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 Life and Environmental Sciences Response

LES College would like to thank our Postgraduate Researchers for their response to PRES. We have been working with LES School leads and LES PGR representatives to better understand the responses and deliver an action plan.

Research culture was identified across the University as an area that we need to improve. In LES we have already been working with PGR reps to gather examples of local success stories, to try to understand which kinds of activities help PGRs to feel better connected to our research culture in LES. We will now begin to facilitate and promote different kinds of events to help improve our LES research culture.

Across the Schools in LES, our induction processes were identified as an area for improvement with 57% of LES PGRs agreeing with the statement “I received an appropriate induction to my research degree programme” compared to 70% for UoB as a whole. We are working with PGR reps, School PGR leads and looking to other Colleges to gain insight into the potential success of a College Induction process.

“I understand the required standard for my thesis” and “The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me” scored lower than UoB as a whole with scores of 67% and 63% agree respectively. We are working with academics in Schools and PGR School leads to devise a clear set of expectations to communicate to all researchers with regard to the standards of a UoB thesis and the requirements for progression and attainment of the research degree.

Whilst the scores associated with provision of computing resource have improved in LES, the College score for agreement with the statement “There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities” was still lower that the UoB wide score (73% vs 77%). LES are continuing to work to provide newer computers for all of our postgraduate researchers.