

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 report outlines the findings for the 2013 PRES and the changes we are making in response to your feedback.

The 2013 PRES ran from March to May 2013 and was completed by 896 postgraduate researchers, a response rate of 29%. This is our highest ever response rate and allows us to make some solid conclusions from the data, so thank you to all of you who took the time to complete the survey.

We are very pleased that supervision emerged as a strength at the University of Birmingham. 91% of you agreed that your supervisors had the necessary skills and knowledge to support your research. Satisfaction with supervision has improved from the 2011 PRES and is significantly higher than at comparable Russell Group universities. 90% of you said that you had regular meetings with your supervisor and 89% said that your supervisors gave useful feedback to direct your research. This is testimony to the skills and hard work of the many excellent supervisors at UoB.

As with any feedback process there were areas which you identified for further improvement. These areas included: induction support; support for part time researchers; access to resources including study space; and access to advice on careers and professional networks.



Professor Gavin Schaffer,
Director of Graduate Studies

As the 'you said we did' section below and opposite 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. We will produce an update report on these actions in February 2014. If you would like to comment further please email graduateschool@contacts.bham.ac.uk or tweet @uobgradschool.

College of Arts and Law perspective

The College of Arts and Law is delighted to see such positive feedback, and to have an opportunity to highlight some of the ways we are listening and responding to your suggestions for improvement – this is in fact one area we have especially targeted as part of our response to your feedback in the PRES survey.

First, listening and acting in response to your feedback is crucial. CAL has undertaken a substantial review of consultative systems, and will be discussing with you ways to enhance and restructure PG Staff Student Committees in 2013/14. We also propose to invite one PG representative/School to sit on the College Graduate School Board to ensure timely two-way dialogue on what matters to you.

Second, research environment is what you're here for; to ensure that information about subject area and interdisciplinary research events is clearly disseminated we have made big changes to how we communicate with you. Our new improved electronic newsletter, in conjunction with reconceptualised iVLE (Canvas) pages, is designed to help you to get the most out of local, College, and University research events.

Third, you indicate strongly that you would like more opportunity to strengthen interdisciplinary conversations. For 2013–14 we are instituting a series of termly Interdisciplinary CAL Work-in-Progress Seminars for PGRs, complementing the CAL Research Poster Event.

Fourth, where you work makes a difference. In response to your feedback about noise and desk availability we have made changes to the PG space in the ERI. We are also undertaking a major survey of use and requirements to clarify what the whole PGR community wants and needs, and to identify how we can work with Estates to find the best solutions.

Fifth, developing your employability, public engagement and communication skills is high on our agenda, and was highlighted by you in PRES.

College of Arts and Law perspective
continued on next page...

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2013

Your response, our commitments.

What were the highest and lowest scores?

Highest scores	Lowest scores
Supervision: My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research	Professional Development: I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme
Supervision: I have regular contact with my supervisor/s, appropriate for my needs	Research culture: I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students
Research Skills: My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme	Research culture: The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work
Supervision: My supervisor/s provide feedback that helps me direct my research activities	Research culture : I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department
Research Skills: My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme	Opportunities to teach: You have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching
Responsibilities: I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student	Responsibilities: My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students
Responsibilities: I am aware of my supervisors' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student	Part time: I feel enough is being done to support part time researchers

You said... we did

Welcome and induction support throughout the year

New for 2013–14, the University Graduate School (UGS) will send a Welcome email to any new PGR starting after October with invitations to activities taking place in that month to help new PGRs get to know the University and the wider researcher community and signpost them to helpful online resources such as the induction package Doctoral Researcher Essentials.

Enhanced part time researcher support

The UGS will be increasing our programme of workshops for part time researchers and piloting a new 'finishing' workshop for part time researchers near the end of their PhD. We will post resources online for access off campus. We are also working closely with the Colleges to enhance support for part time researchers.

Learning resources and study space

Library Services and the UGS will pilot co-hosting events which enhance interdisciplinary networking across the research community and highlight existing researcher spaces in the Main Library. Building on positive feedback from part time researchers, Library Services will further develop web information and guidance for PGRs, review the timing of some induction events and offer support to PGRs via phone, Skype and Canvas.

Professional networks and careers support

We will host events to enable postgraduate researchers to develop professional networks and highlight careers support and advice, both through Careers Network and through more informal channels such as supervisor discussions or mentoring.

College of Arts and Law perspective continued...

After last year's successful pilot of Employability talks, this year we are increasing the series' remit to include more events focused on careers outside academia, and individually, Schools continue to strengthen this activity (eg, in May 2013 UoB hosted a national event addressing employability, co-organised by the Department of History and History Lab Plus, for PGRs and early career scholars: <http://events.history.ac.uk/event/show/9592>).

Sixth, you asked for more opportunity to develop teaching skills; this year Schools will be managing how teaching is allocated to PhD students to ensure that opportunities are available in a structured way, based on need.

Seventh, we want you to get the most from your degree from the very beginning. This year sees a substantial pilot of the Speed PhD process (new PhD students complete a PhD in two days!), with a view to embedding this in CAL induction. We have also streamlined our College induction event to emphasise research culture and support, and after a successful pilot of a streamlined generic research skills programme last year, we will be continuing to develop the suite of training in 2013–14.

Dr Diana Spencer,
Director of the College of Arts and Law Graduate School

March–May	PRES survey takes place	June	PRES results compiled	July	PRES results discussed at the Graduate School Management Board (GSMB). Findings sent to Colleges, the Guild and Corporate Service teams that support PGRs.	Jul–Oct	Action planning	Nov	PGR PRES report circulated	Nov–Jan 2014	Actions implemented	Jan 2014	Colleges and Corporate Services report back to GSMB regarding PRES actions
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