

# 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 Life and Environmental Studies (LES)**

## Summary of LES vs University of Birmingham

LES scored very well on overall satisfaction, receiving 83% agreement. As can be seen from the table below, the scores mirror the UoB average in most sections, with the opportunity to teach and training for teaching scoring significantly higher than UoB.

### Further analysis

On supervision, LES performed well, scoring similarly to other colleges and never below 78% in any question. LES scored best of all colleges in “My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research” with 95%.

In resource, LES have an unsatisfactory 67% for “There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities”. This is an issue that has also been raised via the annual report, although indications in some schools were that it was resolved. However, school leads were concerned that resolution was short lived. The College is reviewing IT provision for all PGR’s in order to provide a long term plan for continued renewal of computers for PGR.

LES Postgraduate Research Committee (PGRC) has continued to monitor this through 2018/19 to put in place a clear process for the renewal and update of PGR IT facilities in each school. All new FT PhD students are provided with a computer, and other research students (PT and M level) have computers made available to them either in shared space or in a hot desking scenario. However, in the past, some of these facilities have been refurbished machines, with increased likelihood of failure. The College lead is reviewing process with the Head of College to create a sustainable supply of new computers.

A concerning aspect of PRES 2017 was the identification of a lack of strong research culture. Obviously, a PGR’s individual experience is very reliant on the immediate environment, i.e. the research supervisor and group. However, schools and the college can play a significant role in the research culture around a PGR.

The perceived lack of research culture in some areas of the college is seen as the biggest challenge to overcome. LES intends to address this in a number of different ways:

1. A new Canvas LES PGR course has been set up to allow information giving, gathering, discussion and survey of LES PGR. The Canvas course has been updated for the current academic year and has been well received with 80% of PGR’s logging on to view and interact with opportunities for training, research news and discussion.
2. A LES College conference is proposed and students have been ‘quizzed’ on the ideal format for this conference. We plan to hold a LES Research conference together with Postdoctoral / Early Researcher Career Development And Training (PERCAT) in the summer of 2019.
3. A new LES training lead has been appointed and is currently reviewing training in order to maximise cross college interaction of students for support of each other, and to share training needs and experiences. A new training programme for LES has been developed for 18/19 and will continue to evolve. This programme combines some general research skills, delivered in collaboration with the Library services postgraduate research skills team, and specific skills requested by LES PGR’s.
4. The LES College Reps have been tasked with getting out and about, communicating and getting to know their peers. We have set up a review group to discuss potential ideas for increasing PGR involvement with the wider research that exists around them. For 2018/19

the reps will be part of a working group, tasked by PGRC to be more proactive in engaging PGR's in a broader research culture.

In progression LES scored lower than UoB and this seems largely driven by low agreement to questions relating to induction and final assessment processes. On further investigation this is particularly driven by the MRES and MSC by research programmes. LES schools have therefore reviewed their M level induction processes to make them more specific for the cohort and less generic towards PGR. In addition, handbooks have been reviewed and good practice, particularly from Psychology and Biosciences has been shared. MRes and MSc research programmes have new and specific inductions for 2018/19 and we are continuing to review ways to create a rich cohort experience for PGR's on these programmes.

The responsibilities section showed some inconsistencies between schools on the feelings of PGR's in relation to their feedback and impact. School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) in particular scored poorly here, in relation to other schools and UoB. GEES already have an action plan in place to strengthen and improve the functioning of the Staff & Student Committee (SSC). New reps have been recruited, including international reps and equality and diversity reps, and the PGR SSC now reports directly to the GEES school executive committee via the school PGR lead. The reps from all schools are being consulted on the wider issue of feedback and impact, and we are discussing ways in which we can listen better and allow students to make themselves feel heard. The canvas site which has been set up for LES PGR and a more engaged group of reps may help improve this.

In terms of opportunity for development, professional and otherwise, LES scored as well as other colleges, and UoB. However, we note careers as an area highlighted for improvement, and are working with the PGR Careers Adviser to deliver bespoke careers advice and support. This will be part of our improved provision to PGR's in LES in 2018/19.

Section	LES	UoB
Supervision - % agree	87%	86%
Resources - % agree	75%	79%
Research culture - % agree	64%	63%
Progress and Assessment - % agree	71%	75%
Responsibilities - % agree	75%	76%
Research Skills - % agree	87%	85%
Professional Development - % agree	78%	76%
Teaching Opportunities	73%	59%
Overall	83%	81%