

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

Completed the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)?

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?

This brief report details the main findings of PRES 2011 and some of the actions being put in place by the University in response to your comments.



Professor Brian Ford Lloyd, Director of the University Graduate School

The 2011 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) ran from March to May this year. 451 UoB postgraduate researchers (PGRs) submitted responses to the survey, a response rate of 19%. This is a 4% increase from the 2009 PRES response rate so a big thank you to everyone who took time to complete the survey.

There is much to celebrate in the results of this year's PRES. The supervision of PGRs emerged as a particular strength for the University. Within the overall question on how supervisory support and guidance has lived up to expectations, 71% of you said this has been more positive

than your expectations. This has increased by 6 percentage points over the last two years and is significantly higher than both the Russell Group (63%) and national scores (66%). Moreover, nearly nine in ten (87%) of you said that you have regular progress meetings with your supervisor. With 98% of survey respondents designating supervisory support and guidance as important, these high scores are extremely encouraging and a testament to the expertise and hard work of UoB supervisors across the University.

As with any feedback process there were areas which you identified for further improvement. These areas included: support for part time researchers; career development and management opportunities for PGRs; support and guidance for those PGRs that teach; and financial support for research activities. As the 'you said we did' section below hopefully demonstrates, the results of this survey will help shape action across the University and ensure improvements are delivered in these flagged areas over the forthcoming year.

College of Arts and Law perspective

The College of Arts and Law welcomes the student input provided by the PRES report. We are particularly pleased by the positive things you have said (obviously!), but we are also glad to hear about the problems. While we aim to keep abreast of developing issues through our numerous cross-College staff-student consultative groups, and through postgraduate representation on all relevant College committees, clearly some things will fall through the cracks, and this is an excellent opportunity to remedy any remaining problems. We have taken a number of steps to address the problems raised in the PRES survey.

First, we have increased the amount of financial support available for research activities by nearly 100%.

Second, we have instituted additional support for teaching activities. There is now a PGTA coordinator and mentor in each School, alongside a College coordinator (Dr Lisa Alberici) who – as part of her role as Student Experience Manager – arranges special teaching skills courses for CAL postgraduates: many of you will have met her already this autumn. We have also increased teaching opportunities: there are now at least two PGTAs in each School, and at least two Study Skills coordinators, who work with undergraduates on improving their study skills.

Third, we are instituting an Employability and Careers group, to be led by postgraduates, to determine exactly what information and services would best fulfil your needs. We are

March–May	PRES survey takes place	June	PRES results compiled	July	PRES results discussed at UEB and special meeting of the Graduate School Management Board (GSMB) Findings sent to Colleges, the Guild and Corporate Service teams that support PGRs	Oct	PGR PRES report circulated	Oct–Dec	Actions discussed and implemented	Jan 2012	Colleges and Corporate Services report back to GSMB regarding PRES actions
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What were the highest and lowest scores?

College of Arts and Law perspective continued...

Highest positive scores	Lowest positive scores
Supervision: My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to adequately support my research	Infrastructure: There is appropriate financial support for research activities
Personal factors: My friends and family are supportive of my research degree programme	Teaching opportunities: I have been given adequate support and guidance for my teaching
Skills development: As a result of my experience so far I have improved my ability to learn independently	Professional development and career: I am encouraged to reflect on my career development needs
UoB questions: I have regular progress meetings with my supervisor	Professional development and career: I am encouraged to think about the range of career opportunities that are available to me
Skills development: My experience so far has improved my analytical skills	Personal factors: The financing of my research degree programme places a strain on my personal finances
Supervision: My supervisor/s provide helpful feedback on my progress	UoB questions: I have received careers support and development opportunities
Supervision: My supervisor/s make a real effort to understand any difficulties I face	Part time: I feel enough is being done to support part time researchers (all part time students)

also aware of PGR needs to find occasional or part time jobs while pursuing a degree, and already provide an on-line service indicating short-term jobs available on campus (and this is also available in our weekly postgraduate newsletter). The new group will aim to expand these opportunities and to make them more readily available to CAL PGRs.

Fourth, we instituted a Mature Student working group last year, and this year we have piloted a Part Time Student working group as well. We have already held focus-group meetings to determine what sorts of issues you would most like us to pursue, and will continue to move forward on this across this academic year.

Fifth, though the awards offered by the Research Councils are limited to Home students, or fees for EU students, all of the College full postgraduate Scholarships (which include maintenance and overseas fees, as relevant) are open to EU and International, as well as Home, PGRs. There were 12 of these Scholarships for 2011–2, and the College also supported the Doctoral Researcher Elite Scholarships scheme for overseas PGRs run centrally – we have three overseas PGRs on this scheme – which covers fees, maintenance, and research costs – for this academic year.

Sixth, we have enhanced induction to take account of the different needs of PGT and PGRs.

Seventh, we are working across this academic year to ensure that viva preparation follows best practice across the College.

Eighth, CAL is instituting 'Supervisor Packs' in January 2012, which will ensure that supervisors know what to do, when, and who to contact to resolve any issues that arise with your supervision. We are closely monitoring supervisory practice, to ensure that the excellent supervision that most of you report is available to all.

Finally, the noise in the ERI issue... This is a perennial problem, and we are well aware of it. This year there are signs requesting that visitors keep their voices down, but we are still working with Estates to come up with a better solution. Watch this space!

Professor Leslie Brubaker,
Director, College of Arts and Law
Graduate School

What areas were most and least improved?

Most improved against trend	Least improved against trend
My experience so far has helped me to understand how to publish my work in a way appropriate to my field	The financing of my research degree programme places a strain on my personal finances
I have adequate access to the equipment necessary for my research	My friends and family are supportive of my research degree programme
I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme more or less within the planned timescale	I am aware of my institution's responsibilities towards me as a research degree student
My supervisor/s make a real effort to understand any difficulties I face	My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students

You said... we did

Part time researcher support
 New for 2011–12, the University Graduate School has created a set of part time researcher web pages on the UGS website which brings together development provision and sources of support available to part time PGRs at UoB. These pages and the resources they link to will be added to throughout the year. The UGS will also be running part time researcher development workshops throughout the year. These sessions will be tailored specifically for part time PGRs and will also be open to part time PGRs across the region to enable UoB participants to develop a wide peer support network.

Career development opportunities
 The Careers and Employability Centre (CEC) has dedicated career development web pages and resources for PGRs (<http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/careers/adept/>).

Each College is working closely with CEC and other central teams to provide tailored

career development activities for their PGRs. UoB PGRs can also access online careers management workshops via WebCT (<http://www.weblearn.bham.ac.uk/selfenrol>).

Support and guidance for PGRs that teach
 The Centre for Learning and Academic Development (CLAD) has launched a revised introductory programme of teaching development for PGRs (click here for info: http://www.hr.bham.ac.uk/development/courses/landt/ILT_Introduction_to_Learning_and_Teaching_in_Higher_Education_for_Postgraduates.shtml).

Financial support for research activities
 The University offers a range of scholarships and financial support for PGRs (<http://www.graduateschool.bham.ac.uk/rsa/researchcouncils/index.shtml>).

PGRs can also apply to Colleges for funding to support development activities eg. PGR-led conferences. Please contact your College PGR lead for more information.