

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 Life and Environmental Sciences perspective

Supervisors helping to identify training and development needs as a researcher: while the College was generally good in this respect it was not uniformly so.

We are making the reflection on training and development needs an integral part of the induction process so that postgraduate researchers (PGRs) will be better prepared to enlist the help of their supervisor and will ensure that it becomes an on-going process.

Research Environment and Culture: some PGRs clearly would like more opportunities to discuss their work with other students and outside the university.

We recognise the importance of access to stimulating research culture and through an initiative set up by College PGR Reps we are providing an annual competition that supports winners to attend international conferences. We are also funding PGRs to create their own conferences so that they can invite those they would like to learn from as well as being able to present their own work in an exciting environment.

Knowledge of final assessment.

We will continue to run regular sessions on 'Preparing for your viva' but we will incorporate extra elements that explicitly focus on how performance of PhD researchers is assessed and what examiners are looking for. We will collect opinions from staff across the College on what they look for in the Thesis and viva and provide these to the PhD researchers.

College of Life and Environmental
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 Life and Environmental Sciences perspective continued...

Valuing PGR feedback. We will explore the possibility of creating a College Newsletter to let PGRs know what is going on and particularly what is being done to improve the environment in which they carry out their research. This will also provide an opportunity to publicise the success of LES PGRs as well as training and development opportunities (for example, the Coniston team skills course). It could also help to raise the profile of the Michael K. O'Rourke PhD Best Publication Awards, as well as highlighting career options by focusing on alumni who have followed different paths.

Opportunities to communicate to a general audience. We will continue to support the Outreach activities/opportunities run for the College by UoB alumnus Dave Price in association with Think Tank. However, we will publicise it more actively via the web site as well as the Newsletter if we take that route. We will also enlist PGRs who have run activities at Think Tank to help develop this further.

Internship opportunities. Although we do not anticipate Internships becoming available for all PGRs the BBSRC-funded MIBTP programme offers 3 month Professional Internship Placements for some PGRs in three Schools in LES and this will allow PGR reaction to the experience to be assessed so that we can decide whether this should be made more widely available.

**Professor Rob Mackenzie,
PGR Lead College of Life and Environmental 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
-----------	-------------------------	------	-----------------------	------	--	---------	-----------------	-----	----------------------------	--------------	---------------------	----------	--