

# 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](mailto:graduateschool@contacts.bham.ac.uk) or tweet @uobgradschool.

### **College of Engineering and Physical Sciences**

The College of Engineering and Physical Sciences values the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey very highly. Each School receives an analysis of its results and, in consultation with student representatives, devises an action plan to be followed. The outcomes and plans are considered by EPS College Board and actions tracked through progress reviews.

For the first time, more than half (50.5%) of the College's PGRs responded to the survey; the University's response rate was 43.5% and the HE sector as a whole 46.1%. This in itself was an outstanding result because it means that the views (both positive and negative) of a wide range of our research students are being heard.

The College's particular strengths are in the provision of resources, from working space, computing and library resources to the provision of specialist resources for your research. You feel that you have developed skills in managing your projects and your professional development during your studies. Your ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences was rated positively and more of you are having opportunities to communicate your work through publishing a journal paper or at an academic conference. Perhaps this is due in part to our response to PRES 2015 where PGR colleagues asked for more access to funding for conference attendance.

You had concerns around your skills training. Generally EPS PGRs feel that they have been less able than other PGRs to complete a development or personal training plan, that they have received less research skills training and are weaker in their transferable skills. The College and Schools have addressed these concerns, as shown below. Our new College induction programme gives PGRs the opportunity to become involved in the wider EPS research community beyond their School/department/research group.

The College decided to review and revise its induction for new PGRs. EPS Graduate School has hosted an induction programme for all new PGRs, ensuring that all new PGR colleagues have the opportunity to find out about a wide range of services from registering, through wellbeing and training in its many varieties to careers services.

Each School has reviewed its induction programme and research and transferable skills training, drawing on its PGRs' PRES comments. Special emphasis has been placed on the processes for inducting colleagues who arrive after the beginning of the academic year. Schools will have run their revised induction programmes for the first time recently and will be reviewing the process in the coming months.

PRES highlighted concerns around about your mental health and wellbeing. The College has since created a team of dedicated Wellbeing Officers to support students, which offers individual appointments as well as group activities specifically for PGRs, including relaxation sessions and trips off campus. It is hoped activities such as the trips off campus will help PGR students to build a network and improve their work/life balance.

Given the substantial response rate, Schools have been able to analyse their results with the confidence that they truly reflect the views of its PGRs and devise actions to address local issues. EPS Graduate School has worked on a variety of themes, some more glamorous than others. By far the least glamorous was to implement a consistent system of email lists, ensuring we can communicate effectively with you bringing you news of our partners' training and careers activities. You have responded by attending these session in growing numbers.

At the more glamorous end, we have brought you training sessions focussed on EPS concerns, for instance in using Bear processing and storage facilities. We have hosted a variety of careers events from the practical help on forming your CV and using recruitment agencies (delivered by external recruitment consultants), to the experiences of our former PhD students and panels from employers.

PRES is a never-resting activity. As soon as the data is received, the College and its Schools work on its interpretation to produce plans that will have impact on the opportunities of our PGRs. This process runs through to the next PRES survey. In 2019, we anticipate that you will respond in at least as greater numbers as in 2017, giving a truly representative set of results. Of course, we hope that you will recognise the many strengths in PGR provision in EPS and give us further topics to think and talk about improving.

General area	Action(s) proposed	Support Required & Dependencies	Action Owner	Timescales and Deadline	Measure of success	Progress by September 2018
General	Completion of EPS PGR mailing lists	IT Services	Director of the EPS Graduate School	30 April 2018	Availability of mailing lists to academic and administrative colleagues.	Completed.

<b>Resources computing</b>	Assess current information provision about available software and its installation and, if necessary, provide better information to PGRs.	College IT Services	Director of the EPS Graduate School	July 2018	Better performance in PRES 2019	Limited progress beyond access to Bear facilities.
<b>Resources information provision</b>	Assess current journal provision and, if necessary, provide better information about accessing the University Library collections to PGRs.	University Library Research Support Services	Director of the EPS Graduate School	July 2018	Better performance in PRES 2019	EPS-focused sessions held in 2017/18 with more to be held in 2018/19.
<b>Opportunities: careers</b>	To continue to develop the provision of EPS-focused careers events in co-operation with the University Graduate School careers colleagues	Requires co-operation with colleagues from University Graduate School/Careers Service.	Director of the EPS Graduate School	January 2019	Increased attendance of EPS PGRs at both EPS-focused events and general events.	Ongoing programme of careers events introduced in collaboration with the UGS PGR Careers Adviser. Better advertising of centrally organized events.

<p><b>Opportunities: training</b></p>	<p>To continue to develop the provision of EPS-focused training in co-operation with University Graduate School and Library Services colleagues</p>	<p>Requires co-operation with colleagues from University Graduate School/Information Services.</p>	<p>Director of the EPS Graduate School</p>	<p>July 2018</p>	<p>Increased attendance of EPS PGRs at both EPS-focused events and general events.</p>	<p>Ongoing support of centrally provided events, particularly through better advertising. Programme of EPS-focused events in collaboration with central providers.</p>
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**Dr Peter Hancox**

**Director of College of Engineering and Physical Sciences Graduate School  
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