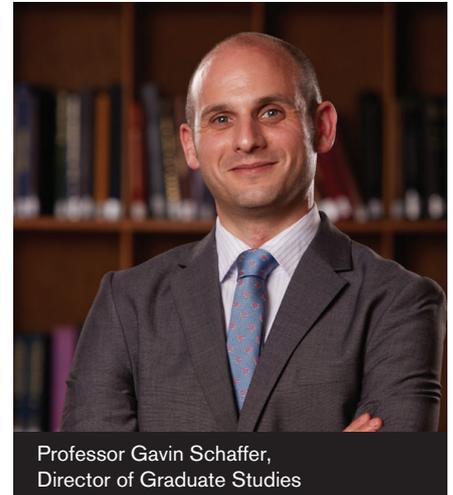


Want to know what your fellow PGRs said and what the University is doing in response to your feedback?

Starting a postgraduate research degree and want to know more about the PGR experience at the University of Birmingham?



Professor Gavin Schaffer,  
Director of Graduate Studies

This report outlines the initial findings and responses to PRES 2015 and the changes we are making in response to your feedback. The 2015 PRES ran from March to May 2015 and was completed by 1,148 Postgraduate Researchers, a response rate of 28%. Thank you to all of you who took time to complete the survey.

You told us that you rate your experience of supervision highly – 93% of you agreed that your supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to support your research and the numbers of you saying your supervisor helps you identify training and development needs have risen since 2013. 80% of you reported you had received support from your supervisor in this area. University of Birmingham supervision scores are some of the highest

in the Russell Group and this is testimony to the skills and hard work of the many excellent supervisors at the University of Birmingham.

You reported that your experience in research skills has developed and improved over your programme, with 91% of you stating that *'my skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme'*. This shows that we are working hard to ensure that you have the skills needed to successfully complete your research.

As with any feedback process, there were areas which you identified for further improvement. These areas included: Access to library resources and physical and access to research cultures, as only 62% of you noted

that you had had opportunity to be involved in wider research cultures outside of your discipline. Lastly, you told us that you are not satisfied that the University listens to and responds to your feedback. We will continue to work hard to improve in this area, and this report forms part of our attempts to show how we are dealing with your feedback.

We hope that this report will go some way to address these concerns. Over the next two pages you will find a 'You said...We did...'  
section highlighting some of the actions central University departments, including the UGS and the Library, will take. If you would like to comment further please email [graduateschool@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:graduateschool@contacts.bham.ac.uk) or tweet [@uobgradschool](https://twitter.com/uobgradschool).

## What were the highest and lowest scores?

Highest scores	Lowest scores
<b>Supervision:</b> My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research	<b>Professional Development:</b> I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme
<b>Research skills:</b> My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme	<b>Research culture:</b> I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students
<b>Supervision:</b> I have regular contact with my supervisor/s, appropriate for my needs	<b>Research culture:</b> The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work
<b>Responsibilities:</b> I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student	<b>Responsibilities:</b> My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students
<b>Research skills:</b> My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme	<b>Research culture:</b> I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department

# Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2015

## Your response, our commitments.

### You said... we did

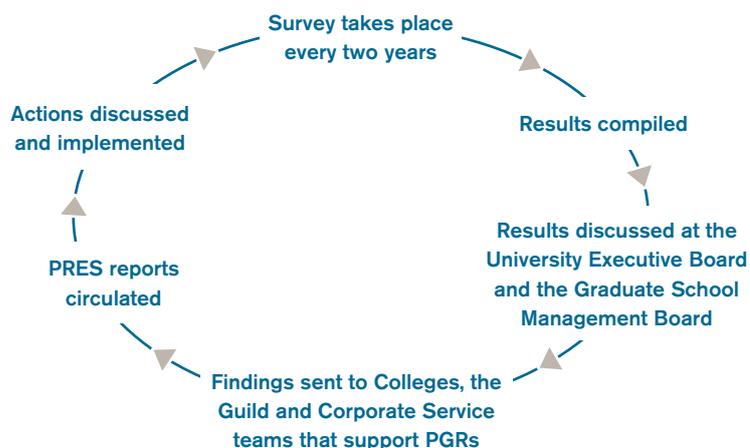
**Access to Research Cultures:** The new Westmere Scholars and the University Graduate School (UGS) will be delivering a series of interdisciplinary events and seminars in the Westmere PGR Hub to give you the opportunity to become involved in the wider research community and meet other PGRs from different disciplines. We will also continue to support the creation of PG research events in colleges through the PGR development fund, including seminars, masterclasses, and postgraduate journals.

**Access to resources and study space:** The new Westmere PGR hub has a common room, social learning space and a seminar room on the ground floor where PGRs can organise their own events and use the space to collaborate with other postgraduate researchers. The New Library will provide improved researcher space in addition to the facilities provided at Westmere and both

developments will provide opportunities for new forms of support, training and guidance targeted at PGRs.

**Responding to Feedback:** We will schedule visits to schools and colleges to talk to postgraduate researchers about our actions

and receive further feedback regarding your personal and professional development and we will look at other ways you can feedback about your experiences outside of PRES including Graduate School drop-in sessions and focus groups in order to continue improving our support services.



Biannual Survey Diagram

### The College of Engineering and Physical Sciences perspective

The College of Engineering and Physical Sciences values the postgraduate Research Experience Survey very highly. It is an exceptional opportunity to assess progress made in development plans since the previous survey and to reflect on and set plans for enhancement in the coming two years. Almost the entire question set was unchanged since 2013, so the recent results give a clear picture of progress to the current state of PGR experience.

EPS's PRES 2015 results were notable in several ways. Postgraduate researchers (EPS) in EPS responded to the call to complete the questionnaire with a response rate of 34%, ahead of all other Colleges. There were 42 main questions ranging from supervision to research skills training. EPS PGR's rated their experience more positively than non-EPS PGR's in 32 of the 42 categories.

Objectives set after PRES 2013 included a greater emphasis on provision of careers

advice and opportunities to develop transferable skills. EPS PGRs reported significant increases in their confidence in communicating their research to mixed audiences and opportunities to discuss their research with other PGRs. 2015 saw the introduction of the PGR-led careers day, including careers advice focused talks and employer stands. EPS is using its Postgraduate Development Fund to support and enhance this opportunity for 2016.

In 2013, there had been an increase in the PGR's understanding of the University's responsibilities to them, and theirs to the University. This has again increased. In 2013, there was less agreement about the University valuing and responding to feedback from research degree students. In 2015, this has improved, with EPS ahead of the University average.

Responding to issues in PRES 2015, EPS will continue its programme to improve PGRs' induction experiences, from their offer until they have settled in to their study. Equally important is talking to current PGRs about ways in which EPS can give them more confidence that they will complete within the University's timescales. In science and engineering disciplines

resources are and always should be a concern and their improvement will always be a priority, however satisfied PGRs may be. The focus will be particularly on improving computing provision. This is a University-wide concern and so EPS will collaborate with the University Graduate School to give this issue the necessary prominence.

Some more recent initiatives within EPS will take time to come to fruition. The rebalancing of the Postgraduate Development Fund is one example. Schools have agreed to devote more of the fund to support PGRs' conference attendance and to ensure that all PGRs have enhancement opportunities within their School. EPS will continue to bring opportunities from the University Graduate School's portfolio of activities to the attention of PGRs and is hoping that the new facilities at Westmere will greatly enhance all PGRs' experience.

**Dr. Peter Hancox, PGR Lead College of Engineering and Physical Sciences**