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. College Directors of Research 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 Engineering and Physical Sciences Response

Taking a longer term view, your College has a record of improving performance in PRES surveys in important areas. For instance, the College’s *Resources* response has improved where the comparable departments in other Russell Group universities and the remainder of the university has fallen. The same is true of our *Research Culture*, *Progression*, *Research Skills* and *Profession Development* survey areas.

Looking at more detailed research areas, the effects of the College’s Graduate School in providing training and development opportunities show through. We have developed our communication methods, with specialised email lists and social media presence to publicise our PGR-focussed opportunities to you.

Our work in improving your opportunities in research skills and transferable skills training is showing through. Our closer working with the Library is reflected in your positive view of the provision of resources and facilities, including online journals. Our training, in partnership with the Library and the University Graduate School (as well as external trainers) has helped make you more confident about preparing your thesis and engaging in well in your viva. Concentrating on the transferable skills, you are increasingly confident in presenting your work, managing your professional development and careers opportunities.

The University is concerned about the continuing low scores in the *Research Culture* section. (All universities’ scores in this area are much lower than in other sections.) Nonetheless, the College wants to see a higher score in the next PRES evaluation as it seems an indicator of the general morale of our research students. While our score has held steady when our Russell Group colleagues’ score have fallen, we have developed a strategy to improve led by the College’s and School’s Directors of Research and Knowledge Transfer.

On a final positive note, once again, EPS has had the highest response rate in the University: 53.7% against a University average of 48.6%. (The 2017 College response rate was 50.5%.) Your strong engagement with this survey is immensely valuable. The strength of your opinions (positive and negative) have to be noted and demand a response.