# PRES 2013: Results from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

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# Foreword by Professor Matthew Lambon Ralph

Postgraduate research students are crucially important for the UK. They are a key component of, and contributor to, the UK's current research activity, translation, and impact both inside and outside traditional academia. In addition, they provide the foundation for the UK's future workforce and thus today's students will be a primary basis for advancing the UK's knowledge-based economy in the years to come. Accordingly, the UK Government, research councils and other funders - including the universities themselves - have maintained their strong interest and investment in postgraduate research (PGR) provision in the UK. Likewise, UK postgraduate research training has a very high international reputation such that a significant number of foreign students come to the UK to benefit from the excellent PGR provision.

Given the importance of PGR students, both now and for the future, universities have maintained their desire to review and improve the PGR 'experience'. Cutting-edge research is, and should always remain, at the heart of any PhD and thus it is important to review this aspect of the students' experience and to ensure that it keeps apace with the intellectual demands and resources required for internationally-leading research. In addition, there has been an increasing recognition that a PhD should also include a broader range of skills and training opportunities for PGR students to undertake as required. A broadly-experienced PhD student will be better able to meet the demands of an ever-changing research landscape and for making an advanced contribution to the academic, commercial, charity and government sectors. In this regard, the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) provides a key stock-take of the PGR experience for UK Universities, who are able to use their own institutional results and benchmarking data for informed local policy and practice.

It is important to note that the PRES is an entirely voluntary process. The fact that 122 higher education institutions in the UK opted to take part in the Survey this year is testament to the importance they place on maintaining and improving the PGR experience. The results from PRES 2013 are very encouraging and support the international reputation for PGR provision in the UK. Direct comparisons with the 2011 results show that there was a significant rise in the completion rate (from 31,102 to 48,401 PGR students representing a shift from 32% to 42% of the PGR population). In addition, on each and every comparative measure, there has been a significant increase in overall satisfaction. These include improved experience not only on the core research component of the PhD but also on the broader aspects of modern UK PhD training. Future developments of PGR provision undertaken by UK universities will benefit from this positive foundation and will be able to use the informative results from PRES 2013 to guide how we can improve the PGR experience even more.

To finish, I would like to thank Dr Paul Bennett and the HEA team for masterminding both the thoughtful streamlining and revision of the PRES and also the collection and analysis of the Survey results. In addition, thanks should also go to the small army of administrators and academics in all of the participating universities who facilitate and provide the crucial local mechanics for this national survey. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank the 48,401 PGR students who took the time out to complete the survey. Their feedback is crucial in maintaining and improving all aspects of the UK PGR provision.

Prof Matthew A Lambon Ralph (University of Manchester)
Chair – PRES Advisory Group

# Executive summary

This report presents the UK findings from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2013. The survey took place in a record 122 higher education institutions in spring 2013. 48,401 postgraduate researchers took part, comprising 41.9% of those eligible, and representing a significant increase on previous years. (In 2011 31,102 postgraduates from 102 institutions took part, with a response rate of 32.0%.) The report gives us the most comprehensive ever picture of the experience of postgraduate researchers in the UK.

**Redesign of PRES**

The PRES questionnaire underwent a major redevelopment and redesign in advance of the 2013 survey to bring it up-to-date, ensure it is robust, and make it more manageable for respondents and useful to institutions. The survey was shortened and scales standardised following a statistically informed analysis, while the wording of many questions was improved following a cognitive testing project undertaken with – and by – postgraduate researchers themselves. Quantitative analysis of the new data suggests the redesign has been successful in creating logical and consistent scales on key aspects of the postgraduate experience.

Consultation with the sector has ensured that both remaining and new questions meet the sector's latest needs. In particular, the redesigned survey has a much stronger focus on research skills and professional development, in recognition of the increasing prominence given to these attributes. The survey continues to maintain a significant emphasis on the quality of supervision and research community and, despite changes, permits some comparison with results from previous years while setting new benchmarks for the future.

**Profile of respondents**

41.9% is a high response rate for an online survey. The top response rate for an individual institution was 95.3% and a quarter of institutions had response rates of 48.8% or higher. The profile of respondents is broadly comparable demographically to the profile of all postgraduate researchers in the UK. For example UK, EU and non-EU students all have a similar propensity to respond, although part-time students are somewhat under-represented in their survey sample compared with their profile in the postgraduate researcher population.

**Overall experience**

The results show that postgraduate researchers in the UK can expect a high quality experience, with 82% of students satisfied overall and the quality of supervision and research skills development rated particularly highly. A total of 64% of students agreed with positive statements about research culture making this the least positive aspect of experience (but nonetheless a good experience for the majority of students).

Analysing the impact of different aspects of experience on overall satisfaction shows that supervision has the strongest influence, followed closely by research skills and professional development (combined). Indeed, all the aspects of experience (as measured by the question scales) have a substantively important impact, with the exception of resources. A possible implication of this is that investment in enhancing learning and supervision is likely to have much greater pay-offs for overall satisfaction than investment in new facilities.

Where comparisons are possible between PRES 2011 and the redesigned PRES 2013, the results show that across all measures there has been an increase in positivity between 2011 and 2013. This positive change principally reflects a shift in responses from the 'neutral' to 'agree' categories on the Survey. Rates of responding in the 'negative' category were generally unchanged. Overall, these comparative results are very encouraging.

**Variations in experience by student group**

The relationship between experience and various demographic and course characteristics was analysed, including discipline, gender, domicile, and mode and year of study. The calculation of effect sizes in PRES shows that the relationships between experience and student and course characteristics are modest. Mode of study had no substantively important effects on experience except for a small effect on perceptions of research culture.

Discipline and year of study had the strongest effects, but even here they were substantively small. Discipline 'explained' about 1.5% of variation in experience of experience of research culture, 1% of variation in experience of professional development and almost 6% of variation in experience of resources.

Year group had small substantive effects on experience of supervision, research skills and professional development. It was encouraging to see that research skills and professional development improved as year group increased, with the exception of those students who had significantly exceeded normal submission times.

The implications of the analysis suggest that, while context is important in interpreting the results, the effect sizes analysed here are too small to simply 'explain away' disappointing scores by pointing to particular student and course characteristics.

**Experience in detail**

*Supervision:* On average, 84% of students agreed with positive statements about their experience of supervision, making this one of the most positive scales in the survey. However, agreement fell to 73% for the new item 1d, 'My supervisor/s help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher'.

*Resources:* Average agreement was 78%, but positivity was notably higher in the sciences than in the humanities and social sciences.

*Research culture:* Average agreement was 64%, although almost three-quarters (73%) agreed their department provides a good seminar programme. Only 58% agreed they had opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond their department. Although mode of study effects were small overall, 53% of part-time students agreed they had frequent opportunities to discuss their research with other research students, compared with 67% of full-time students.

*Progress and assessment:* Average agreement for the scale was 78%, and while only 71% of first years agreed that the final assessment procedures of their degree were clear to them, this rose to 79% for fourth years. However, the sector might usefully focus on improving the induction experience given that 26% of students did not agree they had received an appropriate induction to their research degree programme.

*Responsibilities:* Average agreement was 78%, with 86% to 89% of students claiming a good understanding of their and their supervisors' responsibilities. However, only 60% of respondents agreed that their institution values and responds to feedback from research students and this is a key area of enhancement for the sector.

*Research skills:* This was the highest scoring scale, with average agreement of 85%. There were only very small differences between the research skills experience of those whose training was provided through a doctoral training centre and those whose was not, with negligible effect sizes.

*Professional development:* Average agreement was 76%, and it is very encouraging to see that four-fifths of students had taken ownership of their own professional development during their programme. 69% of respondents had developed contacts or professional networks which was the lowest score for this scale.

*Opportunities:* There is limited variation in professional development opportunities between discipline cluster, although health sciences (56%) and STEM students (54%) are more likely to say they have received training to develop transferable skills than respondents from the social sciences (39%) and arts and humanities (37%). While the proportion of students receiving advice on career options increases with year group it is concerning to find that up to 60% of students may never have this opportunity.

*Teaching:* Just over half of students (52%) had taught or demonstrated at their institution during their research degree programme, rising to 61% in STEM subject areas. Of those who had experienced teaching or demonstrating, 62% had received formal training and 57% agreed they had received appropriate support and guidance for teaching.

*Motivations:* Interest in the subject and improving prospects for an academic research career are the top two motivations for students. While 59% of respondents anticipate a career in higher education, this ranges from 53% of UK domiciled students to 68% of non-EU students.

### Using PRES for enhancement

Student surveys are only worthwhile if the results are used – and used well – to inform quality enhancement. PRES provides a vital initial indicator of where to look for best practice and where enhancement is required, but it is always important to triangulate survey results with other sources – and types – of information. It is recommended that further qualitative insights are obtained from students to drill down into specific issues.

The Higher Education Academy provides resources, events and bespoke consultancy to help departments, institutions and sector bodies use survey data to inform enhancement. Please visit www.heacademy.ac.uk/pres for more information or contact surveys@heacademy.ac.uk or call 01904 717500 to discuss your requirements.

## About the authors

### Dr Paul Bennett

Paul Bennett is Head of Surveys at the HEA where he oversees the delivery and analysis of the HEA's postgraduate experience surveys, as well as the wider support, research and consultancy services that the HEA Surveys team provides to the higher education sector at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. He is regularly invited to speak about the use of student surveys and the implications for policy, practice and enhancement. Prior to joining the HEA, Paul was a senior researcher and analyst in the Scottish Government and, before that, lecturer in Economic Geography for nine years at the University of Edinburgh, where he still occasionally teaches. He holds a BA and DPhil from the University of Oxford and an MSc from the University of Bristol.

### Dr Gosia Turner

Gosia worked as the Survey Co-ordinator for the Higher Education Academy, where she participated in creating PTES, PRES and other surveys. After she found out that UK postgraduate students have such a good experience, she left the HEA to pursue a PhD. Gosia currently works as senior statistical analyst in the Student Data Management and Analysis team at the University of Oxford. She holds a PhD in Social Statistics from the University of Southampton, an MA in Sociology and Economics from the University of Essex and a BA in Sociology from Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, Poland.

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Thanks are especially due to the PRES officers and their colleagues who support the delivery of the survey in institutions, and to all the postgraduate researchers who took the time to respond to PRES 2013.

# 1. Introduction to PRES 2013

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) took place in 122 higher education institutions in the UK between 5 March and 16 May 2013. A total of 48,401 postgraduate researchers took part, comprising 41.9% of those eligible, and representing a significant increase on previous years. (In 2011 31,102 postgraduates from 102 institutions took part, with a response rate of 32.0%.)

In advance of PRES 2013, the questionnaire instrument was redesigned to bring it up-to-date and meet the current and future needs of the higher education sector. It was also made more manageable for respondents and for users of the results. More information about the redevelopment is provided in section 2.

This report presents the UK findings from PRES 2013, aggregating results from the 122 diverse and broadly representative higher education institutions (HEIs) that took part, and giving us the most comprehensive ever picture of the postgraduate research experience in the UK.

## 1.1 The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

PRES is a biennial survey designed to collect feedback from postgraduate researchers about their experiences of their programme and their development as researchers. Although PhD students constitute about 80% of respondents, the survey is also answered by students taking postgraduate certificates and diplomas.

PRES is run by the Higher Education Academy in conjunction with participating institutions. The HEA provides the main template (which has been tested both qualitatively and quantitatively), as well as guidance, resources and support, while institutions are able to add their own bespoke questions and directly invite their students to take part. PRES is overseen by the PRES Advisory Group, whose members include both senior decision makers and operational staff from HEIs and other sector bodies.

| Key features |
|---|
| • Fully tested, standard online survey instrument |
| • Enhancement focus |
| • Institutions can add their own questions |
| • Implemented locally |
| • Institutions' results are confidential |
| • Benchmarking groups available |

PRES is designed for *enhancement,* aiming to inform discussions and decisions about improvements to the experience of postgraduate researchers. Institutional-level results are confidential, so cannot be used to form league tables. This gives institutions the freedom to treat survey results as useful but partial indicators of where things might be going well and not so well. Their effective use in enhancement requires interpretation in conjunction with other more detailed (often qualitative) information from students and staff.

Nonetheless, comparing results can help institutions and subject areas understand where they might need to focus. PRES participants have access to eight benchmarking groups, enabling comparisons with the collective results of the institutions in each group, while keeping individual results confidential.

| UK Benchmarking groups | |
|---|---|
| Pre-1992 | million+ |
| Post-1992 | 1994 Group |
| Small and Specialist | Russell Group |
| Scottish | University Alliance |

PRES is also available for use internationally, allowing participants to compare their own results with those of the UK higher education sector and, in due course, international benchmarking will be made available.

## 1.2 Statistical note

In certain sections in this report the differences between various student groups are evaluated statistically. Depending on the type of variables being tested, different statistical tests have been employed. The chi-square test provides information whether two categorical variables, eg part-time/full-time and agree/neutral/disagree, are independent (there is no relationship between the two) or not (there is a relationship between the two).

Two further tests have been used in this report - independent samples t-test and ANOVA. These tests are used when one continuous variable (eg mean scale score) is paired with one categorical variable, eg fee status. The independent samples t-test has been used to compare the mean scales scores between distant and face-to-face learners. The ANOVA test is used if the categorical variable has more than two categories, eg fee status (home, other EU, non EU). In simple terms, both tests work in the same way by comparing the variability within the group (mean scales scores variability among distant learners and mean scale scores variability among face-to-face learners) with the variability between the groups (difference between all distant learners and face-to-face learners). The test result shows if the mean scale scores are statistically significantly different between the groups.

Because of the large sample size for PRES, many of the results are statistically significant even where observed differences are very small. Where possible, effect sizes have been calculated from t-test or ANOVA results to give an indication of the substantive importance of differences between groups. An Eta-squared value of between 0.01 and 0.06 is generally taken to indicate the effect size is small. A value of less than 0.01 (which would indicate the variable explains less than 1% of variance in experience) is regarded as a negligible effect, even where it is statistically significant.

Note that estimates of statistical significance should be treated with caution because PRES does not use a random sample but adopts a census approach which attempts to survey every student in the relevant population. Like many surveys (even those which attempt a random sample) it is vulnerable to non-response bias which is not accounted for in statistical significance testing. Further, the derivation of continuous variables from categorical Likert scales is not without controversy given that the 'distance' between categories (such as 'definitely agree', 'mostly agree' and 'neither agree nor disagree') cannot be assumed to be the same. These are used in the correlation, regression, t-test and ANOVA tests in this report as well as in the descriptive reporting of scale means. The statistics reported should therefore be regarded as indicative.

# 2. Redesign of PRES

The PRES questionnaire underwent a major redevelopment and redesign in advance of the 2013 survey to bring it up-to-date, ensure it is robust, and make it more manageable and useful to institutions. Significant changes include:

- shortening the questionnaire through the removal of a range of scales and individual items;
- introducing new scales and items which increase the focus on research skills and professional development;
- improving the wording of many questions;
- standardising scales;
- introducing free-text comments boxes for each main question scale.

The original PRES had been piloted in the UK in 2006 and first took place nationally in 2007. It was based on the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), an Australian post-graduation survey, which was adapted for use with on-programme students in a UK context. Since 2006, there have been some significant developments in postgraduate research, including the introduction of the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) by Vitae and Chapter B11 (Research Degrees) of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education by the QAA. Additionally, feedback from some institutions indicated concern over the length of the survey and the possible impact of this on response rates and institutions' ability to handle the amount of data generated.

In summer 2012, the Higher Education Academy embarked on a programme of research and consultation to ensure any changes to the questionnaire were evidence-based and informed the needs of the sector. The redesign was based on a careful, statistically-informed analysis of the earlier PRES datasets, as well as qualitative testing of existing and newly proposed questions. This allowed us to retain the ability to capture key areas of the postgraduate experience and to compare results directly with some of those obtained in PRES 2011, but also licensed a significant reduction in length through the eradication of duplicated questions.

## 2.1 Approach to redesign

The redesign focused on the first half of the PRES questionnaire (which asks students about their experience) rather than the second half (which asks factual questions about students' backgrounds and their programmes) although some minor changes were made to the latter. The programme of research and consultation involved:

**Quantitative analysis of the national PRES datasets from previous years.** This analysis (which included factor analysis, internal consistency testing and inter-item correlations) identified redundancy in the survey – ie questions which effectively duplicated the results of other questions. It also looked for opportunities to compress multiple scales into one. Additionally, questions with unusually low response rates were identified as candidates for removal.

**Cognitive testing of questions with (and by) postgraduate researchers.** The HEA commissioned researchers at the University of Glasgow to lead an innovative programme of qualitative testing of both existing and newly proposed questions with postgraduate researchers. To ensure wide coverage, interviewing was devolved (with appropriate training and quality management) to postgraduate researchers with relevant skills in 16 institutions across the UK. These researchers conducted cognitive interviews with their peers to test that their understanding and interpretation of questions was consistent and as intended. A wide range of student groups across disciplines were interviewed, including international and part-time students and distance learners. Significant changes were made to existing and proposed questions as a result of this research.

**Consultation with Higher Education Institutions and Sector Bodies.** Initially, all institutions having used PRES were consulted by Vitae on behalf of the HEA about their use of the survey. A number of institutions were then consulted in depth, the HEA worked with Vitae to examine potential alignment with the Research Development Framework and a draft set of proposals was developed. All institutions were then given the opportunity to comment on the proposals in autumn 2012, with final decisions on the design of the survey made by the PRES Advisory Group in late November 2012. This group, chaired by Professor Matt Lambon Ralph from the University of Manchester, includes representatives from a range of institutions, as well as NUS, Research Councils UK, Vitae, QAA and the HEA. The Higher Education Academy is grateful for the contribution of everyone who had an input into the redesign.

## 2.2 Enhanced focus on researcher development

| Experience scales |
|---|
| • Supervision |
| • Resources |
| • Research community |
| • Progress and assessment |
| • Responsibilities |
| • Research skills |
| • Professional development |

The new experience section comprises seven main question scales, each containing four items and an additional written comments option. There is a further section on the development opportunities experienced (including the opportunity to teach) and a final section on overall satisfaction and expected timeliness of completion. The questionnaire also asks about students' motivations and anticipated career, and obtains information about their programme and demographic background.

The new PRES has an enhanced focus on researcher development. The improvement of both research and professional skills (recognising that for those progressing to a research career there is often little distinction) has gained increasing prominence in the sector since PRES was first introduced, and the redesigned survey examines support, opportunities and outcomes. This has been informed by the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and, indeed, PRES provides one way in which institutions might monitor progress against key RDF domains. New researcher development questions are set out below while the full questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2.

| Supervision | |
|---|---|
| **Q1 d** | My supervisor/s help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher |

| Research skills | |
|---|---|
| **Q11 a** | My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme |
| **Q11 b** | My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme |
| **Q11 c** | My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme |
| **Q11 d** | My understanding of 'research integrity' (eg rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during my programme |

| Professional development | |
|---|---|
| **Q13 a** | My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme |
| **Q13 b** | My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme |
| **Q13 c** | I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme |
| **Q13 d** | I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme |

| Opportunities | |
|---|---|
| **Q15** | Please indicate which of the following opportunities you have experienced during your research degree programme (select all that apply):<br>○ Agreeing a personal training or development plan<br>○ Receiving training to develop my research skills<br>○ Receiving training to develop my transferable skills<br>○ Receiving advice on career options<br>○ Taking part in a placement or internship<br>○ Attending an academic research conference<br>○ Presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference<br>○ Submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal or book<br>○ Communicating your research to a non-academic audience |

| Teaching | |
|---|---|
| **Q16** | Please indicate whether you have taught (or demonstrated) at your institution during your research degree programme (Y/N)<br>If yes, to what extent do you agree that you have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching?<br>Did you receive formal training for your teaching? |

## 2.3 Quantitative testing of the new question scales

While the new questionnaire is structured into logical thematic scales informed by the quantitative analysis of the original PRES, and robustly tested qualitatively, the changes to the experience scales were so extensive that we could not confirm in advance that each of the seven new scales constituted a coherent and distinct 'factor'. This is important because the four items in each scale are intended to *collectively* give a coherent picture of each aspect of experience, which should be more reliable than relying on the results to individual items. Factor analysis and internal consistency testing were thus performed on the seven main scales using the national 2013 dataset to check whether it was legitimate to summarise each questionnaire scale with a single score (or whether there was actually a different set of factors at work that deviated from the visual questionnaire structure).

### Factor analysis

| **Scales which are distinct factors and should be reported using a single scale score from four items** |
|---|
| Supervision |
| Resources |
| Research community |

| **Scales which are strongly related and can *either* be reported as four scale scores *or* as two eight-item scales** |
|---|
| Progress and assessment **and** Responsibilities |
| Research skills **and** Professional development |

A factor analysis using the principal components method was conducted involving all 28 items from the seven main question scales (questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13). The analysis reveals factors that reflect the structure of the questionnaire and suggest that it is legitimate to report a single scale score for each of the seven scales. However, it also found an optimal five-factor solution, in which the final four question scales can be combined into two for the purposes of reporting and analysis.

For reporting purposes it is most straightforward and meaningful to report on each of the seven scales separately. However, for some analyses (such as examining the impact of each scale on overall experience, as is undertaken in this report) it is necessary to combine the final four scales into two factors as their impact individually cannot be isolated.

### Internal consistency

To check the internal consistency of each scale (ie the extent to which the four items 'hang-together' and provide a coherent measure of the scale theme) the Cronbach's alpha of each scale was calculated and the results are shown in Table 2.1.

A minimum Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 is normally sought with values of 0.8 or more desirable as they show strong internal consistency. All seven of the scales in PRES (plus the two larger combined scales) have Cronbach's alpha scores that exceed 0.8, suggesting that single scale scores are legitimate and coherent measures for each of the aspects of experience.

| Scale | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|
| Supervision | 0.901 |
| Resources | 0.820 |
| Research community | 0.838 |
| Progress and assessment | 0.852 |
| Responsibilities | 0.808 |
| Research skills | 0.890 |
| Professional development | 0.830 |
| Progress and assessment and Responsibilities (combined) | 0.890 |
| Research skills and Professional development (combined) | 0.905 |

**Table 2.1 Internal consistency of new scales**

## 2.4 Making comparisons with previous years

The scale of changes requested by stakeholders together with the results of cognitive testing mean that only some of the experience questions in PRES 2013 are comparable with those from PRES 2011 and earlier. Questions which are the same as or modified from 2011 are set out in Table 2.2. It is not advisable to compare scale scores between 2011 and 2013 because of the change in content of each scale. Modified questions should be compared with care as even minor changes can alter response patterns.

| No. | Wording | Change |
|---|---|---|
| **Q1 a** | a. My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to ~~adequately~~ support my research | modified |
| **Q3 a** | a. I have a suitable working space | **same** |
| **Q3 b** | b. There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities | **same** |
| **Q3 c** | c. There is adequate provision of library facilities **(including physical and online resources)** | **modified** |
| **Q5 a** | a. My department provides a good seminar programme for ~~research students~~ | **modified** |
| **Q5 c** | c. The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work | **same** |
| **Q7 b** | b. I understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress | **same** |
| **Q7 c** | c. I understand the required standard for my thesis | **same** |
| **Q9 a** | a. My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students | **same** |
| **Q9 b** | b. I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student | **same** |
| **Q9 c** | c. I am aware of my **supervisors'** ~~institution's~~ responsibilities towards me as a research degree student | **modified** |
| **Q9 d** | d. **Other than my supervisor/s,** I know who to approach, ~~or where to find this out,~~ if I am concerned about any aspect of my degree programme | **modified** |
| **Q17 b** | b. I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme ~~more or less~~ within ~~the planned~~ **my institution's** expected timescale | **modified** |

**Table 2.2: Experience items that are the same as or slightly modified from PRES 2011**

## 2.5 'Reversed scale' effect

There was some evidence from institutions that a small minority of students had misinterpreted the direction of the answer scales. In the majority of cases this was found to be confined to the 'incomplete responses' in which the student realised their mistake and stopped answering the survey before submitting the final page. These answers, by default, are excluded from the national and institutional datasets. Students who reported doing this were then usually issued with a new username and given the opportunity to complete the survey again.

The possibility remained that some students had completed full responses containing errors. The national dataset was analysed for unusual response patterns which shifted from consistently negative (or positive) responses to consistently positive (or negative) responses in later scales. In total, 568 respondents (1.2% of the sample) were identified as those who can be reasonably considered to have made a mistake when completing the questionnaire (in other words, they switched their responses at some early point). For the purposes of analysis these responses have been removed from the national dataset (and also from the analyses provided by the HEA to institutions).

The provision of a facility in the online survey software to go backwards and make corrections will significantly reduce this effect next time and further guidance on the scale direction will be provided to respondents. The HEA will also consider reversing the direction of the scale responses. Interestingly the effect was much more limited in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) despite it using the same scales, direction and online structure, and the HEA will explore the reasons for this further.

# 3. Profile of respondents

## 3.1 Response rates

A total of 48,401 postgraduate research students in 122 institutions took part in PRES 2013, representing 41.9% of all the students invited to take part in those institutions. This represents a major increase on the response rate in previous years, with Table 3.1 showing how response rates have changed since PRES first took place nationally in the UK in 2007.

| Year | HEIs | Responses | Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | 58 | 10,544 | 25.2% |
| 2008 | 73 | 16,524 | 28.9% |
| 2009 | 82 | 18,644 | 28.6% |
| 2011 | 102 | 31,202 | 32.0% |
| **2013** | **122** | **48,401** | **41.9%** |

**Table 3.1: UK response rates for PRES, 2007-2013**

The top response rate for an individual institution was 95.3% and a quarter of institutions had response rates of 49.4% or higher, with more detail shown in Table 3.2. Although small and specialist institutions are slightly over-represented in the top quartile of response rates, the top response rate for a larger institution was 66.8%. These response rates reflect a significant amount of work by PRES officers and their colleagues in institutions, as well as by academic staff in encouraging their students to respond.

| | Rate |
|---|---|
| Top of the range | 95.3% |
| Larger institution (>750 expected) | 66.8% |
| Upper quartile | 49.4% |
| Median | 40.4% |
| Lower quartile | 33.3% |

**Table: 3.2 Institutional response rates for PRES 2013**

## 3.2 Representativeness of respondents

Although 41.9% is a high response rate for an online survey, it still leaves the question of whether respondents' views are representative of all postgraduate researchers. While we cannot be sure about this, it is possible at least to compare the demographic profile of respondents with the profile of demographic groups in the whole postgraduate researcher population (as Full Person Equivalent recorded by HESA in the previous year). Of course, just because respondents may share the same demographic group as non-respondents, does not mean they hold the same views.

| | PRES 2013 | HESA 2011/12 |
|---|---|---|
| **Male** | 50.1% | 53.4% |
| **Female** | 49.9% | 46.6% |
| **N** | 46,644 | 109,035 |

**Table 3.3: Profile of respondents, by gender**

Table 3.3 shows that female students are slightly over-represented in the PRES sample compared with their presence in the postgraduate researcher population. Females have a greater tendency to respond to social surveys and so this over-representation does not raise any particular concerns about PRES, but small gender effects may be present in the results.

| | PRES 2013 | HESA 2011/12 |
|---|---|---|
| **UK** | 58.9% | 59.2% |
| **Other EU** | 12.2% | 12.9% |
| **Non EU** | 28.9% | 28.0% |
| **N** | 46,818 | 109,070 |

**Table 3.4: Profile of respondents, by domicile**

Table 3.4 shows that PRES respondents closely mirror the profile of all postgraduate research students by broad domicile. However, table 3.5 suggests that part-time students are somewhat under-represented in the survey sample. It is important for institutions to bear in mind this under-representation in the sample, particularly where the experiences of full-time and part-time students diverge.

| | PRES 2013 | HESA 2011/12 |
|---|---|---|
| **Full-time** | 80.4% | 72.4% |
| **Part-time** | 19.6% | 27.6% |
| **N** | 46,931 | 109,055 |

**Table 3.5: Profile of respondents, by mode of study**

| | PRES 2013 | HESA 2011/12 |
|---|---|---|
| **White** | 82.4% | 80.9% |
| **Black** | 2.2% | 2.9% |
| **Chinese and Chinese British** | 1.9% | 1.5% |
| **Asian or Asian British -- Indian, Pakistani or** | 2.9% | 4.0% |
| **Asian or Asian British -- Other Asian background** | 1.2% | 1.9% |
| **Mixed background** | 2.5% | 4.4% (Other) |
| **Arab** | 1.7% | |
| **Other** | 1.2% | |
| **Prefer not to say/Not known** | 4.0% | 4.5% |
| **N** | 27,235 | 64,235 |

**Table 3.6: Profile of respondents, by ethnicity (UK domiciled students only)**

The profile of respondents by ethnicity shown in table 3.6 is broadly similar to the profile in the student population, but there is some under-representation of Black students and (non-Chinese) Asian or Asian British students in the survey sample.

PRES also collects a range of other demographic information about respondents, including age and disability, as well as information about their programme and discipline, whether they are in employment (and, if so, hours worked), their source of funding and their motivations. These data can then be used to analyse the results of the experience scales to examine differences in experience which may exist between different student groups. This analysis can be found in section 5.

# 4. Overall experience

## 4.1 Experience scales and overall satisfaction

| | Mean score | Standard Deviation (SD) | N | Mean % Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Supervision** | 4.32 | 0.89 | 47,631 | 84% |
| **Resources** | 4.06 | 0.88 | 47,351 | 78% |
| **Research culture** | 3.73 | 0.92 | 47,264 | 64% |
| **Progress and assessment** | 4.03 | 0.83 | 47,630 | 78% |
| **Responsibilities** | 4.05 | 0.76 | 47,541 | 78% |
| **Research skills** | 4.25 | 0.76 | 47,512 | 85% |
| **Professional development** | 4.04 | 0.77 | 47,406 | 76% |
| **Overall satisfaction (Q17a)** | 4.08 | 0.98 | 47,623 | 82% |

**Table 4.1: Overall scale results**

Table 4.1 shows summary scores for each the seven main scales (each summarising four individual question items) as well as question 17a, on overall satisfaction. The mean scores convert the answer categories into numbers, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree and average them across the four items in the scale for all students. The % agree simply collapses the 'mostly agree' and 'definitely agree' responses into a single percentage. The results show that, on average, postgraduate researchers in the UK can expect a high quality experience, with 82% of students satisfied overall and supervision and research skills development rated particularly highly. There are good levels of positivity across all the scales, but 'research culture' stands out as having a notably lower mean score and a lower % agree than the other six scales.

## 4.2 Relationships between aspects of experience and overall satisfaction

Analysis of PRES allows the relationship between the different aspects of experience to be examined, as well as the influence of the different aspects on overall satisfaction. Table 4.2 shows the relationship between the scales which have been treated as continuous variables for this analysis. All the (Pearson's r) correlations are statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, but the most substantively important relationships are between progress and assessment and responsibilities and between research skills and professional development. This is not surprising as the Factor Analysis of the new questionnaire indicated that these four scales could be collapsed into two factors. Stronger correlations suggest interesting relationships for further investigation, but there is no guarantee that

| | Supervision | Resources | Research culture | Progress and assessment | Responsibilities | Research skills | Professional development |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall satisfaction** | 0.575 | 0.421 | 0.57 | 0.535 | 0.605 | 0.575 | 0.507 |
| **Supervision** | | 0.389 | 0.458 | 0.470 | 0.537 | 0.462 | 0.379 |
| **Resources** | | | 0.465 | 0.401 | 0.455 | 0.385 | 0.345 |
| **Research culture** | | | | 0.492 | 0.578 | 0.471 | 0.485 |
| **Progress and assessment** | | | | | 0.691 | 0.531 | 0.479 |
| **Responsibilities** | | | | | | 0.566 | 0.526 |
| **Research skills** | | | | | | | 0.692 |

**Table 4.2: Correlations between the scales**

improving one dimension of experience will lead to improvements in another dimension, even where the relationship appears strong.

While there are many influences on overall satisfaction, it is reasonable to expect that the aspects of experience measured by the question scales will influence overall satisfaction. A multiple regression was thus performed in SPSS using the enter method. Because of the strong correlations between progress and assessment and responsibilities and between research skills and professional development these were amalgamated into two scales, as their individual influence cannot be distinguished. The regression found that the seven main question scales explain 54% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.537$) of variance in overall satisfaction as measured by question 17a.

| | Standardised Beta | Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| **Supervision** | .251 | p<0.001 |
| **Resources** | .046 | p<0.001 |
| **Research culture** | .197 | p<0.001 |
| **Responsibilities and Progress and assessment** (combined scales) | .201 | p<0.001 |
| **Research skills and Professional development** (combined scales) | .231 | p<0.001 |

**Table 4.3: Multiple regression between scale scores and overall satisfaction**

All scales are highly statistically significant predictors of the overall experience. The 'Standardised Beta' in Table 4.3 suggests that supervision is the most important influence, closely followed by research skills and professional development (combined due to high correlation). The resources scale was the only one found to be substantively unimportant (though still statistically significant). This is also typically the case with PTES and the NSS. While this doesn't mean that institutions can afford to ignore resources (as 'hygiene factors' students would notice if they weren't provided or were very poor), investment in enhancing learning and supervision is likely to have much greater pay offs for overall experience than investment in expensive new facilities.

## 4.3 Comparisons between 2011 and 2013

As mentioned in section 2 it is inadvisable to make comparisons at scale level between PRES 2013 and PRES 2011 because of the extent of the changes to the questionnaire. Nonetheless there are some items which have remained the same, or which have received minor modifications, where comparisons may be more legitimate. These are set out in table 4.4. Wording deletions since 2011 are struck out, and additions are shown in bold.

The results show that generally there has been an increase in the level of agreement (with positive items about their experience) between 2011 and 2013. Often this reflects a bigger reduction in the proportion of respondents with neutral views than it reflects reductions in the proportion disagreeing.

It should be borne in mind that even small changes in wording can have an impact on response – for example the addition of 'including physical and online resources' may explain the increase in positivity about library resources. Note also that the number of institutions participating in PRES increased from 102 in 2011 to 122 in 2013 so differences in results may also reflect changes in the profile of institutions participating.

| Question wording 2013 showing changes from 2011 | Year | Disagree | Neutral | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1a. My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to ~~adequately~~ support my research | 2013 | 6.1% | 3.3% | 90.6% |
| | 2011 | 5.4% | 7.0% | 87.5% |
| Q3a. I have a suitable working space | 2013 | 14.0% | 9.5% | 76.6% |
| | 2011 | 14.1% | 13.6% | 72.4% |
| Q3b. There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities | 2013 | 12.4% | 9.8% | 77.9% |
| | 2011 | 12.0% | 15.1% | 72.9% |
| Q3c. There is adequate provision of library facilities **(including physical and online resources)** | 2013 | 9.4% | 8.1% | 82.5% |
| | 2011 | 9.9% | 13.7% | 76.4% |
| Q5a. My department provides a good seminar programme for ~~research students~~ | 2013 | 10.7% | 16.1% | 73.3% |
| | 2011 | 14.4% | 20.3% | 65.2% |
| Q5c. The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work | 2013 | 15.4% | 22.5% | 62.1% |
| | 2011 | 17.9% | 23.9% | 54.0% |
| Q7b. I understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress | 2013 | 7.3% | 7.7% | 85.0% |
| | 2011 | 8.6% | 14.9% | 76.9% |
| Q7c. I understand the required standard for my thesis | 2013 | 8.7% | 11.8% | 79.4% |
| | 2011 | 8.2% | 16.8% | 75.0% |
| Q9a. My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students | 2013 | 10.9% | 29.6% | 59.6% |
| | 2011 | 14.6% | 28.2% | 57.3% |
| Q9b. I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student | 2013 | 3.8% | 7.6% | 88.6% |
| | 2011 | 5.8% | 14.1% | 80.2% |
| Q9c. I am aware of my **supervisors'** ~~institution's~~ responsibilities towards me as a research degree student | 2013 | 5.6% | 8.0% | 86.4% |
| | 2011 | 13.1% | 24.1% | 62.8% |
| Q9 d. **Other than my supervisor/s,** I know who to approach, ~~or where to find this out,~~ if I am concerned about any aspect of my degree programme | 2013 | 11.9% | 11.7% | 76.5% |
| | 2011 | 14.9% | 20.5% | 64.6% |
| Q16a. **If yes,** [to what extent do you agree that you have] been given **appropriate** ~~adequate~~ support and guidance for [your] teaching? | 2013 | 29.0% | 14.1% | 56.9% |
| | 2011 | 23.9% | 25.0% | 51.1% |
| Q17b. I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme ~~more or less~~ within ~~the planned~~ **my institution's** expected timescale | 2013 | 7.9% | 11.5% | 80.5% |
| | 2011 | 10.1% | 16.7% | 73.3% |

**Table 4.4: Comparison of results between 2011 and 2013 – items that are the same or that have minor modifications**

# 5. Variations in experience by student group

A key question for all types of (inter)national student surveys is the relationship between student characteristics and experience. Where the effects of student characteristics on experience are large (including discipline, gender, domicile, and mode and year of study) these may call into question comparisons between institutions with different student profiles and across disciplines within an institution. That said, it is not the intention of this analysis to help departments explain away poor results. Effect sizes are generally quite modest. And, in any case, where the experience of a particular group is less positive, it means the needs of those students are not being met and enhancing their experience should be a high priority.

It is important to note that the analyses in this section are generally bivariate and do not test for causal relationships. That is, while 'experience' can be assumed to be the dependent variable, the existence of a relationship with, say, mode of study does not necessarily mean that mode of study is behind the variation in experience. After all, part-time students are also more likely to be older, female, distance learners and in employment – any or all of which may drive experience.

## 5.1 Discipline

While individual institutions are able to map results to their own structure, at a national level (and for benchmarking) we need to use a generic subject classification and this year moved to using the 36 units of assessment for the Research Excellence Framework (REF). As well as providing a more meaningful and balanced classification for postgraduate researchers (compared with the previous JACS level 2 classification), this will also allow the relationship between the experience of postgraduate researchers and research excellence to be explored following the publication of REF results in 2014-15.

Figure 5.1 shows the mean percentage agree for overall satisfaction broken down by the 36 REF discipline categories. Although the pattern is not universal, STEM and health sciences subjects in general receive greater levels of overall satisfaction than arts and humanities and social sciences, although over three-quarters of students in all subjects are satisfied. The error bars provide the range in which we are 95% confident the true level of satisfaction lies in the population (as opposed to just the respondents).

Although there do appear to be discipline effects on overall experience, these are relatively minor (it was not possible to demonstrate a substantively important effect size) and statistically significant differences only exist between the extreme ends of the graph. That said, the fact that the grouping of disciplines on the graph has some logic to it and is not purely random suggests we should not ignore discipline effects. The implication is that institutions should be careful – but not unduly so – in making comparisons among their own departments and should also examine how well a department compares with the same subject in other institutions.

| Scale | Eta squared | Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| **Supervision** | 0.004 | p<0.001 |
| **Resources** | 0.056 | p<0.001 |
| **Research culture** | 0.015 | p<0.001 |
| **Progress and assessment** | 0.004 | p<0.001 |
| **Responsibilities** | 0.003 | p<0.001 |
| **Research skills** | 0.007 | p<0.001 |
| **Professional development** | 0.010 | p<0.001 |

**Table 5.1: Effect sizes of discipline on question scales**

The effect of discipline on the main question scales was tested using an ANOVA test. While effects are statistically significant across the scales (due to the large sample size) the calculation of effect sizes revealed only very small effects of discipline on research culture and professional development, and small to medium effect of discipline on resources. (Eta-squared values of between 0.01 and 0.06 are generally taken to indicate a small effect, suggesting that between 1% and 6% of variance in the scale can be explained by the influencing factor.) While statistically significant, the effect of discipline on the other scales is substantively unimportant.

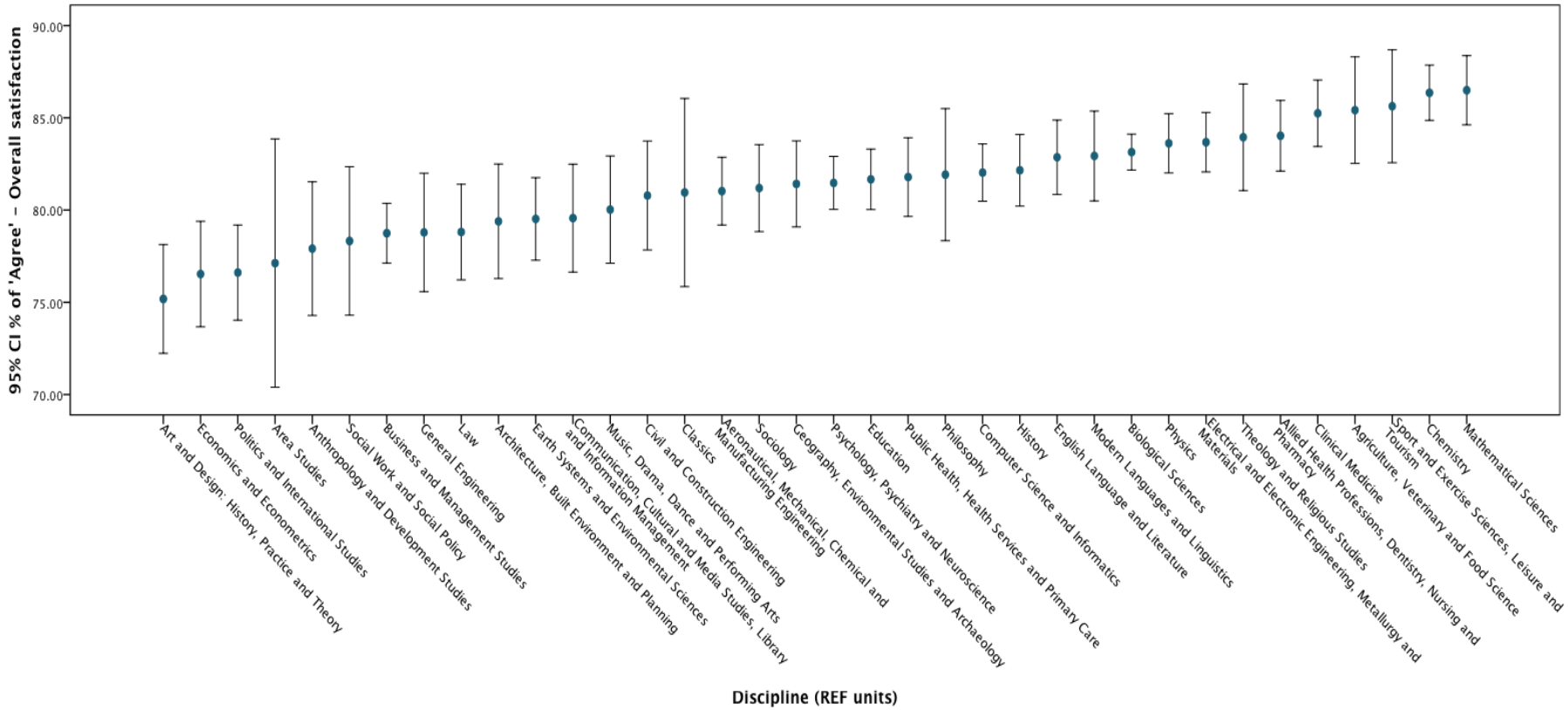



**Figure 5.1: Overall satisfaction, by discipline**

## 5.2 Gender

| | N (max) | Supervision | Resources | Research culture | Progress and assessment | Responsibilities | Research skills | Professional development | Q17a. Overall satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Male** | 23342 | 85.4% | 79.9% | 65.9% | 79.1% | 78.6% | 85.9% | 77.1% | 83.5% |
| **Female** | 23302 | 83.8% | 76.9% | 63.6% | 78.2% | 77.8% | 84.1% | 76.0% | 80.8% |

**Table 5.2: Average percentage agree for question scales, by gender**

Table 5.2 shows that 83.5% of male respondents agreed they were satisfied with their overall experience compared with 80.8% of females.

Examining the difference in mean scale scores for males and females finds all the scales except professional development have a statistically significant difference ($p<0.01$) but none of the effect sizes are substantively important (ie none have an Eta-squared greater than or equal to 0.01). Any difference in experience between genders at institutional level, then, could indicate an issue in need of enhancement.

## 5.3 Domicile

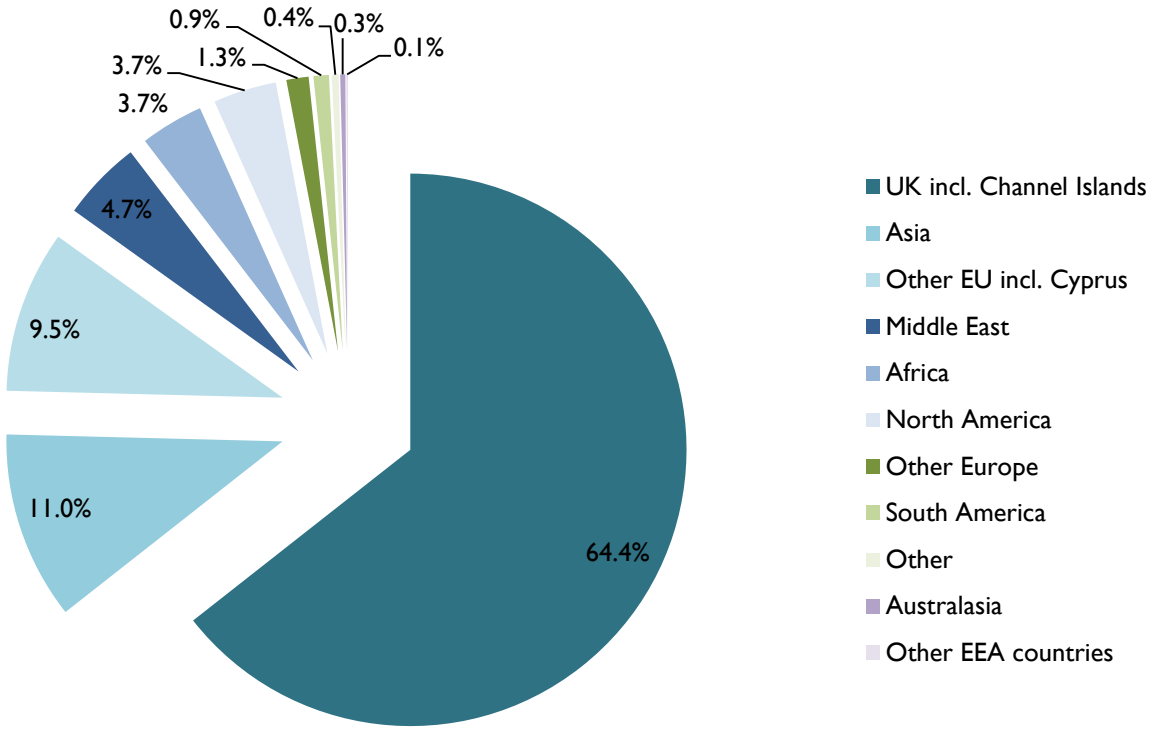



**Figure 5.2: Profile of respondents, by domicile**

| | N (Max) | Supervision | Resources | Research culture | Progress and assessment | Responsibilities | Research skills | Professional development | Q17a. Overall satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **UK** | 27580 | 83.5% | 78.9% | 65.0% | 78.0% | 76.9% | 84.7% | 76.6% | 82.3% |
| **EU** | 5716 | 83.3% | 77.6% | 63.1% | 77.3% | 77.6% | 83.2% | 74.3% | 81.3% |
| **Non-EU** | 13522 | 86.7% | 77.2% | 64.2% | 80.1% | 80.3% | 85.8% | 76.9% | 81.1% |

**Table 5.3 Average percentage agree for question scales, by broad domicile**

Figure 5.2 shows the profile of respondents to PRES by domicile, with around two-thirds citing the UK as their country of residence (this is slightly higher than the 58.9% who give their domicile as 'home' for fees purposes).

Table 5.3 suggests there are relatively small differences in experience by domicile, something that is borne out by the more detailed breakdown of overall satisfaction by major country group in figure 5.3. Although differences in experience between domicile are statistically significant ($p < 0.03$) due to the large sample size, the magnitude of differences in scale means is not substantively important with very small effect sizes as measured by Eta-squared. That said, the slightly greater positivity of students from Africa and Asia relative to those from North America (and Australasia, although there are small numbers of the latter) is a common pattern across undergraduate and postgraduate experience surveys in the UK.

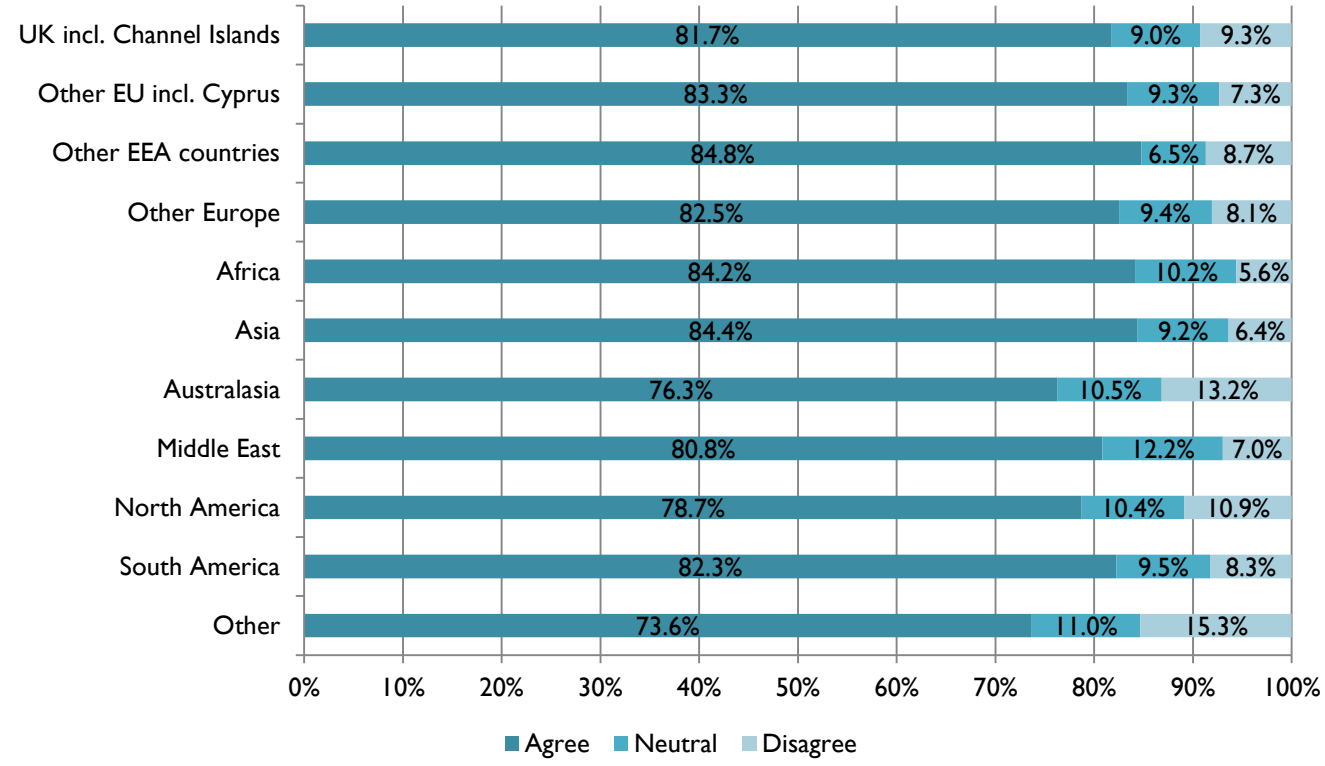



**Figure 5.3: Overall satisfaction, by country of residence group**

## 5.4 Mode of study

| | N (Max) | Supervision | Resources | Research culture | Progress and assessment | Responsibilities | Research skills | Professional development | Q17a. Overall satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Full-time** | 37735 | 84.7% | 78.8% | 65.7% | 78.3% | 78.2% | 85.0% | 77.1% | 82.1% |
| **Part-time** | 9196 | 83.2% | 75.4% | 59.1% | 79.1% | 76.8% | 84.2% | 73.3% | 80.7% |

**Table 5.4: Average percentage agree for question scales, by mode of study**

Comparison of the scale scores by mode of study shows there are only slight differences in experience between full-time and part-time students. The largest difference is for research culture whereby 59.1% of part-time students report a positive experience compared with 65.7% of full-time students. This may be because part-time students are more likely to be distance learners or, even if not, they are likely to spend a smaller proportion of their time within their department or other unit. This suggests that institutions may need to pay attention to the involvement of part-time students in the research culture and this scale is examined in more detail in section 6.3. Analysis of differences in the scale means between the groups reveals statistically significant differences, but only the effect on research culture is of substantive importance (Eta-squared = 0.012, indicating a small effect). The lack of difference across the other scales suggests that the under-representation of part-time students in the survey sample (see section 3) does not notably skew the results.

## 5.5 Year of study

The analysis in this section examines year of study – important because PRES is answered by students at any stage in their programme. While year effects may 'average out' they can be significant for individual departments that have seen growth or shrinkage in recruitment or just happen to have a particularly large or small cohort passing through.

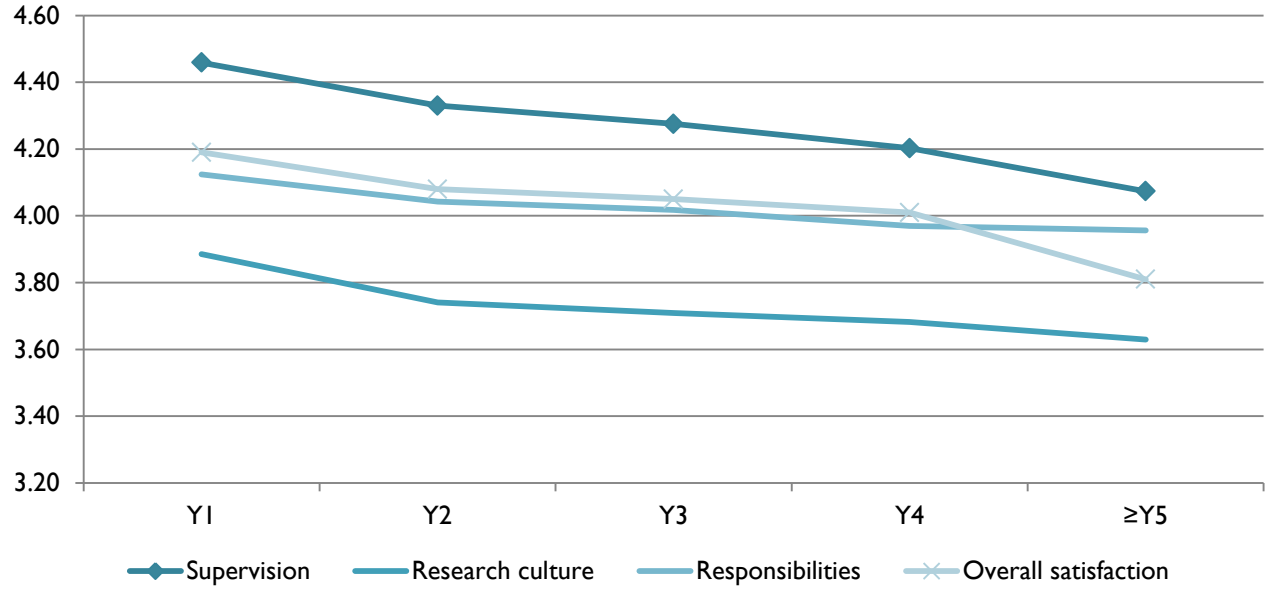
For the purposes of analysis, full-time and part-time students have been separated given that part-time students, on average, take longer to complete their programmes. That said, a student's mode of study does not always remain the same throughout their programme. Numbers of respondents in each year group are shown in table 5.5.

| Year | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 or more |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Full-time** | 11527 | 10002 | 8705 | 5690 | 1328 |

| Year | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 or more |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Part-time** | 1882 | 2050 | 1703 | 1323 | 885 | 563 | 259 | 109 | 57 |

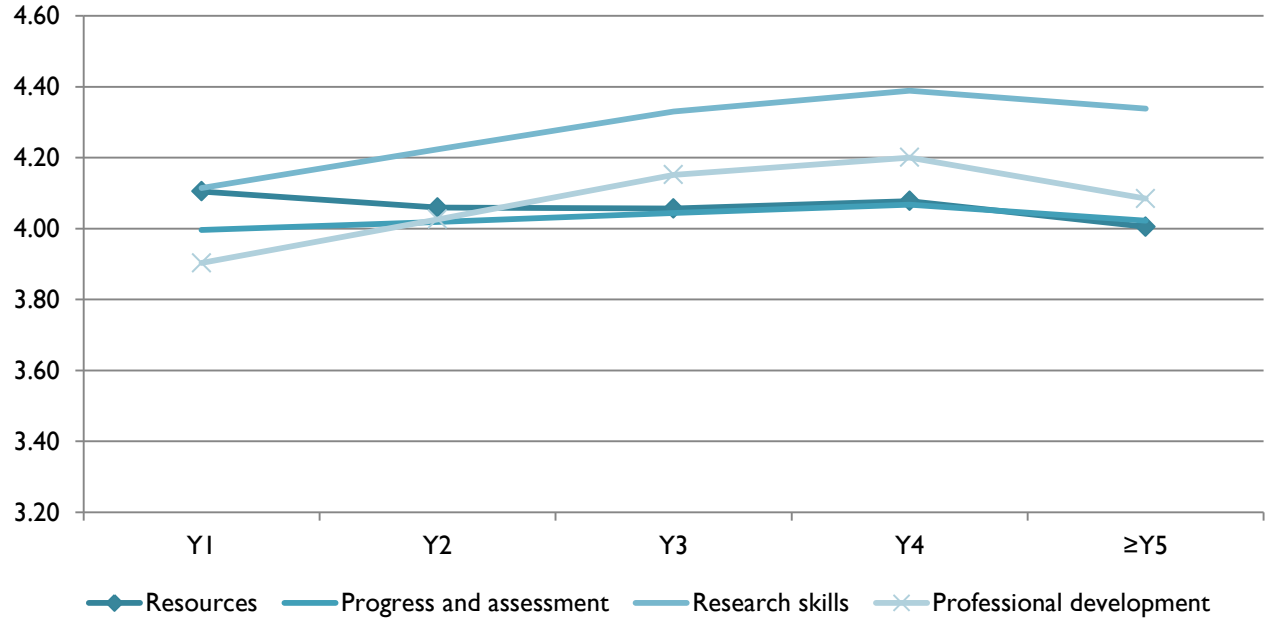
**Table 5.5: Numbers of respondents by year group and mode of study**

Figures 5.4a and b shows how mean scale scores (1= always definitely disagree and 5 = always definitely agree) vary by year group for full-time students. There is a clear decline in positivity by year group for supervision and overall satisfaction and a slightly more gradual decline in positivity for research culture and responsibilities. Conversely, there is a clear improvement in positivity for research skills and professional development as would be expected and desired, with the exception of year 5 – where students may be overdue with their submission. There is little change in positivity about resources and progress and assessment by year group. While all effects are statistically significant, year group only has a substantively important effect on professional development, research skills and supervision, although all effects are small (Table 5.5).




N = 37,098

**Figure 5.4a: Mean scale scores by year of study (full-time students only)**



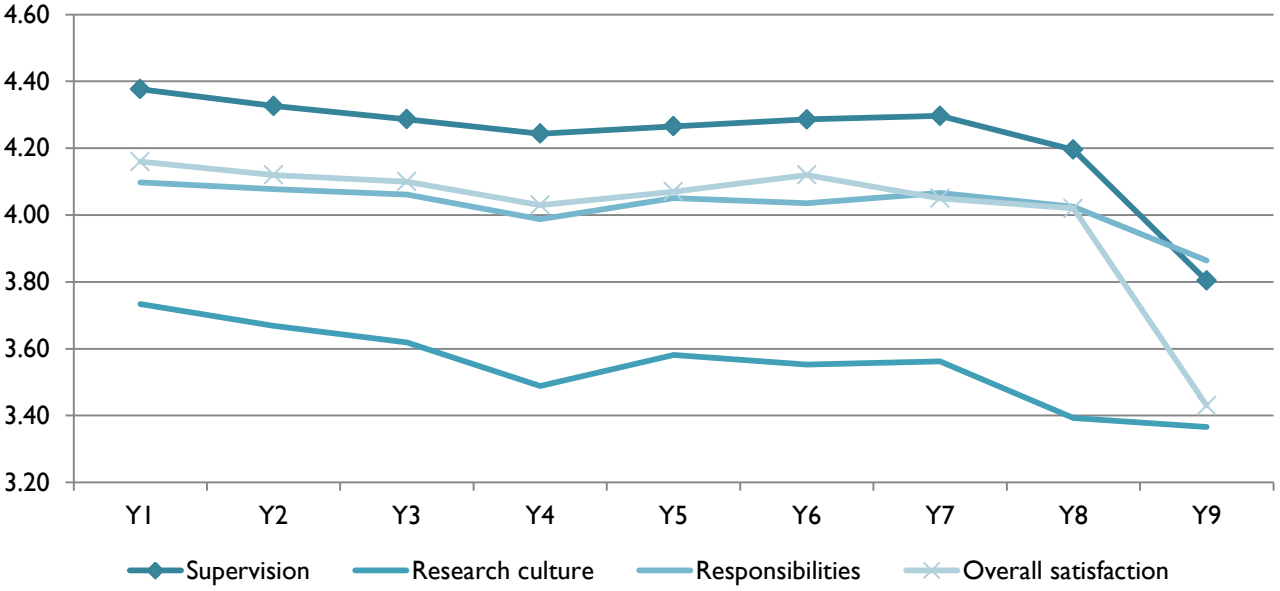

N = 37,098

**Figure 5.4b: Mean scale scores by year of study (full-time students only)**

| Scale | Eta squared | Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| **Supervision** | 0.014 | 0.000 |
| **Resources** | 0.001 | 0.000 |
| **Research culture** | 0.009 | 0.000 |
| **Progress and assessment** | 0.001 | 0.000 |
| **Responsibilities** | 0.006 | 0.000 |
| **Research skills** | 0.019 | 0.000 |
| **Professional development** | 0.023 | 0.000 |

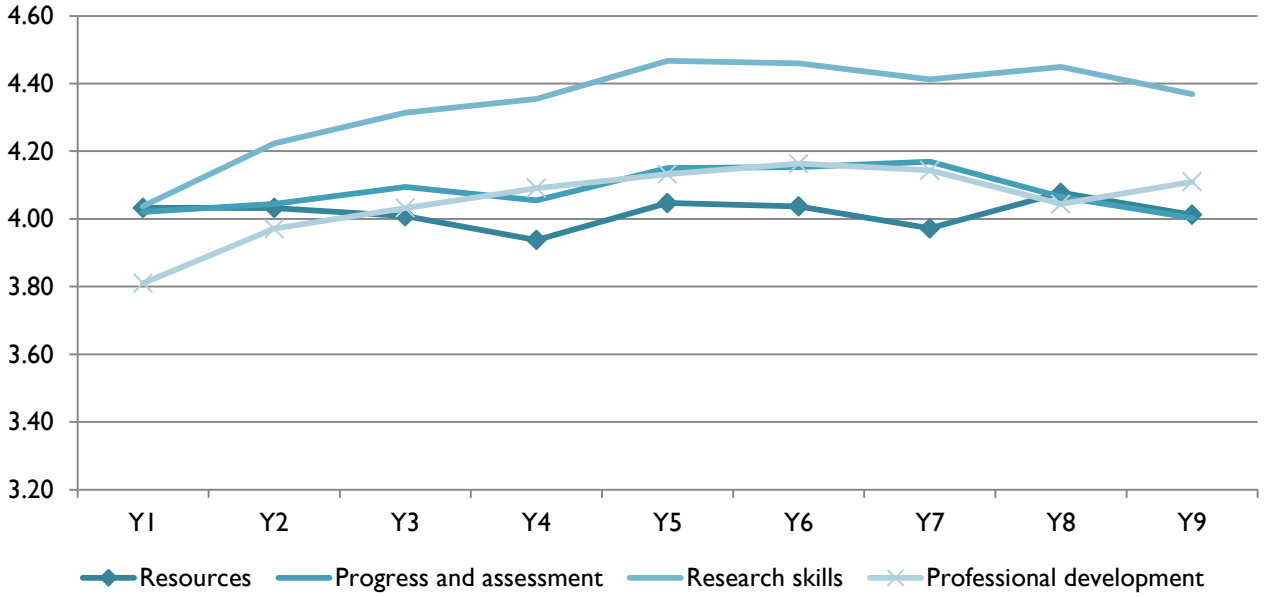
**Table 5.6: Effect sizes of year group (full-time) on question scales**

For part-time students the decline in positivity for supervision, research culture, responsibilities and overall satisfaction is much more slight and only becomes apparent for years 8 and 9 (Figure 5.5a). However, a similar increase in positivity around research skills and professional development is observed by year group (Figure 5.5b) and for part-time students it is for these two scales that year of study has a small but meaningful effect (Table 5.7).




N = 8,790

**Figure 5.5a: Mean scale scores by year of study (part-time students only)**




N = 8,790

**Figure 5.5b: Mean scale scores by year of study (part-time students only)**

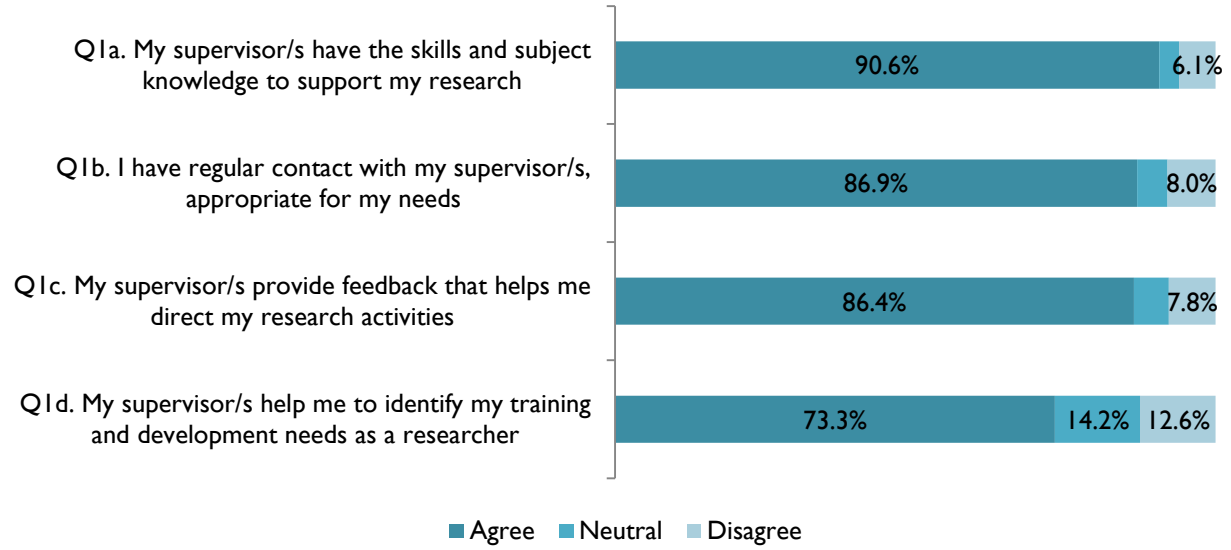
| Scale | Eta squared | Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| **Supervision** | 0.004 | p<0.001 |
| **Resources** | 0.001 | p<0.001 |
| **Research culture** | 0.008 | p<0.001 |
| **Progress and assessment** | 0.003 | p<0.001 |
| **Responsibilities** | 0.002 | p<0.001 |
| **Research skills** | 0.033 | p<0.001 |
| **Professional development** | 0.020 | p<0.001 |

**Table 5.7: Effect sizes of year group (part-time) on question scales**

# 6. Experience in detail

This section examines the experience of postgraduate researchers across the UK as measured by the individual experience items in PRES. For ease of interpretation, the five-point answer scales (ranging from 'definitely agree' to 'definitely disagree') are amalgamated into '% agree', '% neutral' and '% disagree'. A table of results can also be seen in Appendix A.

## 6.1 Supervision




N = 46,904 – 47,568

**Figure 6.1: Experience of supervision**

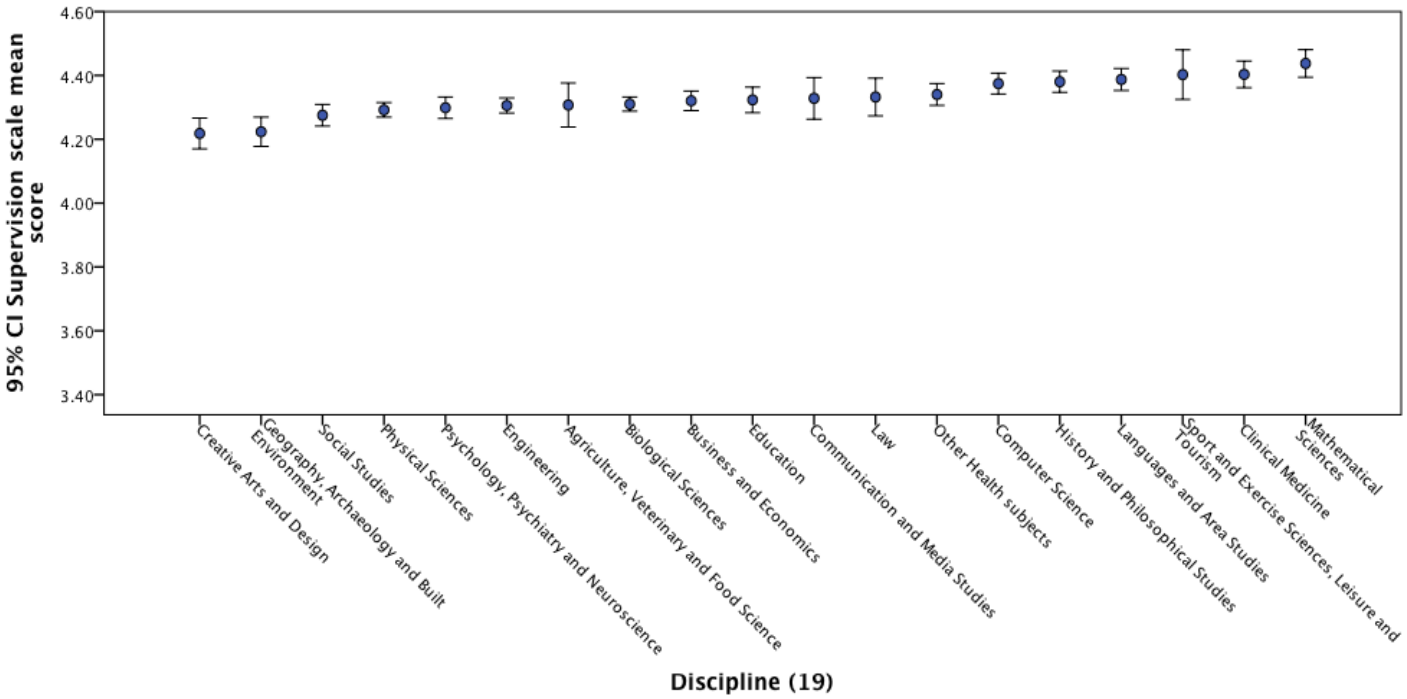


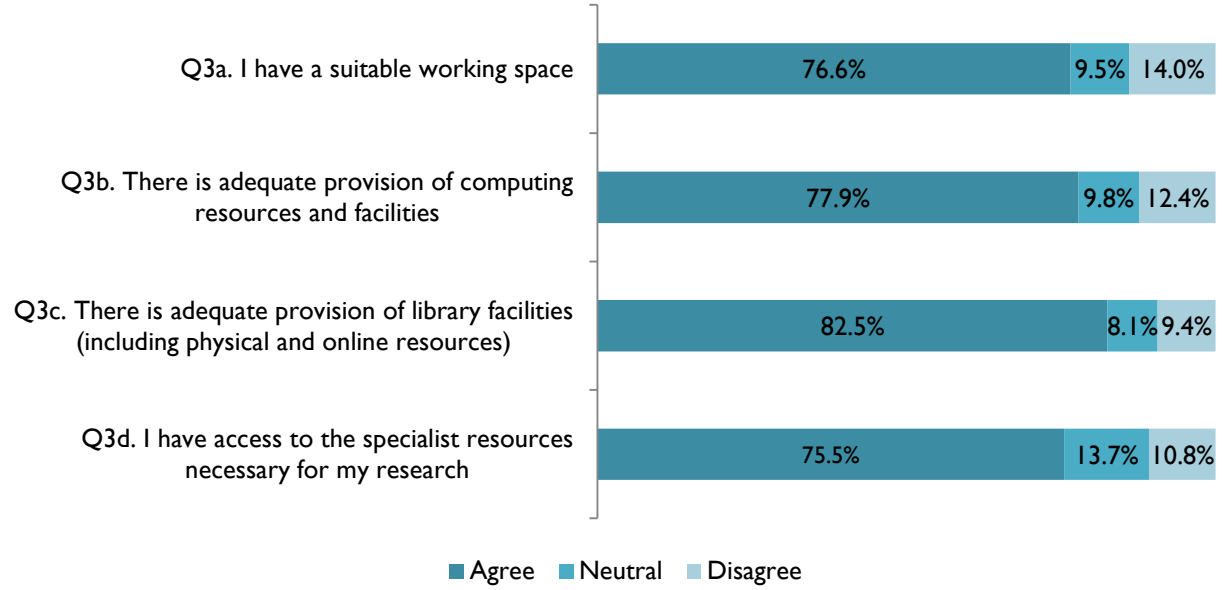

**Figure 6.2: Mean supervisor scale scores, by grouped discipline**

Figure 6.1 shows that the vast majority of students have positive experiences of supervision. New question item 1d, however, has notably lower levels of positivity that the other items in the scale, with just under three-quarters of students agreeing their supervisors help them to identify their training and development needs as a researcher.

It's possible, of course, that these needs are identified in discussions with staff other than the students' supervisors, but it would nonetheless be concerning if supervisors had no involvement in what is a core part of support for postgraduate researchers or if students were missing out on this altogether.

Figure 6.2 suggests there is only a slight relationship between discipline and experience of supervision and, indeed, the effect size was unimportant (Eta squared = 0.004). This suggests that where supervision scores are low in a particular department, it is not credible to 'explain away' the difference by pointing to disciplinary idiosyncrasies.

## 6.2 Resources




N = 44,506 – 46,794

**Figure 6.3: Experience of resources**

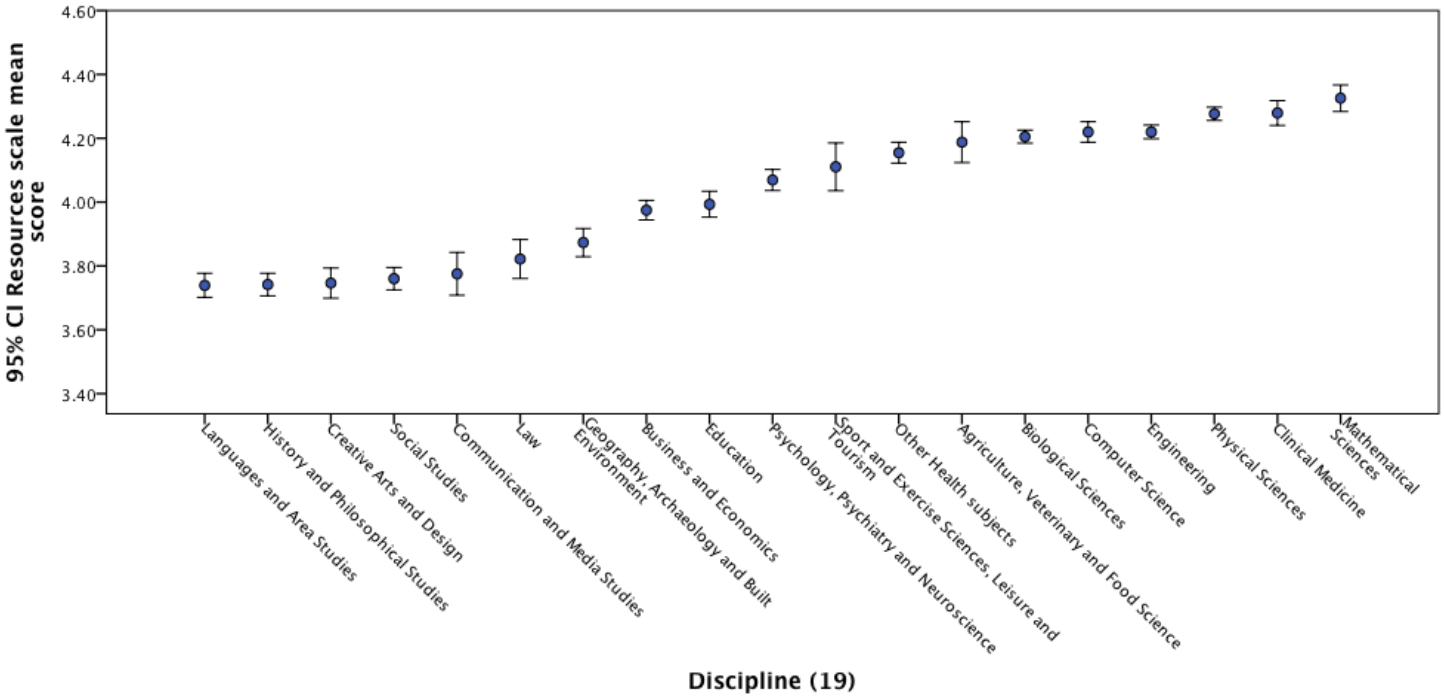
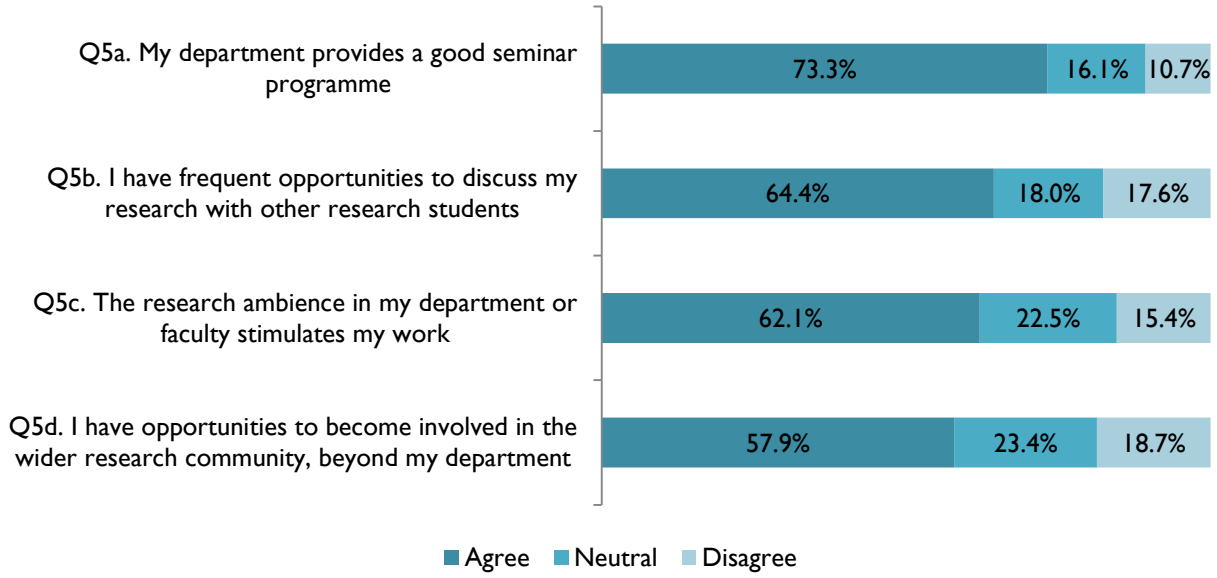



**Figure 6.4: Mean resources scale scores, by grouped discipline**

Figure 6.3 reveals generally high levels of positivity about resources, particularly library resources. Experience of resources is related to discipline, however, as figure 6.4 reveals, with higher levels of positivity – perhaps not surprisingly – among postgraduate researchers in STEM and Health Sciences disciplines. The effect size of discipline on resources is small to medium with an Eta squared value of 0.056.

## 6.3 Research culture




N = 45,649 – 46,204

**Figure 6.5: Experience of research culture**

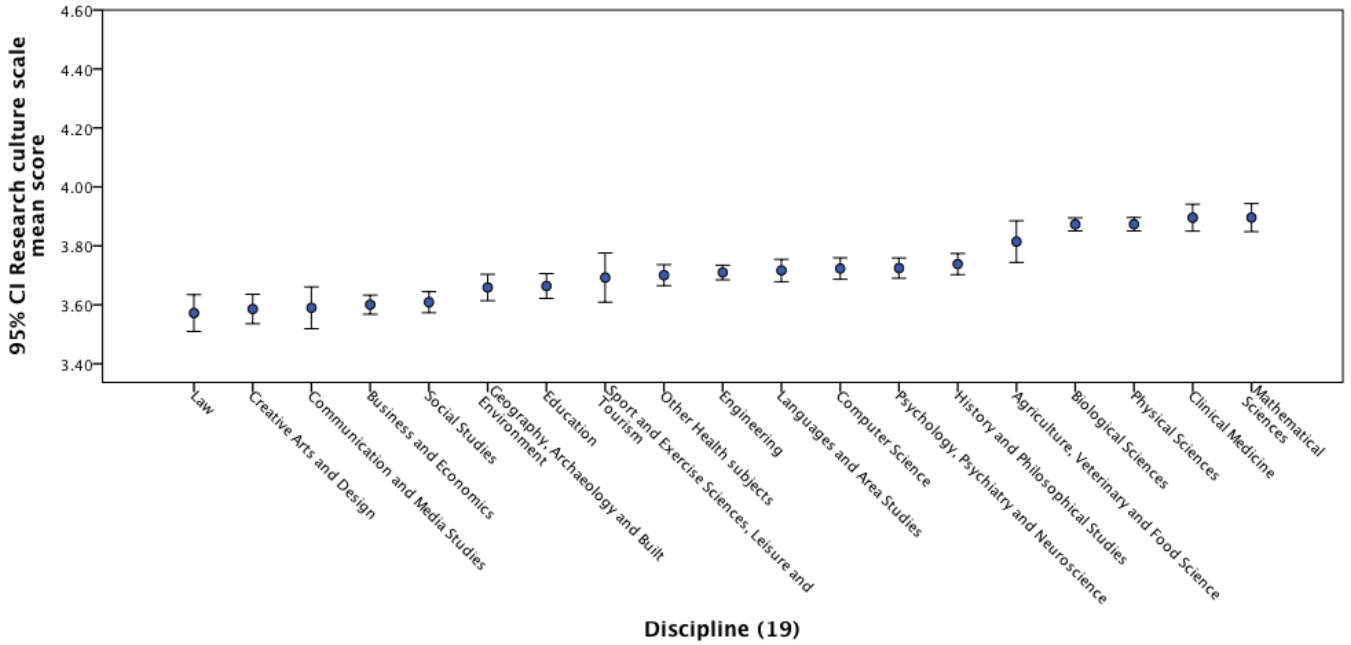


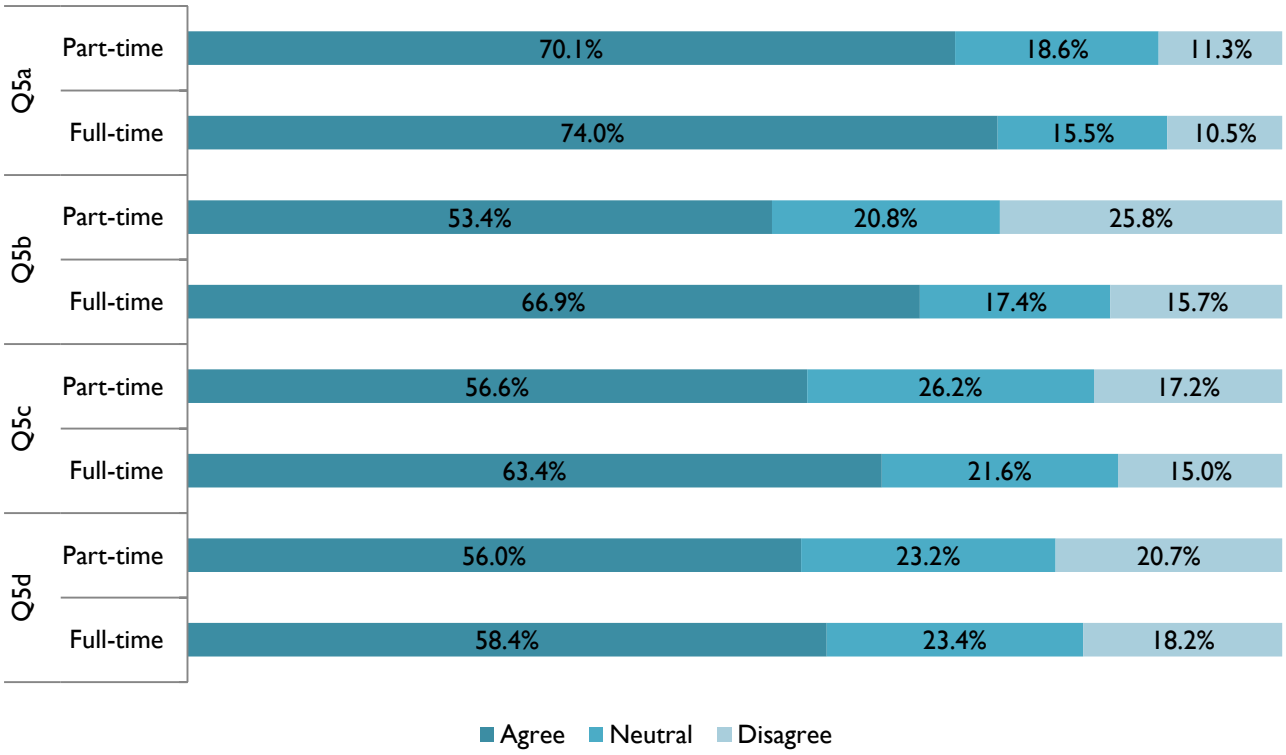

**Figure 6.6: Mean research culture scale scores, by grouped discipline**

Research culture is the lowest scoring scale and figure 6.5 shows the constituent parts of this scale. While almost three-quarters of students are positive about their department's seminar programme, positivity is substantially lower for the other items, with less than two-thirds having frequent opportunities to discuss their research with other research students. While the term 'department' is used in two items it should also be noted that students

are asked to answer with respect to the centre, school, institute or other unit where they are primarily based or attached for their research. It remains possible that items 5a and 5c underestimate positivity in very small units where opportunities for interaction may nonetheless exist across units.

Figure 6.6 shows that while slight there is a relationship between discipline and positive experience of research culture, with those students in STEM and health science subjects – where working in research teams or groups is more common – more likely to be positive than those in the arts and social sciences. The effect size is small (with an Eta-squared value of 0.012) and the difference is less than might be expected given stereotypes of the lone-researcher in the latter subject areas.

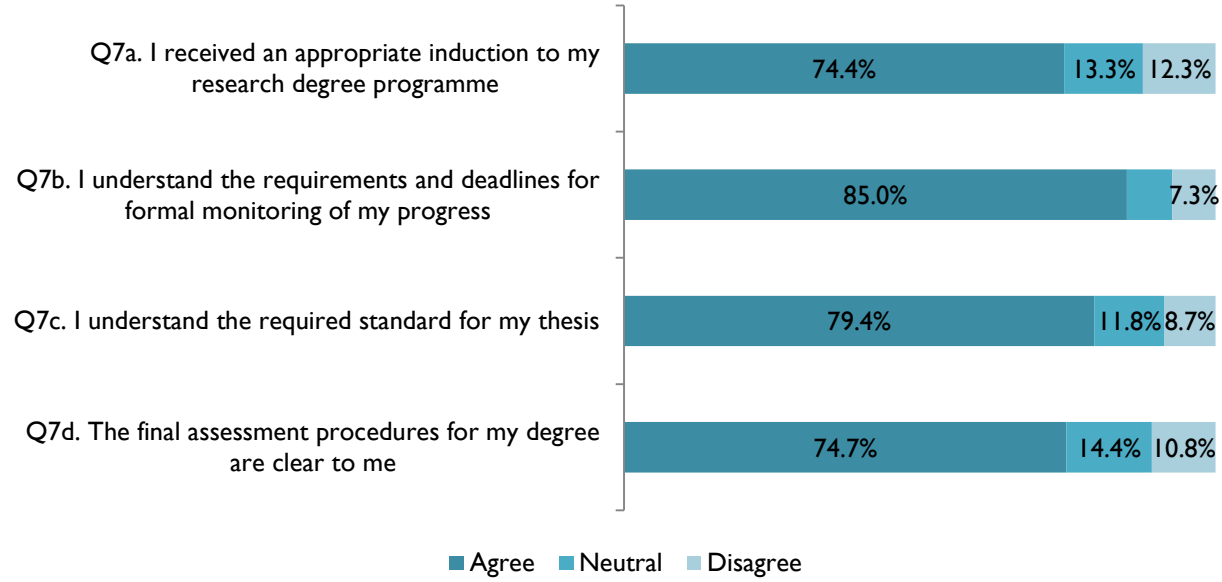
Analysis in section 5 indicated that the effects of mode of study on experience were generally unimportant, but there was a small effect in respect of research culture. Examining the individual items in this scale by mode of study (figure 6.7) reveals that there is a more notable divergence in experience for item 5b, where 53.4% of part-time students agree they have frequent opportunities to discuss their research with other research students compared with 66.9% of full-time students. While this is perhaps not surprising, given that part-time students are less frequently on site and are often distance learners, it does raise an important challenge for institutions and one that shouldn't be insurmountable given advances in communications technology.




Q5a. My department provides a good seminar programme.
Q5b. I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students.
Q5c. The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work.
Q5d. I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department.

**Figure 6.7: Experience of research culture, by mode of study**

## 6.4 Progress and assessment

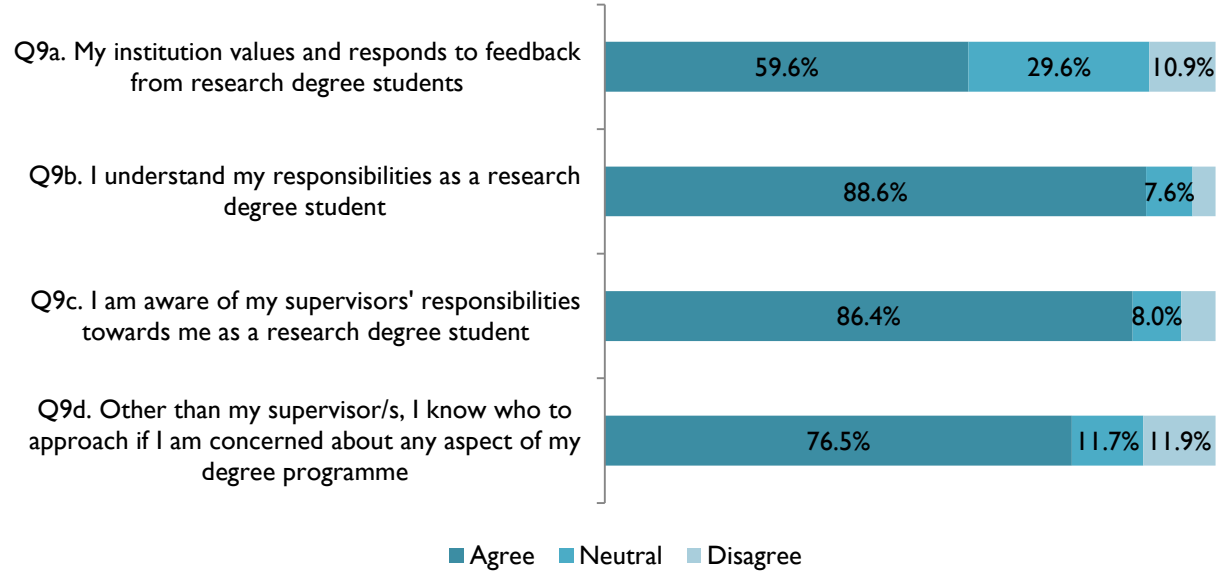



N = 46,928 – 47,424

**Figure 6.8: Experience of progress and assessment**

While the majority of students report a positive experience of the progress and assessment items, only three-quarters say they received an appropriate induction to their programme (figure 6.8). Even among first years – the group most likely to say they received a positive experience – the percentage agreeing only rises to 77.5%. Those who understand the required standard for their thesis do increase, however, from 75.5% for first years to 83.5% of fourth years. Similarly, those clear about final assessment procedures increases from 70.9% in year 1 to 79.4% in year 4. These latter two statistics are more encouraging and suggest that it is on question 7a. – induction – where the sector may usefully focus enhancement.

## 6.5 Responsibilities



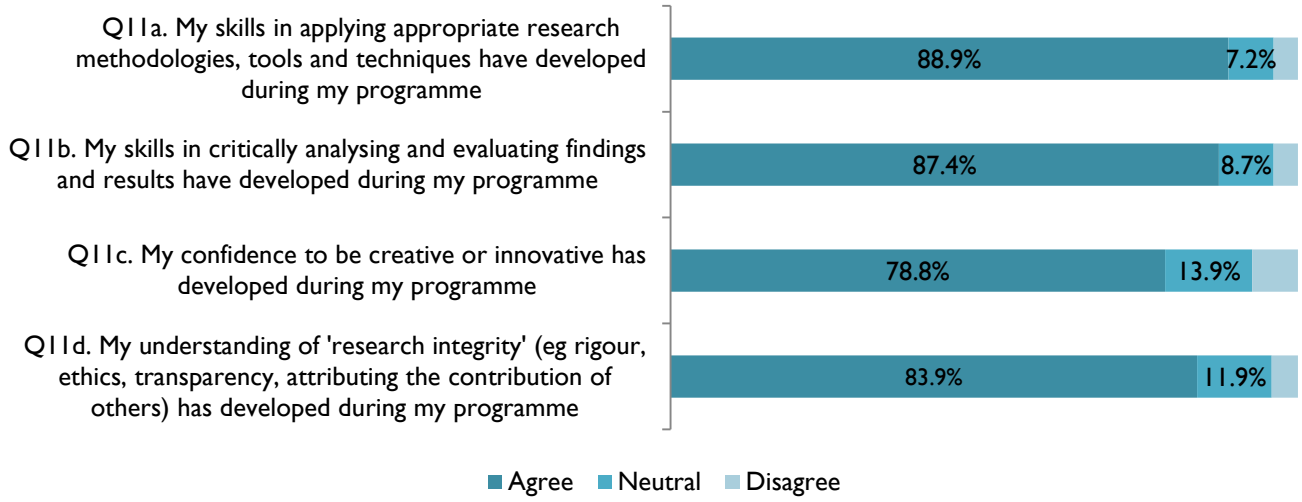

N = 45,890 - 47,301

**Figure 6.9: Experience of responsibilities**

Figure 6.9 encouragingly shows that the vast majority of students believe they understand their responsibilities as a research degree student, as well as their supervisors' responsibilities towards them. However, almost a quarter did not agree that they know who to approach (other than their supervisors) if they are concerned about any aspect of their degree programme – an obvious concern where difficulties arise in the supervisory relationship.

Most starkly, only 59.6% of respondents agreed that their institution responds to and values feedback from research degree students. One might speculate that this percentage would be lower still among those not choosing to answer a survey about their experience distributed by their institution. Interestingly there is a reasonably strong correlation (Spearman's rho = 0.518) between this item and the research culture scale and suggests that enhancing the value attributed to feedback from students – and making sure students are aware of this – might be tackled in tandem with efforts to enhance the research culture in a department.

## 6.6 Research skills




N = 46,866 – 46,866

**Figure 6.10: Experience of research skills**

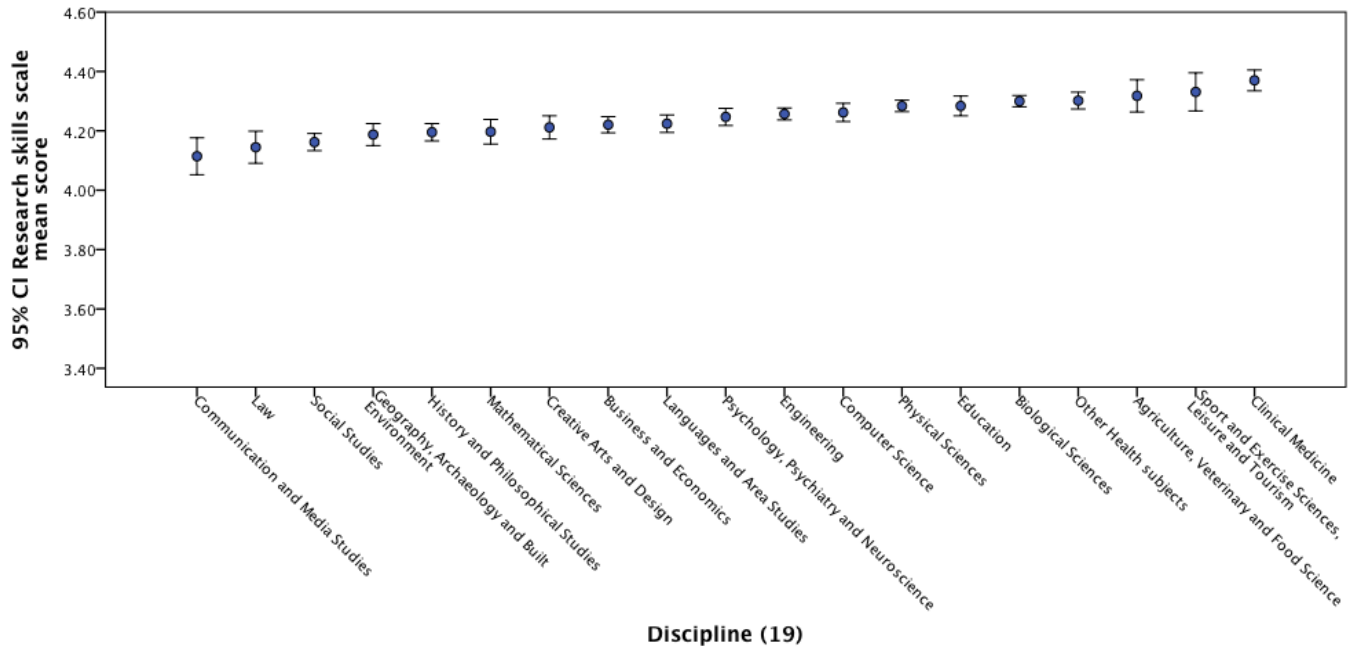
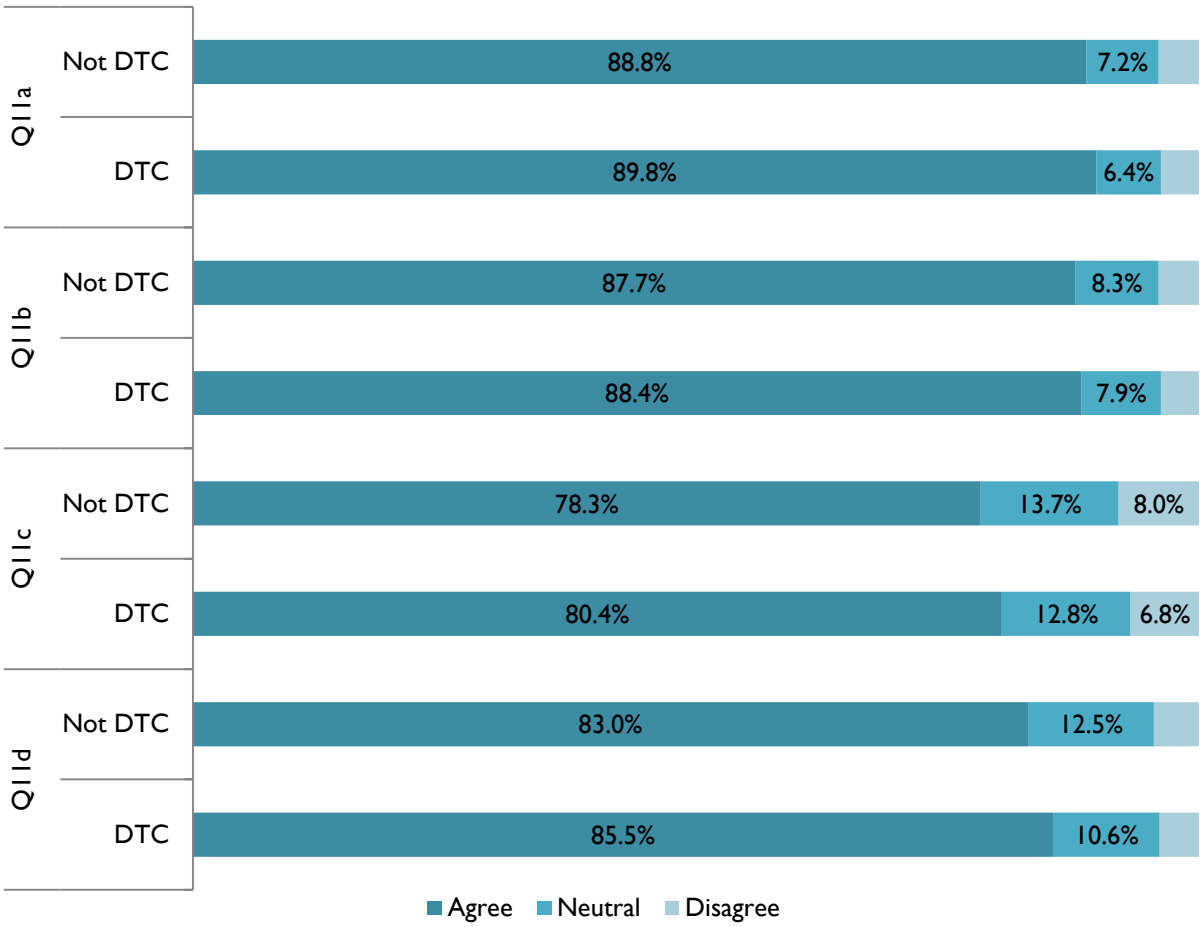



**Figure 6.11: Mean research skills scale scores, by grouped discipline**

Figure 6.10 shows that the majority of students nationally have experienced improvements in their research skills over the course of their programme to date, although the rate of agreement could be enhanced for question 11c., 'My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme'.

Figure 6.11 suggests that there is little variation nationally in research skills development by discipline, though slightly higher rates of positivity among health and science subjects. However, the effect size of discipline on research skills was unimportant (Eta squared = 0.007).

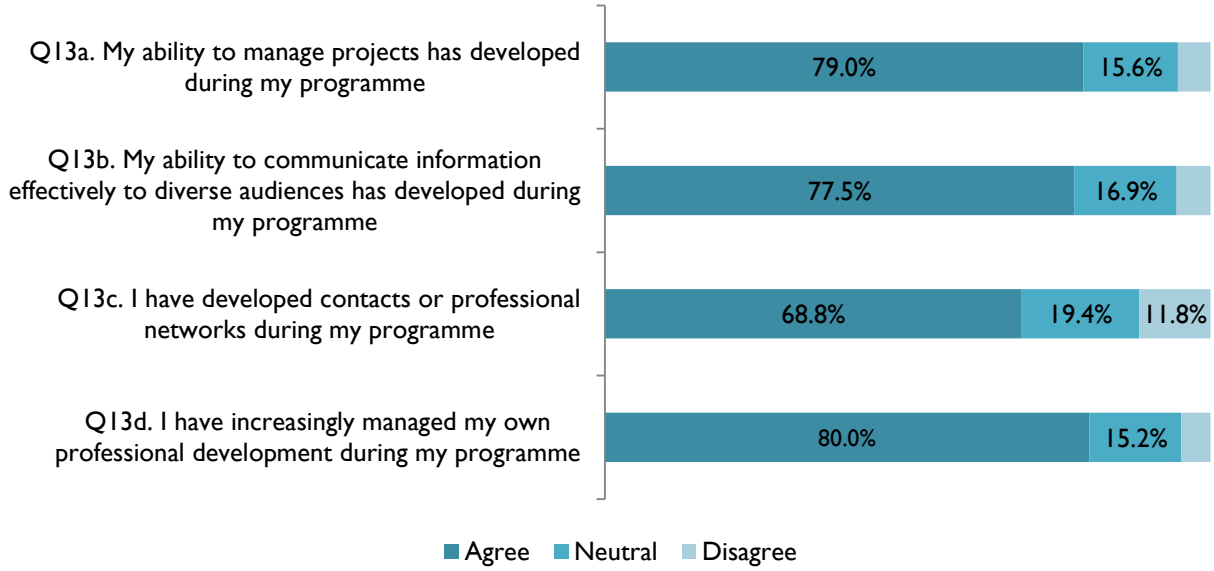



Q11a. My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme.
Q11b. My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme.
Q11c. My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme.
Q11d. My understanding of 'research integrity' (eg rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during my programme.

**Figure 6.12: Experience of research skills by whether part of Doctoral Training Centre (DTC)**

PRES 2013 asked students whether their doctoral training was provided via a Doctoral Training Centre (DTC) or Partnership. The majority of students did not know, but the experience of research skills for the 20,381 who answered yes or no was compared. Figure 6.12 shows that there were only very small differences between the research skills experience of those in doctoral training centres and those not in a doctoral training centre, with the strongest difference to be found for question 11d. on understanding of research integrity. Even here the effect size is negligible. As more students become aware of the term 'Doctoral Training Centre' it may be possible to include a greater proportion of respondents in this analysis in future years.

## 6.7 Professional development




N = 46,441 – 46,668

**Figure 6.13: Experience of professional development**

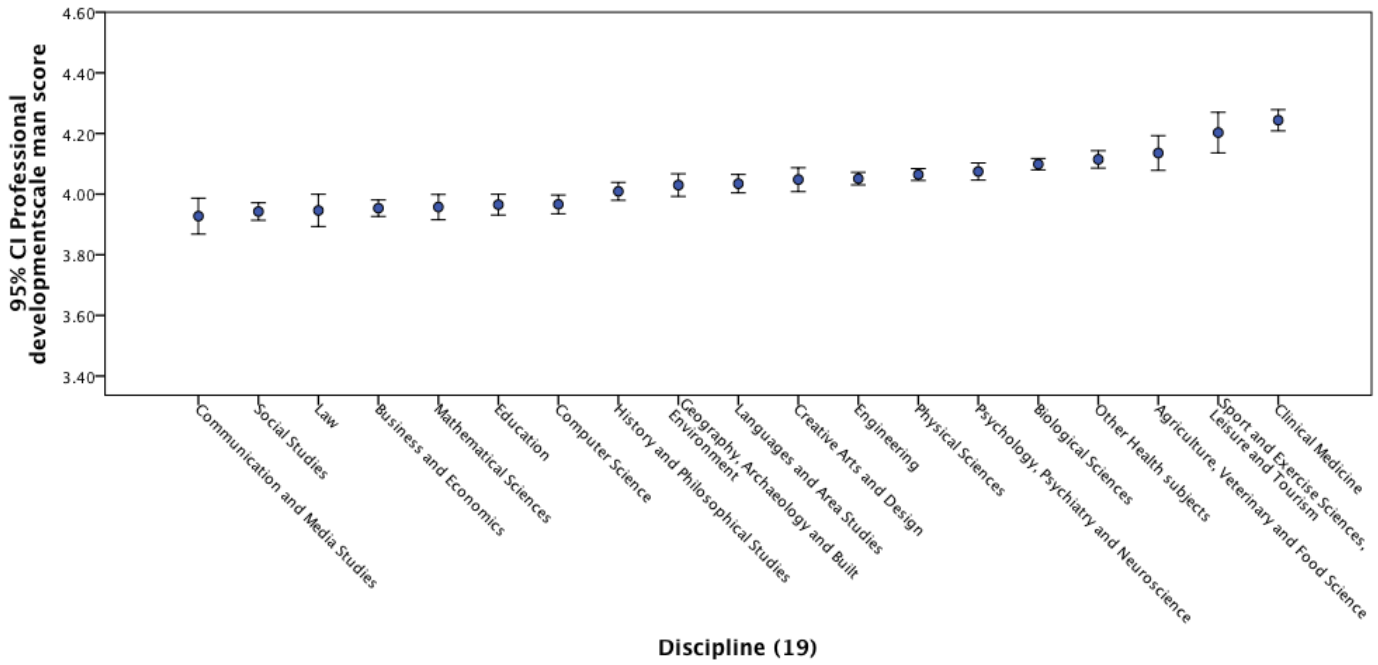



**Figure 6.14: Mean professional development scale scores, by grouped discipline**

For professional development, fewer students have developed contacts or professional networks during their programme than have enhanced their other professional capabilities and capital (figure 6.13). While not everyone who is undertaking a research degree is doing it for career development purposes, it is interesting that the highest levels of agreement for this item were for students who had selected non-career motivations for taking their research programme. It is very encouraging to see that four-fifths of students had taken ownership of their own professional development during their programme (question 13 d.).

Disciplinary differences in scale scores (figure 6.14) are relatively modest but health, agriculture, food and sports subjects have slightly higher levels. There was a small effect size of discipline on professional development (Eta squared 0.010). While research in these subjects may often concern particular vocations, there is no evidence that students in these subjects are more likely to want to improve non-academic career prospects than those in others.

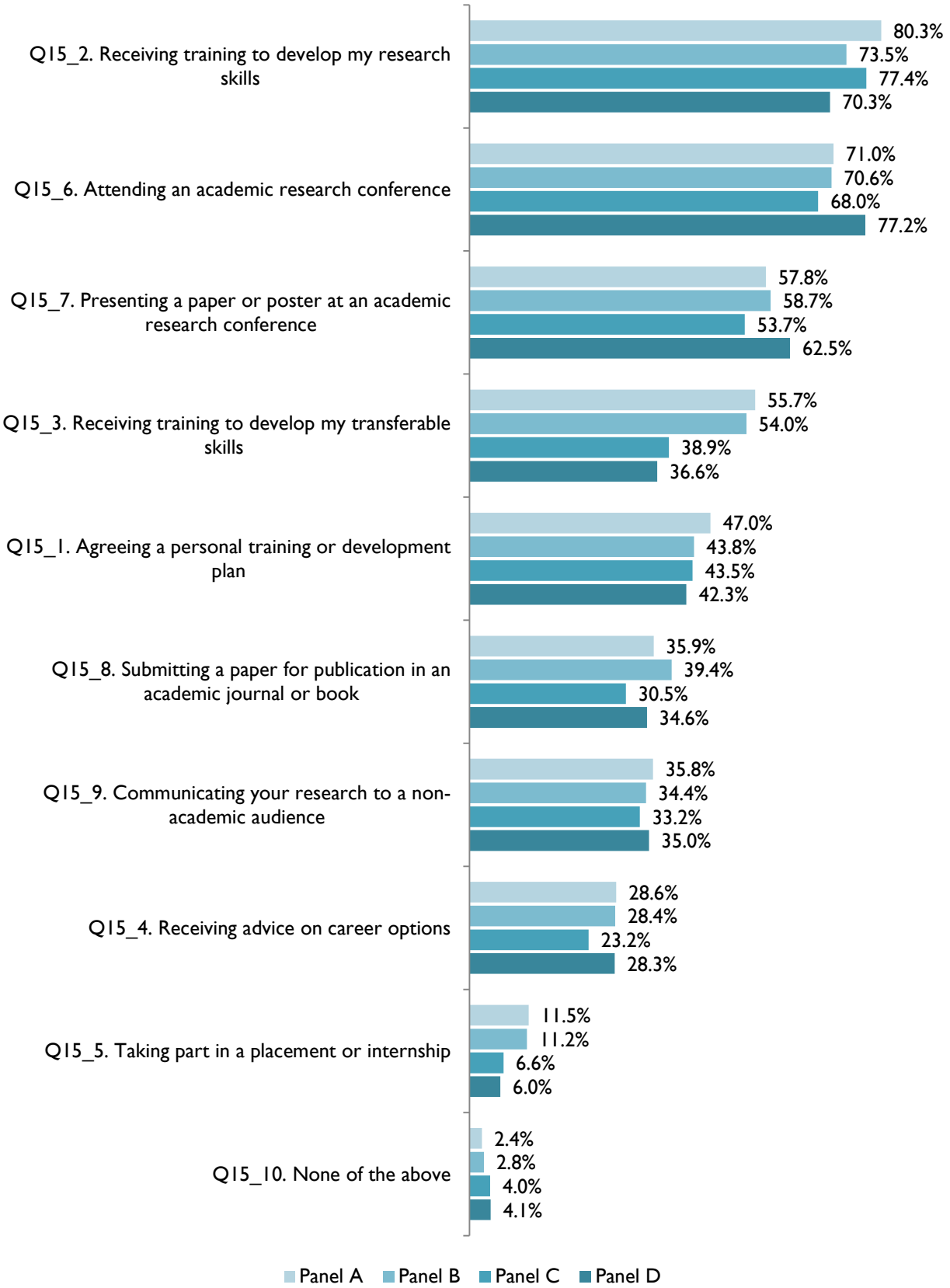



**Figure 6.15: Development opportunities experienced, by discipline cluster (REF main panels)**

Figure 6.15 shows the development opportunities experienced by students, broken down by main REF subject panel (where panel A = health and biological sciences, panel B = STEM, panel C = social sciences and panel D = arts and humanities). Opportunities to develop (academic) research skills are generally widely available, but opportunities to develop transferable type skills are more patchy. There are generally modest differences between broad discipline cluster, but health and biological sciences and STEM subjects are notably more likely to have opportunities to develop their transferable skills. Career advice opportunities are low across subject areas.

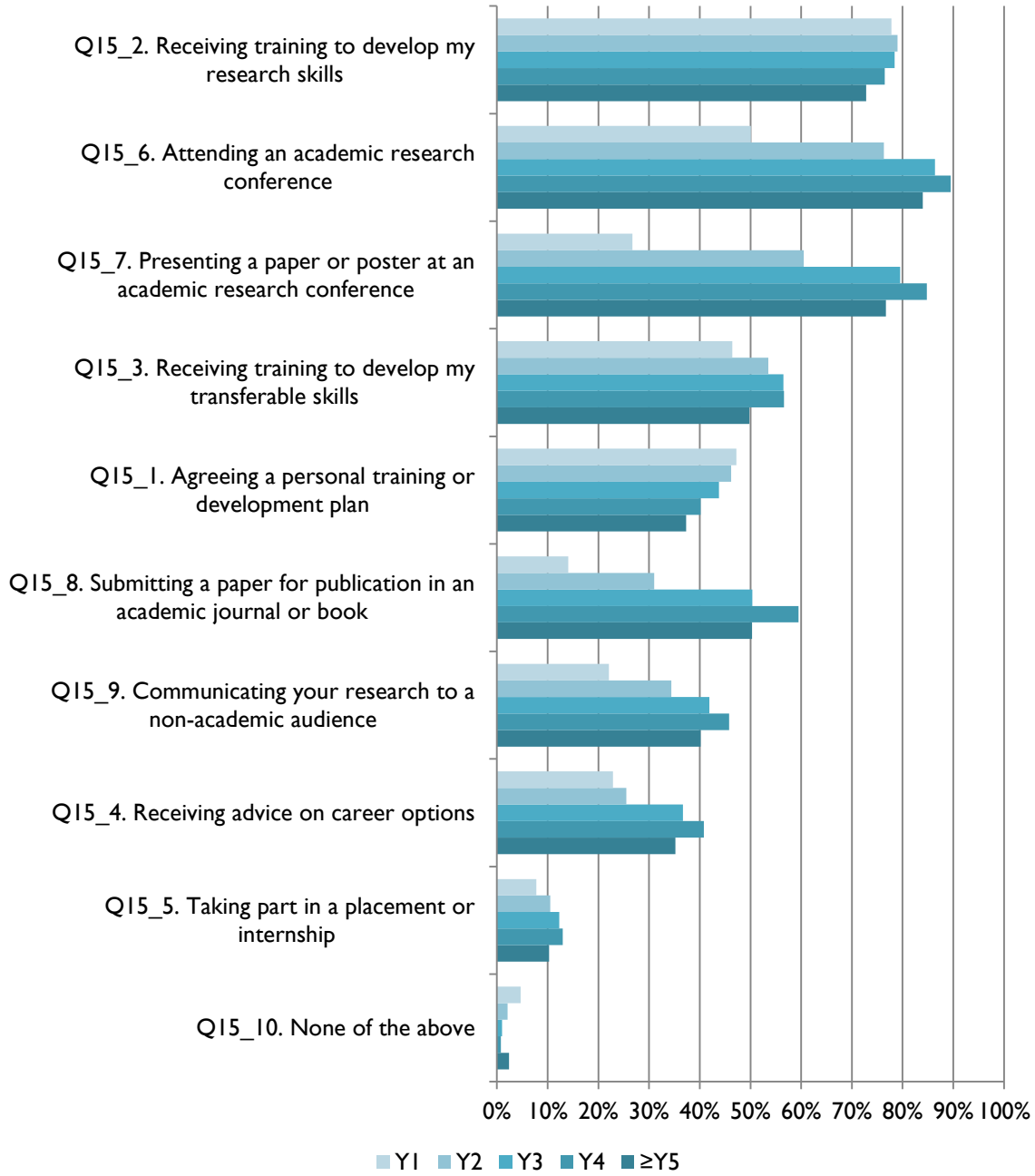



**Figure 6.16: Development opportunities experienced, by year group (full-time students)**

Figure 6.16 presents the same results but broken down by year group (full-time). There is a clear increase in opportunities experienced across most items (up to year 4), with the exception of research training (which is often concentrated in year 1) and agreeing a personal training or development plan, which is more common with newer postgraduate researchers (although less that 50% of those in first or second year have one). Receiving advice on career options does increase as students near the end of their programme, but it is concerning that up to 60% of students may never have this opportunity.

Figure 6.17 shows the same results for part-time students. These show a similar pattern, albeit spread out over a longer timescale. The number of students reporting they have experienced each opportunity is slightly lower than for full-time students. This may reflect the fact that part-time students are more likely to be in employment already and to have developed many skills. It may also be a questionnaire effect in that part-time students are being asked to recall opportunities experienced over a more extended period.

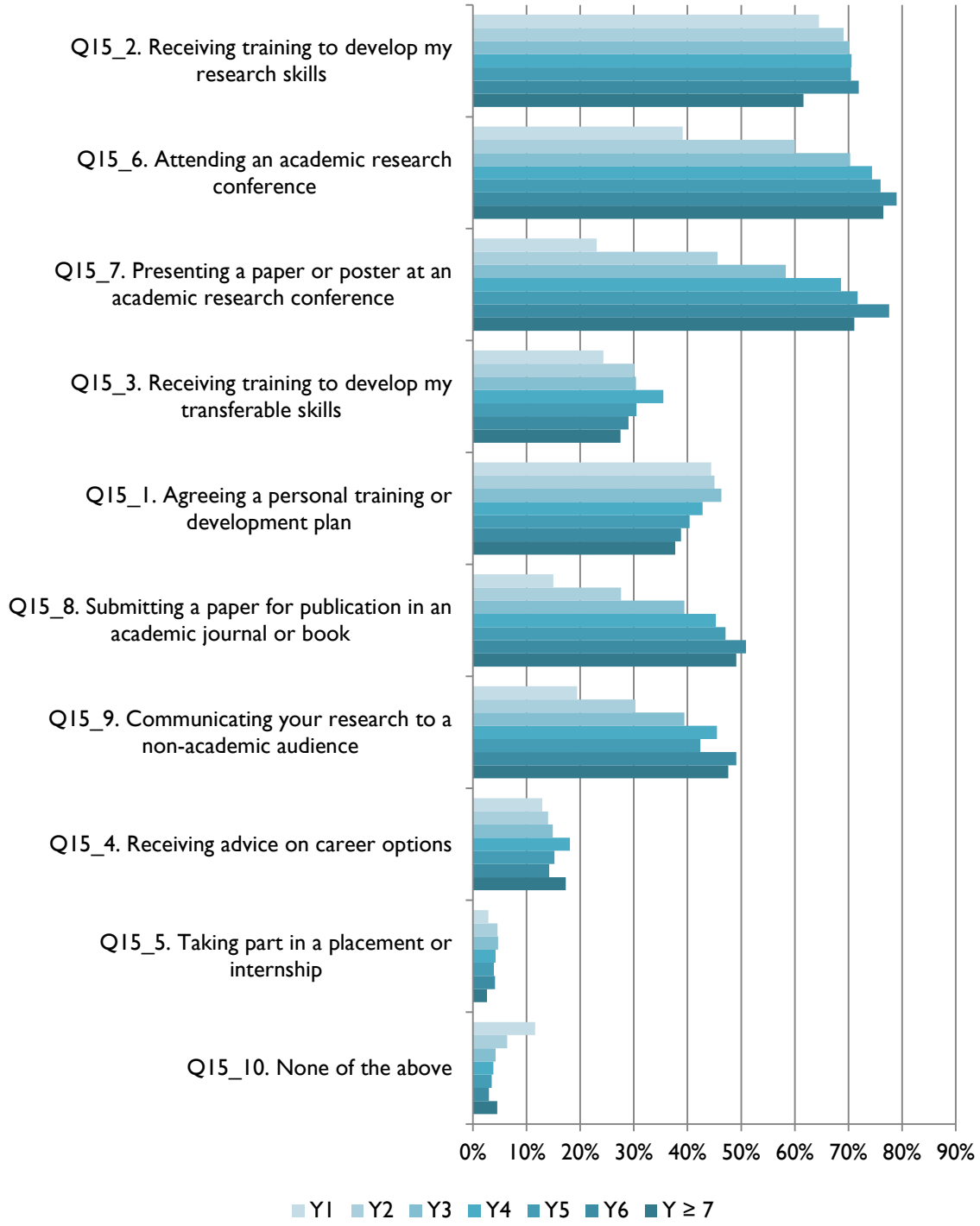



**Figure 6.17: Development opportunities experienced, by year group (part-time students)**

## 6.8 Teaching

The opportunity to teach other students (mainly, but not exclusively undergraduates) is a particular form of professional development experienced by many postgraduate researchers and is of particular interest because the quality of support received also has implications for those they teach. Just over half of students (51.6%) had taught or demonstrated at their institution during their research degree programme. Figure 6.18 shows that those students in STEM subjects are considerably more likely to experience teaching or demonstrating opportunities than those in other subject areas.

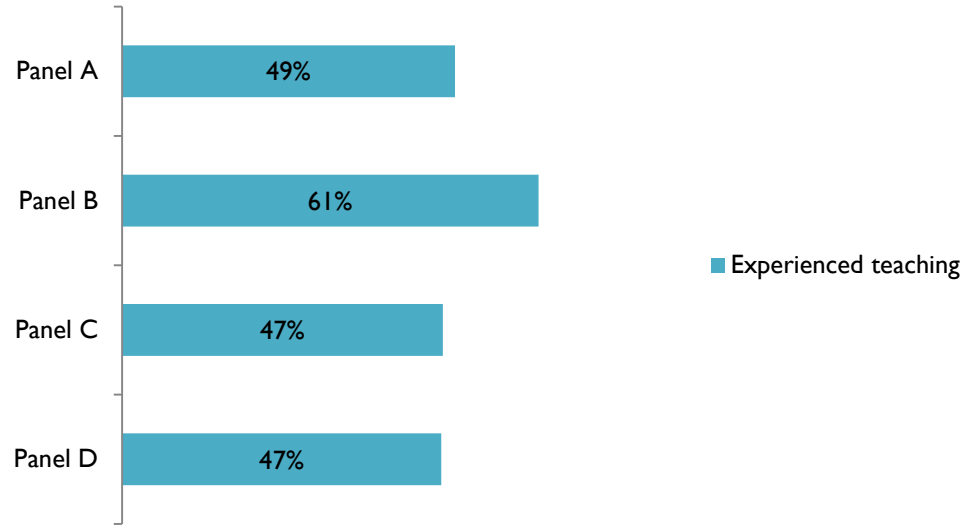



**Figure 6.18: Teaching opportunities experienced, by discipline cluster (REF main panels)**

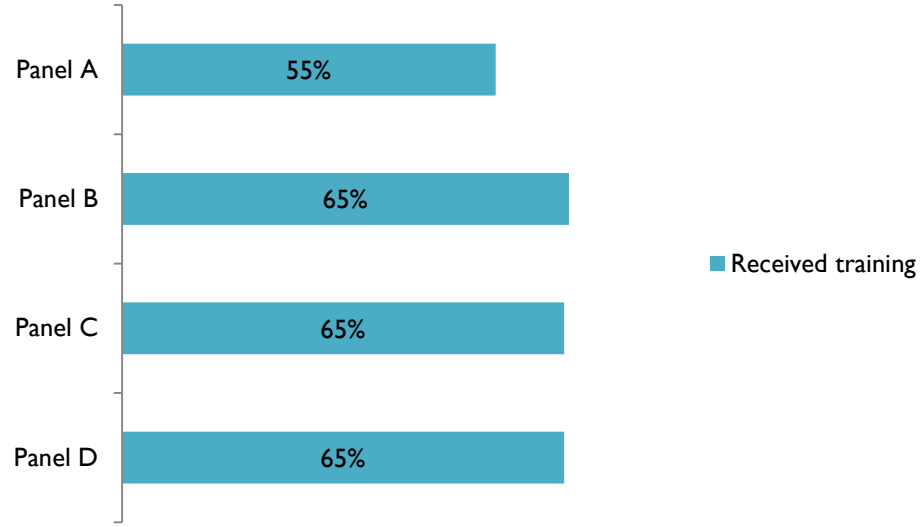



**Figure 6.19: Formal training received, by discipline cluster (REF main panels)**

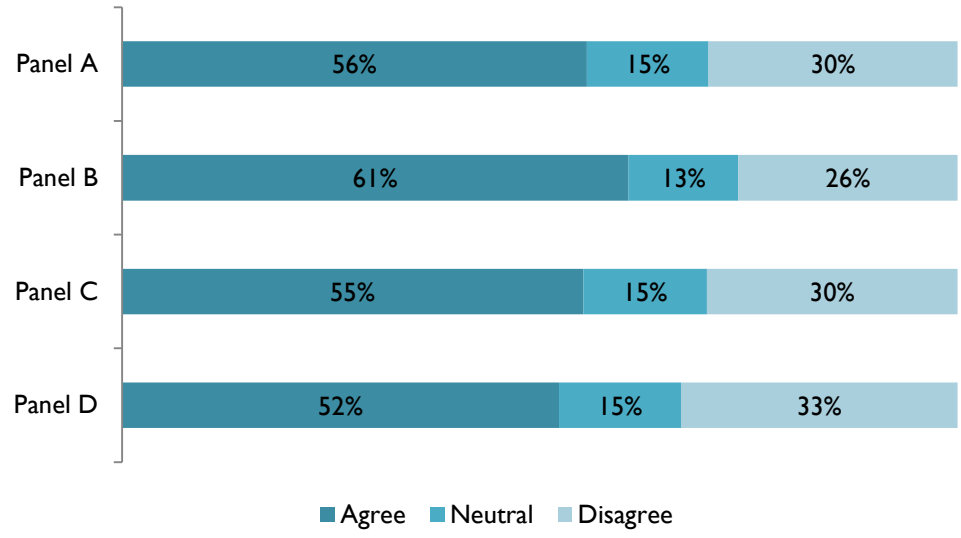
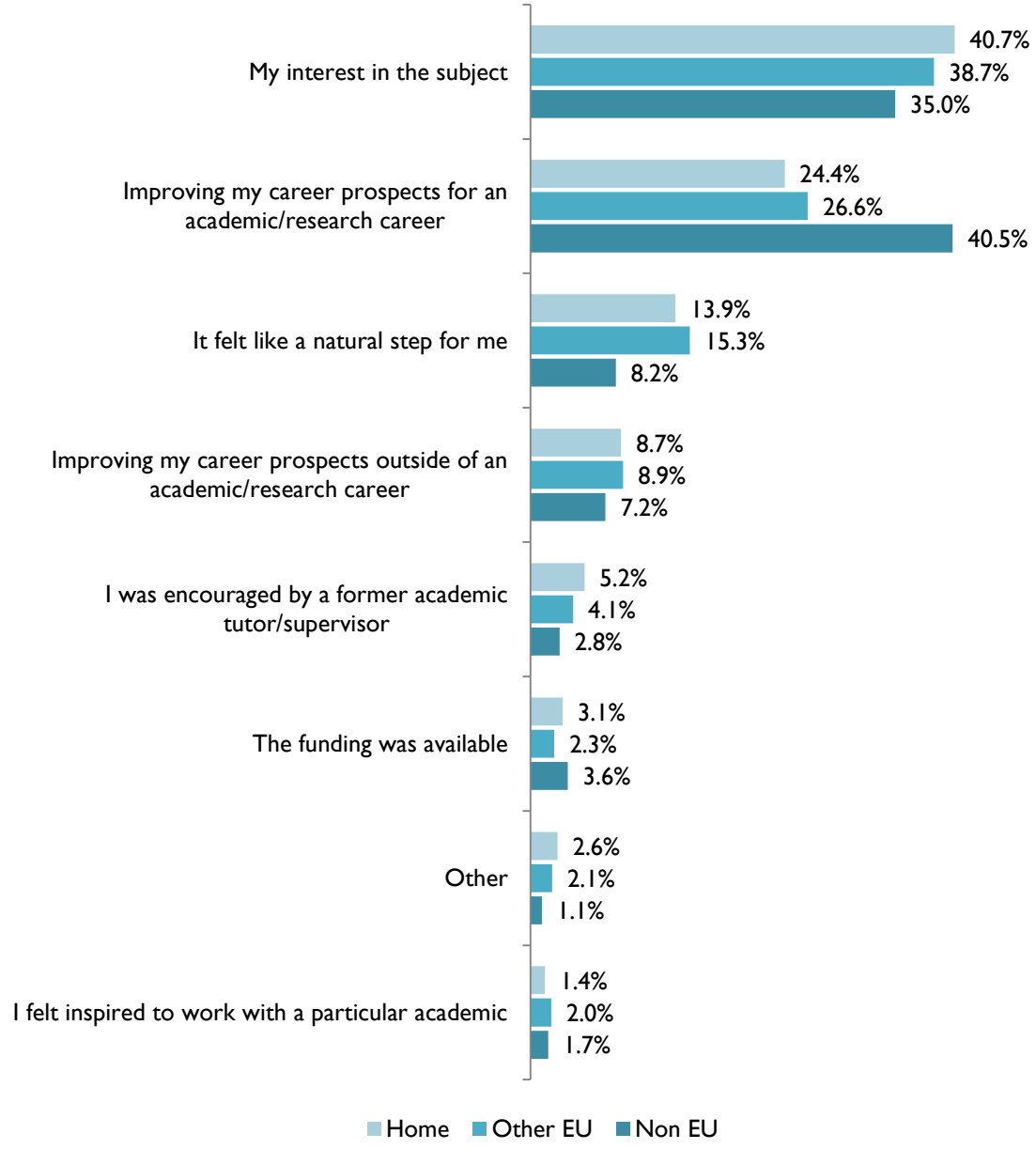



**Figure 6.20: Appropriate support and guidance received, by discipline cluster (REF main panels)**

The percentages in figures 6.19 and 6.20 are out of the 51.6% of students who had experienced teaching or demonstrating. Of them, 62.3% stated they have received formal training for their teaching, though this was notably lower in the panel A discipline area as shown in figure 6.19 (especially in clinical medicine where only 40.1% of students undertaking teaching had received formal training). Of the students who had taught or demonstrated 56.9% agreed they had received appropriate support and guidance for teaching, while 29.0% disagreed, with positivity slightly greater in STEM subject areas (figure 6.20) perhaps related to the greater number of students teaching or demonstrating in STEM subjects.

## 6.9 Motivations

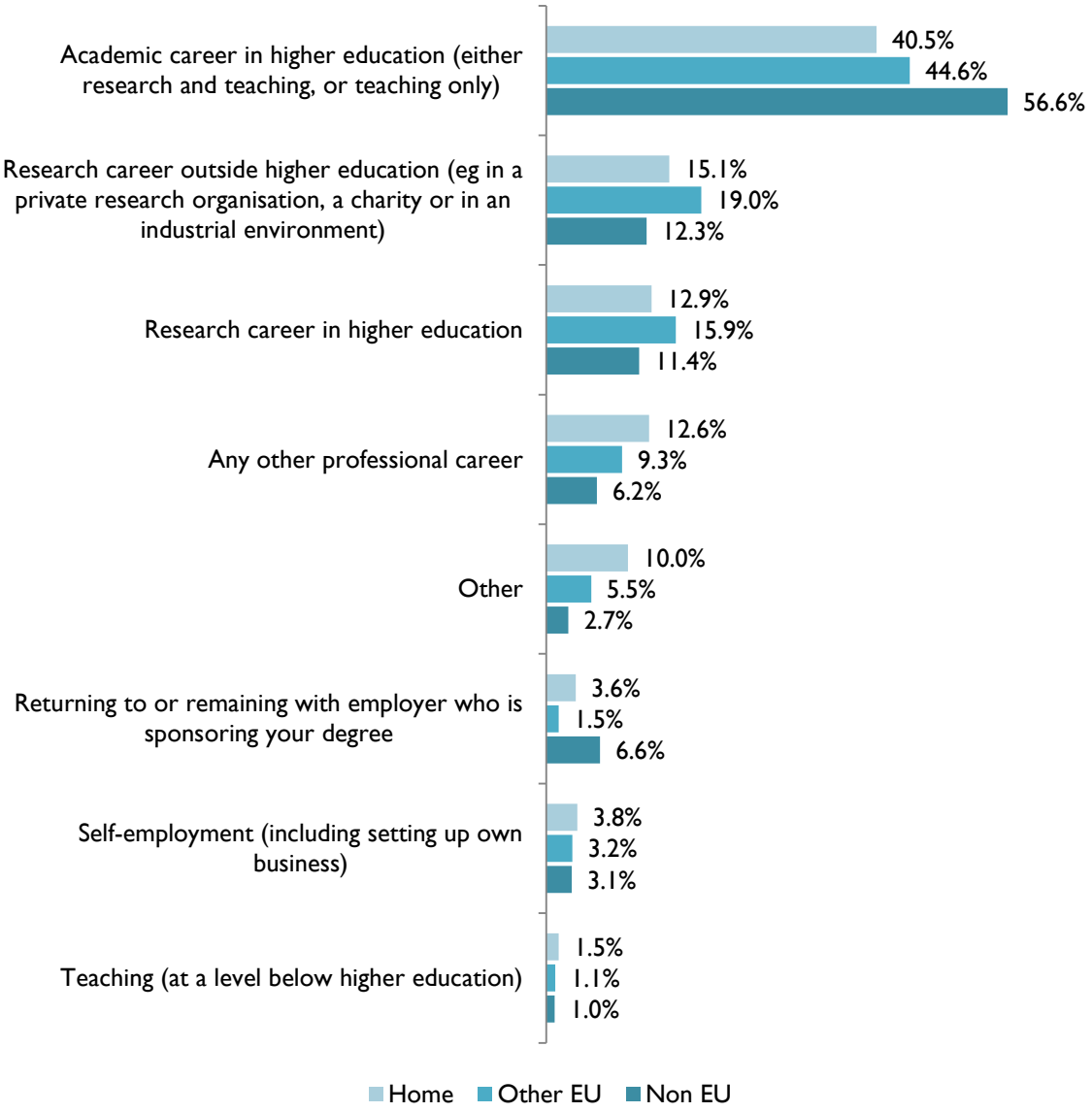
Figure 6.21 shows the main motivations students have for studying for their degree, with interest in the subject and improving prospects for an academic research career being the top two motivations for students from all three broad domiciles. However, interestingly, improving career prospects for an academic research career is cited by over 40% of non-EU students, while it is the top motivation for only around a quarter of UK and other EU students.




N = 46,617

**Figure 6.21: Main motivations for taking programme, by domicile**

When we examine anticipated career, overall 45.8% of students anticipate going on into an academic teaching role in higher education, and another 12.8% anticipate going on into a research only role in higher education. In the past this has led to some concern about unrealistic expectations about career prospects in UK higher education. However, figure 6.22 breaks down anticipated career by broad domicile and shows that the percentage of non-EU students anticipating an academic teaching career is substantially greater than for UK students, which may be a more realistic pattern. Nonetheless there are substantial proportions of students from all domiciles who anticipate a non-academic career (and many others who may well move into non-academic roles) and it is important that a wide set of professional development needs are catered for.




N = 46,117

**Figure 6.22: Anticipated career, by domicile**

# 7. Using PRES for enhancement

Student surveys are only worthwhile if the results are used – and used well – to inform quality enhancement. The *raison d'être* of PRES is not to survey students for its own sake, but to collect systematic feedback which informs significant, real enhancements to the experience of postgraduate researchers. Running the survey, analysing responses and disseminating the results should only be regarded as first steps.

Student surveys are best used as an initial indicator of where to look for best practice and where enhancement is required, rather than as definitive measures of quality. Context can be important, and there is particular evidence that discipline and year of study have an impact on responses. That said, as shown in this report, most course and demographic effects in PRES are substantively small, so it is important that contextual factors are not simply used to dismiss poor results. Participating institutions have access to 'benchmarking groups' allowing them to compare their results with the aggregate results of similar institutions by discipline, while the results in this report set a national benchmark. Comparing results in this way can help prioritise areas for enhancement.

However, it is also important that survey data are not considered to be the last words on the student experience. Surveys give reliable, extensive and comparable information that is vital, but like any research method they provide a partial representation of experience. Triangulation with other sources – and types – of information is a vital precursor to making enhancement decisions which often involve a significant investment of time and effort. In particular, it is recommended that further qualitative insights are obtained from students to drill down into specific issues. This can be done informally, through staff student discussions as well as in formal staff-student committees, but there may also be cases where it makes sense to undertake further research (through, for example, focus groups) to get to grips with specific concerns and possible solutions. The qualitative comments now collected by PRES can also provide an invaluable source here.

Finally, PRES is not only intended to inform enhancement within institutions, but also to inform policymakers, sector bodies and discipline communities about the successes and challenges in supporting a high quality experience for postgraduate researchers. This report on the UK results is intended to contribute to policy level discussions.

## 7.1 Further support

The Higher Education Academy provides resources, events and bespoke consultancy to help departments, institutions and sector bodies use survey data to inform enhancement.

*Using PRES to enhance the experience of postgraduate researchers*: In 2012 we commissioned a project examining how institutions use PRES to inform enhancement which was undertaken by Vitae. The project collected nine case studies which are included in the final report and are intended to share practice in the use of PRES. The report is available on the PRES website at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/pres

*Making it Count: Reflecting on the National Student Survey in the process of enhancement*: While focused on the use of the undergraduate National Student Survey (NSS), institutions may also find many of the practices in this 2012 report applicable to the effective use of PRES. The report is available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/nss

*Surveys for Enhancement Conference:* Our annual conference each May is an opportunity to hear about the latest research, developments and practices in student surveys at all levels. Over 150 delegates attended the Surveys for Enhancement Conference in Manchester in May 2013. To see resources from this and previous events, please visit www.heacademy.ac.uk/postgraduate-enhancement

*Consultancy:* the HEA Surveys team provides bespoke support to institutions and sector bodies on all aspects of student surveys, including: advice on survey design, operation, analysis and reporting; the creation of bespoke survey reports; follow-up research and analysis; the development of strategies for evidence informed enhancement; and the delivery of staff development workshops. To discuss your requirements, please contact: surveys@heacademy.ac.uk or call 01904 717500.

# Appendix 1: Results table

| | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Supervision** | | | | |
| Q1a. My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research | 6.1% | 3.3% | 90.6% | 47568 |
| Q1b. I have regular contact with my supervisor/s, appropriate for my needs | 8.0% | 5.1% | 86.9% | 47347 |
| Q1c. My supervisor/s provide feedback that helps me direct my research activities | 7.8% | 5.8% | 86.4% | 47138 |
| Q1d. My supervisor/s help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher | 12.6% | 14.2% | 73.3% | 46904 |
| **Resources** | | | | |
| Q3a. I have a suitable working space | 14.0% | 9.5% | 76.6% | 44506 |
| Q3b. There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities | 12.4% | 9.8% | 77.9% | 45084 |
| Q3c. There is adequate provision of library facilities (including physical and online resources) | 9.4% | 8.1% | 82.5% | 46794 |
| Q3d. I have access to the specialist resources necessary for my research | 10.8% | 13.7% | 75.5% | 45561 |
| **Research culture** | | | | |
| Q5a. My department provides a good seminar programme | 10.7% | 16.1% | 73.3% | 46018 |
| Q5b. I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students | 17.6% | 18.0% | 64.4% | 46204 |
| Q5c. The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work | 15.4% | 22.5% | 62.1% | 45649 |
| Q5d. I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department | 18.7% | 23.4% | 57.9% | 46007 |
| **Progress and assessment** | | | | |
| Q7a. I received an appropriate induction to my research degree programme | 12.3% | 13.3% | 74.4% | 46928 |
| Q7b. I understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress | 7.3% | 7.7% | 85.0% | 47424 |
| Q7c. I understand the required standard for my thesis | 8.7% | 11.8% | 79.4% | 47304 |
| Q7d. The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me | 10.8% | 14.4% | 74.7% | 47159 |
| **Responsibilities** | | | | |
| Q9a. My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students | 10.9% | 29.6% | 59.6% | 45890 |
| Q9b. I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student | 3.8% | 7.6% | 88.6% | 47301 |
| Q9c. I am aware of my supervisors' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student | 5.6% | 8.0% | 86.4% | 47129 |
| Q9d. Other than my supervisor/s, I know who to approach if I am concerned about any aspect of my degree programme | 11.9% | 11.7% | 76.5% | 47191 |
| **Research skills** | | | | |
| Q11a. My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme | 3.9% | 7.2% | 88.9% | 47227 |
| Q11b. My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme | 3.9% | 8.7% | 87.4% | 46866 |
| Q11c. My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme | 7.3% | 13.9% | 78.8% | 47089 |
| Q11d. My understanding of 'research integrity' (eg rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during my programme | 4.2% | 11.9% | 83.9% | 46953 |
| **Professional development** | | | | |
| Q13a. My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme | 5.4% | 15.6% | 79.0% | 46581 |
| Q13b. My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme | 5.6% | 16.9% | 77.5% | 46441 |
| Q13c. I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme | 11.8% | 19.4% | 68.8% | 46668 |
| Q13d. I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme | 4.8% | 15.2% | 80.0% | 46610 |

| | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q16a. To what extent do you agree that you have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching? | 29.0% | 14.1% | 56.9% | 23299 |
| Q17a. Overall, I am satisfied with the experience of my research degree programme | 8.7% | 9.6% | 81.7% | 47623 |
| Q17b. I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme within my institution's expected timescale | 7.9% | 11.5% | 80.5% | 47096 |

# Appendix 2: PRES 2013 questionnaire

## Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (2013)

### Welcome

This survey asks about your experiences of your postgraduate research programme. Your responses will be combined with those of others to help inform your institution about the experience of postgraduate researchers, helping to improve future support. The results are also used nationally to help advise policy and improve the postgraduate research experience across the sector.

Please answer all the questions that apply to you. The questionnaire should take **around fifteen minutes** to complete. Please note that it is not possible to return to a page once it has been completed; when you arrive at the final 'thank you' page, you will know that your responses have been recorded on our database.

Once you click 'continue' you will be directed to the first section of the survey.

Many thanks for your participation.

Dr Paul Bennett (Head of Surveys, Higher Education Academy)
Professor Matthew Lambon Ralph (Associate Vice-President (Research), University of Manchester, and Chair of the PRES Advisory Group)

### Data protection

All data collected in this survey will be held securely. Results are confidential to your institution, though your institution may choose to share or publish aggregated, anonymous results. All participating institutions have agreed not to identify any individuals when reporting their results internally or externally, and to use their best efforts to ensure that no individuals can be identified by implication. The full PRES dataset will be available to the Higher Education Academy in order to conduct national level analysis, and all results will be reported in an aggregated and anonymised form.

## Supervision

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about supervision?

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. I have regular contact with my supervisor/s, appropriate for my needs | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. My supervisor/s provide feedback that helps me direct my research activities | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. My supervisor/s help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

2. If you have any additional comments about supervision, please write them in here:

## Resources

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about resources?

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I have a suitable working space | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. There is adequate provision of library facilities (including physical and online resources) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. I have access to the specialist resources necessary for my research | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

4. If you have any additional comments about resources, please write them in here:

## Research culture

5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the research culture?
(**Note:** Where we have used the term 'department' please answer with respect to your centre, school, institute or other unit where you are primarily based or attached for your research.)

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. My department provides a good seminar programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

6. If you have any additional comments about the research culture, please write them in here:

## Progress and assessment

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about induction, progression arrangements and assessment?

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I received an appropriate induction to my research degree programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. I understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. I understand the required standard for my thesis | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

8. If you have any additional comments about induction, progression arrangements and assessment, please write them in here:

## Responsibilities

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about responsibilities?

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. I am aware of my supervisors' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. Other than my supervisor/s, I know who to approach if I am concerned about any aspect of my degree programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

10. If you have any additional comments about feedback mechanisms and student/staff responsibilities, please write them in here:

## Research skills

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about research skills development?

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. My understanding of 'research integrity' (eg rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

12. If you have any additional comments about research skills development please write them in here:

## Professional development

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about professional development?

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

14. If you have any additional comments about professional development, please write them in here:

## Opportunities

15. Please indicate which of the following opportunities you have experienced during your research degree programme (select all that apply):

- ○ Agreeing a personal training or development plan
- ○ Receiving training to develop my research skills
- ○ Receiving training to develop my transferable skills
- ○ Receiving advice on career options
- ○ Taking part in a placement or internship
- ○ Attending an academic research conference
- ○ Presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference
- ○ Submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal or book
- ○ Communicating your research to a non-academic audience

16. Please indicate whether you have taught (or demonstrated) at your institution during your research degree programme (Y/N):

- ○ Yes
- ○ No (go to question 17)

| **If yes,** to what extent do you agree that you have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching? | Did you receive formal training for your teaching? |
|---|---|
| ○ Definitely disagree<br>○ Mostly disagree<br>○ Neither agree nor disagree<br>○ Mostly agree<br>○ Definitely agree<br>○ N/A | ○ Yes<br>○ No<br>○ N/A |

## Overall experience

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your experience?

| | Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Overall, I am satisfied with the experience of my research degree programme | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme within my institution's expected timescale | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

18. If you have any additional comments about your experience of your research degree programme, please write them in here. For example, what would further improve your experience?

## [Institutional questions]

## You and your programme

19. I am currently registered as doing:

- ○ PhD
- ○ Professional doctorate
- ○ PhD by published work
- ○ New Route PhD
- ○ MPhil with transfer to PhD
- ○ MPhil
- ○ Master in research
- ○ Other (please specify)……

Note: PhD includes DPhil courses.

19a. **(Doctoral students only)** Is your doctoral training programme provided through a Doctoral Training Centre or Doctoral Training Partnership?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Don't know

20. The main motivation for me pursuing a research degree programme was:

- ○ My interest in the subject
- ○ Improving my career prospects for an academic/research career
- ○ Improving my career prospects outside of an academic/research career
- ○ I was encouraged by a former academic tutor/supervisor
- ○ The funding was available
- ○ It felt like a natural step for me
- ○ I felt inspired to work with a particular academic
- ○ Other (please specify)……

21. What type of career do you have in mind for when you complete your research degree?

- ○ Academic career in higher education (either research and teaching, or teaching only)
- ○ Research career in higher education
- ○ Research career outside higher education (eg in a private research organisation, a charity or in an industrial environment)
- ○ Teaching (at a level below higher education)
- ○ Any other professional career
- ○ Self-employment (including setting up own business)
- ○ Returning to or remaining with employer who is sponsoring your degree
- ○ Other (please specify)……

22. I am:

- ○ 25 years old or younger
- ○ 26-30 years old
- ○ 31-35 years old
- ○ 36-40 years old
- ○ 41-45 years old
- ○ 46-50 years old
- ○ 51-55 years old
- ○ 56 years old or older

23. I am:

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other (please specify) ……

24. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**If yes**, please indicate which of the following apply *(*select all that apply*):*

- ○ Social/communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder
- ○ Blind/serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses
- ○ Deaf/serious hearing impairment
- ○ Long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy
- ○ Mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder
- ○ Specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, or AD(H)D
- ○ Physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches
- ○ A disability, impairment or medical condition that is not listed above
- ○ Prefer not to say

25. Please select which of the following most closely matches your primary discipline:

- ○ Clinical Medicine
- ○ Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care
- ○ Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
- ○ Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
- ○ Biological Sciences
- ○ Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science
- ○ Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences
- ○ Chemistry
- ○ Physics
- ○ Mathematical Sciences
- ○ Computer Science and Informatics
- ○ Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering
- ○ Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Metallurgy and Materials
- ○ Civil and Construction Engineering
- ○ General Engineering
- ○ Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
- ○ Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology
- ○ Economics and Econometrics
- ○ Business and Management Studies
- ○ Law
- ○ Politics and International Studies
- ○ Social Work and Social Policy
- ○ Sociology
- ○ Anthropology and Development Studies
- ○ Education
- ○ Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
- ○ Area Studies
- ○ Modern Languages and Linguistics
- ○ English Language and Literature
- ○ History
- ○ Classics
- ○ Philosophy
- ○ Theology and Religious Studies
- ○ Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
- ○ Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
- ○ Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

26. *** Which Department do you belong to? *** This is a question for each institution to map their departmental structure. The format of this question is a drop down list and question wording can be changed or deleted. If you wish to compare your results with previous years in BOS, please test your question wording carefully to make sure that you can access the information you need.

27. I am currently registered as studying:

- ○ Full-time
- ○ Part-time

28. What year of your research degree programme are you in?

- ○ Year 1
- ○ Year 2
- ○ Year 3
- ○ Year 4
- ○ Year 5
- ○ Year 6
- ○ Year 7
- ○ Year 8
- ○ Year 9
- ○ Other (please specify) …..……

29. I currently:

- ○ am planning or doing my research
- ○ am writing up my thesis
- ○ have submitted my thesis and I am awaiting my viva
- ○ am making amendments to my thesis following my viva
- ○ am awaiting my doctoral award following my viva
- ○ Other (please specify)……

30. I am:

- ○ Primarily a face-to-face learner (eg, based at my institution)
- ○ Primarily a distance learner

31. For fees purposes, is your normal place of residence registered as:

- ○ Home
- ○ Other EU
- ○ Non EU

32. Where is your normal place of residence?

- ○ United Kingdom – England
- ○ United Kingdom – Northern Ireland
- ○ United Kingdom – Scotland
- ○ United Kingdom – Wales
- ○ Afghanistan
- ○ Åland Islands
- ○ Albania
- ○ Algeria
- ○ American Samoa
- ○ Andorra
- ○ Angola
- ○ Anguilla
- ○ Antigua and Barbuda
- ○ Argentina
- ○ Armenia
- ○ Aruba
- ○ Australia
- ○ Austria
- ○ Azerbaijan
- ○ Bahamas
- ○ Bahrain
- ○ Bangladesh
- ○ Barbados
- ○ Belarus
- ○ Belgium
- ○ Belize
- ○ Benin
- ○ Bermuda
- ○ Bhutan
- ○ Bolivia (Plurinational state of)
- ○ Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ○ Botswana
- ○ Brazil
- ○ British Virgin Islands
- ○ Brunei Darussalam
- ○ Bulgaria
- ○ Burkina Faso
- ○ Burundi
- ○ Cambodia
- ○ Cameroon
- ○ Canada
- ○ Cape Verde
- ○ Cayman Islands
- ○ Central African Republic
- ○ Chad
- ○ Channel Islands
- ○ Chile
- ○ China
- ○ China, Hong Kong
- ○ China, Macao
- ○ Colombia
- ○ Comoros
- ○ Congo
- ○ Cook Islands
- ○ Costa Rica
- ○ Côte d'Ivoire
- ○ Croatia
- ○ Cuba
- ○ Cyprus
- ○ Czech Republic
- ○ Democratic People's Republic of Korea
- ○ Democratic Republic of the Congo
- ○ Denmark
- ○ Djibouti
- ○ Dominica
- ○ Dominican Republic
- ○ Ecuador
- ○ Egypt
- ○ El Salvador
- ○ Equatorial Guinea
- ○ Eritrea
- ○ Estonia
- ○ Ethiopia
- ○ Faeroe Islands
- ○ Falkland Islands (Malvinas)
- ○ Fiji
- ○ Finland
- ○ France
- ○ French Guiana
- ○ French Polynesia
- ○ Gabon

- Gambia
- Georgia
- Germany
- Ghana
- Gibraltar
- Greece
- Greenland
- Grenada
- Guadeloupe
- Guam
- Guatemala
- Guernsey
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Guyana
- Haiti
- Holy See
- Honduras
- Hungary
- Iceland
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran (Islamic Republic of)
- Iraq
- Ireland
- Isle of Man
- Israel
- Italy
- Jamaica
- Japan
- Jersey
- Jordan
- Kazakhstan
- Kenya
- Kiribati
- Kosovo
- Kuwait
- Kyrgyzstan
- Lao People's Democratic Republic
- Latvia
- Lebanon
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Macedonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Malaysia
- Maldives
- Mali
- Malta
- Marshall Islands
- Martinique
- Mauritania
- Mauritius
- Mayotte
- Mexico
- Micronesia (Federated States of)
- Monaco
- Mongolia
- Montenegro
- Montserrat
- Morocco
- Mozambique
- Myanmar
- Namibia
- Nauru
- Nepal
- Netherlands
- Netherlands Antilles
- New Caledonia
- New Zealand
- Nicaragua
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Niue
- Norfolk Island
- Northern Mariana Islands
- Norway
- Occupied Palestinian Territory
- Oman
- Pakistan
- Palau
- Panama
- Papua New Guinea
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Philippines
- Pitcairn
- Poland
- Portugal
- Puerto Rico
- Qatar
- Republic of Korea
- Republic of Moldova
- Réunion
- Romania
- Russian Federation
- Rwanda
- Saint-Barthélemy
- Saint Helena
- Saint Kitts and Nevis
- Saint Lucia
- Saint-Martin (French part)
- Saint Pierre and Miquelon
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Samoa
- San Marino
- Sao Tome and Principe
- Saudi Arabia
- Senegal
- Serbia
- Seychelles
- Sierra Leone
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Solomon Islands
- Somalia
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Spain
- Sri Lanka
- Sudan
- Suriname
- Svalbard and Jan Mayen Islands
- Swaziland
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Taiwan
- Tajikistan
- Thailand
- Timor-Leste
- Togo
- Tokelau
- Tonga
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- Turkmenistan
- Turks and Caicos Islands
- Tuvalu
- Uganda
- Ukraine
- United Arab Emirates
- United Republic of Tanzania
- United States of America
- United States Virgin Islands
- Uruguay
- Uzbekistan
- Vanuatu
- Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
- Vietnam
- Wallis and Futuna Islands
- Western Sahara
- Yemen
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe
- Other (please specify)
  .....

33. I am:

- ○ White
- ○ Black
- ○ Mixed background
- ○ Chinese or Chinese British
- ○ Asian or Asian British – Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi
- ○ Asian or Asian British – Other Asian background
- ○ Arab
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other (please specify)…….

34. Are you currently in paid employment?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**If yes**, how many hours of paid employment do you undertake in a typical week (term time)?

- ○ 1-10 hours
- ○ 11-20 hours
- ○ 21-30 hours
- ○ More than 30 hours

35. I am (select all that apply):

- ○ Self-funded
- ○ Research Council funded
- ○ Funded by a charity
- ○ Funded by a higher education institution
- ○ UK industry funded
- ○ UK Government funded
- ○ EU/EC funded
- ○ Funded by an overseas organisation
- ○ Other *(Please specify)*……...

36. In the year before starting my research degree programme I:

- ○ Completed my undergraduate studies
- ○ Completed my postgraduate studies (for example, MSc, MA)
- ○ Took a gap year
- ○ Worked in the same organisation that I currently work in
- ○ Worked as a researcher
- ○ Worked in a non research role
- ○ Other (please specify)……..

## Contact us

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