

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 Life and Environmental Sciences perspective

Financial support for research activities: While many areas of research in the College are well funded it recognises the need to increase grant income. Directors of Research in all four Schools are overseeing mechanisms to ensure that staff submit the highest quality grant applications that address issues prioritised by funding bodies. LES also allocated more than £10,000 to support PGR-led conferences on a range of topics in 2010–11. The funds allowed our PGRs to present their work as posters and talks alongside high profile researchers from inside and outside the University. The process of planning and making the conferences happen for those PGRs directly involved is an opportunity to develop useful organisational skills.

Support and guidance for PGRs who teach: The College recognises the need to allow PGRs to develop their teaching skills both because PGRs play an important role as demonstrators, teaching assistants and assistants in supervising research projects and because this is a form of communication that will be required in many different careers. The College is working with CLAD in the implementation of its new modular training for PGRs and has in the last year worked with a cross-College group of PGRs to develop new guidance for PGRs who assist in supervising research projects. It is also trialling ways of supporting PGRs whose first language is not English to develop

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.

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/LT_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.

College of Life and Environmental Sciences perspective continued...

the skills and confidence to play a full role in supporting teaching in the ways described above.

Career development opportunities:

The College has worked with the CEC over the last two years through the Adept programme to understand what support PGRs require. It recognises that many PGRs do not follow a standard academic career and is trying to ensure that careers events encourage exploration of the full range of paths that doctoral graduates can follow. It is also investing dedicated resource to ensure that the Careers and Employability points within the four schools of the College provide tailored advice for PGRs. Each School is working with the CEC to flag up these resources and support during Induction to maximise awareness of the support that exists.

Understanding the PhD examination and the standards expected:

The College is trying to ensure that PGRs have as clear a picture of the PhD examination and the standards expected as possible. Induction and training events at the start of programmes do encourage PGRs to find out what is expected of them through reading successful theses, and discussion with supervisors and research staff. The College also provides specific sessions on 'Preparing for your viva' which are well received and have been attended by PGRs at all stages of their PhD.

Valuing feedback from PGRs:

The College recognises the importance of PGRs in continuously improving what the College does. Each School has an appropriate Committee which reviews PGR feedback and where appropriate and possible this is acted upon. Psychology will be running a revised Taught Doctoral Programme in 2011–12 after a review of the modules prompted by PGR feedback. Reps also meet at College level and all of the College responses to the above items have involved PGR views.



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Sciences