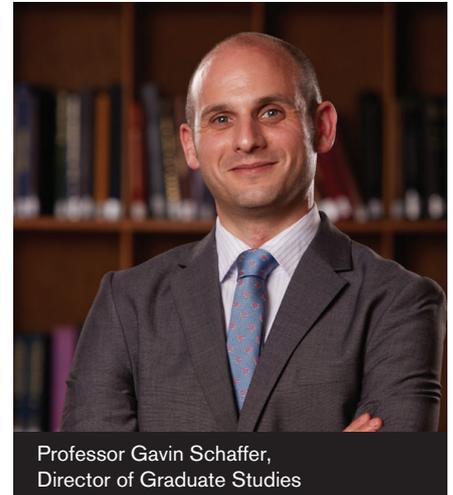


Want to know what your fellow PGRs said and what the University is doing in response to your feedback?

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

### College of Life Sciences perspective

#### Valuing and responding to feedback from Postgraduate Researchers

We will ensure that the School level annual reviews of postgraduate research provision take into account results from PRES. We will also harmonise school DR-staff committee meetings with College PGR committee meetings to ensure issues of concern to DRs can be raised in a timely manner at the appropriate level. We envisage that the new student rep system will also facilitate improved communication.

#### Research Culture

We continue to recognise the importance of PGRs to our research and PGRs are actively involved in running research events in all parts of the College. In 2014 we funded a number of PGR-led research symposia and will continue to do so in 2015 and beyond. A welcome aspect of this initiative was the cross-school collaboration seen in some of these symposia. The recently opened Westmere Hub and the appointment of a

College Westmere Scholar will encourage engagement with activities outside the immediate School and College environment.

#### Support for Doctoral Researchers involved in teaching activity

PGR support for our teaching activities is valued within the College and provides important development training for the PGR. All PGRs are eligible to contribute to teaching within the College but numbers involved varies between Schools. We will ensure all LES PGRs are aware of the teaching opportunities available and the need to undertake the training provided by CLAD before undertaking any teaching activity.

#### Resources

Issues with IT provision are raised by many of our PGRs and we continue to raise these issues both at College and at University level. IT security is clearly an issue that the University has to take very seriously and this can result in what appear to be restrictive practices (for example, controlling administrator rights) but are necessary measures to protect the University. However, we are hopeful that some of the issues raised by PGRs can

be addressed in the coming year. There is significant pressure on PGR workspace in some parts of the College and longer term we hope that the proposed relocation of parts of the College will help alleviate some of these problems.

#### Induction

Evaluation of our induction process shows that it is well received across the College and includes activities such as Speed PhD in SportexR and Biosciences. However, we acknowledge that the induction process could be improved for those PGRs who begin their studies after the start of the academic year. Some Schools run an additional induction event in semester 2 for PGRs starting in January and we will encourage adoption of this practice across the College.

All Schools in the College now include induction material on CANVAS and clearer guidance will be given to supervisors concerning their role in the induction process.

**Dr Neil Hotchin PGR Lead College of Life Sciences**