

Subject: Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2019/20 Report

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1. Introduction

The Advance HE Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) launched on Monday 2 March and closed on Monday 23 March 2020. The survey was hosted by JISC Surveys, responses and results were confidential and anonymised. 75 students participated (compared with 36 in 2018/19), providing a wider range of feedback. However, it is worth noting that the percentage response rate has only slightly risen (26% vs. 24% in 2018/19), due to twice as many students being contacted in 2019/20 – 288 in 2019/20 vs. 150 in 2018/19. This analysis concentrates on the changes between the two surveys. It is understood that, where there have been some positive developments in some areas, there is work to be done in order to further improve the experience of Postgraduate Research Students.

In the analysis below 'student(s)' is used as a term of convenience for 'survey participant(s)'.

2. Highlights

Resources:

I have a suitable working space **+14%**

There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities **+6%**

I have access to the specialist resources necessary for my research **+14%**

Research Culture:

I have access to a good seminar programme in my research area **+11.3%**

I am aware of opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department **+27.7%**

Progress and achievement:

I understand the required standard for my thesis **+11.3%**

The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me **+11.7%**

Responsibilities:

My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students **+10.7%**

Other than my supervisor/s, I know who to approach if I am concerned about any aspect of my degree programme **+13%**

Overall experience:

Overall, I am satisfied with the experience of my research degree programme **+16.5%**

3. Full analysis

There is a slight improvement in overall student experience (66% vs. 63% in 2018/19) with increases in most categories. The striking result of the survey is that the answers were less polarised than in 2018/19 with far fewer students showing overall dissatisfaction (-21%). The results for the individual survey categories are presented below.

3a. Supervision

Both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with supervision are lower than in 2018/19. 74% of students think that they have regular contact with their supervisor (89% in 2018/19) and only 67% think that their supervisors help them identify their training and development needs (80% in 2028/19). Further development for staff via the Research Staff Development Programme and for students via the PGR Training Programme intends to address any shortfalls in this area.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
		%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
2.1	My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research	86	14	84	9.4	-2	-4.6
2.2	I have regular contact with my supervisor/s,	89	11	74	9.3	-15	-1.7

	appropriate for my needs						
2.3	My supervisor/s provide feedback that helps me direct my research activities	86	14	80	6.7	-6	-7.3
2.4	My supervisor/s help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher	80	20	67	16	-13	-4

3b. Resources

Students are more satisfied with resources (only Library resources show a slight drop: -3%) and far fewer students are dissatisfied. 72% feel they have a suitable working space (58% in 2018/19), 64% that they have access to specialist resources necessary for their research (50% in 2018/19). Far fewer students feel that they do not have access to such resources (12% vs. 50% in 2018/19) and only 12% of students are now dissatisfied with computing resources (as opposed to 42% in 2018/19).

The efforts made in 2019/20, in particular, the provision of working spaces in the Library, have been well-received, but further improvement is necessary. The prime concerns are IT support and better access to research sources through the Library.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
		%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
3.1	I have a suitable working space	58	42	72	16	14	-26
3.2	There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities	58	42	64	12	6	-30
3.3	There is adequate provision of library facilities (including physical and online resources)	74	26	70.7	12	-3.3	-14

3.4	I have access to the specialist resources necessary for my research	50	50	64	12	14	-38
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3c. Research Culture

Students are more satisfied with all aspects of our research culture with dissatisfaction having massively decreased. 63% of students now agree that they are aware of opportunities to become involved in the research community (35% in 2018/19) and only 24% disagree (65% in 2018/19). 49% of students feel that they have access to a good seminar programme in their area (38% in 2018/19) with only 23% disagreeing (62% in 2018/19). Dissatisfaction with aspects of the research culture has dropped by between 35% and 41%!

The direction of travel is right, but after lowering dissatisfaction, the aim should be to continue encouraging as many students as possible to engage with the growing research culture and the opportunities available to them via a growing number of research initiatives.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
		%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
4.1	I have access to a good seminar	38	62	49.3	22.6	11.3	-39.4

	programme in my research area						
4.2	I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other researchers including research students	38	62	41.4	22.7	3.4	-39.3
4.3	The research community in my research area stimulates my work	38	62	38.7	26.7	0.7	-35.3
4.4	I am aware of opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department	35	62	62.7	24	27.7	-41

3d. Progress and achievement

73% of students confirm that they understand the requirements of their thesis (62% in 2018/19), while 20% of students state that they do not have such understanding (38% in 2018/19). 71% agree that the final assessment procedures for their degree are clear to them (53% in 2018/19), while 17% disagree (47% in 2018/19). Student disagreement with the statements on progression and achievement has dropped by between 13% and 30%!

Again, the direction of travel is right, but we need to persevere to make more students understand the University's expectations for and administrative procedures of their PGR journey.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
	Progress and achievement	%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
5.1	I received an appropriate induction to my research degree programme	56	44	62.6	22.6	6.6	-21.4
5.2	I understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress	74	26	80	13.4	6	-12.6

5.3	I understand the required standard for my thesis	62	28	73.3	20	11.3	-18
5.4	The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me	53	47	70.7	17.3	11.7	-29.7

3e. Responsibilities

63% of students feel that the University values and responds to their feedback (52% in 2018/19), while only 16% disagree (48% in 2018/19). 66% of students state that they know who to approach if they have any concern other than their supervisors (53% in 2018/19), while only 23% disagree (47% in 2018/19). However, only 75% of students state that they are aware of their supervisors' responsibilities towards them (down from 86% in 2018/19).

Again, while the improvement is noted, dissatisfaction with supervision is an area for improvement.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
		%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
6.1	My institution values and responds to	52	48	62.7	16	10.7	-32

	feedback from research degree students						
6.2	I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student	83	17	85.4	8	2.4	-9
6.3	I am aware of my supervisors' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student	86	14	74.7	16	-11.3	2
6.4	Other than my supervisor/s, I know who to approach if I am concerned about any aspect of my degree programme	53	47	66	22.6	13	-24.4

3f. Research Skills

83% of students feel that their skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during their programme (78% in 2018/19). However, fewer students than in 2018/19 think that their skills in critical analysis and evaluating findings (77%, down from 82%) and their understanding of research integrity (79%, down from 85%) have developed.

A mixed result: while good supervision is key, the PGR training programming should help. In the coming 12 months, we will run increased sessions for staff and students on regulations, expectations and research skills.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
		%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
7.1	My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme	78	22	92.7	8	4.7	-14
7.2	My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and	82	18	77.3	8	-4.7	-10

	results have developed during my programme						
7.3	My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme	73	27	72	12	-1	-15
7.4	My understanding of 'research integrity' (e.g. rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during my programme	85	15	78.7	6.7	-6.3	-8.3

3g. Professional development

76% of students report that their ability to manage projects has developed during their programme (down from 84% in 2018/19), 73% of students observe improvement of their skills in communicating information to diverse audiences (66% in 2018/19). Only 8% of

students see no improvement in both respects (down from 16% and 34% respectively in 2018/19). 57% of students report developing contacts and networking (52% in 2018/19), while only 16% of students feel that they have not done so (as opposed 48% in 2018/19).

Again a mixed result: while dissatisfaction is lower, it would have been good to see a bigger uplift as a result of School and University PGR training programmes. Attendance levels have been varied. Increased attendance is to be encouraged.

	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
	Professional development	%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
8.1	My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme	84	16	76	8	-8	-8
8.2	My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme	66	34	73.4	8	7.4	-26
8.3	I have developed contacts or professional	52	48	57.3	16	5.3	-32

	networks during my programme						
8.4	I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme	76	24	81	5.4	5	-18.6

3h. Opportunities

Only 50% of students feel that they have been given support and guidance for their teaching (down from 62% in 2018/19) and only 43% state that they have received formal training for their teaching (down from 87% in 2018/19!). 50% disagree with having received formal training for their teaching (as opposed only 13% in 2018/19).

This result has one source: the comparative lack of teaching opportunities that are available to PGR students. This will be addressed as a key action for 2020/21.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
	Opportunities	%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points

9.1 0	Please indicate which of the following opportunities you have experienced during your research degree programme (Y/N):	75	25	n/a	n/a		
9.1 1	To what extent do you agree that you have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching	62	38	50	28.6	-12	-9.4
9.1 2	Did you receive formal training for your teaching? (e.g. teacher/lecturer training schemes or staff	87	13	42.8	50	-44.2	37

	development classes run by your institutions; a PGCert course)						
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3i. Overall Experience

64% are satisfied with their experience of the research degree programme (47% in 2018/19) with dissatisfaction down (24% vs. 53% in 2018/19). However, confidence of completing the programme is down (69 % vs. 78% in 2018/19).

This is an ambiguous message: whilst we're heading in the right direction for satisfaction, the approval figure should be much higher. The lower confidence in completing is to be addressed. It might be a side effect of the PGR research training programme, which seems to have made students more aware of the expected standards, this is a positive outcome though.

No	Themes / Questions	PRES 2018/19		PRES 2019/20		Difference (Agree) from 18/19 to 19/20	Difference (Disagree) from 18/19 to 19/20
	Overall experience	%Agree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Disagree	%-points	%-points
10.1	Overall, I am satisfied with the experience of my research degree programme	47	53	63.5	24.4	16.5	-28.6

10.2	I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme within my institution's expected timescale	78	22	69.3	9.3	-8.7	-12.7
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4. Actions

Key actions we will implement for the 2020-21 academic year include:

1. Provide a strong research skills component within the PGR Training Programme in liaison with PGR students and Schools
2. Provide more opportunities for PGR students to gain teaching experience through shadowing, co-teaching, seminar convening, mentoring as well as GA and AsL teaching (do you think this is definitely achievable?)
3. Increase the delivery of online and/or on-campus training sessions to enable more students to attend