Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2019

Thank you to everyone who participated in the 2019 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The survey received a 48.6% response rate (1,998 PGRs), which is the highest response to date. While you may have received numerous reminders to complete the survey, this reflects the importance of your feedback to us. Our PGR population is diverse and the experiences of each PGR are unique. A high response rate provides greater assurance that the feedback received reflects everyone’s experiences. The results identify what is working well and what would benefit from greater attention.

This article gives an overview of the results as well as the initial actions that are being taken in response to the feedback. Further updates will be given over the coming year.

Overall, 79% of University of Birmingham PGRs are satisfied with the experience of their research degree. You told us that you rate your experience of supervision highly with:

* 91% agreeing their supervisor(s) has the skills and subject knowledge to support your research.
* 87% agreeing their supervisor(s) provide feedback that helps them to direct their research activities.
* 77% agreeing their supervisor(s) help to identify training and development needs.

There were also positive results in terms of resources: 76% reported that they have a suitable working space; 77% adequate computing resources and facilities; and 85% adequate provision of library facilities.

The survey identified ‘Research Culture’ as an area we particularly need to improve. The overall score in this section dropped from 63% in 2017 to 61% in 2019. Colleges have been asked to develop and implement action plans to improve research culture in each College.

73% of respondents reported they had ‘received training to develop their research skills’ and 38% ‘received training to develop their transferable skills’. We will review central and local communications to ensure all PGRs are aware of the research and transferable skills training available.

There is still work to do in developing responsiveness to PGR feedback. 55% of the survey respondents agreed that “my institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students” which is fractionally down from the 2017 survey and we aim to improve this.

Details of results and outcomes in your College are shown below. If you have any questions or would like to share any comments, please email graduateschool@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

College of Arts and Law Response

For the 2019 survey the University saw an overall increase in the number of responses (from 43.5% to 48%) from 2017. CAL also saw an increase, although not on the same scale with the final response rate of 46% slightly lower than the University’s as a whole and only the fourth highest of the individual colleges.

PRES Headlines for CAL

* 87% of CAL PGRS are “*overall satisfied”* with their experience which remains the highest at UoB) and is a slight increase on the 84% in the 2017 survey.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* 88% of CAL PGRs think they are likely to *submit their thesis on time* which is again a slight increase on 2017 and remains the highest in UoB.
* 53% of CAL PGRs are thinking of an academic career in higher education once they have completed their research degree – significantly above the Russell Group average of 36%.
* 31% of CAL PGRs have taught as part of their degree, somewhat below the UoB average of 44% and the Russell Group average of 52%.

UoB continued to have lower results than the Russell Group overall for Resources and Research Culture. CAL, however, continued to have lower results than UoB for the majority of the questions of both sections and some of the results were lower than those for 2017. In contrast the sections on Supervision, Responsibilities, and Research Skills were particularly strong areas for CAL where it outperformed both UoB and the Russell Group with, for example, 94% of CAL students saying that their ‘supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research’.

Action Plan

The College PG Student Experience Officer undertook a detailed analysis of the PRES 2019 data, examining both College and School-level outcomes. The College Graduate School has considered and will be working on the following issues:

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| Area | Actions taken | Actions planned |
| Resources | New spaces in Frankland added to existing provision of assigned desks for PGRs. Large scale review of provision and organisation of spaces conducted using feedback from PGRs (both those who currently have assigned desk and those who do not). Changes made include adding some desks with just ‘docking stations’ and getting students to rank which space they preferred based on what the space is like. Also agreed with students to ‘recycle’ desks not being used faster to those on waiting lists. | Continuing to review process and usage of spaces through the PGR Study Space manager and especially looking for improved methods of monitoring the spaces. Will begin to try and encourage desk sharing between PGRs to increase desk usage and increase the flexibility of existing spaces.Further review of provision is taking place. We will continue to involve PGRs in discussions of management of these spaces through the PGR reps.Hot-desking room for thesis-awaited students is being considered and resources located for this. |
| Research Culture | Creation of a PGR peer-mentor scheme to help new students better integrate into the postgraduate community and research culture within the Schools inside CAL. Using the results from PRES have begun discussion with PGR student reps in the CAL PGR SSF as to what they understand by ‘Research Culture’. Participating in CAL- CoSS EEF funded project ‘The Common Room’ designed to improve the research culture and community for PT and DL students.January induction to help non-standard starters get the information they need to be better involved in the research community.More recordings of events and live-tweeting to allow PT and DL students to better engage with events on campus | Further actions as part of the ‘Common Room’ project including surveys and focus groups over the next year to establish specific improvements for PT and DL students.Trialling a Cultural Calendar Seminar series which allows PGRs to present on a cultural festival (in either a research paper or workshop format) to help foster PGRs awareness of the diversity of their research community.Introduce a CAL\_PG\_Experience twitter feed to help promote events for PGRs and better engage with them through social media. |
| Skills and Training | Addition of ‘Networking’ session as part of extended induction. Presentation/Public Speaking skills workshops run by external provider with excellent feedback (Storytelling with Polly Tisdall)Reflecting on PhD/MRes progress event run to help 1st year PGRs reflect on their progress, what training they might need and how to access it.Better engagement with Careers Network, Student Services and Library Research skills by having them host CAL based workshops on a range of skills, from writing and research practices to writing academic/non-academic cvs.  | Adding employability skills workshops to CAL Careers conferenceAdd workshop on publication and/or outreach and engagementRunning workshop on Outreach skills and creating outreach workshopsReview of research language training provision resulting in the pilot of an improved package for the next academic year.  |
| Progress | ‘Demystifying’ series of events run around key transition moments in PGRs to help improve PhDs understanding of events such as the Progress Panel and viva. | Addition of additional events in final year of PhD regarding the transition into Writing-Up and going through the submission process, and a further one on the viva itself. |
| PGR student support and wellbeing | Developed CAL specific Wellbeing canvas page with wide range of links to both internal and external resources.Addition of DL PGR peer-mentor scheme for 19/20 to help those students develop a peer-support network. | Continue to develop close working relationship between CAL Graduate School, PG Student Experience, and Wellbeing to further co-ordinate activities to support PGR wellbeing. |

1. The other Colleges’ totals are: CoSS 75%; EPS 78%; LES 74%; and MDS 80%. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)