

# 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](mailto:graduateschool@contacts.bham.ac.uk) or tweet @uobgradschool.

## College of Engineering and Physical Sciences perspective

In the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS) we are pleased that postgraduate researchers' satisfaction with the quality of supervision and the availability of resources has been maintained at the high levels previously observed in the PRES 2011 survey. It is also pleasing to see increases in the area of intellectual climate and research culture, with postgraduate researchers (PGRs) responding more positively to School and College seminar programmes and appreciating the research ambience within their Schools to a greater extent than before. It is clear, however, that PGRs are looking for additional involvement in the wider research community, beyond their own Schools.

One of the College's goals is to develop greater cross-College activities amongst its PGRs. To help us achieve this, the Graduate School Committee recently decided to dedicate approximately one third of its postgraduate development funds to the provision of a College-wide Team and Independent Research Skills programme to be run at the University's outdoor pursuits centre at Lake Coniston. We will also continue with the highly successful, PGR-led, 'Big Speaker' event. This opportunity to invite and listen to high profile engaging scientists, keen to communicate their science, has been a key feature of the EPS PGR Development programme for several years now, and it is one which I hope will continue for many years.

The PRES report indicates an increase in PGRs' understanding of the University's responsibilities to them, and theirs to the University. However, there is lower agreement regarding the University's response to PGRs' feedback. The EPS Graduate School Committee will work with the PGR Reps to develop ways in which our responses to your feedback can be articulated better.

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

Another area of concern that the Committee will work to improve is the provision of careers advice and the opportunities for PGRs to develop transferable skills. The College has invested significantly in careers advice and employability in recent years. We will now take the opportunity over the forthcoming year to seek your views on what careers advice you feel is lacking and then to act on that to develop something of enhanced value to you.

We have also enhanced the proportion of the development fund budget allocated to PGR conference attendance, which will assist in the development of PGRs' written and oral communication skills to a broad audience, and we encourage PGRs to actively participate in the research seminars and conferences organised within Schools, and to consider entry into wider events, such as the University's 'Three Minute Thesis' competition. We will also work with the University Graduate School and the other Colleges to identify and develop transferable skills training appropriate to engineers and physical scientists.

**Professor John Bridgeman,**  
PGR Lead College of Engineering and Physical 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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