

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 Social Sciences perspective

In the College of Social Sciences we were delighted to see how positive PGRs felt about the quality of their supervision and their opportunities for skills development. There has been a great deal of upheaval in the moves to Muirhead Tower and the reorganisation of space within the building and it is clear from the survey that PGRs have suffered during this process. We have now finished this reorganisation and feel that PGRs will be pleased with the results – You will now be allocated a desk rather than hot-desking and the PGR area has been broken down into School zoned areas to enable PGRs to develop more of a research community within their Schools and Departments. Social and meeting areas are also provided to facilitate interaction between PGRs.

The survey highlighted that PGRs are not always aware of the seminars and activities that are going on within their Schools. Therefore we are developing a College-wide newsletter where all research seminars programmes and training sessions will be advertised so that you can see what activities are available. We are also developing a College of Social Sciences Year book which will give details of all PGRs across the College and their research interests. This will be available on-line and in a paper copy so that it is easier to identify other PGRs who may have similar or related research interests to you even if they are in different Schools.

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?

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)

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.

A fully integrated part-time version of the MA Social Research has been developed within the College of Social Sciences (CoSS) to enable part-time PGRs to get the same research training as full time PGRs.

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. For instance, CoSS will continue to run CV clinics and are developing careers workshops involving speakers talking about alternative careers and giving PGRs more insight into the challenges involved. 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:

College of Social Sciences
perspective continued...

Our successful application for an ESRC Doctoral Training Centre means that we are able to offer extensive training in research methods including both core and advanced modules. We are also keen to help PGRs reflect on their professional development and future careers. This year we will continue to run CV clinics and help PGRs develop their CVs but we will also be offering workshops across the College where PGRs can hear about different forms of career they might consider and discuss potential options. We will also be offering PGRs the opportunity to apply for funds to present papers at conferences and each of the Schools within the College has a budget for the development of a doctoral researcher colloquium to give PGRs increased opportunities to present their work and gain feedback on it.

Dr Joanne Duberley,
PGR Lead College of Social Sciences

http://www.hr.bham.ac.uk/development/courses/landt/ILT_Introduction_to_Learning_and_Teaching_in_Higher_Education_for_Postgraduates.shtml).

All Schools within CoSS are looking at how they use PGAs and liaison between modules leaders and PGAs.

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.

All Schools in CoSS have a devolved budget to support PGRs presenting papers at conferences and a budget for PGR symposia.