

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 Medical and Dental Sciences

1. How MDS will continue to address the student concern about Research Culture.

- Increase seminar programmes - making attendance compulsory. The number of seminar programmes has increased substantially as Institutes have become more established. Each Institute runs a Seminar programme which PGRs are invited to. Attendance at PGR-focused and at some Institute seminars is compulsory.
- PGR Reps and Westmere scholar to be more actively engaged – consider funding their social events. The College PGR reps continue to run an active social programme with financial support from College PGR. Coffee mornings have been recently introduced which are proving very popular. The Westmere scholar for 2018/19 is also one of the College PGR reps which will ensure active engagement during the course of the year
- Provide Institute inductions as well as College induction. Rather than separate Institute events, Institute PGR inductions have been incorporated into the comprehensive College induction event
- PGRs & supervisors to attend/engage at the PGR College Festival (resulting in being involved in the wider research community). Active and increased engagement in the annual Research Festival is an ongoing action and the use of social media before, during and after the event will be increased to help raise the event's profile. We are increasing engagement with the PGR reps to provide a feeling of increased ownership of the event, so that they help increase PGR attendance
- PGRs to attend events such as Research Lifecycle event held annually organised by the Research and Knowledge Office team to meet relevant staff. Research lifecycle events are being held.
- Highlight PGRs support mechanisms in place. Comprehensive information is being provided through Canvas, Handbooks and the College PGR induction events.
- Hold PGR careers events so PGRs are aware of their career options/trajectory. An MDS PGR Careers day was held on 3rd July 2018 and will be held annually on an ongoing basis.

2. MDS review of induction and consideration of whether MRes should be inducted separately from PhDs

- Separating MRes could lead to disengagement from the PGR community we would suggest attendance at both PGR induction and PGT Induction to cover the taught element. The MRes programmes were invited in 2017/18 and will be again for 2018/19.
- PGR College induction has been reviewed within the last 12 months, good feedback received on the 3 day induction – all relevant topics were covered and experts on hand to answer queries/give talks.
- Mini induction in April captures those who started after October induction.
- Additional induction for Overseas PGRs would be beneficial. Key information is covered at the College PGR induction event and individual queries are dealt with by the MDS PGR admin team. Feedback from current overseas PGRs will be requested to inform the format of a separate event.

3. *Review of support mechanisms available for PGRs who teach.*

- In the majority of Institutes in MDS, PGRs perform, at most, a few of hours of wet lab practical teaching/year, although there are exceptions.
- Due to this, Institute PGR leads will be asked to survey their PGRs to identify the amount of teaching performed by local PGRs.
- Appropriate local support mechanisms can then be put in place. This action was held over due to changes in personnel at Institute PGR lead level and will be completed in 2018/19.