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# Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2025

## Sector report

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# 1 Executive summary

The results from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2025 showcase a very positive experience being provided to postgraduate researchers across the participating institutions. Overall satisfaction levels are the highest we have seen in over a decade, and there is evidence of progress being made across many of the aspects covered in the survey.

Even the areas of research culture and community, which perennially score lower than the other main sections, have begun to show consistently higher scores (albeit still with room for improvement), which are a likely reflection of dedicated activity to drive improvement.

Elsewhere in the survey, supervision is highly praised, as is the provision of online and on-campus resources.

Correlation analysis has provided a clear and consistent view of the areas of the experience with the strongest link to overall satisfaction and it is again the case that providing a sense of belonging, and valuing and responding to feedback, are two of the strongest correlations. For both aspects, there is clear room for improvement, despite the high scores elsewhere.

One area where further focus is required, both at institutional and potentially at policy level, is improving parity of the experience among PGRs with a disability. Although there is evidence of increasing satisfaction over time, the gap compared to PGRs who do not report a disability remains significant.

International students comprise a major proportion of PGRs, and there is evidence that their experience is very positive. However, in a context of cost-of-living challenges impacting on students at all levels, with PGRs being no exception, it is striking to see evidence that international students are particularly impacted by these financial challenges as they progress through their research degree.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Background

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is a long-established instrument for gathering insight into the postgraduate researcher (PGR) experience, while also providing a key opportunity for PGRs themselves to have a voice.

PRES is open to all Advance HE member institutions globally, providing confidential results to drive enhancement of their PGR provision. Due the scale and reach of PRES, this provides the opportunity for participating higher education institutions (HEIs) to receive detailed benchmarking comparisons, ranging from the overall sample to specific representative groups or geographies.

Advance HE also offers an additional service where members can hand-pick comparator groups of HEIs, whose results are then anonymised and aggregated, providing tailored comparison data.

### 2.2 Content

To provide comparability, much of the content of PRES remains consistent year to year. However, there is also scope to evolve the content and bring in new or updated question areas, with individual items being updated in consultation with the participating HEIs and wider sector representation as and when appropriate.

For example, some elements of PRES were updated significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic to reflect the scale of online studying and remote interactions taking place. Several of these elements have remained in the survey as the best way of positioning the PGR experience post-pandemic.

That said, in 2025, changes to the content were relatively minimal, providing a high level of consistency to recent years. The main changes were:

- + a small number of questions were removed from the survey. These questions were follow-up questions regarding training for teaching, preparedness for career and year of programme
- + in response to stakeholder feedback, the resources question set was split into two question sets: on-campus resources and online learning resources.

The key sections in the survey are:

- + **Supervision** (four closed questions, one open question)
- + **On-campus resources** (four closed questions, one open question)
- + **Online learning resources** (three closed questions, one open question)
- + **Research culture** (four closed questions, one open question)
- + **Community** (three closed questions)
- + **Progress and assessment / Progression** (four closed questions, one open question)
- + **Responsibilities** (four closed questions, one open question)
- + **Support** (three closed questions, one open question)
- + **Research skills** (four closed questions, one open question)
- + **Professional development** (four closed questions, one open question).

There are also sections covering the overall experience (including an 'overall satisfaction' question), demographics, and development opportunities including teaching.

Each main question set is followed by an open comment question for students to provide further feedback on that theme, with institutions having the ability to remove these questions for a shorter survey if required. There are also two open comment questions asked of all respondents: 'What has been the one most positive aspect of your research degree programme so far?' and 'What one thing would most improve your experience of your research degree programme'?

In addition to the overall benchmarking reports provided to institutions by Advance HE, institutions could also opt-in to receive tailored analysis on the two main open comment questions. This analysis was provided to institutions directly, on behalf of Advance HE, by evasys<sup>1</sup> and Student Voice AI.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.3 Data collection

Surveys were distributed by participating HEIs directly to their PGR population, who responded to a link hosted on the Jisc Online Surveys platform.<sup>3</sup> Data was collected between 3 February and 16 May 2025. Within this survey window, HEIs could decide when to run the survey, with a minimum fieldwork length of three weeks.

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<sup>1</sup> [evasys.co.uk](http://evasys.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [www.studentvoice.ai](http://www.studentvoice.ai)

<sup>3</sup> [www.onlinesurveys.jisc.ac.uk](http://www.onlinesurveys.jisc.ac.uk)

## 2.4 Sample size

Until 2017 PRES ran on a biennial basis, with Advance HE introducing an annual cycle from 2018. Accordingly, we have seen some HEIs choose to continue with a biennial approach, while others have taken the opportunity to reflect the views of their PGR community annually.

As a legacy of this biennial history, we see a pattern of high participation every two years, with a different number of participating institutions (around 60% as large) in intervening years. In 2025 there was strong participation across the board, including among large research intensive and smaller, specialist institutions.

### PRES participation: institutions and responses (2017–2025)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Institutions	117	66	107	45	94	62	105*	61**	93
Responses	57,689	16,817	50,600	8,432	39,855	13,922	37,661	12,123	35,475

\*81 of the institutions from 2023 also took part in 2025

\*\*33 of the institutions from 2024 also took part in 2025

## 2.5 Benchmark groups

The participation cohort of 93 institutions was spread across a range of geographies and types of institution, enabling Advance HE to provide a wide range of (anonymised) benchmark groups for comparison. Each participating institution receives a bespoke suite of Power BI dashboards and the choice of comparison against three benchmark groups.

Benchmark group 2025	Number of HEIs <sup>4</sup>
Total sector	93
Cathedrals Group	7
Guild HE	5
Million Plus	10
Pre-92	43
Post-92	40
Russell Group	16
Small & Specialist	10
University Alliance	10
Australia	4
London	21
Scottish	8
Welsh	5

<sup>4</sup> Membership of these benchmark/comparator groups is not mutually exclusive.

## **2.6 Australia**

PRES is available to Advance HE members anywhere in the world, but historically it had principally been UK institutions choosing to take part. In recent years, we have been pleased to work with a number of Australian member institutions to run PRES.<sup>5</sup>

This enabled us to produce another Australian benchmark, and this is available as a comparison option to all institutions.

The core survey content for Australian institutions is the same, although there is flexibility to adjust demographic questions to reflect the Australian context for certain categories.

Accordingly, many of the data points in this report reflect all UK and Australian institutions that have participated, although there are some findings where Australian institutions have been removed (referenced throughout) for ease of comparison.

## **2.7 Year-on-year comparison**

As noted above, annual participation in PRES tends to alternate between a large sample of HEIs (including many larger HEIs) and a sample around 60% as large containing many smaller PGR cohorts.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we have not focused solely on year-on-year comparisons in this report, in many cases highlighting data across a range of years to reflect this varying participation.

That said, the sample sizes in each year are extremely robust with a very small margin for error in any particular year.

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<sup>5</sup> This report represents the results at overall level, including the four Australian institutions, unless otherwise stated; hence, on many aspects it is not a purely UK snapshot.

<sup>6</sup> Some HEIs take part biennially and others take part annually, and this is regularly evolving.

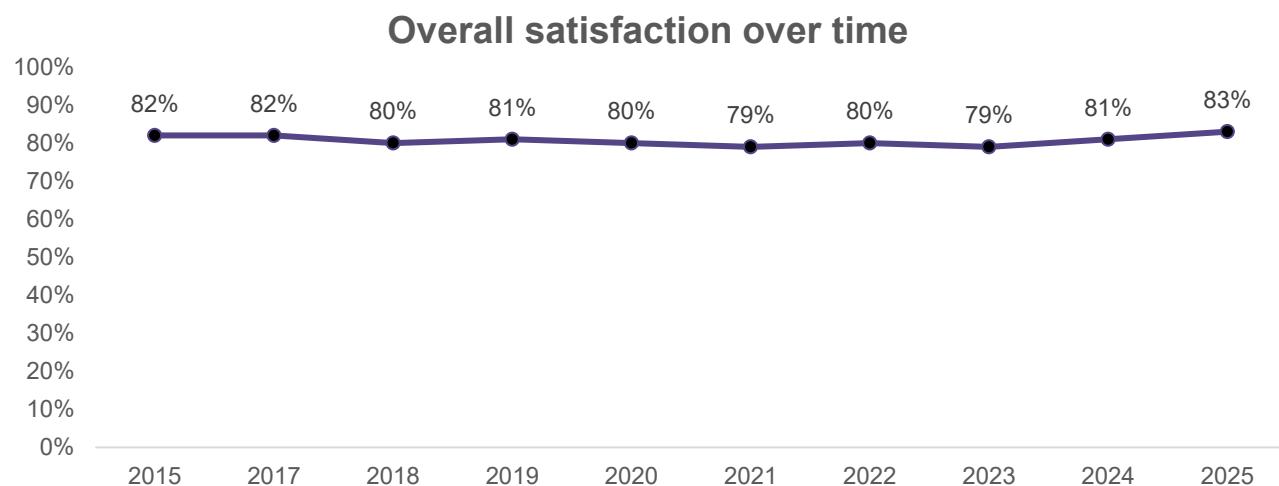
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## 3 Overall satisfaction

### 3.1 The overall experience

One of the key questions in the survey which serves as an overall measure for the experience is the question asking how postgraduate researchers rate their experience overall.

The specific question is worded as follows: *“to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement – overall, I am satisfied with the experience of my research degree programme”* with agreement on a five-point scale. In this and in most other questions throughout the survey, we have added together the most positive two points on the scale – in this case “definitely agree” or “mostly agree”, to give an overall score for PGR satisfaction.

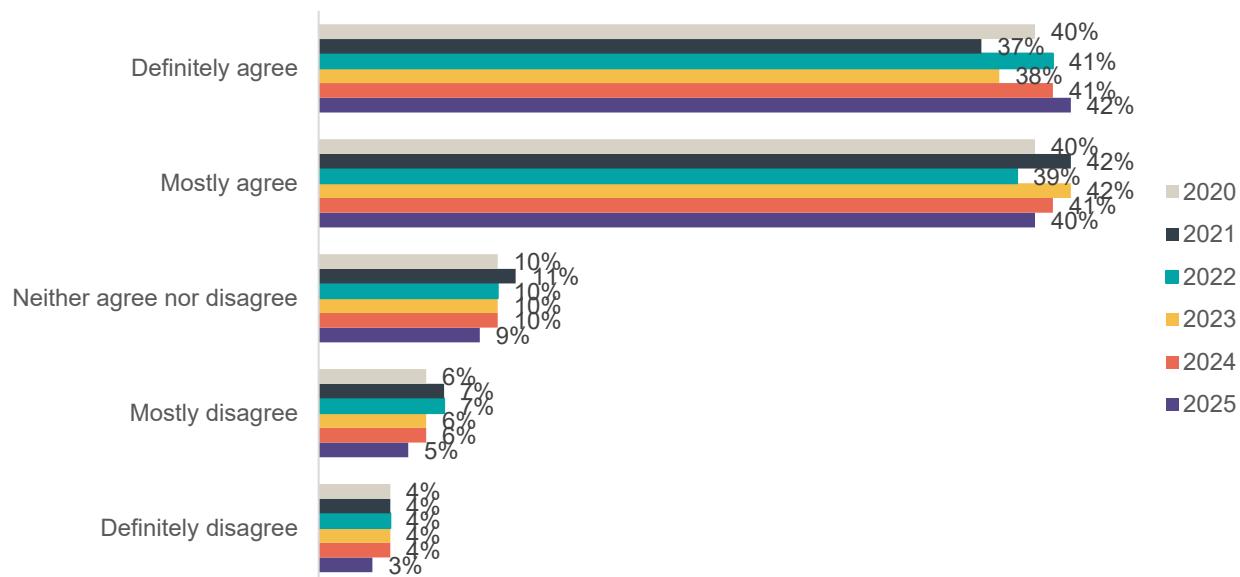


The score for this question, as depicted in the above chart, is very positive, at 83%, which represents a clear upward trend over the past few years (since 2021), and is striking in that it is the highest score achieved in the last 10 years.

Indeed, analysis of historic data tells us that we need to go back all the way to 2011 (86%) to find a higher overall score (not charted here). This is a very strong endorsement of how institutions across the UK and Australia are committed to maximising the postgraduate research experience, as measured across more than 90 institutions and 35,000 responses.

The 2025 results also provide evidence that the strength of feeling within overall satisfaction is also increasing, with 42% definitely agreeing that they are satisfied – the highest level over the last few years.

### Overall satisfaction – strength of feeling over time



## 3.2 Postgraduate and undergraduate comparison

Advance HE administers both the PRES and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES).<sup>7</sup> Between them, these two high-profile surveys provide a robust, publicly available measurement of the postgraduate experience in UK HEIs.<sup>8</sup>

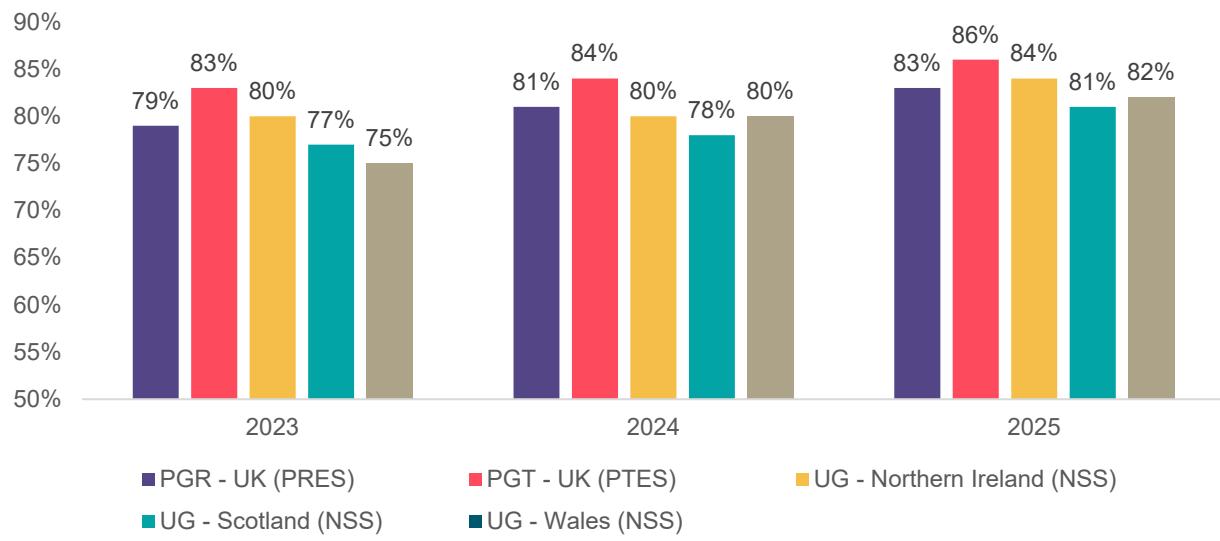
Although both surveys have their own specific sets of questions, both contain an ‘overall satisfaction’ question (see above), which enables topline comparison to a similarly worded question included in the National Student Survey (NSS) for undergraduates run by the Office for Students.<sup>9</sup> Since a change to the NSS ahead of 2023, the ‘overall satisfaction’ question is no longer asked in England, but time-series comparisons to undergraduates studying at institutions in the rest of the UK are available, as detailed in the chart below.

<sup>7</sup> For a separate report on the PTES 2025 results, see Advance HE (2025) ‘Postgraduate Taught Student Satisfaction Reaches Highest Level Since Survey Began’. *Advance HE News + Views*, 20 November. Available at: [www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/postgraduate-taught-student-satisfaction-reaches-highest-level-survey-began](http://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/postgraduate-taught-student-satisfaction-reaches-highest-level-survey-began)

<sup>8</sup> As explained earlier, PRES contains some institutions from Australia but, given that the PGT and undergraduate surveys referred to in this section are UK-only, the PRES results in this graph have been produced based on UK institutions only for direct comparison.

<sup>9</sup> Office for Students (2025) *National Student Survey 2025 Results*. Bristol and London: Office for Students. Available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/national-student-survey-data](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/national-student-survey-data)

### Comparison of satisfaction levels in sector surveys - PGR, PGT, UG



Of the three cohorts, postgraduate taught (PGT) students are consistently the most satisfied, with very high satisfaction levels as measured by the PTES survey. However, particularly in 2025, the satisfaction levels of PGRs compare well, and are slightly above the levels for undergraduates in Scotland and Wales.

### 3.3 International comparison

Advance HE's PRES survey is used under licence to form the basis of the PGR Student Survey.ie that is run every two years in Ireland. The Irish PGR survey is co-sponsored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Universities Association (TUA), and Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ), formerly the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). In 2025, 17 institutions and 4,225 postgraduates took part.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, a number of data points in the two surveys are broadly comparable, with a topline comparison of the “overall satisfaction” results across the two surveys, showing 75% for the Irish PGR Survey, and 83% for PRES.<sup>11</sup>

Both point to generally positive postgraduate research experiences, with observed differences best understood in the context of differing national systems, structures and participation profiles.

<sup>10</sup> StudentSurvey.ie (2026) ‘Welcome! The 2026 Taught Student Survey Opens February 3!’ Dublin: Irish Survey of Student Engagement. Available at: [studentsurvey.ie](http://studentsurvey.ie)

<sup>11</sup> To enable direct comparison with Ireland, the PRES results in this comparison are based on UK institutions only.

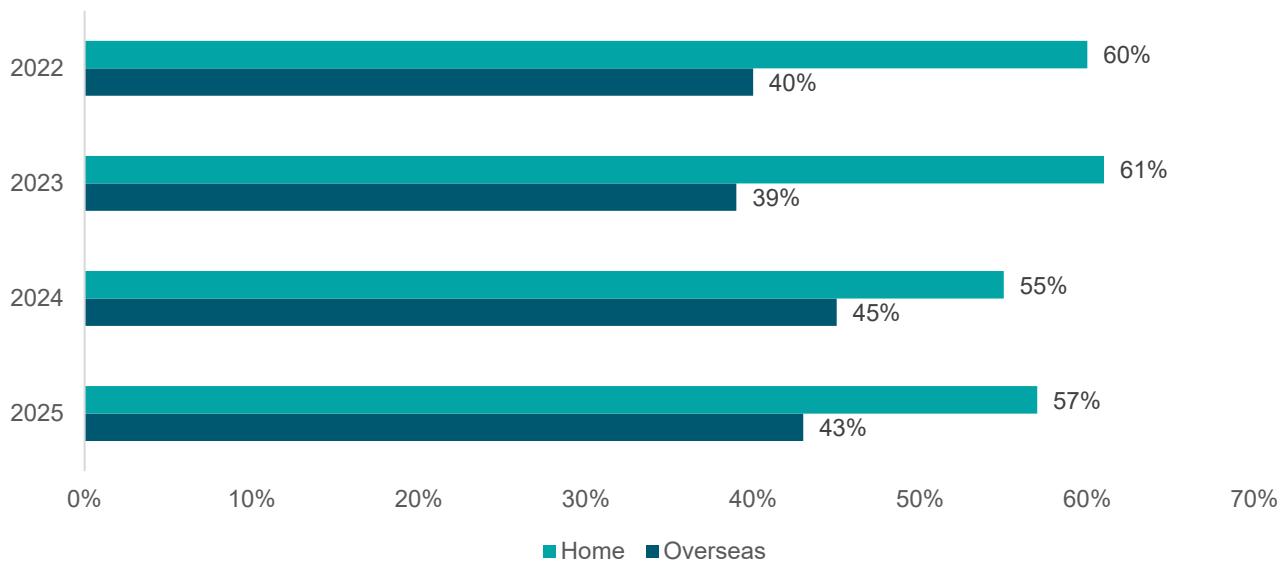
## 4 Home and overseas

### 4.1 Proportion of sample

The proportion of 'overseas' students in PRES 2025 was 43%, a strong match for the overall UK sector figure of 42% of PGRs who are domiciled outside the UK.<sup>12</sup>

Please note that, for simplicity and ease of analysis, the definition of 'home' and 'overseas' students in this report is based on students at UK HEIs only and does not include respondents from Australian institutions.

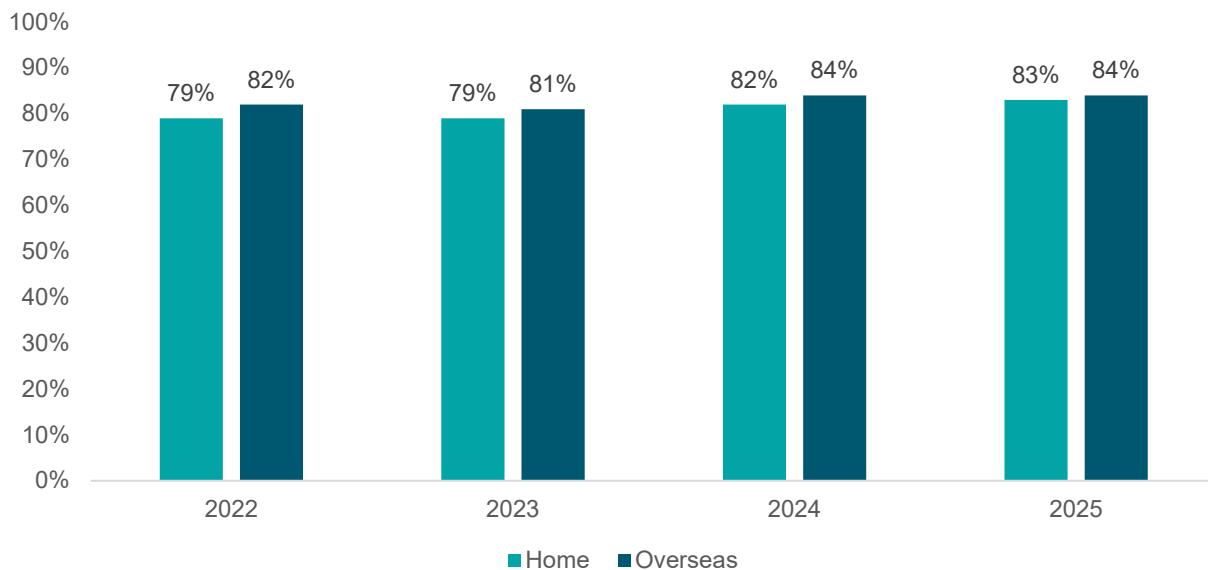
**Home/overseas – percentage of UK responses by domicile**



Turning to satisfaction levels, there is now little or no difference between home and overseas students, with the latter reporting higher levels of satisfaction at 84%. However, it is encouraging to see that satisfaction levels among home students have increased markedly.

<sup>12</sup> Source: HESA (2026) 'Where do HE students come from?' Cheltenham: Jisc. Available at: [www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from)

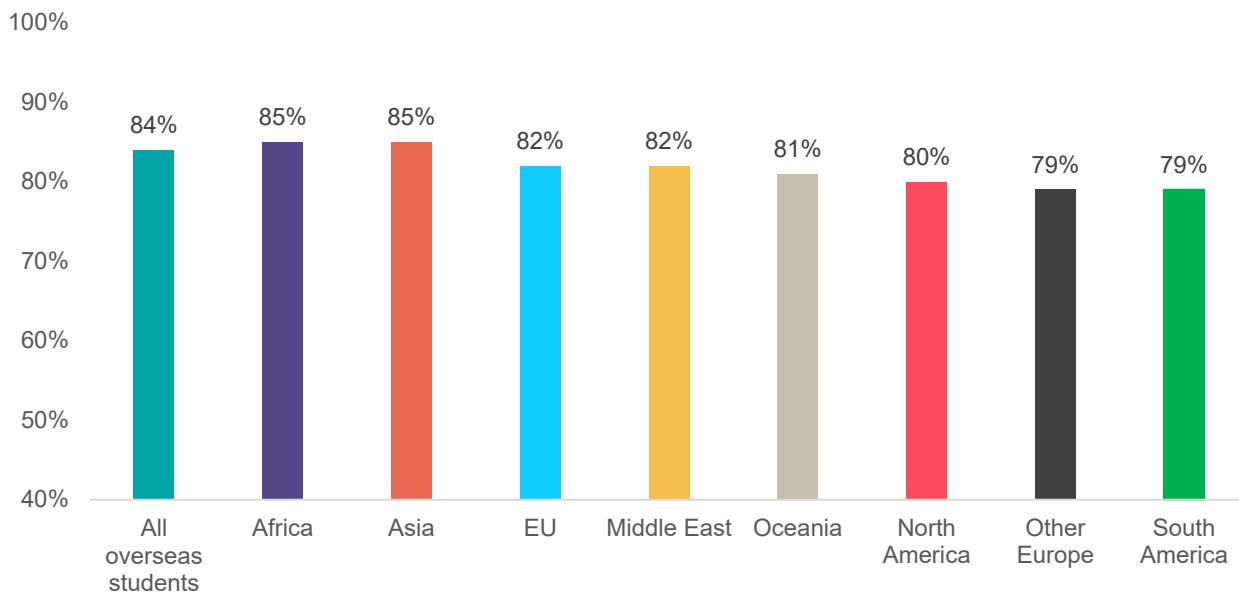
### Overall satisfaction by domicile



Even taking into account any differences in the composition of the sample between different years, the data suggests a clear increase in satisfaction among home students over the past few years. There has also been a smaller improvement among overseas students, whose levels of satisfaction have generally been very high.

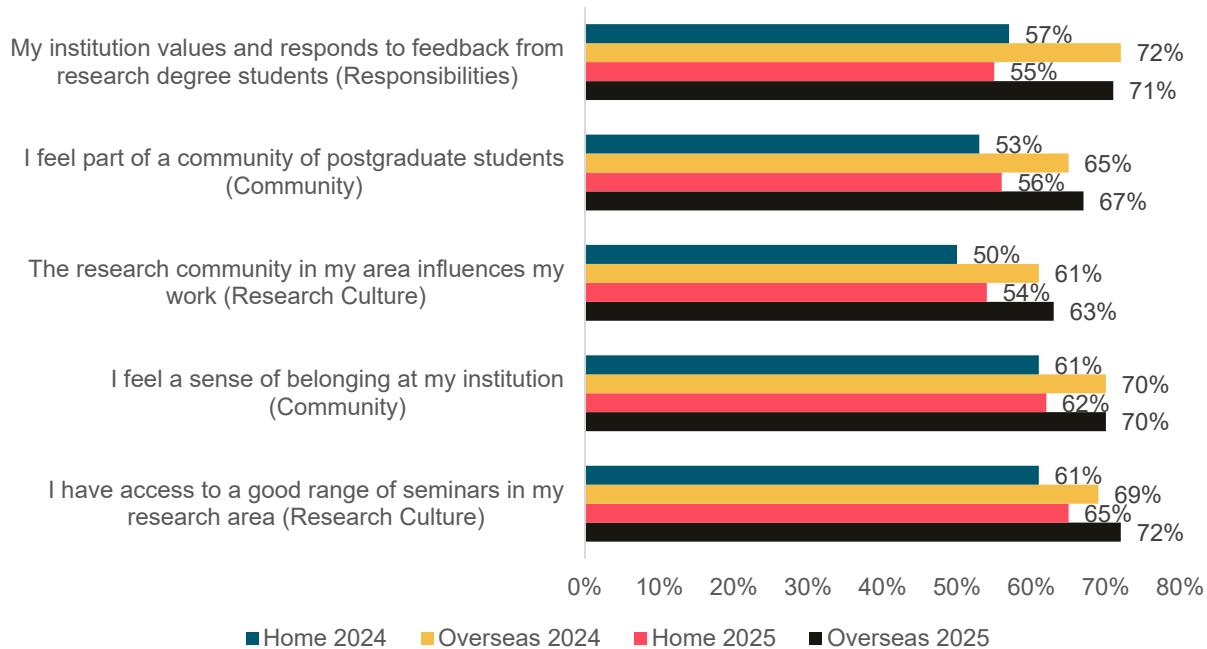
In general, there was good consistency in the experience between PGRs from different parts of the world, although as shown below, international students from North and South America, as well as those from Europe but outside the EU, gave scores a few percentage points lower. One potential impact explanation for this could be high levels of pressure created by cost-of-living concerns. As we will see later, this impacted overseas students in general but particularly those from North and South America.

## Overall satisfaction, 2025, by global region



Although there are few very large gaps between home and overseas students across the survey (fewer than in the past), most of the areas where overseas students are markedly more satisfied are within the themes of research culture and community, the views on which are potentially influenced by different experiences in conducting research while studying in other parts of the world. Encouragingly, however, although the size of the gap in the experience has not changed hugely, the above chart shows that satisfaction levels are generally higher in 2025 among both cohorts, as we will explore later on.

## Home and overseas – largest gaps (2025 in order of size)

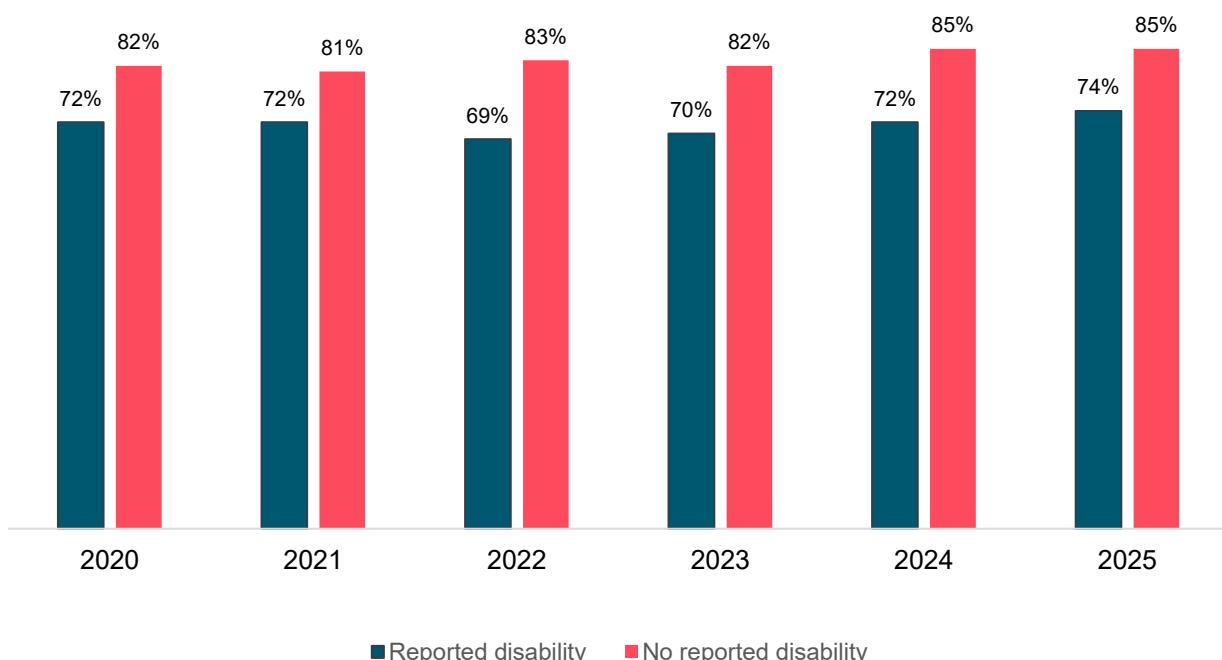


Less positively, there appears to have been no progress made in terms of what is still the largest gap – responding to PGR feedback. Not only has the gap remained significant (in fact, slightly increased) but results for both cohorts are marginally lower this year than last. In a context of many scores showing a positive improvement this year, valuing and responding to feedback stands out as a key area for focus across many participating institutions, and we will see later that it is an area with a strong link to satisfaction.

## 5 Reported disability

In the context of generally high scores, and increasing levels of satisfaction, PGRs with a disability are one of the main cohorts where results suggest there is clear room for progress. It is important to recognise that, as detailed in the chart below, there has been a clear and positive movement in overall satisfaction levels since 2022 (69%, up to 74%), but given that scores have generally improved across the board, there remains a 11 point gap in overall satisfaction between PGRs who report a disability and those who do not.

Overall satisfaction levels – by disability



Looking beyond the overall satisfaction question, the analysis below highlights individual areas of the survey with the largest gaps in the experience among PGRs who report a disability.

The largest gap, as was the case in previous analysis from 2023, is again in terms of providing opportunities to give feedback. We will see later in this report that this is an area with a strong correlation with overall satisfaction, and here we can again see that PGRs with a disability can often find it challenging to have their voice heard. Although most questions within the survey have shown an improvement in satisfaction in 2025, this particular question is one of the exceptions, with disabled PGRs being three percentage points less likely to feel satisfied in terms of feedback, compared to 2024.

## Reported vs no disability - largest gaps 2025 (in order of size)



The next two largest gaps are both related to feeling included, with disabled PGRs much less likely to feel a sense of belonging or being part of a community of PGRs. In general, neither of these aspects score particularly well across the total sample but it appears that creating a sense of community is even more challenging for PGRs with a disability. For both these aspects, there is evidence of a slight positive movement in scores between 2024 and 2025.

### Some PGRs who report a disability are looking for greater levels of support

*“Some things in the wider university context make it more difficult for disabled researchers. Regardless of supervisors being understanding, if the wider context is not accessible then the training and development is affected.”*

*“I have regular contact with the university counselling service and disabilities and learning support service and they have been wonderful. I cannot praise them more highly. I have undertaken courses in writing, but many of them are more generic and less relevant to students in my particular field.”*

*“I am an international student with a disability, I would like to have access to financial support since my health impairment has affected my research performance and my financial situation.”*

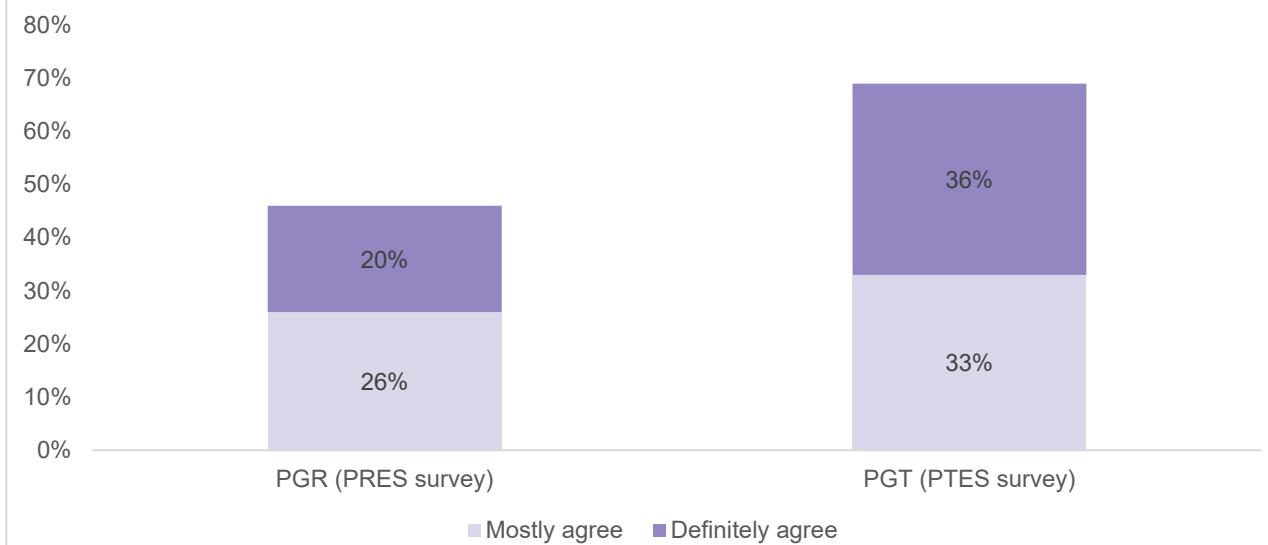
*“I requested for an adjustable desk inside the doctoral school for my work space due to health disability. I just gave up after sending multiple emails to avoid the frustration as my issue was not properly addressed. The request has remained unresolved.”*

*“My interactions with disability services have been poor. There is a lack of understanding about the nature of research courses eg that they do not have a taught element and forms have been completed incorrectly. This does not give me confidence to use this service.”*

In 2024, we introduced a new question in both PRES and PTES surveys, repeated in 2025, which asked disabled students if they felt their institution made reasonable adjustments for their needs. The proportion of disabled PGRs in 2025 giving an answer who felt that reasonable adjustments were made is not particularly high, with just under half of those who gave an answer agreeing with the statement. As context, disagreement levels (not charted here) were not especially high either, at 28% in 2025 (10% definitely disagreed/18% mostly disagreed) with 26% giving a neutral response. However, we can see by comparison with results among PGTs from the PTES survey that there appears to be clear room for improvement in this space

For further discussion on the challenges specific to PGR provision in making reasonable adjustments, see McKinven, Dean and Holland in WonkHE, December 2025.<sup>13</sup>

## My institution makes reasonable adjustments that are suitable for my needs



Base: students with a reported disability, removing “not applicable”. All findings from 2025.

<sup>13</sup> McKinven, T, Dean, K and Holland, P (2025) ‘Why is it so difficult to make reasonable adjustments when assessing disabled PGRs?’. WONKHE blog, 5 December. Available at: [wonkhe.com/blogs/why-is-it-so-difficult-to-make-reasonable-adjustments-when-assessing-disabled-pgrs](http://wonkhe.com/blogs/why-is-it-so-difficult-to-make-reasonable-adjustments-when-assessing-disabled-pgrs)

## 6 Key drivers of overall satisfaction

Using the overall PRES dataset, we have conducted correlation analysis to identify which questions in the survey are most closely linked to overall satisfaction.

Question measure (top 10 correlations)	Theme	Position in top 10 2024	Pearson correlation value (2025) <sup>14</sup>	Satisfaction level 2024	Satisfaction level 2025
I feel a sense of belonging at my institution	Community	1	0.622	64%	65%
Confidence to be creative or innovative	Research skills	4	0.559	80%	81%
My institution values and responds to feedback from PGRs	Responsibilities	2	0.557	62%	62%
I am confident I can complete my research degree programme within the expected timescale	Overall	Not included in last year's analysis	0.556	83%	84%
Support for academic skills meets my needs	Support	3	0.534	77%	78%
My supervisors help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher	Supervision	7	0.533	79%	80%
I am aware of my supervisor responsibilities towards me as a PGR	Responsibilities	Not in top 10	0.529	89%	89%
I feel part of a community of PGRs	Community	Not in top 10	0.518	58%	61%
My supervisor provides feedback that helps direct my research activities	Supervision	7	0.517	90%	91%
My skills in applying appropriate methodologies have developed	Research skills	9	0.518	89%	90%

<sup>14</sup> Statistical definitions using Pearson's correlation guidelines where 0.501+ is strong, 0.30 to 0.50 is moderate and 0.10 to 0.30 is weak. All correlations are significant at 99%.

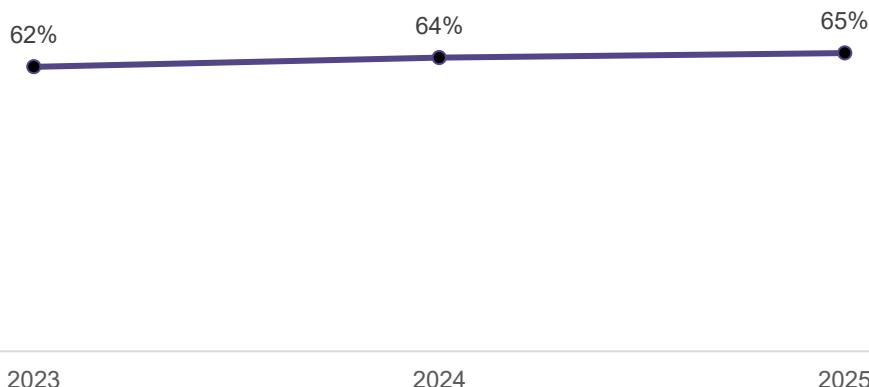
Although this is not intended to prove a causal link, this analysis does provide guidance as to the areas which, if improved, could have a particularly positive impact on the quality of the experience.

The table above combines correlation scores with satisfaction levels to highlight the areas of greatest potential for focus at the overall sector level – those areas that could potentially impact satisfaction levels but where there is clear room for improvement.

Although most of the measures in the tables score very well (ie ‘agreement’ levels above 80%), it is striking that two of the three measures with highest correlation show clear room for improvement in their actual scores. Individual institutions will have their own potentially different priorities, but at overall sector level, this provides a clear indication of priorities for improvement. Based on these data points, any action to help improve ‘sense of belonging’ and ‘valuing/responding to feedback’ would appear to have a strong potential to positively influence the overall quality of the PGR experience.

The questions on sense of belonging and responding to feedback were also highlighted in the same analysis based on 2023 and 2024 data, so this does give a consistent picture in terms of what is linked closest to satisfaction and yet is not scoring particularly well.

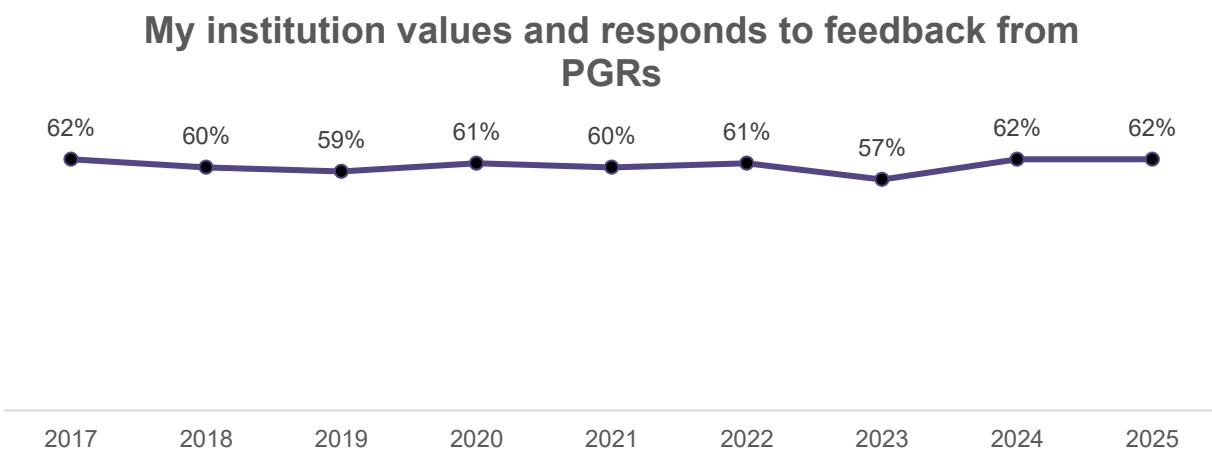
## I feel a sense of belonging at my institution



Sense of belonging is part of the battery of statements on community introduced in 2023 and are consistently among the lower scoring areas. There has been an improvement since we first asked this question in 2023 but, given its consistent status as one of the two or three key drivers of satisfaction, this measure stands out as one of the key areas for institutions to try to understand better in order to help drive higher scores.

2025	PGR (PRES)	PGT (PTES)	UG (SAES) <sup>15</sup>
<b>I feel a sense of belonging at my institution (agreement levels)</b>	65%	71%	62%

Although there is clear room for improvement for PGRs, there is key evidence from other surveys that achieving a sense of belonging is a challenge at all levels. The above table compares a very similar questions being asked in the latest edition of the Advance HE-HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES), which polls full-time UK undergraduates, as well as the exact same question asked of PGT students in the Advance HE PTES survey. As shown, the score for belonging for undergraduates is slightly lower than for PGR students, with both showing clear room for improvement. Levels of belonging are higher among PGT students but not especially so.



Valuing and responding to feedback has consistently scored around 60%, although this fell to 57% in 2023. This has recovered again to 62% but there is still clear evidence of a gap in terms of what PGRs at an overall level perceive compared to what they need in this space. This is particularly the case given the earlier analysis in this report, which showed that PGRs from overseas are a lot more satisfied (71%). However, this may be a function of different perceptions and a contrast between the experiences of this cohort in the parts of the world where they have studied before.

<sup>15</sup> Neves, J, Freeman, J, Stephenson, R and Rowan, A (2025) *Student Academic Experience Survey 2025*. York: Advance HE, p 35. Available at: [www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-academic-experience-survey-2025](http://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-academic-experience-survey-2025)

Please note the Likert scale used in the Student Academic Experience Survey was very slightly different but was also based around “agreement” hence we have chosen to compare these results.

## Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2025

Jonathan Neves

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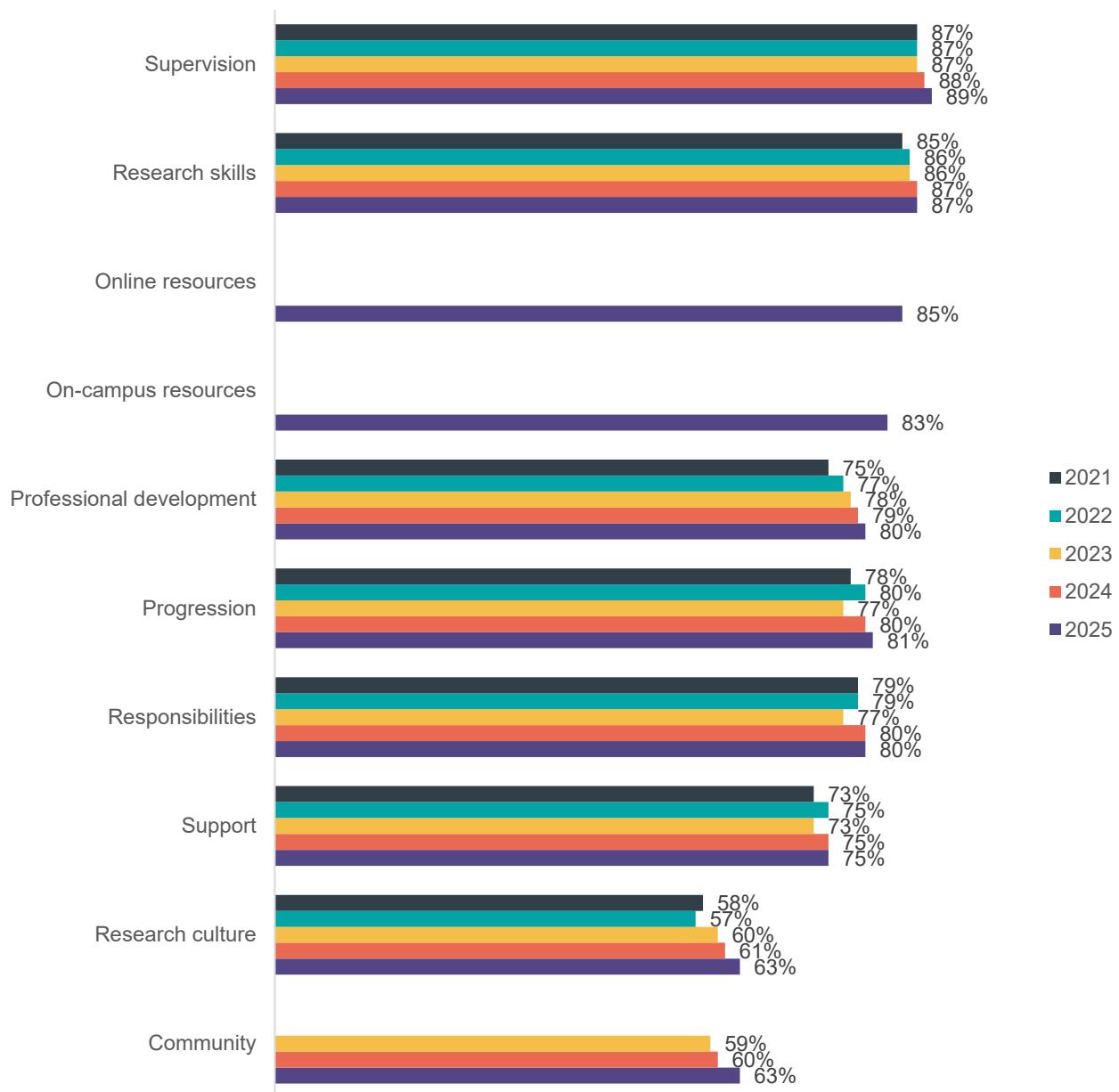
We would expect that PGRs are thinking about all elements of the feedback opportunities they are provided with across their research degree, but regular participation in PRES itself and closing the feedback loop around this is one area that could help convince PGRs that their voices are being listened to.

# 7 Satisfaction with specific areas of the PGR experience

## 7.1 Elements of the student experience

PRES measures satisfaction across 10 different core themes. Each theme contains individual question items (ranging from three to four) which are then aggregated together (as well as assessed separately) to provide overall scores for each theme.

**Satisfaction with areas of the research degree experience**



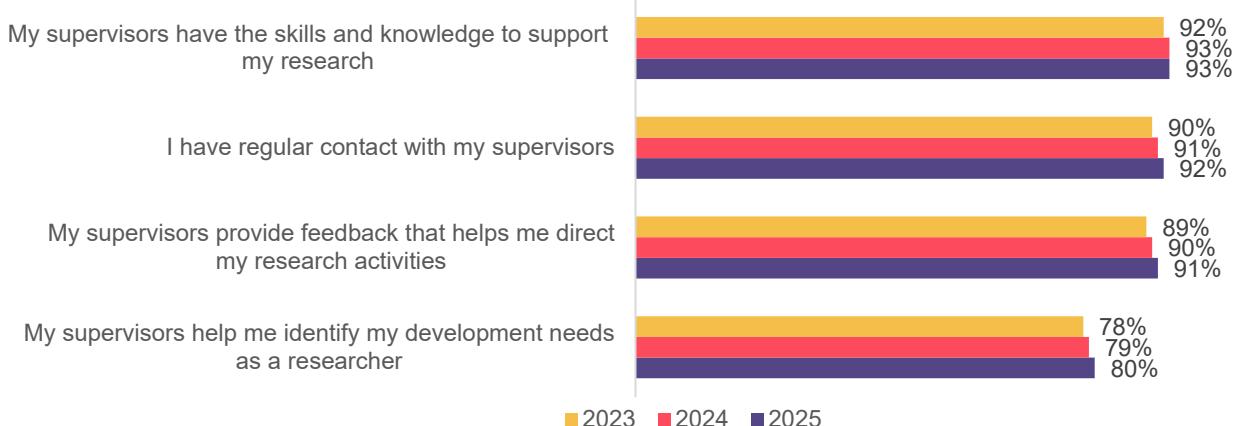
Looking at the evolution of these scores over time (where time-series data allows) we can see a positive picture in that most scores are higher than in both 2023 and 2024, which underlines that these 2025 results provide evidence of a positive PGR experience. Although the year-on-year changes are not particularly large, the consistent evolution is particularly apparent for professional development, research culture, and community – despite these latter two areas still being low scoring in absolute terms.

Due to the previous resources section being split into ‘online’ and ‘on-campus’ resources, these areas do not have a direct time-series comparison, but it is encouraging to see both scores comfortably above 80%.

## 7.2 Supervision

This was the strongest performing area overall, so we have displayed the different question areas in more detail below.

### Satisfaction with elements of supervision



Clearly, the high level of supervision is a key strength across participating institutions, particularly in terms of knowledge and availability, although focusing on development needs is perhaps an area that receives less attention in researcher-supervisor communications. As evidenced by the comments below, there were many positive comments about supervision, even though not every experience delivered on the same level.

For further coverage and dedicated research into supervision at doctoral level, please see the Research England-funded Next Generation Research Supervision Project (RSVP).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> RSVP (2025) ‘Transforming the culture and practice of research supervision’. UK: RSVP Consortium. Available at: [www.rsvp.ac.uk](http://www.rsvp.ac.uk)

**Supervision is often an area of praise, although not every experience has been completely positive**

*“My supervisors have been exemplary. They have been patient, supportive, and their knowledge of my subject is excellent.”*

*“My supervisors are fantastic. I said before I started my PhD that I would need close support and regular checking in, which I have been given over and above what I expected. I have been consistently encouraged when my confidence is low and I think that outweighs any other quality you could ask for in a supervisory team.”*

*“At least three times, my supervisors forgot about our meetings and/or postpone them informing me on the same day. Considering that I work full time... I need to ask for permissions to attend those meetings during office hours and prepare for the meetings with them, I think their behaviours have been disrespectful. Further, sometimes I have the feeling that they do not read what I send them and I never had a meaningful exchange of ideas on the topic.”*

*“In my research project, my main and second supervisors bring a wealth of knowledge, offering solid support at the PhD level for most parts of my work. That said, when it comes to methodology, I feel extra help could really lift my project to the next level. Although my current supervisors are highly skilled and capable in many areas, adding an external supervisor with deep expertise in methodology could provide valuable additional guidance.”*

*“While the supervisory meetings have been progressive, arranging them can be effortful. ...Having to follow up multiple times, potentially taking a month to arrange a team meeting due to the lack of communication...and still needing to confirm a meeting on the week of the meeting itself raises issues surrounding the uncertainty like the student's own schedule.”*

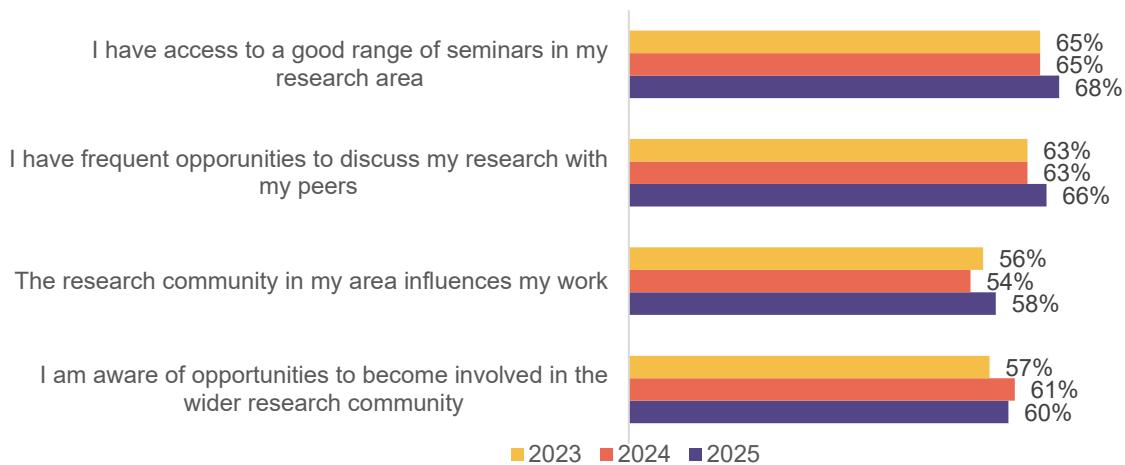
## 7.3 Research culture

Research culture is a key aspect of the survey, in some ways very specific to the PGR experience. However, the ratings for this aspect have often been relatively low, compared to other areas that are highly praised, such as supervision (above).

Although the scores, both overall and for individual elements of research culture, are still low in relative terms, there has been a clear positive movement. This is the case both when compared to 2024 but also 2023, when there was a more comparable sample of research-intensive institutions taking part in PRES.

In particular, there has been a clear step forward for providing a good range of seminars within specific research areas, for opportunities to discuss research with other PGRs and in terms of access to an influential research community. However, there has been less progress made in providing opportunities to become involved in a wider research community.

### Satisfaction with elements of research culture



The comments highlighted below reflect some of the progress made in this area while still representing the fact that this is one of the lower performing areas in the survey.

**Although there are concerns about the research culture – and some constructive feedback – there are also areas of praise, reflecting the increasing levels of satisfaction**

*"I do think working remotely does impact my ability to be involved in the research community."*

*"My group does a lot of work to connect itself with the research community in the wider country and world. However, due to physical separation to our own department..., we have little to no relation to the research community in our department within the university."*

*"Although I feel that there are limited seminars in my research area, the culture and community in my department provide interest in my research and frequent opportunities to discuss my research with students and staff."*

*"It would be nice to be in a building with other researchers who are working on similar topics. I find that those with overlapping interests are spread across many buildings and campuses, making it more difficult to meet up. I will have to then personally reach out individually in order to make time to meet with other relevant researchers. It is also more difficult to connect when many people work remotely."*

*"I've had few opportunities to engage or collaborate with other students but I see this is being improved and it was partly due to the Covid-19 lockdowns that took place across my first and second year."*

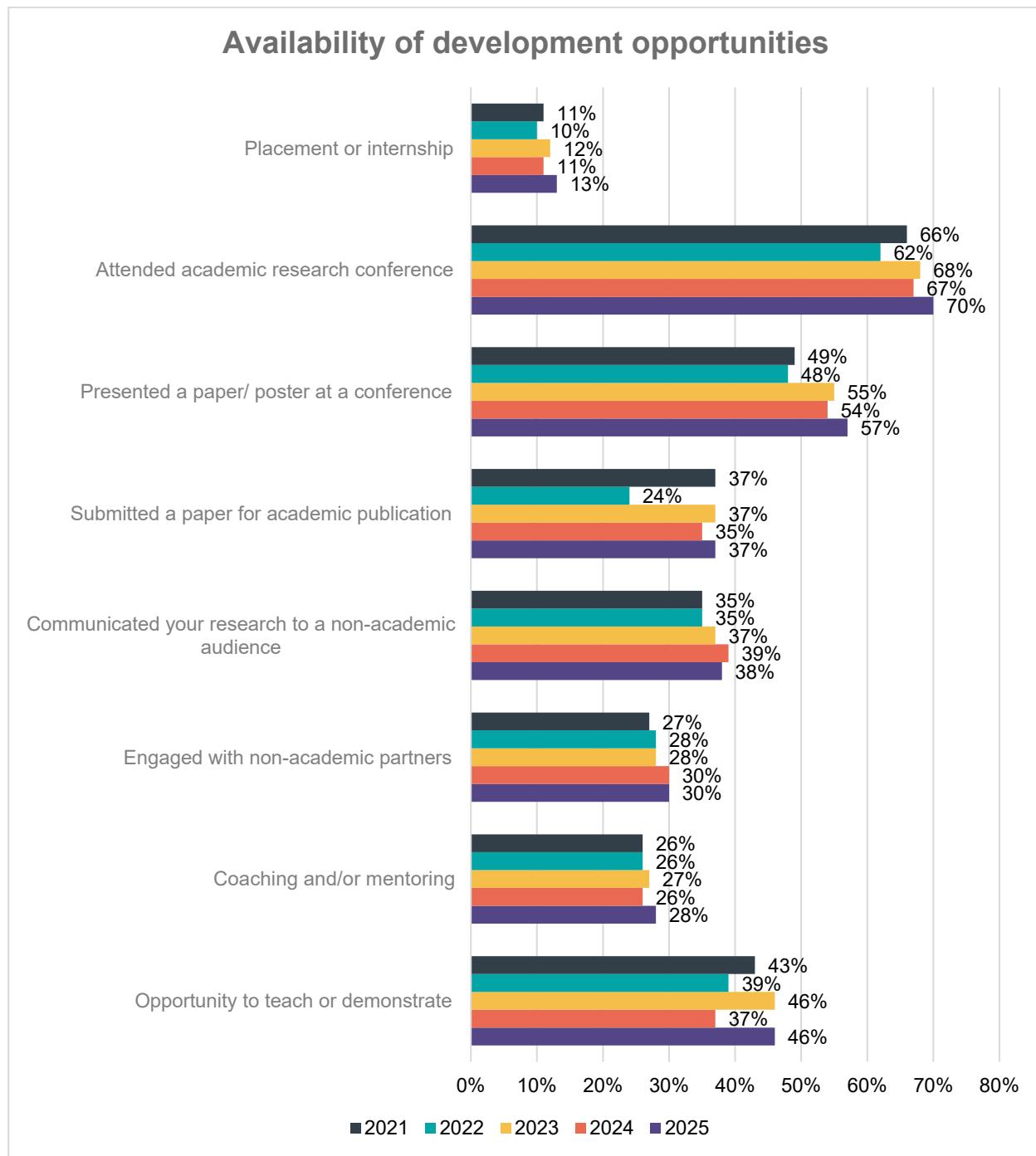
*"Lots of talks/seminars going on, which is great. Almost too many to choose from!"*

*"(my institution) is incredibly good at the community aspect. We have very frequent socials, journal clubs, presentation opportunities and intra-departmental and internal conferences."*

## 7.4 Development opportunities

Many PGRs have expectations that their research programme will provide them with a range of wider opportunities to showcase their research and/or gain specific skills such as teaching or presenting that will stand them in good stead for the future – whether their aspirations are academically focused or to move into industry.

From the range of opportunities covered within PRES, there is positive evidence that many PGRs can attend, and often present at, research conferences – and that this seems to be increasing.



There are some small year-on-year fluctuations in terms of submitting papers for publication and engaging with/presenting to non-academic partners, but broadly there has been no material change over the past few years, with around one in three PGRs benefiting from these kinds of opportunities. Likewise, there has been little movement in the proportion of PGRs who have opportunities for placements in industry or coaching/mentoring, both of which remain relatively niche and, in the case of placements, will be likely to be subject-dependent.

The other key developmental opportunity tracked through PRES is the opportunity for PGRs to do paid teaching or demonstrating. As we can see in the open comments, this is something that is clearly valued, both from a developmental and financial point of view.

However, the availability of these opportunities has often been an area of frustration. In 2024 there was a concerning decline to just 37% of PGRs having these opportunities. It is positive to see that this has increased in 2025, back to previous levels, at 46% but this is still an area that prompts a lot of comments from PGRs who would like to see more progress made in this space.

**Teaching opportunities are valued but where they are absent this can be a barrier for some**

*“Provide more teaching opportunities and demonstration for PhD students to get the experience by communicating emails that includes all PhD students within the school, fair distribution of the available opportunities and provide paid and unpaid ones.”*

*“I still lack teaching skills and have faced lots of job application rejection due to this. The Department could have done more to support us in gaining teaching experience (Leadership and Management) but they cancelled some teaching opportunities for no clear reason.”*

*“Teaching in higher education is a skill that enhances professionalism. Sadly, this opportunity is no longer available ... I feel strongly that work policies should be revisited to accommodate this practice for PGRs even if the hours per week are reduced to two hours.”*

*“I hope the university can offer some research or teaching positions for us to gain practical experience.”*

*“Teaching opportunities are extremely rare – I consider myself lucky to have accessed some formal teaching experience in the last year of my PhD.”*

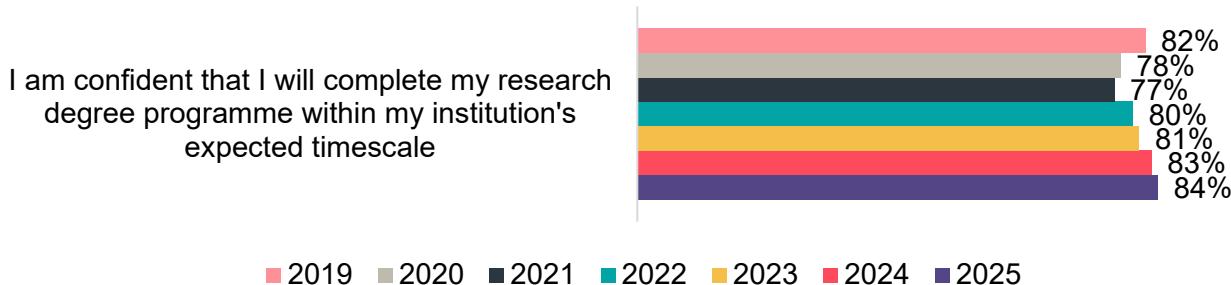
*“My advisors. They have really driven my experience in the programme. They make me feel confident enough to pursue things not just in my research but also extracurricularly, like teaching and outreach.”*

## 7.5 Confidence to complete on time

As we saw earlier in the report, if PGRs are confident they will complete on time, then they are highly likely to be satisfied with their experience – making this measure the fourth largest correlation with overall satisfaction. This indicates that this is a key barometer of how PGRs feel about their programme overall.

Encouragingly, there is generally a high degree of optimism among PGRs that they will complete on time and although the year-on-year changes are only small, the 84% that are confident of completing on time represents the highest figure we have seen in recent years. Clearly, there is a high level of effective communication and progress management between supervisors and PGRs themselves within participating institutions, which is playing a key role in the high levels of satisfaction recorded.

### Confidence on completion – over time



#### There are positive examples of the right support and resources being provided to help contribute to completing on time

*"The support that I receive from my main supervisor has been elemental in assisting me to continue my research degree... Although I had to step back from the programme for six months I am quite confident that I will still be in the position to complete on time."*

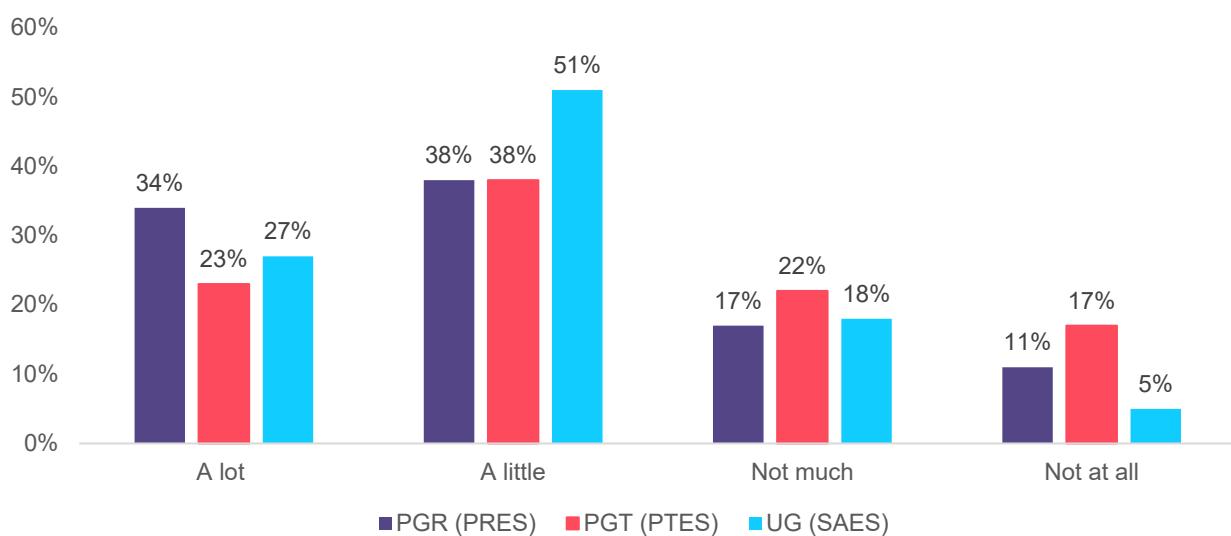
*"I've really had a great experience and that's mainly been to the community and a (usually) good work life balance. Never worked an evening or weekend and I'm one of the only PhD students I know who is expected to finish on time."*

*"The support provided by my entire research group has been fantastic throughout my programme. It enabled me to publish numerous papers and prepare my thesis on time. Moreover, the improvement in my academic writing, presentation and self-driven working skills has been far greater than I originally expected."*

## 8 Cost-of-living challenges

Given the current and recent financial challenges that many global economies and sections of society are facing, we recently introduced a question to understand the extent to which cost-of-living challenges have impacted our audience in terms of their progress or achievements during their research degree programme. Similar questions are asked in high-profile student survey work among undergraduates (the Student Academic Experience Survey) and postgraduate taught students (the PTES survey), so asking this question in PRES enables a direct comparison between different levels of study/research.

### To what extent, if at all, have concerns around cost of living negatively impacted your studies?



The above comparison with these surveys from 2025 tells us that the level of impact of financial challenges at PGR level is clearly significant. PGRs are much more likely than either of the other two cohorts to say their studies have been impacted “a lot”, which is likely to have clear implications for the types of support required. A very high proportion of undergraduates feel they have been impacted to some extent (ie “a little”), while the impact on the postgraduate taught population overall appears to be less substantial for some.

In terms of year-on-year comparison, there has been little change since 2024, which provides evidence that the financial climate is still having a major impact for the PGR audience. Much of the coverage of financial challenges facing students is focused on undergraduate experiences, hence it is important to be able to report the experiences of PGRs via these results.

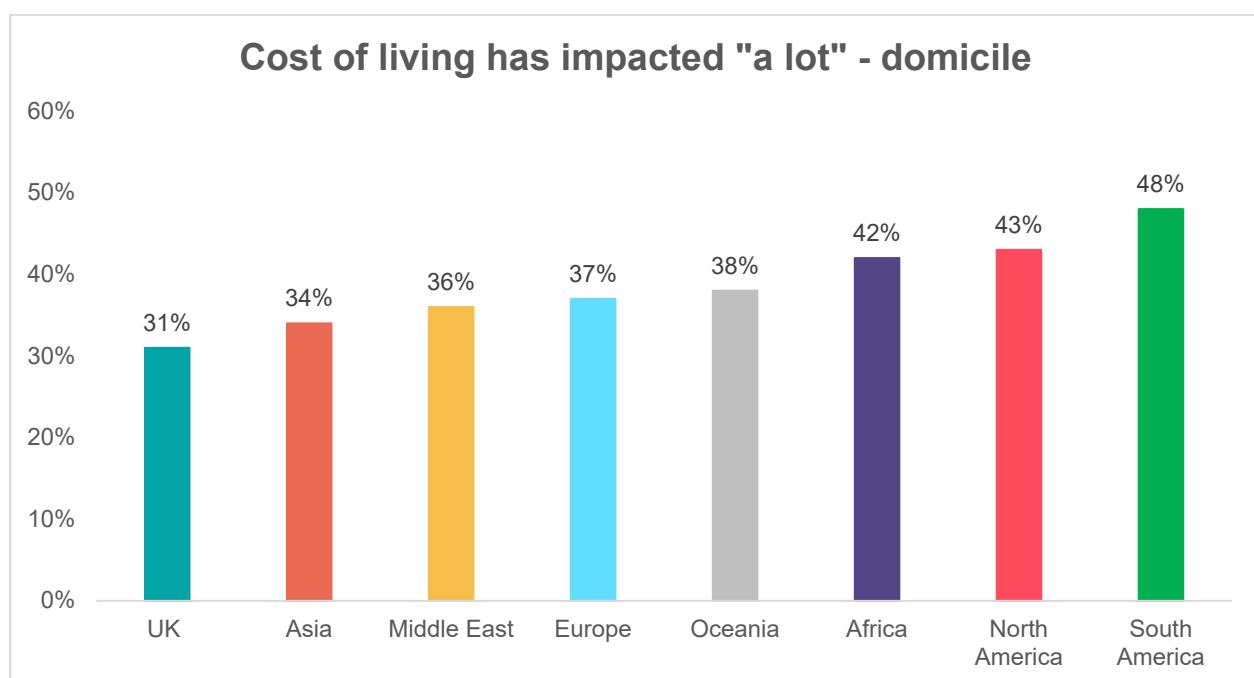
PRES	2024	2025
Impacted “a lot”	35%	34%
Impacted “a little”	36%	38%

# Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2025

Jonathan Neves

We saw earlier in this report that 43% of PGRs in our 2025 sample were international students (ie domiciled outside the UK), compared to 40% of all PGRs studying in the UK overall. Hence, the international student experience is a major factor when considering the range of issues that contribute to or impact on a positive experience across all PGRs. It is well documented that international students at all levels generally face higher fees, and this is particularly the case at PGR level.

With this in mind, it is particularly striking to see the data below that points towards international students generally being more likely to experience financial difficulties which impact on their studies. In particular, PGRs from Africa and the Americas are impacted, although even for students from Asia and the Middle East the levels of impact are higher than for home students.<sup>17</sup>



Studying for a PhD or equivalent often represents a major financial investment, which is particularly the case among international students. In some ways therefore it could be seen as logical that international students are more susceptible to financial concerns. Alongside this, there are findings from the 2025 SAES survey which, based on analysis of questions on students' paid employment activity, tells us that international students at undergraduate level are more likely to be working during term time than home students, and among those who are not working, international students often want/need to work but find it harder to find a job.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This analysis of global regions is based on responses from UK institutions only.

<sup>18</sup> Neves, J, Freeman, J, Stephenson, R and Rowan, A (2025) *Student Academic Experience Survey 2025*. York: Advance HE, p 44. Available at: [www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-academic-experience-survey-2025](http://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-academic-experience-survey-2025)

Clearly, international students are not one homogeneous group, and will be a from a variety of different income backgrounds, but, the relatively high cost-of-living concerns are perhaps logical given the high fee levels faced by international students and given what we know from other survey data about international students needing to work during their studies or sometimes being unable to find a job.

For further discussion and resources around cost-of-living challenges for students please see the work conducted by Universities UK.<sup>19</sup>

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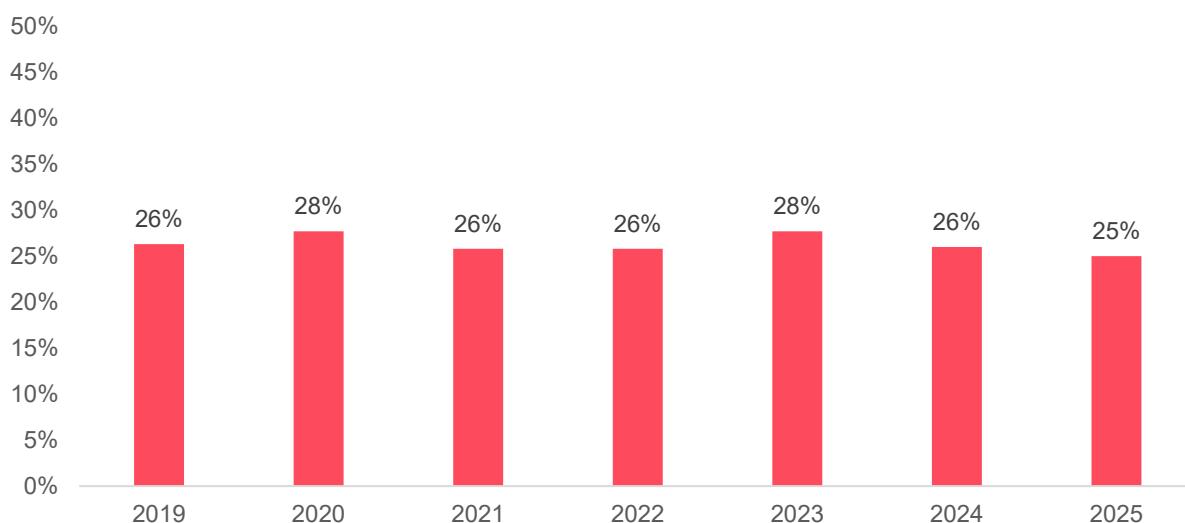
<sup>19</sup> UUK (2025) 'Cost of living crisis: impact on university students'. *Universities UK Publications*, 29 October. Available at: [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/cost-living-crisis-impact-university](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/cost-living-crisis-impact-university)

## 9 Considering leaving

The nature of postgraduate research is that it is a challenging and high-level academic experience. It is also one that demands a significant time commitment over several years. Coupled with the financial challenges outlined above, it is perhaps to be expected that a sizeable proportion consider leaving their studies. By definition, our audience for PRES were still carrying out their studies (or had just finished) at the time of the survey, but we have seen consistently that just over one in four had considered leaving at some point.

Although year-on-year differences are small, the 2025 figure of 25% is actually the lowest we have seen in recent years, which is logical given the high levels of satisfaction levels showcased in this report, reflecting a very positive experience for many.

### PGRs who considered leaving their course



When considering the reasons behind this, we had seen in recent years that mental/emotional reasons were the main driver, but that financial reasons were increasing in importance, which was logical given the well-recognised cost-of-living concerns affecting individuals in many societies. In 2025, we saw more of a steady state, as shown in the table below, with little material change in the relative importance of the different reasons and possibly a minor shift back towards mental health being the main driver of potential non-continuation.

<b>Reasons for considering leaving – over time</b>				
	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
Mental/emotional health	23%	24%	19%	20%
Financial difficulties	12%	17%	16%	14%
Difficulties balancing research and other commitments	15%	11%	15%	13%
Not enough support for research	8%	8%	8%	8%
Family or personal problems	5%	5%	5%	6%
	Table shows top five answers – shown as a proportion of those who considered leaving			

## 10 Considerations for HEIs

As we have seen in this report, levels of satisfaction with the PGR experience across participating institutions in the UK and Australia are the highest we have seen for a number of years. Hence, the areas for focus outlined in this section should be looked at in this context, as suggestions to help drive an even more positive experience.

### Reflecting the high overall level of satisfaction, there is significant praise for many aspects of the PGR experience

*“A positive aspect of my research degree programme is the strong support system I've received, which focuses on both my academic and personal development. The guidance has boosted my confidence in applying my learning and developing my research. Collaborating with a dedicated team has also been invaluable, helping me stay aligned with current developments and adapt my work to meet emerging needs in the field.”*

*“To be surrounded by leaders in the field, and to take part in their seminars and the tools they develop.”*

*“This has been an opportunity to pursue a longstanding dream, explore new career directions, dive deeply into a topic of interest in an area I'm passionate about, and take an extended period to take stock of the past and consider next steps. What more can I say?”*

*“Researching a topic which is personal to me and my identity and will hopefully help society. And, having a really understanding supervisor.”*

*“One significant highlight was having the opportunity to design and deliver lectures and seminars for a postgraduate module. This enabled me to share and teach my research, develop my skills, build my confidence, and realise I want to continue in academia as a career. I feel very fortunate and grateful to have been provided this opportunity so early in my research career.”*

- 1 Correlation analysis over time has told us consistently that one of aspects of the survey with the strongest links to overall satisfaction is around valuing and responding to feedback. However, this is one of the few aspects where results are actually declining overall. Taking part in PRES itself provides a major feedback mechanism, but in an environment where students at all levels are particularly time pressured, it is more important than ever to ensure that all opportunities to provide feedback are backed up with a clear strategy to close the loop in terms of showcasing how that feedback has been listened to.
- 2 Another aspect with a consistent, strong link to overall satisfaction is the extent to which HEIs can provide PGRs with a sense of belonging while at the institution. Comparative results from other surveys tell us that this is a challenging aspect and the students at all levels often struggle with a sense of belonging. The often-individual nature of PGR study may exacerbate this. It is encouraging, however, to see some increases in satisfaction on other aspects of research culture and community, and some of the free text comment examples highlighted here could be helpful for HEIs when considering how to provide more support and collaboration in this space.
- 3 The comparative finding that particularly high number of PGRs have been struggling with cost-of-living concerns is significant. Institutions will be aware of their own local feedback on the areas of support that PGRs need, but the findings here make it clear that providing financial support and advice is especially critical at PGR level. International students, in particular, are likely to be managing high fees with high levels of paid work or, in other cases, difficulty finding work. Hence this provides clear evidence for HEIs to focus resources on maximising the support they can provide through careers advice, financial guidance and general wellbeing resources.
- 4 PGRs with a disability report consistently lower levels of satisfaction. There is also evidence that providing reasonable adjustments is a concern for PGRs. In the context of positive scores and genuine improvements in other areas, these results suggest that continuing to fully investigate the experience of disabled PGRs and implementing dedicated support resource should be a key area for focus for HEIs in considering how to maximise their PGR provision.

# Appendix 1 List of participating institutions

Aston University	University College London
Birkbeck, University of London	University of the Creative Arts*
Bournemouth University*	University of Aberdeen*
Canterbury Christ Church University*	University of Bath
Cardiff Metropolitan University*	University of Bedfordshire
Cardiff University	University of Birmingham
City St Georges University of London	University of Bradford*
Coventry University	University of Brighton
Cranfield University*	University of Bristol
De Montfort University	University of Cambridge*
Durham University	University of Chester
Edinburgh Napier University	University of Cumbria
Glasgow Caledonian University	University of East Anglia
Guildhall School of Music & Drama*	University of East London
Heriot-Watt University*	University of Exeter
Imperial College London	University of Hertfordshire
King's College London	University of Huddersfield
Lancaster University*	University of Hull
Leeds Beckett University	University of Kent
Leeds Trinity University*	University of Leeds
Liverpool John Moores University	University of Lincoln*
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine*	University of New South Wales*
London Metropolitan University*	University of Nottingham
London South Bank University	University of Plymouth
Loughborough University	University of Portsmouth*
Middlesex University*	University of Roehampton*
Newcastle University	University of Salford*
Northeastern University London*	University of South Wales*
Northumbria University	University of Southampton
Norwich University of the Arts	University of St Andrews*
Nottingham Trent University	University of Staffordshire
Oxford Brookes University	University of Stirling*
Queen Mary University of London	University of Suffolk*
Queensland University of Technology*	University of Surrey
Royal College of Art*	University of Sussex
Royal Holloway University of London*	University of the Arts London*
Royal Veterinary College*	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Sheffield Hallam University*	University of West London
SOAS University of London	University of Westminster
Scotland's Rural College	University of Winchester

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Teesside University	University of Wolverhampton
The Australian National University	University of Worcester
Institute of Cancer Research	University of York
The Open University	University of the West of England Bristol
The University of Edinburgh	Wrexham University*
The University of Newcastle, Australia	York St John University*
Ulster University	

**Key**

\* Also took part in 2024

In colour – also took part in 2023

## Appendix 2 Respondent profile

Category <sup>20</sup>	PRES 2022	PRES 2023	PRES 2024	PRES 2025
<b>Age</b>				
30 and under	46%	<b>54%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>53%</b>
31 and over	54%	<b>46%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>47%</b>
Reported disability	13%	14%	16%	16%
No reported disability	87%	86%	84%	84%
(UK domiciled) Black, Asian and minority ethnic	15%	18%	19%	19%
(UK domiciled) White	85%	82%	81%	81%
UK	61%	<b>56%</b>	55%	57%
EU	8%	9%	<b>5%</b>	6%
Rest of the world	31%	<b>35%</b>	<b>39%</b>	37%
Full time	72%	<b>80%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>79%</b>
Part time	28%	<b>20%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>21%</b>

The nature of the cycle of PRES, with more institutions, including more of the larger, research-intensive HEIs, taking part every second year creates some fluctuation in the demographic composition of the PRES sample.

Accordingly, there are similarities between 2022 and 2024, while 2025 strongly matches 2023, providing a sample that is younger, and with higher representation of part-time researchers (though there remains a majority who are full time).

By contrast there is year-on-year consistency in how the samples are comprised in terms of reported disability, ethnicity (within UK domicile) and domicile.

<sup>20</sup> Note: differences of +/-3% or more versus the previous year are in bold. All percentages on this table have been recalculated where appropriate to remove those not providing one of the answers in the table.

# Contact us

## All enquiries

Email: [enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk)

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