

Information Sheet – Promoting the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

The 2013 **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey** (for PGR students) launches at The University of Manchester on **Tuesday 5 March 2013** and will run until **16 May 2013**.

PRES runs every **TWO YEARS** and the University participated in the PRES for the first time in 2011.

Now in its fifth year, PRES is a UK-wide survey that collects the views of current postgraduate researchers in order to target, design and evaluate work to enhance the learning experiences of postgraduate students on research programmes.

In the last wave of PRES in 2011, 102 institutions took part in PRES. With 31,202 students completing the survey, there was a national response rate of 32%. The institutional response rate for Manchester was 26%.

Institutional-level results are confidential, meaning they cannot be used to form league tables. However, PRES allows benchmarking while keeping institutional level results confidential, through the creation of benchmarking groups, including the Russell Group. These allow participating institutions to compare their own performance with the average performance of the institutions in each group.

The PRES survey is being administered by the Graduate Education Office. Your point of contact for any queries about the administration of the survey is Helen Baker (helen.c.baker@manchester.ac.uk)

Once the survey has been conducted and the data has been checked, the Graduate Education Office will arrange for results to be shared with colleagues. A national report will also be produced by the Higher Education Academy – you can read the 2011 report at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/postgraduate/PRES_2011_report

There is an internal University website which contains further information about the PRES Survey at www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/student-experience

PLEASE NOTE: This website is for information and promotional materials and does not provide access to the survey – research student needs to follow the unique link they are provided with via email or My Manchester for their response to be counted.

Launching the survey to students

Once the survey launches, PGR students will receive a central email from the University inviting them to take the PRES – this email will contain a unique access link for them to follow and complete the survey.

However, good practice guidelines suggest that it may be advantageous for a School/centre to communicate with students in advance of the launch, to let them know to expect the email and also the purpose of the survey.

There will also be a special edition of the My Manchester weekly student bulletin targeted at PGR students, which will feature the survey and encourage students to take part.

They will also see their unique survey link when they log into the My Manchester student portal at <http://my.manchester.ac.uk>. The survey will also be promoted in eProg.

It is important that as many research students as possible provide their feedback for the survey to generate reliable information.

We are aiming to achieve a response rate of at least 26% at institution level – and we need your help to encourage research students to fill out the survey and achieve as high a response rate as possible.

Key Messages

The Communication strategy for the PRES is being overseen and co-ordinated by the Student Communication and Marketing Team and the Graduate Education Office, working with colleagues from the DSE Project Office, Students' Union and Internal Communications.

A number of key messages for students have been defined – you can use these in any written or oral communications with students

- PRES will open on Tuesday 5 March and will run until Thursday 16 May 2013
- For all postgraduate research students.
- Opportunity to give your opinions on your experience at Manchester, including supervision, resources, research community, progress and assessment, research skills and professional development.
- If eligible you will receive an email from the University inviting you to take part.
- You can also log into My Manchester to take the survey
- Responses remain anonymous and your contact details are only used for the purpose of administering the survey.
- Survey is run in partnership with the Students' Union
- Part of the University's and Union's commitment to listening to our students and improving the student experience
- Inform improvements and extension of good practice ***[use examples of enhancements made to student experience previously as a result of feedback, eg 2011 PRES]***
- Results used nationally to help improve learning and teaching of research postgraduates across the sector.

Specific guidance for academic and student support staff

You can help by:

- Discussing the surveys with students you are supervising, advising or training
- Displaying appropriate promotional materials in your office or on your email signatures
- Arranging for dedicated time in computer labs for students to complete the survey (***one school in the 2011 survey also arranged to provide free pizza and achieved over 90% participation***)

Important points to make to students:

- If eligible for the PRES, students will receive a central email inviting them to participate. They can also log into [My Manchester](#) and follow the link to the PRES survey.
- They should feel free to give their honest feedback – the survey is anonymous and we want to know what they really think, not what they think we would like to hear

- The surveys will have an impact on what things get done or don't get done – we appreciate that in some cases they may not benefit directly themselves, but we hope that they will be willing to share their experiences so that future students can benefit

Please be careful that:

- Students are targeted equally so that each eligible students are given a chance to express their views on their student experience
- You don't monitor, or give the appearance of monitoring, their responses
- You encourage them only to reflect in their answers their genuine perceptions of their experiences

Publicity and Promotional Material

Below is a list of the available materials, together with suggestions as to how they can be used to promote the PRES to postgraduate research students. Arrangements have also been made for eligible students to see a PRES box and a survey link in the My Manchester student portal when they log in.

Hard copy materials:

Although HEA produces its own electronic publicity material for the PRES, a strong brand does not exist in the same way as for the NSS, and therefore a decision has been taken to produce our own PRES promotional materials. These have been produced in consultation with PGR students to try and ensure their effectiveness and relevance in communicating key messages.

If you wish to order A3 and A4 posters and A5 flyers, please email Leah Clegg (leah.clegg@manchester.ac.uk) in the Student Communications Team, specifying quantities. We expect to deliver all materials w/b 25 February.

Posters – please display in prominent locations e.g. near entrances/in areas frequented by postgraduate research students / in any PG computer clusters, and also cafes located in your building. If you have specific social or study areas for PG students, these would be ideal.

Flyers – We are working with the SU to involve PGR Student Reps in promoting the PRES, but it is also worth engaging with them and encouraging them to support the campaign. They can help by distributing flyers to their peers (this would be more effective than simply leaving them on counters or around buildings).

Online materials: (still in production, but when ready you can download them from <http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/student-experience/ptes-and-pres/promoting/>)

Banners – For use online and electronically, as appropriate. These can also be added to email signatures – but please remember to remove them once the PRES finishes.

Screensavers - These could be loaded onto machines in School managed computer clusters.

Plasma Screen Display- A slide suitable for display on plasma screens will be available for those who have access to such a screen in their School/Building.

Use of email to communicate with students

Colleagues are encouraged to use email channels to communicate with relevant students, but are asked to;

- target messages as precisely as possible (eg send messages to a PGR Listserv rather than one for the whole School)
- use this method sparingly to avoid 'bombarding' – evidence suggests this approach can lead to students ignoring emails
- try to ensure they come from a named person or familiar face rather than a generic address

The Student Communications and Marketing Team will use its weekly My Manchester student bulletin to promote the PRES periodically, and it is recommended this is supported by localised communications.

Rather than sending blanket emails to everyone, it's suggested that you work with the Graduate Education Office to monitor response rates and then only email students or groups of students who have not yet responded – perhaps send four of these reminder emails within a ten week survey period.

We have included a suggested email template in Appendix A at the end of this briefing note

Further advice may be obtained from the Student Communications Team – in the first instance please contact Alex Waddington, Student Communications Manager, on x67998, or by email: alex.waddington@manchester.ac.uk

Incentives & Prize Draws

There will not be a University-wide incentive scheme or prize draw for the PRES. Evidence suggests that prize draws can be ineffective as a way of increasing response rates, although offering something for everyone who participates can be more effective (see example below).

For example, free pizza in computer labs or clusters has shown to be a good way of getting students to complete the survey. This approach could be extended to offering students who come to an event and complete the survey the opportunity to enter a prize draw. You – and your student reps – may have other ideas

Please ensure that any incentive you offer a) does not compromise the neutrality of the survey and b) is equally available to all eligible students.

Working with Your Student Reps

It has been shown that enlisting the support of student reps and students' unions is one of the best ways to promote surveys.

Centrally we are working closely with the SU to ensure reps are made aware of the PRES and are able to communicate key messages to their peers effectively. But why not hold a meeting with your reps to tell them about PRES and involve them in planning and promotion?

In 2012, one school increased response rate from 73% to 86% in the NSS through a successful partnership with reps, which saw the reps using their student-led Facebook groups and Twitter accounts to engage with students and promote the survey.

How you discuss the PRES with students

When you discuss the PRES with students, ***remind them that responses are anonymous, and they should feel free to express their honest opinions.***

CAUTION - it is crucial that local survey promotion is neutral and that:

- Students are targeted equally so that each eligible student is given a chance to express their views on their student experience
- Students feel free to give honest feedback about their experiences without their responses being influenced by their institution
- Students must not be asked to complete the survey while a member of staff is overseeing their responses, or made to feel that their responses are being monitored
- Students must not be encouraged to reflect in their answers anything other than their genuine perceptions of their experience
- No link between the PRES, league tables, and the perceived value of students' degrees should be made in any promotional materials or targeted emails.

Remember to keep your information factual and avoid attempting, or appearing to attempt, to influence the way that students answer the questions.

Other ways you can help

The support and encouragement of the student's school/programme team and individual supervisors has been shown to be highly influential in achieving a high level of response to student surveys.

Please ensure that academic colleagues in your School are aware of the survey and encourage them to promote it to their PGR students.

In **Appendix B** you will find an email template to help you do this.

Weekly Response Updates: Once the PRES survey is underway, the Graduate Education Office will provide regular reports about how the responses are progressing.

This will be distributed by email so that you can see if any further publicity is required in your area – please feel free to contact the Student Communications Team on x67998 or email alex.waddington@manchester.ac.uk if you want further advice, help and guidance on doing this.

Helen Baker
Head of Graduate Education & Researcher Development
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Appendix A

1 - Suggested text for circular email to postgraduate research students re PRES 2013

Do you want your opinions on your postgraduate research experience to be heard?

Take part in the **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey** (PRES) 2013. Whether you feel your time as a student at the University of Manchester has been great, or you feel that some aspects could have been better, the PRES gives you a unique opportunity to speak up and make an impact in a meaningful way.

Your opinions matter and can lead to real change within the University. Based on previous year's results we have implemented the following changes:

- INSERT EXAMPLES ***[Note: the Graduate Education Office will be collating examples of improvements made following PRES 2011]***

If you are eligible for the survey, the University will contact you by email at the beginning of March 2013 to invite you to fill in the survey online.

Thank you

[Signed by a member of staff that students are likely to be familiar with]

Appendix B

2 - Suggested text for internal memo to staff/supervisors re PRES 2013

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2013.

Now entering its fifth year, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) will launch at the University on 5 March 2013 and will be available for students to complete until May 16 2013.

PRES is a survey of postgraduate research students in Higher Education Institutions and is commissioned by the [Higher Education Academy](#) .

It is important that as many students as possible provide their feedback for the PRES survey to generate reliable information. We need to achieve a response rate of at least 26% at institution level to match the 2011 survey response rates.

Around 5 March our eligible postgraduate research students will be sent an invitation email to complete the PRES survey by the University with a personalised link to their own section of the survey (the survey can also be accessed via 'My Manchester at <http://my.manchester.ac.uk>'). Those who have not completed the survey may later be contacted again by email to remind them to complete the survey. Early online completion is desirable so please make your students aware of the PRES and encourage them to complete the survey.

If you have any questions please contact your School/Faculty PGR administrator or you can contact Helen Baker in the Graduate Education Team..

Many thanks for your help.