

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](https://twitter.com/uobgradschool).

College of Social Sciences perspective

In the College of Social Sciences (CoSS) we were delighted to see how positive postgraduate researchers (PGRs) felt about the quality of their supervision and their opportunities for research skills development. We are also pleased that CoSS PGRs have a good understanding of the standards required for their research theses.

Since our move to Muirhead Tower we hope that PGRs are satisfied with their current working spaces and that the School zoned areas are facilitating the development of a more cohesive research community within Schools and Departments. We also hope that PGRs are taking full advantage of the social and meeting areas to facilitate interaction.

The survey highlighted that PGRs are not always able to take advantage of opportunities to communicate their research to a non-academic audience or present a paper or poster at an academic conference. We are therefore organising events within the College and external to the University that give CoSS PGRs the opportunity to showcase their research. The first of these is a College event to welcome new PGRs and incorporates an exhibition of PGR work. The second is a public engagement event at the New Birmingham Library in the City centre. This incorporates a week long exhibition of PGR work and linked activities and is running as part of the national ESRC Festival of Social Science.

We will also continue to offer 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 postgraduate researcher colloquium to give PGRs increased opportunities to present their work and gain feedback on it.

PGRs are not always aware of the seminars and activities that are going on within their Schools and across the College. Therefore we are extending the system of College-wide email alerts to keep you informed about the research seminar programmes and training sessions that are available.

College of Social Sciences
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 Social Sciences perspective continued...

We have also developed 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 online and in a paper copy so that it will be easier to promote your research, raise your profile within the wider research community and identify other PGRs who have related research interests to you even if they are in different Schools.

Our ESRC Doctoral Training Centre means that we are able to offer extensive training in research methods including both core and advanced modules on both a full and part-time basis. We are also keen to help PGRs develop their academic writing skills and reflect on their professional development and future careers. We will continue to run academic writing workshops to help PGRs develop their thesis writing and writing for publications skills.

On-going careers advice to help PGRs develop their CVs and discuss different forms of career and potential options continues to be available through the College Careers Network and Careers for Business. A dedicated website has been constructed providing careers advice, information and helpful links for PGRs (www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers/pgr).

Professor Fiona Carmichael,
PGR Lead College of Social Sciences

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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