to a scenario where you will need to be self-motivated and organise yourself and your time. Research does not come to you. You need to **proactively** plan your days and work, think up research questions, experiments, reading, data analysis. If you are not in control, nothing happens. Academic work will require self-imposed deadlines to ensure milestones are met.
- Take responsibility for your research – in the end it is **your work** and your supervisors are to help you accomplish your research objectives, but not to do the thinking for you! You will need to work hard, show initiative, drive the process and strive to understand the research. We encourage you to be self-critical of your own work and results, keep up with the literature in your field and continue to develop your skills and learning.

2. HR considerations

There are a number of HR matters you need to consider before starting your fellowship. Your first port of call should be the **ICHT Standard Operating Procedure** for setting up Research awards (for non-medical Healthcare Professionals). You will receive a copy of the SOP with this guide.

Organising cover for your post (for Healthcare Professionals)



- You should have had a discussion with your line manager prior to applying for the fellowship, particularly over the need to find a replacement during your absence.
- If you have not had this discussion, you need to do so immediately so that recruitment for the backfill of your current post can begin. Backfill must cover 100% of your research fellowship, for example, 0.5 WTE if you are planning to do the fellowship part time on 50% or 1 WTE if you are planning to do the fellowship full time.
- You should not start your fellowship until backfill has been secured and you can be released to undertake the research.
- Your fellowship gives you valuable protected time to focus on your research. You need to structure your research and time so that you can focus on the research and avoid being tempted or drawn back into clinical distractions. If you experience problems extricating yourself from clinical responsibilities, please inform the charity and your supervisors as we may be able to help.
- Please ensure the charity are kept regularly informed about the progress of this recruitment and your potential start date. This is important as delays can happen. We will do our best to accommodate your circumstances.

Getting back to work after the fellowship

Do:

- Keep in touch with your line manager and team during your absence so you are aware of departmental developments and you maintain your mandatory training requirements.
- About three months before the end of your fellowship, discuss your return to your previous post with your line manager.
- On a personal level, you could consider the upcoming change to your routine as it can be difficult to return to work after enjoying some flexibility during your fellowship.

Please Note:

- Your fellowship is co-funded by the charity and BRC. However, the charity manages the fellowships and all matters pertaining to your fellowship, including any top-up provided by CATO (as outlined in your grant award letter), should be directed to us in the first instance. We are unable to fund extensions or bridging awards if you have not finished your research project as planned.

3. Research Governance

Research Governance can be defined as the broad range of regulations, principles and standards of good practice, that exist to achieve, and continuously improve, research quality across all aspects of healthcare in the UK and worldwide. There are a number of stages, applications and processes that must be followed in order to obtain the correct approvals for your research.

Research governance/ethics is a huge and complex area and the process can take some time to complete, so this must be factored into your research plans at the very start of the process. For information, help and guidance with research governance contact the Imperial College London/Imperial College Healthcare Trust Joint Research Compliance Office ([JCRO](#)). There are some [e-learning modules](#) for researchers produced by the [Health Research Authority](#) that may be helpful.

4. Planning and running your research

- Arrange a meeting with your primary supervisor (and co-supervisors) as soon as you can to discuss exactly what you will need to do at the start of your fellowship.
- Discuss your aims and objectives with your supervisor(s) so they are clear from the beginning of your fellowship.
- A Gantt chart can be useful to plan out the time you will need to prepare, carry out and disseminate your research. You may wish to use the Gantt chart you provided with your fellowship application and revise it accordingly.



- Unless all research governance/ethics approvals are already in place for your project, your Gantt chart will often start with getting these in place. The website of the Joint Research Compliance Office is a useful resource to help you through these approvals.
- Remember to think early about how to incorporate Public Patient Involvement/Engagement into your research. The Imperial College Patient Experience Research Centre can help with this and grants to pay for PPI/PE may be available from the NIHR Research Design Service.
- Think early about whether you will need any specific software to undertake your research (e.g. SPSS, NVIVO, EndNote). If you do need to purchase some, you can apply for a [Research Software Bursary](#) – these are available for Healthcare Professionals and medics. CATO will fund 75% of the costs up to a maximum of £1,500 (refer to your grant award letter), applicants must first pay for/buy the software and be reimbursed via CATO through the expense claim route. Further details on the [CATO website](#).
- Ensure your Gantt chart goes into detail about the whole of your research process, which might include any training needs, data collection, analysis and dissemination.
- Ensure you also include a plan to prepare your subsequent PhD fellowship application. Remember that the financial part of these forms takes much longer to complete than you can imagine. This needs the support of your finance manager and/or divisional research manager (DRM). Your supervisor will be able to introduce you to right contact person.
- If your project is taking place in the Trust, then your DRM will want to be informed of your project.

Divisional Research Managers contact details:

- Surgery Cancer and Cardiovascular: Donna Copeland (donna.copeland@nhs.net)
- Medicine and Integrated Care: Scott Mullaney (scott.mullaney@nhs.net)
- Women's, Children's and Clinical Support: Ella Johnson ella.johnson@nhs.net

Your DRM will be a key person with whom to liaise as your career progresses in the Trust, so it is worth getting to know them early in your project

- Ensure you keep your supervisor(s) aware of any emerging barriers to completing your research.
- Ensure you keep your supervisor(s) aware of your progress. Regular meetings are important. It is advisable to create an agenda for these meetings in order to ensure you remain on schedule. Also make notes of meetings, including decisions made and what to do next – and give your supervisor(s) a dated copy.
- Ensure you send any documents such as fellowship applications or dissemination of your research for comment to your supervisor in plenty of time, so they can feedback in a timely manner.

5. Your research supervisor will:

- help guide you about how to set up your project and ensure you have a clear idea of the aims and objectives as well as an initial workplan.
- ensure you have the appropriate workspace.
- guide and assist you through your fellowship and help you to understand your training needs.
- be available to talk about your research at regular intervals and set a timetable with you on when to meet.
- be aware (and you should keep the supervisor aware) of any safety issues relating to your research.

6. Managing your grant

- This is managed by the charity.
- As a grantee there are a number of conditions and terms you must abide by as laid out in your grant award letter (GAL).



- The relevant Finance department (whether Trust or Imperial London College) will need to establish an account code to provide funding for the project. If in the Trust, this will be provided by Research & Development Finance Team. If College, then it is the relevant finance person for the department. You will need to identify who your Finance contact person is and send them a copy of your GAL to set up the account code.
- All costs as outlined in your GAL including salary, which are borne by the Trust/College up-front and then recharged to the charity.
- All expenditure is expected to be made within the funding period as indicated in your Grant Start Certificate (GSC).
- Requests to allocate underspend must be submitted in writing for review/approval (*at least three months before the end of your project. The charity will not consider any requests retrospectively, i.e., after you have incurred the cost.*)
- You must inform the charity if you are likely to incur unanticipated project costs, in addition to your approved budget, as soon as possible. You will need to provide justification for these additional costs and how you plan to meet the shortfall.
- You must inform the charity as soon as possible if there are any other unanticipated delays to your research and related spending on the grant, e.g., you are called back to full time clinical duties due to Covid-19 clinical pressures.
- Any remaining unused funds at the end of your fellowship will be written back to the charity.
- Any cost transfers between budget lines over 10% cannot be made unless you have the charity's prior written approval.
- Delays and complications can happen, and we will do our best to help. The most important thing to do is keep the charity up to date with possible delays or changes so we can find the best way forward.
- Remember, one of the conditions of your grant is that you are required to complete an end of grant report (see your GAL).
- You must ensure you sign any correspondence in whatever format (e.g., letter, emails etc.) with the line "Imperial Health Charity/NIHR Imperial BRC Fellow". Please refer to your GAL.
- You must acknowledge the fellowship on any official/public facing/non-public facing documents, posters, articles with "This work was supported by Imperial Health Charity and NIHR Imperial BRC." Please refer to your GAL.

Taking the fellowship part-time

- Some fellowships are taken part-time. It is key to try and ensure you retain the appropriate time for your fellowship as it can be challenging to mix your clinical responsibilities with research.
- Ensure your line manager and your clinical colleagues are aware of the project you are doing.
- Agree with your line manager and colleagues how you are going to manage your clinical or managerial responsibilities during the week, and when you will be doing your project work.
- Try and remain flexible and ensure you discuss with your line manager any barriers that may emerge.

7. Finishing up/next steps

- It is important to plan the return to your clinical post. Ensure you discuss this return with your line manager at least three months before the end of your fellowship so that a smooth return can be implemented.
- Within the parameters of your fellowship it is expected that you will use some of the time to prepare another application for an externally funded fellowship, e.g., PhD. However, this can be challenging and deadlines can fall outside of your fellowship's timeframe. In addition, research delays can mean that you are not ready to submit an application. It is important to ensure momentum is retained, so plan a new Gantt



chart that includes any deadlines for future applications as well as dissemination plans for your research.

- Ensure your onward plans are realistic and achievable now that you will have returned to your usual responsibilities.
- Seek out the onward support and guidance of your supervisor so that you can plan your next steps.
- You may also seek out mentorship to help guide your continuing progress. CATO may be able to advise you.
- All being well you will be shortlisted for an interview for your next fellowship application! The importance of preparation before the interview cannot be understated. Ensure you tell your supervisor and ask them to help you prepare and practice for the interview. Also, let IHC/BRC and CATO know about your interview – we are keen to celebrate your achievements and to support you through the interview, and can usually organise a mock interview panel for you. There are some helpful videos giving insights into the fellowship interview process on the CATO website, in the [support/useful resources](#) section.

8. Research support and resources

There are a number of resources that fellows can access when undertaking research projects. This section lists a selection.

Imperial College London Joint Research Compliance Office

The JRCO exists to help the College and its researchers meet the requirements of research governance, ensuring Imperial fulfils the legal, ethical and scientific obligations of the healthcare research process. Visit the [JCRO webpages](#) further info.

Imperial College London - Good Clinical Practice courses

The [Medicines for Human Use \(Clinical Trials\) Regulations 2004](#) requires that Clinical Trials are conducted in accordance with the ICH Guideline for Good Clinical Practice (GCP). This course is designed for Imperial staff (Trust and College) undertaking or who are planning to take part on clinical trials. The aim of the course is to provide an overview of Good Clinical Practice and the requirements for regulatory affairs and pharmacovigilance. For details on how to book a place visit the [ICL GCP webpages](#).

Imperial College London Patient Experience Research Centre

The PERC promotes participatory approaches to improving healthcare and biomedical research. PERC is a multidisciplinary group of clinicians, public health specialists and social scientists combining strengths in quantitative and qualitative research methods. The service promotes active communication between patients, researchers and clinical staff to address real problems, and through this improve the quality of healthcare and the impact of translational research. For further details visit the [PERC webpages](#).

NIHR Research Design Service (London)

RDS London can provide free design and methodological review to applied health or social care researchers who are developing research funding applications to NIHR and other open, national, peer-reviewed funding programmes. Additionally, the service can help identify suitable sources of funding for projects, advise on accessing funds to enable public involvement and foster collaborative links with established research groups in the capital. The RDS has a long waiting list so if you need their input its best to contact them in the very early stages of your project. Visit the [RDS website](#).

CATO Team and website

The 'non-medical' and 'support' pages of the CATO site contain videos, details about courses and events and useful resources such as the ['building a research career' handbook](#) that may be of use.

CATO also has links with and access to experienced medical and non-medical clinical academic researchers from a range of professions and specialties through our clinical academic committees and links across the AHSC and with other interested parties. Fellows may find it helpful to be put in touch with some of our contacts. To enquire email cato@imperial.ac.uk

The CATO Team also supports the IHC/BRC funded post-doctoral research fellows who may be a good source of guidance. To ask to be put in touch email the charity in the first instance.

Other courses, events and resources (all FREE)

Access to Imperial College London – for any Healthcare Professional fellows that might need this, supervisors in academic departments should be able to set you up as ‘Honorary clinical research fellows’ with the College for the duration of your Charity/BRC fellowship. This will give you a unique College ID number, Imperial College email address and access to the libraries.

Events and support for researchers (CATO organised)

- **For Healthcare Professionals** – fellows are strongly encouraged to attend the ‘*NWL Research Symposium for Health Care Professionals*’, that usually takes place every September, further details will be on the [CATO website](#).
- **For medics in training** – ‘*Academic Opportunities for Junior doctors: How to develop a career in Academic Medicine*’ takes place every October, further details will go on the CATO website in due course.
- **For all clinical professions** – the annual programme of CATO Masterclasses runs throughout the year. Masterclasses are short bitesize sessions on topics common across all areas of research and here are opportunities for networking afterwards. Fellows are very welcome to attend; details will be on the CATO website.
- **For all clinical professions** – CATO has produced a ‘*Clinical Research Training Framework*’. We suggest you use this to monitor the development of your research skills as you progress through your research project.

CATO Top Up Funding and research consumables bursary

CATO is making available to all fellows up to £3,000 (top-up funds) that can be used for the following research-related expenses during the course of your fellowship:

- Research consumables
- Research Training costs
- Open access publication costs
- Publication costs, journals etc.
- Library Fees

The charity and CATO **will not consider any other cost types** other than those specified, and **they must be directly related to the research project of your fellowship**. Furthermore, **you must demonstrate that you have fully utilised/exhausted options with your award before looking to apply to the Top Up Fund**. The £3,000 does not replace the amounts already agreed in your GAL (table 1). You will need to email the charity within eight weeks of the date of your GAL with a request on how you wish to use the top-up funds, including a breakdown of costs. The charity and CATO will review your request and then will inform you of our decision.

The £3,000 top-up funding is additional to the software bursary that will refund the full cost of purchasing **research software programmes** to an upper limit per person of £1,500, which you will need to apply for directly to CATO (for further details see the [CATO website](#)).

Poster funding for Healthcare Professionals outside of medicine (only)

For information on how to access this funding, contact Maggie Baldock, Therapy Business Support Manager (maggiiebaldock@nhs.net).

9. Useful contacts

Imperial Health Charity

- **Hani Ahmad**, Grants Manager
hani.ahmad@imperialcharity.org.uk T: 0203 006 5328
- **Paula Wilkinson**, Grants Officer
paula.wilkinson@imperialcharity.org.uk T: 020 3675 2415

NIHR Imperial Biomedical Research Centre

- **Irina Babina** Research Programmes Manager
BRCo officer@imperial.ac.uk
<https://imperialbrc.nihr.ac.uk/>

CATO Team, Imperial College Academic Health Science Centre - Clinical Academic Training Office

- **Tamsin Lock** and **Kieron Blake**, CATO Coordinators. **Sam Hobbs**, CATO Manager
cato@imperial.ac.uk T: 020 331 31373/37397
- **Dr Caroline Alexander** – Lead Clinical Academic for Therapies
- **Prof Mary Wells** – Research Lead for Nursing & Midwifery
- **Prof Jeremy Levy** – Director of Clinical Academic Training
Contact initially via cato@imperial.ac.uk

10. Appendix: Guidance and tips for starting your fellowship journey

Useful for all fellows, but with some Healthcare Professionals specific details)

- Read the Standard Operating Procedure for Fellowships and Grants and make sure you have followed it. This will help with all the administrative aspects of your fellowship. (Healthcare Professionals)
- Take control and responsibility for learning and work – this is all self-directed. Supervisors are there to support and guide you – not to do the work for you or plan your days for you. The fellowship will provide you with the opportunity to create a learning plan specific to your professional interests and needs. It will allow you to have a more flexible approach to your work – work from home, library, office based – as long as you get the work done and attend meetings and deliver your outcomes. Remember **you** are in charge of your time, but don't be surprised if this takes a bit of adjustment.
- Training is very important during your fellowship as the aim of the fellowship is not just to deliver a project but also to develop professionally. The College has given fellows access to the Graduate School Masters courses, which is a valuable resource. Other resources that are online or face to face that are provided include the CRN resources, Futurelearn Online, Imperial College Library, PERC PPI, ICL stats courses, JRCO Ethics courses, Clinical Academic Training Office (CATO) symposiums and masterclasses, research skills workshops.
- At Imperial we are very lucky to have a lot of support and engagement platforms that are readily available to join. We strongly recommend for you to sign up to HPAG (Healthcare Professionals Academic Group), CATO, and the post-graduate forums as these all provide places which you can hear about other fellows' work (early and late stage) and talk to peers who are embarking on this new experience and it is a time to share challenges and learn from each other. Fellows are encouraged to join any profession specific research special interest groups such as the Council for AHP Research. or the RCN Research Society.
- If you have not already signed up to be on Twitter, sign up for a Twitter account. This will help to keep you in the loop in your research area as well as giving you a platform



to promote your work and achievements. It also allows you to get in contact with experts in your field and events that may be of interest to you.

- Set yourself short- and long-term goals - this will help prevent burnout, allows you to build and enhance skills and relationships specific to your career plans and also provides a platform for you to know you are on schedule to achieve your final end goal. If your Gantt chart has slipped, re do the timelines and milestones to make them more realistic
- Mentor - if you haven't already found a mentor (not the same as a supervisor) this is really important. Contact your clinical academic lead if you need help with finding someone.
- Read widely - when reading papers always have a reason/ question. Why am I reading this? What has been done before and what are the gaps in knowledge? Apply a critical eye. Access the critical appraisal module through LEARN and/or attend library workshops. Start a reference library (e.g. Mendeley, Endnote) for all your papers, and make notes about each paper so that you can refer back to these.
- Engage with the academic and clinical communities - talk to colleagues about your ideas, go to seminars, submit abstracts and attend conferences. Even if the topic of the seminar doesn't seem highly relevant to you, it is likely that you will learn something about research methodology, or that the content will spark other ideas and thoughts that will be useful. You will also meet a whole range of people who could open doors or provide mutual support.
- Engage with patients and the public - attend the PERC PPI training, ask patients in your clinical area what they think about aspects of your research, host your own Patient and Public involvement events. You can win small grants from PERC or the Research Design Service that can support these aims. Read the INVOLVE website to become more familiar with PPI.
- Prepare and be realistic about timescales - if you are developing a new study be prepared that the necessary steps will not happen overnight. Understand the steps involved and allow for time to get the appropriate permissions such as HRA, sponsor and ethics). Don't get disheartened if this does not go as planned - continue to persevere, it will be worth it.
- Small things we all take for granted:
 - Research notebook (paper or online (evernote)) as this will allow you to organise your thoughts and will probably come in good use when writing methods for a paper.
 - Finances - do you know who to contact to order your laptop, equipment, to go on a course etc. If not find that out sooner rather than later and once you have found out who your contact is, discuss what they expect from you.
 - How many hours are you scheduled to work on your fellowship? If you are doing your fellowship part-time, your NHS time should be separate to your fellowship time. Make sure to be disciplined and think about the work environment that would be best suited to achieve your goals.
 - Gantt Chart- you should do a Gantt chart for your project but also for your professional development
 - Reporting - make sure you provide reports at the scheduled time points to your funding body. You should take into account that these need to be written in good time as your supervisor will need to read them prior to submission. You should give your supervisor at least a week to review documentation.
 - Useful online resources to help organise yourself and find templates are:
 - <https://www.ithinkwell.com.au/>
 - <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/>
- Supervisions: Take responsibility for arranging meetings with your supervisor, and provide an agenda in advance of the meeting, ideally with a few short explanatory notes about each topic. Make sure to then write up the minutes of the meetings with actions that have arisen.
- Write as often as you can - every day if possible. Good academic writing takes practice, and this is an essential skill for any researcher. Ask for critical feedback on your writing.



HELPING
OUR HOSPITALS
DO MORE

Imperial Health Charity, NIHR Imperial BRC research fellowship grants

NIHR | Imperial Biomedical
Research Centre

Attend writing workshops. Think about what you could publish and where – blogs, newsletters and magazines, professional journals, academic journals.

- Keep a structured note of all your training and research experience, keeping in mind anything you have achieved that could be added to your research CV to demonstrate that you are the right person for a clinical academic career. Plan for publications and presentations and your next steps, including PhD applications.
- Look after your own mental and physical health. A fellowship is a journey into the unknown and most of you will have come from busy, clinical settings where there is a needed action/ goal whereas your fellowship is about you creating goals and targets and being in charge of your time and professional development. The start of the fellowship can be daunting, and you can feel lonely, isolated and on your own BUT YOU ARE NOT. You will all have supervisors who can help guide you and there are lots of other fellows you can connect with and learn from each other's experience. For example, postgraduate forums, HPAG, CATO events...the list goes on. Don't be shy of reaching out to others.

This will feel like a new experience for you and as with any new experiences, you will face challenges, but remember you have been selected for this as the funding committees see something in you and your ideas. You can do this. Persevere – the results and achievements will be worth it.

Lillie Shahabi, IHC/NIHR BRC Fellow, 2019/20 cohort