

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 Social Sciences (CoSS)

Within the College of Social Sciences two main areas of concern were identified:

Mental Wellbeing – high levels of students reporting that their mental health has been adversely affected by their studies.

Research Culture – low levels of students reporting feeling engaged with their departmental/school research culture

The key developments reported in the College Annual Progress Review summary that relate to these two concerns are based on the recognition that prevention is better than treatment both with regards to adverse mental health and low student engagement. They also recognise that these two concerns are invariably inter-related:

- New enhanced Induction programme developed for 2018/19 to be delivered over two weeks, building on good practice in Government and Society. This was focussed upon building community and engagement to reduce student isolation.
- Review of the APR processes to enhance rigour, building on good practice in School of Social Policy and Government and Society. This included ensuring engagement was a requirement of our PGRs.
- Developing closer links with the School/College Directors of Research to ensure better integration of PGRs into research culture including, where appropriate, rolling out good practice for School of Social Policy of a Research Newsletter that engages PGRs.
- Enhancing Canvas communication and engagement – development of a College PGR ‘information’ site, with more interactive School-level sites (in collaboration with Technology Enhanced Learning).
- Arranging informal meetings with PGR student reps to empower them to be more engaged and critical.

In practice, the actions are:

Run a workshop this year with our PGR reps on mental health to think through how to move forward.	Completed by May 2018
College Academic and Admin lead to meet with senior student reps on a regular basis (to prevent problems arising).	Completed by May 2018 and ongoing (new standard practice)
Liaising with College Student Engagement/Welfare Officer to discuss access to welfare services being more PGR-friendly (building on some good out of hours practice in Education)	Completed by Sept 2018 with School Welfare Officers available to PGRs
Development of the new induction programme for PGRs (2 weeks instead of 1 day), including a day (designed by NG) dedicated to mental health issues – delivered in an integrated and ‘social science’ way thinking about the importance of strong social and professional networks for PGRs. In addition, there will be a whole day devoted to understanding more about how to become involved in the ‘research culture’ in each school – which is a key part of some PGRs sense of isolation from the wider scholarship.	Development completed, and implemented in October 2018 and feedback obtained. Currently reviewing as part of ongoing improvement

Improved communication of College, School and Departmental events to PGRs along with expectations of PGR attendance.	From Sept 2018 communications of events undertaken via Canvas. Expectations of engagement set and in induction and monitored in GRS3.
Development and implementation of College-wide Annual Progress Review process and form (GRS3) with School focussed explanatory notes including reporting on engagement with School, Department, Research Groups and wider community	Developed and rolled-out by Schools in 2018-19
Canvas – thinking through ways that DL and PT students can be more engaged and feel ‘part of’ the University – including a massive update of our ‘online’ presence – to work against the feeling of isolation. Ensuring that all students are made aware of research events across the college.	Canvas pages were set up and operational for student events, forms etc. with links to university policies etc. by September 2018. Ongoing work to populate remaining pages, and ensure currency. All communication of events now by Canvas
We are working to ensure better recording and sharing of RAPs (Reasonable Adjustment Plans) for PGRs.	By 2018/19 this should be standard practice
We are working to improve uptake of supervisor initial and refresher training to ensure supervisors remain adopt best practices in supervision as these are known to be drivers of student wellbeing and engagement	Ongoing
Participation in the PGR Mental Health Working Group	Ongoing
Introduction of new section in the Research Centres reporting – to comment on involvement of PGRs and early career researchers (ECRs)	Agreed at May College Research and Knowledge Transfer Board

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