

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017

Your response, our commitments

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?

The 2017 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) ran from March to May 2017 and was completed by 1,884 UoB postgraduate researchers. This represents a response rate of 43%, and is the largest rate of participation by the University's PGRs to date. A very big thank you to all of you who took time to complete the survey, your feedback is highly valued and the University is now working on a series of action plans in response.

You told us that you rate your experience of supervision highly, with 92% agreeing that your supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to support your research. 78% reported that they have a suitable working space, a rise on the PRES 2015 results. University of Birmingham supervision scores are traditionally some of the highest in the Russell Group and this is testimony to the skills and hard work of the many excellent supervisors at UoB.

You reported your experience in research skills has developed and improved over your programme, with 89% 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.

However, you also told us areas that we need to improve on. Of the 44% of PGRs who have taught (or demonstrated) at UoB during their research degree programme, 58% agreed that they had been given appropriate support and guidance for their teaching. This is an area we are looking at improving as part of the University's revisions to the PGR induction process and on-going training support.

We are committed to building on existing opportunities for UoB PGRs to engage in the wider University research community as only 57% of you noted that you had an opportunity to be involved in wider research cultures outside of your discipline.

There is still work to do in developing our responsiveness to PGR feedback as an institution. 59% agreed that *"my institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students"* which is fractionally down from the 2015 PRES and needs improvement.

The College Action Plans are one way in which we seek to demonstrate the value we place on your feedback. This work will be reinforced by the PGR annual review discussions that take place across all Schools from late November; your voice and views play a key part in the annual review process and we always encourage you to speak to your PGR representatives and School academic PGR leads.

We hope you found this helpful. In the meantime if you have any questions or would like to comment further please email graduateschool@contacts.bham.ac.uk or tweet @uobgradschool.

College of Arts and Law (CAL)

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) ran at the University of Birmingham and c.100 other UK HEIs 17 March–18 May 2017. The University wide response rate saw a significant increase from 2015 (43.5% versus 28%) when the survey last ran. CAL 45.3% response rate was second highest (after EPS 50.5%).

PRES Headlines for CAL

- 84% of CAL PGRs are “overall satisfied” with their experience (highest at UoB)¹
- 86% of CAL PGRs feel that they are likely to *submit their thesis on time* (highest at UoB)
- 50% hope to become an academic after their studies
- 28% of CAL PGRs feel that their studies have “negatively affected their physical and/or mental wellbeing”.²

Specific cohorts of PGRs also raised some concerns specific to their needs (Part-Time, Distance Learning, Disability).

UoB also has a statistically significantly lower scores in Research Culture and Resources than the Russell Group overall. CAL achieved weak scores on “opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department” (58%) and “frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students” (52%). Supervisor expertise, however, is a particular strong point for UoB as a whole, with CAL achieving high scores for “supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research” (92%).

Action Plan

The College PG Student Experience Officer undertook a detailed analysis of the PRES 2017 data, examining both College and School-level outcomes. The College Graduate School has considered and will be working on the following issues:

Area	Actions taken	Actions planned
Employability beyond academia	Successful June 2017 ‘Life after Postgraduate Study’ careers event (involving alumni and external speakers), attended by c.70 PGRs. Successful June 2018 Careers event with focus on non-academic pathways. <i>Meetings scheduled between PGR welfare and Careers to address how the two can be better aligned.</i>	Better planning of PGR Career opportunities for CAL 2018-2019; <i>Planning for 2019 Careers event (with emphasis of non-academic careers paths) has commenced.</i> Better signposting to resources on professional development, generic and transferrable skills.
PGR student support and wellbeing	Wellbeing report drafted and approved by College. The Report identifies a number of short- to medium-term measures, some of which require consultation/action at UGS level.	To ensure improved signposting to online (College and University) welfare resources and consider the provision of bespoke PGR facilitative support. To offer a more structured support to PhD life-cycle – particularly at key junctions, such as

¹ This is by a slight margin the highest percentage in the institution versus LES (83%), EPS (79%), MDS (78%), CoSS (74%).

² CAL (28%), CoSS (43%), EPS (31%), LES (38%), MDS (30%).

	<p><i>Designation of a PGR welfare 'lead' to act as a focus point for any concerns and to help develop new strategies alongside PG SEO. Creation of pilot 'buddy' scheme where new PGRs can opt to have a peer-mentor to help with the transition to research degree (currently 28 students have opted-in).</i></p>	<p>transition to research element for MRes students, viva preparation, etc.</p> <p><i>Regular meetings of PGR welfare lead, CAL Welfare team and Student Experience team (including PG SEO) to ensure that the subject is being addressed and that new ideas and initiatives are being considered.</i></p>
Induction and Ethics training	<p>'Reflecting on your PhD Progress' event held in January 2018 focused on building a successful relationship with supervisory team and research integrity / ethical approval.</p> <p><i>Addition of a separate induction for MRes students to ensure that they understand their degree and its various stages. Welcome emails sent out in weeks leading up to Welcome Week to ensure students are aware of significance of induction events. Sessions on ethics and research development added to college induction programme.</i></p>	<p>Engage in dialogue with Schools and HASS Ethics Committee as to best support for ethical approval.</p> <p><i>Welcome events planned for week 1 as well to ensure that those unable to attend can still meet and socialise with other researchers. CAL Graduate School Canvas page will have resources used in induction added afterwards for access by those unable to attend.</i></p> <p><i>Reflective event for first year PhDs planned for May/June 2019.</i></p>
Research culture	<p><i>MRes students included in successful PGT Research Placement scheme.</i></p>	<p>Coordinating with REF planning teams, and working with Heads of Postgraduate Studies to make sure that activities and opportunities involve PGRs and are flagged appropriately.</p> <p><i>Proposal for future funding for Research Placement scheme suggests continuing to allow MRes students to be involved in future.</i></p>

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 CAL