



Imperial College
Academic Health
Science Centre
Improving Patient Care

CATO Bitesize

Quick guides to success as a
clinical research training fellow

Top Tips for NMAHPPs

(Nurses, Midwives, AHPs, Healthcare Scientists, Pharmacy staff & Psychologists)

First of all.....Congratulate yourself! You're coming to Imperial College London to do a PhD – Well done! This is an amazing opportunity, but will feel very different from clinical work initially (at least). And you are not alone, although it can feel like that at times.

Do remember you are bright, competent and able; you are equal to the other clinicians doing PhDs: you are not an imposter! Your research may be different and is often more patient-focussed. It is deemed of high value by your funders, and will probably impact patient care faster than some of those doing less patient facing research around you. It may take a bit of time to feel you 'fit in' with the rest of the lab/research group because what they are doing might be rather different. Remember this is your PhD and not theirs – there is nothing wrong with doing something differently as long as the science and output is of high quality.

Please also read the other CATO bite size fact sheets ...

Administration

- * Get your employment contract sorted as quickly as you can with Imperial College. This is usually organised by the Section Manager in your Department, who will liaise with the Imperial College HR staff hub. For nurses, midwives, AHPs etc, this can be especially fraught – so start the process early and come and talk to CATO if you get bogged down. You might be on a secondment from the Trust (NHS), and have an honorary College contract, but this still needs to be in place!
- * Once you have your contract you need to register with Imperial College as a PhD student, using the online [application form](#).
- * Send a copy of your contract (by email) to your Departmental Research Degrees Manager. This will ensure that you are registered correctly i.e. your employment contract is required to ensure that you are registered as a staff/student with part-time registration and appropriate milestones.
- * Your clinical contract might continue with ICHNT/ other NHS Trust but you must check this if you are still seeing patients. This should not be a problem at all if “seconded” from your Trust. If not, you may need an honorary contract via the relevant clinical department.

Key people

- * Arrange to meet your academic supervisor in your first week, if not weeks before you actually begin. Meet any current PhD research fellows/students in the lab/research group and ask them for their advice especially around who to approach to learn key skills. Get to know the Section Manager of your Imperial College academic Department.
- * Arrange to meet Prof Mary Wells or Dr Gemma Clunie (ICHT), before you start, who are especially expert at solving issues for NMAHPPs.
- * Discuss the best means of keeping in touch with your manager in the NHS while you are undertaking your PhD. This is an important relationship and it will help if you keep your manager informed about the work you are doing and use opportunities to present to colleagues.

PhD Programme Milestones

Make sure you know your targets for submission - especially your Early-Stage Assessment which is undertaken 9 months after starting for students completing in 3 years and varies if you are doing your PhD part time: further details are in your Departmental Research Degrees Handbook, and will be emailed to you by the College.



Training and Development

* Be sure to attend Induction and Orientation events organised within your Department and Section. Research is very different from clinical work and you need all the support you can get, and need to know who to approach.

* Read the Graduate School website <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/study/pg/graduate-school/> to learn about the professional development opportunities freely available to you and the mandatory requirements: especially the Doctoral programme pages. The CATO web pages also have lots of useful information

* Attend as many CATO and other relevant events as you can to make connections with others and keep yourself updated – details will be circulated via departmental Research Degrees Managers.

Clinical vs. Academic time

The transition is tough! Clinical work just keeps coming to or at you - you don't need to seek it out, and your days are filled for you with "stuff". Academic work/research does not come to you. You need to proactively plan your days, plan your work, think about research questions, experiments, reading, data analysis. If you are not in control, nothing happens! Research provides greater opportunity to have ownership over your day, time and projects. Whilst this can take some time to get used to, it is a definite bonus coming from busy clinical jobs.

Similar prioritisation skills are needed for clinical and academic work, however, academic work will require self-imposed deadlines to ensure milestones are met. And ask for help for all the new things you will need to learn.

You must limit the amount of clinical or other NHS role-related work you undertake: it is too easy to be nice and helpful and suddenly be doing your normal clinical work 3 days a week. You should be doing the amount you specified in your application, other than that directly contributing to your research. Don't forget your time is being funded to undertake research, and completing this in 3 years is not easy.

Develop a clear plan with your research supervisor of what is and what is not reasonable whilst undertaking clinical work during your PhD, and if doing extra shifts / bank work you must be careful not to over-commit.

You will not become de-skilled during your PhD, don't worry !

Make sure you plan for and keep accurate notes of supervision sessions and progress. There are various templates you can use for setting agendas and record-keeping during your PhD, which are very helpful in ensuring that you stay on track and remember why certain decisions were made along the way.

Support and Information

* Make sure you are familiar with the guidance and requirements laid out in your Departmental Research Degrees Handbook

* Read the Graduate School's 'Success Guide for Doctoral Students' <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/students/success-guide/pg/>

* Remember there is lots of other personal and development support available to you through the College such as; [researcher wellbeing](#), [dyslexia & neurodiversity](#), [stress management support](#)

* The Graduate School's Doctoral Student Coaching programme provides an opportunity to talk independently from your academic department, about challenges you may be experiencing <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/study/pg/graduate-school/community-support/coaching/>

* NMAHPPs (Nurses, Midwives, AHPs, Healthcare scientists, Pharmacy staff & Psychologists) who are not NIHR ICA funded, should consider applying to the AHSC's Mentoring for Research programme, which is available to support PhD fellows <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/medicine/study/clinical-academic-training-office/non-medical-opportunities/academic-research-mentoring/>.

NIHR funded fellows who are on the ICA stream will have access to their mentorship programme.

* Whilst the majority of research degree fellow supervisor partnerships work extremely well, there may be occasions where fellows and/or their supervisors are unhappy with their partnership. This can be for a variety of reasons, but quite often it is mis-communication/ misinterpretation of intention between the fellow and supervisor which leads to partnership difficulties. The Graduate School has a confidential pilot Research Degree Mediation service, designed for use where other services and support have not worked yet and with a view to pre-empting a breakdown of the relationship <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/study/pg/graduate-school/mediation/>

* Other resources you may find helpful that are freely available, include

www.vitae.ac.uk (Resources section)

www.ithinkwell.com.au (Resources for supervision etc)

Notes:

- Clinical staff based in the Imperial College AHSC but not registered for PhDs at Imperial College London should seek guidance from the equivalent departments at the HEI where they are registered.
- AHSC staff registered at other HEIs are welcome to use services provided by the CATO team, but are not eligible to use other Imperial College services such as the Graduate School and Early Career Researcher Institute (ECRI)