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 Medical and Dental Sciences Response

We are pleased that the overall feedback within the College was positive, but have identified areas where your feedback suggests we can further improve.

Whilst the Research Culture summary score increased from 66% in 2017 to 68% in 2019 for MDS (the Russell Group average for this section is 65%), it is recognised that improvements need to be made. To that end, the entire MDS PGR cohort was surveyed in late 2019 on research culture and skills & training development. The responses will be reviewed by College PGR Board and action points identified.

Where we need to make substantial improvement is around ‘The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me’, where we received the 3rd lowest score across UoB. We continue to try to improve our communication with PGRs across their studies, but working with the MDS PGR reps, we will ensure that the information already available via Canvas, intranet, centrally-held workshops and training sessions are clearly signposted. We will consider using the APRs to provide information on final assessment and next steps. Furthermore, we will now also keep supervisors up-to-date with the guidelines and arrangements for final assessment procedures so you have an additional point of contact for the information; this will be done via the locally held training sessions.

Whilst the overall score for ‘Receiving training to develop my transferable skills’ was the 2nd highest in the University at 43%, we aim to improve this and have appointed a dedicated deputy PGR lead with responsibility for training. We are currently reviewing the training provision to ensure both research and transferable skills opportunities are offered.