

PRES Response

—
2019



Contents

Introduction	03
Interconnected Issues	06
Global Comparison	07
Supervision	08
Resources	11
Research Culture	14
Induction, Progress and Assessment	17
Responsibilities	20
Research Skills	24
Professional Development	27
Wellbeing	30
Recommendations	33



For a digital copy of this report and accompanying information go online to

imperialcollegeunion.org/responses

Introduction

Imperial College Union is proud to present our Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) response, as part of our ongoing collaboration with College to improve the educational experience of our postgraduate research (PGR) students.

The PRES is a survey completed every other year by many postgraduate research students, globally. Alongside its counterpart, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), and undergraduate equivalent, the National Student Survey (NSS), the PRES offers an insight into the experiences of postgraduate research students studying at Imperial. The survey focuses on students' experiences of: supervision, resources, research community, progress and assessment, skills and professional development.

There are just under 4000 PGR students at Imperial and just under 2000 students (approximately 50%) completed the survey. Globally, there were over 50,000 responses from 103 higher education institutes (HEIs), including around 30,000 responses from 22 HEIs from the Russell Group. The results can be used to benchmark Imperial's postgraduate provision against others in the global higher education sector, as well as the Russell Group.



Ashley Brooks

Deputy President (Education)
dpeducation@imperial.ac.uk

Imperial College Union and the College enjoy a strong collaborative relationship, working together on several initiatives such as Students as Partners (e.g. Student Programme Leaders with the Graduate School) and StudentShapers for the benefit of our students. Across Imperial, students and staff are working to provide enhanced support, events and resources for the PGR communities in their departments. Building on a theme from previous responses, we continue to emphasise active partnership between Imperial College Union and the College.

Our approach in creating this response was to undertake an extensive and detailed qualitative analysis of the many thousands of comments from students. When reviewing the PRES comments, a recurring theme was the lack of parity of student experience, with equally strong positive and

negative comments within the same sections. This was evident, in particular, within Supervision (4th quartile globally), Responsibilities (3rd quartile globally), and Induction, Progress and Progression (3rd quartile globally) — the latter two also among the lowest scoring sections (see page 7 for global comparisons). The highest performing section, as in 2017, was Resources; however, there is still inconsistency in experience.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway is that so much hinges on the supervision experience, and that this permeates deeply into wellbeing (a new section for 2019). Arguably, this dependence on (often) one individual reveals a ‘single point of failure’, preventing the entire PGR ecosystem from working effectively, which is undesirable and should be addressed urgently—see page 6 for an illustration of interconnected issues.

In line with the College’s Learning and Teaching Strategy and Academic Strategy, striving for parity of experience and quality assurance is a common aim of our recommendations.

Imperial College Union and the College are at the point where we should not just identify areas requiring work, but commit to working on them in partnership to promote Imperial as a world leader in educational experience.

In light of this, recommendations are shaped to include elements of the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound) framework, where possible, to enable swift and straightforward action. Where appropriate, key partners to be involved in executing the recommended actions have been suggested.

Introduction

The Graduate Student Union (GSU) and Imperial College Union have worked closely together to produce this document.

The recommendations in this document highlight the most important areas where continued improvement is required. The GSU look forward to working with the college in implementing these recommendations to improve the overall postgraduate research student experience.

In particular, look out and lobby for the future development of a PG community hub; our proposed initiative to encourage



Mohit Devgan

Graduate Student Union President
gsu.president@imperial.ac.uk

interdisciplinary discussions and enhance the PG community, in alignment with the strategic aims of the College.

Acknowledgements

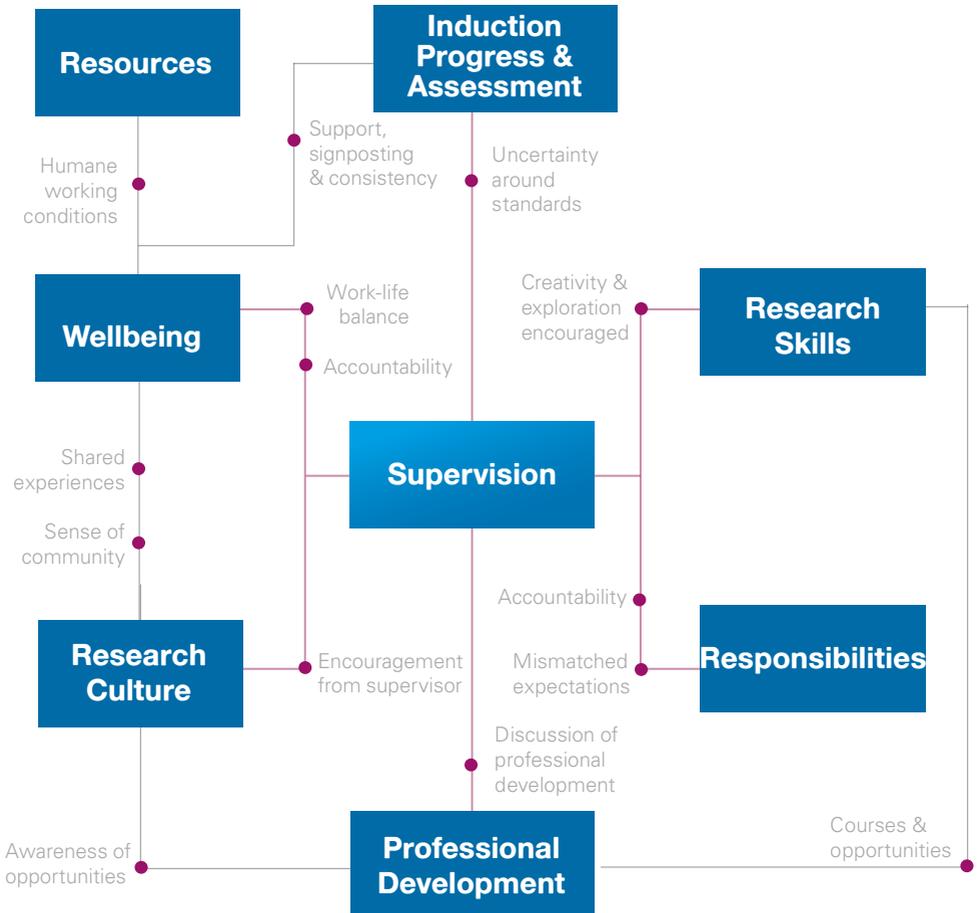
I would like to thank the Union's Representation Team for tirelessly trawling through the PRES data/comments and reviewing this document with me.

Furthermore, I am forever grateful to the Graduate Student's Union for their collaboration in formulating the recommendations and writing parts of this document. I would also like to thank the College and all departments for implementing several of the recommendations from previous PRES responses. We look forward to partnering with the College to embed these recommendations as mechanisms for positive change.

Ashley Brooks

Interconnected Issues

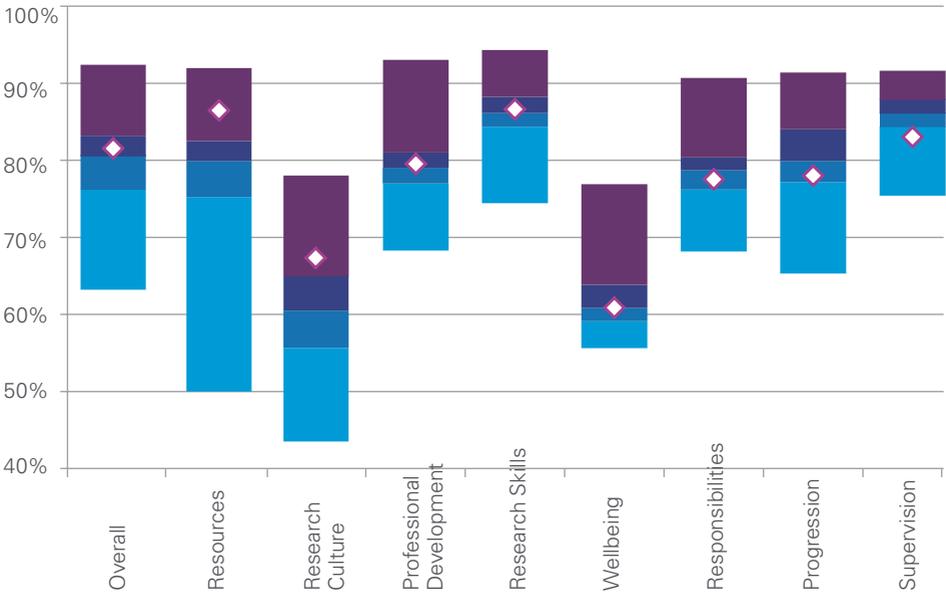
From evaluation of the PRES, it is evident that many issues are interconnected. The most commonly found connections, identified within students' comments, are illustrated in the diagram below. In particular, supervision is linked to almost all other areas and, therefore, addressing issues in this area should lead to improvements in others. Moreover, this dependence on (often) one individual reveals, arguably, a 'single point of failure', preventing the entire PGR ecosystem from working effectively, which is undesirable and should be addressed urgently. It is worth remembering that inasmuch as problems are interconnected, so are solutions, and making improvements/investments in one area will likely lead to improvements in another.



Global Comparison

The graph shows the position of Imperial in relation to institutions in the Global benchmark. Imperial was mostly in the second and third quarters.

%agree for area



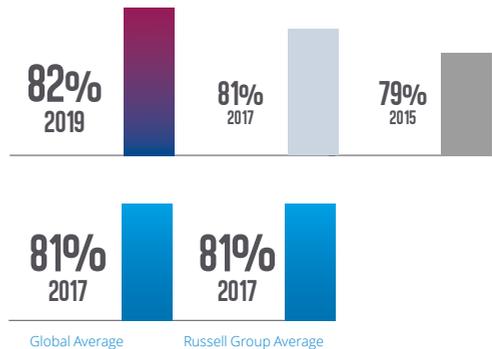
Key



Imperial College London

Highest Quarter	In the top 25% of institutions for this area
Second Quarter	Above average, but below the top 25%
Third Quarter	Below average, but above the bottom 25%
Lowest Quarter	In the bottom 25% of institutions for the area

Overall Satisfaction





Supervision

83%
2019



83%
2017



80%
2015



86%
Global
Average

The Supervision section aims to assess whether supervisors possess suitable skills and knowledge to support and direct their students' research. This section also aims to determine whether there is adequate contact between supervisor and student.

86%
Russell Group
Average

Overall satisfaction with supervision standards at Imperial has remained the same as 2017 and is 3% lower than both Global and Russell Group averages.

There are generally quite mixed experiences with support from supervisors. Most report having two supervisors where one is particularly supportive and the other distant and disengaged. It is noted that the 'scores' are not truly reflective

of experience due to disparity between two supervisors. Positive comments typically refer to high levels of satisfaction with support and guidance they receive.

Supervisors are often perceived to be too busy to be able to effectively support students, either through other commitments or supervising too many students, and not able to dedicate sufficient time. Students also report that some supervisors have a negative approach to work-life balance and impose unrealistic/unhealthy expectations.

“

I am very lucky to have a super positive supervision experience. My supervisor is very knowledgeable in my field of research and he provides a lot of advice on how to progress in my project as well as, frequent and constructive feedback. In addition, he is very supportive and cares about his students well-being and work-life balance.

F-T Year 1 Aeronautical, Mechanical,
Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering

I've been actively discouraged from: collaborations, attending workshops and contributing to review papers. The reasoning given is that it would distract me from my main projects, but I would like to pursue the opportunities to pursue this alongside of my research. I would also like more regular contact with my supervisor.

F-T Year 2 Clinical Medicine

Graduate students are seen as the convenient middle point between student and staff. They don't get the rights and privileges of staff (pay, holiday, respect, consideration in College affairs), but are expected to work just as hard, if not harder, because their time is limited.

Unknown

”

The relationship between supervisor and student is one of the defining features of postgraduate education. Supervisors should encourage, challenge and support their students, both academically and pastorally. A positive supervisor-student relationship benefits both parties, and increases the likelihood of a successful project outcome.

Many report that their supervisors may be well intentioned but are over-stretched and do not have sufficient time either due to other commitments or by having too many students to supervise. Some report a negative attitude towards healthy work/life balance and are motivated by personal research interests rather than what is helpful for the student.

Those that report a positive experience are very satisfied with the support and guidance they receive. It appears that clarity on expectations of the role would be useful for both parties, identifying structures/procedures for overseeing support offered and providing the opportunity to raise concerns (increasing accountability). An additional point of contact may help to alleviate the pressure on supervisory relationships, as well as having more official procedures in place to ensure things like holiday entitlement.

Recommendations for College

- C1.** Ensure supervisor training and sharing of best practice is regular and standardised (working with CHERS and potentially training/sharing with PGRs). This includes monitoring/ limiting the ratio of students to supervisor.
- C2.** Provide students the opportunity to discuss supervision concerns in confidence with an assigned mentor, thereby increasing accountability (e.g. 3-6 month catch ups, see Rec C9).

Recommendations for Union

- U1.** Survey PGR students to review their experience with their supervisor and underpin what best practice supervisors are undertaking e.g. outlining work/life balance, how often feedback is given, structure of relationship.
- U2.** From this, develop guidelines (working with college) to specify how supervisor-PGR relationships should work, with the aim for increased consistency across college.



Resources



81%
Global
Average

The Resources section aims to assess whether students feel they are provided with adequate learning resources to fulfil their potential as researchers. It covers working spaces, computing and library facilities, and any special resources required.

82%
Russell Group
Average

This is a section where Imperial has traditionally excelled, but although scores are well above both Global and Russell Group averages, this year, the score has dropped back 2%, raising some cause for concern.

Students report that when starting their PhD it took many months to be allocated a workstation. In turn, this resulted in several adverse effects including isolation, connecting with

their cohort, stability and settling in, etc. — all of which could have been avoided. Furthermore, students note that many computers require updating as they are old and slow to use or do not have appropriate software installed.

The recommendations in this section set out how Imperial can continue to lead the way in resource provision for all postgraduate research students.

“

I have my own designated workspace as well as a choice of computers (whether Mac or PC) and easily bookable seminar rooms for group meetings and discussion. Library staff are very helpful and knowledgeable and regularly provide assistance in performing meta-analytical publication searches.

F-T Year 1 Clinical Medicine

My office is situated in a basement without natural light, which drives me away from it and makes me work from home. The lack of natural light prevents me to be at my best, and it affects most people in my section as well. Working from home has the downside of making me feel isolated and sometimes distracted...I would highly recommend putting regulations in place so that such working conditions would be avoided.

F-T Year 4 Civil and Construction Engineering

”

With students spending a significant portion of their days at desks and in labs, adequate space provision and utilisation is vital in order to maximise wellbeing and productivity. Given its importance, it is unsurprising that many students identify space and environment as an area needing improvement.

A number of health and safety concerns have been raised including building issues (natural light, ventilation, heating), layout (noise and overcrowding in open plan) and seats that are not ergonomic. On arrival, many students had to wait a long time before being given office space or a PC. Often PCs were old and outdated, meaning that they were slow to use and inefficient. ICT response times in supporting students to get set up with required software can be slow and cause delays to research. In addition, software is often not compatible with Mac users.

Where College doesn't provide appropriate equipment or software, students can find that bursaries are not sufficient for covering the costs of necessary materials and resources.

Recommendations for College

C3. Provide and enforce a minimum standard policy for PGR students' working conditions; to include heating, natural light, ventilation, access to a working computer and limit overcrowding.

Recommendations for Union

U3. DPE to look at the condition and availability of PGR spaces and environments through the College Space Sharing Programme.

U4. Lobby for the new Academic Strategy to focus on the current condition of PGR spaces/equipment (especially computers) and review how often this should be updated/revisited.



Research Culture



63%
Global
Average

The Research Culture section aims to assess the opportunities for students to discuss and present their research, both within their department and more widely as part of a research community. This section also looks to understand how the sense of community within departments and College can stimulate a healthy working environment.

65%
Russell Group
Average

Satisfaction with Research Culture at Imperial has decreased 1% since 2017, yet exceeds that of the Global and Russell Group averages by 4% and 2% respectively.

Here recommendations put forward here look to instill a culture that encourages collaboration, interaction and shared experiences/activities. We need to act swiftly, and lead the way within the higher education sector, to ensure PGR students don't experience isolation.

“

The research culture in my department was excellent. The Work in Progress (WiP) seminars, guest seminars and regular lab meetings allowed me to not only discuss my research but learn about other research areas. This helped broaden my knowledge. The regular emails about meetings in other departments also allowed me to choose to experience other research areas.

F-T Year 4 Clinical Medicine

I'm quite unaware of opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department. I don't get frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other researchers presently as I've been allotted an office which has researchers from a different research area. Since there are not frequent academic mingle events for PhDs, I've not made any close friends in my PhD with whom I can discuss my research.

F-T Year 1 Mathematical Sciences

”

Students report there are opportunities available for collaboration (i.e. seminars) but these are either not considered relevant to the niche research areas that students are engaging in, aren't effectively communicated or aren't accessible.

Engagement in a research community is very much dependent on the perspective and encouragement of the students' supervisor. Some encourage and facilitate opportunities to discuss and build a network both inside and outside Imperial, others actively discourage discussing research with peers. For some, the onus is on the student to establish their own networks and community, which can be challenging, particularly if they do not have a supervisor that serves as a role model for this area. Similarly students can lack confidence or knowledge of where to find peers in relevant research areas.

Students whose research is inter-disciplinary reportedly find it difficult to see where they 'fit', and where they can be part of a community. As the departments have no structure, or opportunities to demonstrate integration and collaboration, students speak of finding greater benefit in opportunities to be part of a research community that takes place outside of Imperial.

Recommendations for College

C4. Provide financial support for the newly established GSU Community Hub which has been set up to enable/increase cross-faculty collaboration and interaction.

Recommendations for Union

U5. Support the GSU to improve PGR social engagement and community building, across departments and faculties.



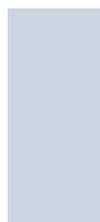


Induction, Progress and Assessment

78%
2019



79%
2017



76%
2015



79%
Global
Average

The Induction, Progress and Assessment section aims to determine how students found the organisation of their postgraduate degree. Specifically, it gauges students' opinions on: induction, progress monitoring and final assessment, including whether they understand the required thesis standard.

78%
Russell Group
Average

Satisfaction with progress and assessment has decreased 1% since 2015, scoring roughly in line with both Global and Russell Group averages.

Effective course organisation plays a key role in student satisfaction. A robust course induction, alongside transparent and well-communicated course requirements, can significantly enhance the student experience.

Students' comments indicate that quality and experience of induction depends on when you start – many students missed a formal departmental induction or welcome period and therefore missed out significantly. Also, the information regarding assessment and progression is inconsistent and unclear.

The recommendations in this section aim to tackle the inconsistency of the induction experience and improve existing provisions at Imperial, ensuring that every student is aware of what is expected of them, and how they can achieve these expectations.

“

I have been given all the information needed to complete my programme, and if I do not feel clear about something I know who to contact.

F-T Year 2 Clinical Medicine

I was introduced to the PhD program but that's about it. Deadlines are made clear in the sense that I know what date I need to submit my thesis but that's it. Other requirements are so vague that I'm not even sure other staff members understand them either. There are no useful guidelines for the standard of my thesis and I've found better results from google than imperial.

F-T Year 3 Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical
and Manufacturing Engineering

”

Students who started their course during non-traditional points of the year commented that they were not given an adequate induction or enough course specific materials to inform them of assignments and key contacts, which made them feel isolated from an early point.

Information about assessment and progression (i.e. Early Stage Assessment - ESA /Late Stage Review - LSR/ Thesis) is inconsistent and unclear, and there is a feeling of undefined standards and requirements, getting different information from people and places.

More details and consistency around milestones/assessments such as structure and expectations of work, is needed to ensure students feel confident and prepared for what they are undertaking. This, in turn, would aid them in progressing through their research without issue, and ensure *parity of student experience*.

Recommendations for College

C5. Ensure termly inductions due to varied starting points.

C6. Ensure consistency of information regarding assessment and progression (e.g. ESA/LSR/thesis expectations) across departments and people.

Recommendations for Union

U6. Support and be present at termly inductions and welcome events.



Responsibilities



78%
Global
Average

The Responsibilities section asks students to reflect both on their responsibilities as students, and their supervisor’s responsibilities towards them. Alongside this, questions within this section seek to gauge students’ opinions of the perceived value of their feedback.

78%
Russell Group
Average

Imperial remained at 78% from 2017, in line with both Global and Russell Group averages.

Students understand their basic responsibilities but struggle to find a clear or consistent process when it comes to larger concerns such as an issue with their supervisor – or feel that too many responsibilities have been placed onto them which may be affecting their wellbeing.

Student feedback is incredibly important in order for academic teams to instigate change that will better the course for both current and future students. However, students feel that either feedback was asked for as a formality with no intention of making changes, or that they were not forthcoming with feedback in fear of damaging the relationship with their supervisor.

Students also comment that feedback rarely leads to any (visible) action, which discourages them from submitting it in the first instance.

“

[Responsibilities] are relatively well delineated in the PhD handbook which is extremely helpful. A little more information would be nice.

F-T Year 3 Clinical Medicine

Understanding and implementation of student/staff responsibilities seems to vary widely from supervisor to supervisor, there doesn't seem to be a common standard to which supervisors are held.

F-T Year 2 Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering

”

It is reported that supervisor/student responsibilities are unclear, or the supervisor discharges too many responsibilities to the student. Though the highly useful *Mutual Expectations* document has been created, students are not always made aware of this and key points are often overlooked. The Mutual Expectations document should be included in all postgraduate research handbooks and highlighted in departmental welcome talks. It should continuously be revised and sent out to both new and continuing students. Supervisors should also be made aware of the document, and actively encouraged to abide by it. Students are advised to go through the document at an early meeting with their supervisor.

Recommendations for College

C7. Include the *Mutual Expectations* document in PGR handbooks and highlight this in induction/departamental welcome talks. Revise annually and send out to continuing students, and new students.

C8. Ensure supervisors are aware of the *Mutual Expectations* document, and are actively encouraged to go through the document at an early meeting with their students.

Recommendations for Union

U7. Work with College departments to identify student reps and highlight their importance/structure to the college.

Students know who to talk to about simple issues, but not the more difficult issues such as a problem with a supervisor, or wellbeing, for fear of destroying the supervisor-student relationship. Furthermore, student feedback is rarely asked for and almost always ignored – when any feedback is given, it rarely leads to any action. A more regular, structured and robust feedback/evaluation mechanism is required. The College established a 'Lecturer and Module Evaluation' group for undergraduates, which could perhaps look into this issue, and/or set up a new bespoke group for student/supervisor feedback/evaluation.

Additionally, the mentor programme, where each research student is assigned a 'mentor', who is another member of academic supervision staff in their department, has proven successful and could be more widespread and consistent across departments. This would provide students with someone to speak with if they feel uncomfortable speaking to their supervisor. These mentors should be trained on how to support students, similar to how undergraduate personal tutors are trained.

Recommendations for College

C9. Roll out the successful mentor programme across departments where each PGR student is assigned a 'mentor' who is a member of academic supervision staff.

C10. Create simple termly evaluation/feedback forms for PGR students and a more detailed version at the end of each year, which could lead to further follow-up, if necessary (to address supervisor, department and college wide issues) (Utilise Lecturer and Module Evaluation group or create equivalent).

C11. Increase awareness of the mental health first aiders and wellbeing support staff and reps available in each department / campus.

“

The research office is highly efficient in addressing and supporting student issues and general questions. The postgraduate tutor and director of postgraduate studies are both approachable and helpful. I think feedback has mostly always been given - except for occasional issues such as GTA work and pay - where there is very little transparency.

F-T Year 3 Civil and Construction Engineering

With regard feedback, aside this survey, I am not aware of any other institutional offer for student feedback. I am not aware of the stated responsibilities of supervisors. If such responsibilities are defined, it would be helpful to give them a more prominent place in induction, to capture student feedback on whether they are met and allow this to inform future student decision on supervision.

P-T Year 2 Clinical Medicine

”

Recommendations for Union

U8. Deputy President (Education) and Representation Coordinator to work with Postgraduate Research reps and College to implement mentor programme and expedite creation and implementation of evaluation/feedback forms.

U9. Increase awareness of the Union Advice Centre for students who are struggling with larger academic issues. Include this within rep training so reps can help signpost.



Research Skills



86%
Global
Average

86%
Russell Group
Average

The Research Skills section aims to assess whether PGR students feel their professional skills as a researcher are being sufficiently improved, challenged and supported. Students are asked to reflect on the development of particular skills, including: appropriate research methodologies; critical analysis and evaluation; creativity; innovation; research ethics and integrity.

Imperial's score in this section also remained the same as 2017, placing Imperial 1% above both Global and Russell Group averages. However, it is worth noting that only 78% of students agreed that their confidence to be innovative or creative has developed during their research program, which lowered the score.

The main discrepancy from largely positive comments was around creativity and innovation. Students reported that an ongoing “pressure to publish” means supervisors discourage creativity and experiments which are untraditional or at risk of failing. This, in general, has mostly a negative impact on their mindset towards their work and experience at Imperial. Additionally, students reported that generally research skills development is not encouraged by their supervisor, and in some cases this leads to additional pressure.

The recommendations put forward here seek to enhance existing opportunities for skills development.

“

I have learnt a lot throughout my PhD. I have been exposed and trained in different areas, which nurture my development as a researcher.

F-T Year 3 Clinical Medicine

The Professional Development Programme definitely helped me develop my skills. I tried to do as many of them as I could.

F-T Year 4 Clinical Medicine

At Imperial I've learned how to be an efficient researcher. However, the pressure of writing high quality papers leaves us with no time for thinking creatively, having side projects, or taking risks of testing new ideas for curiosity. Many times, my lab colleagues and I have some ideas of developing new features for simulators or performing experiments to test a technology under different scenarios in order to create a profile, but we were always discouraged to do that because 'it is not publishable' or it is very 'application based'.

Year 4 Computer Science

”

Many students mentioned that whilst their skills have been developed, this has not always been encouraged or supported by their supervisor, but through their own initiative. This was also often linked to a lack of meetings with their supervisors. Therefore, there should be more pro-active discussion around research skills.

Several students praised the Graduate School's Professional Development Programme, which aided them in developing these skills and gave them opportunities to grow. This programme, alongside other courses, is a valuable asset that should be known by, promoted and encouraged by supervisors, departments and the College.

Recommendations for College

C12. Supervisors (/and research groups) to discuss necessary research skills and ways to acquire them (e.g. internal/external/online courses, Graduate School's Professional Development Programme).

C13. Support (financially, where applicable) and encourage participation in internal/external/online courses, Graduate School's Professional Development Programme.

C14. Encourage supervisors to promote creativity in research by encouraging time at the HackSpace or other Imperial innovation centres in order to promote a culture of exploration and creativity.

Recommendations for Union

U10. Work with the GSU and Graduate School to provide events and opportunities to promote exploration and creativity among PGR students in non-academic environments and in order to increase sense of community.



Professional Development



79%
Global
Average

The Professional Development section aims to assess the opportunities available for students to develop a professional network and communicate with diverse audiences. Students are asked to consider their progress in terms of project management and how they have approached managing their professional development.

79%
Russell Group
Average

This section saw a 1% increase in satisfaction from 2017, 1% above both Global and Russell Group averages. Graduate School courses are recognised to provide professional development opportunities, however it is difficult in terms of access to reach campuses outside South Kensington.

The recommendations in this section look to extend the support offered to postgraduate research students and create opportunities for them to develop professional skills beyond the scope of their degree.

“

The Graduate School programme has been very valuable in developing my skills beyond pure research.

F-T Year 1 Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering

My science communication is improving but I had a lot of experience to diverse audiences so I doubt my improvement is an indication of time on my research programme. There are very few professional development opportunities that are applicable and of high value offered by the College. I have gained good experiences by attending outside/specialist led workshops/seminars etc.

F-T Year 2 Civil and Construction Engineering

”

Generally, the feedback is positive, with Graduate School programmes being highly commended, and identified as a clear opportunity for professional development. However, efforts should be maintained to ensure they are accessible to those studying at non-South Kensington campuses. The Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication (CLCC) could also be utilised to diversify professional development activities for PGR students.

Many comments reflected that students early in their PhDs don't feel able to comment which would suggest that any form of professional development isn't expected until much later into their research degree, and is reportedly considered a tick-box exercise. This presents an opportunity for College (and the Union) to encourage and support and promote professional development earlier.

Recommendations for College

C15. Ensure a commitment to deliver Graduate School courses on other campuses outside of South Kensington

C16. Encourage the Graduate School to incorporate science communication courses in partnership with the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication.

C17. Discuss and encourage professional development activities through coordination with, and expansion of, the highly praised Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication.

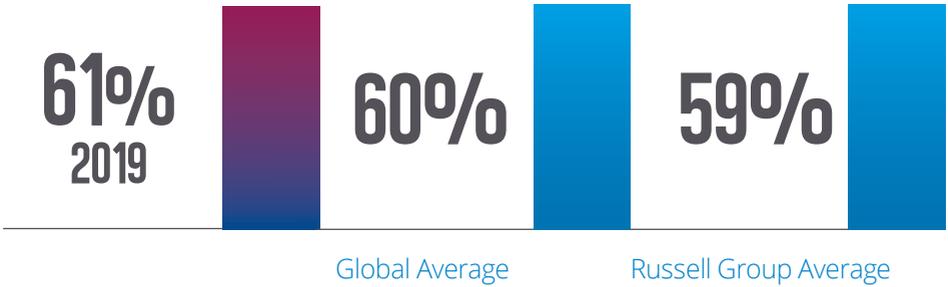
Recommendations for Union

U11. Advertise development opportunities available to students through the Union e.g. Graduate School/CLCC courses and Emerging Leaders by promoting print materials in H-Bar/Postgrad only spaces and using targeted emails.

U12. Work with the GSU to uncover what opportunities students would like to see and collaborate on attainable ideas.



Wellbeing



Note: due to the nature of some questions, the absolute value of the percentages above may be misleading, and are for indicative/comparative purposes only.



of students agreed with the statement:

"If I am experiencing difficulties with my wellbeing, I feel comfortable to reach out for support within the college."



of students agreed with the statement:

"If I am experiencing difficulties with my wellbeing, I know which college services are available to support me."

The Wellbeing section is new to the 2019 PRES at Imperial. It was introduced to get a sense of how the Imperial postgraduate research experience impacts the wellbeing of students, and what could be improved in this area.

This section saw a general satisfaction of 61%, just above Global and Russell Group averages (see note above).

Two particular questions were asked to ascertain how well students felt they could access support in the College should they need it. Just under 60% of students felt that they knew which College services are available to support them, but only about half felt comfortable to reach out for support. It is clear that more needs to be done to raise awareness among research students about what is available to them, and to change the culture around accessing support.

The recommendations in this section address the above, as well as responding to suggestions about how to improve wellbeing given in free-text comments.

“

Within our department there is an active student group promoting well-being and reduction of stress which gives students space to talk about their concerns. Without this student group I don't think the support would be as good or as accessible.

Unknown

”

Students reported a lack of community, asking for more social events, and better spaces for socialising. There were some good examples as well as areas for this to improve.

Students struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance – there are examples of unhealthy behaviour: working late, working weekends and feeling under pressure. There are also examples of good behaviour including exercising, group activities, and being involved in wellbeing activities offered by the Graduate School.

More mental health support, counselling or therapy are common themes across what students requested. There were suggestions for every student to be seen (twice a year) by a specialist and have more PSE support.

“

There is certainly not enough support for our general wellbeing during our research. I feel like a lot of it is down to the relationship with your supervisor but most times it is difficult to set up the platform to feel comfortable talking about how you generally feel. I am aware of the counselling services at Imperial but this is because I did my undergraduate here - there has been no real mention of this service or any other alternative platforms available to researchers, and I feel this could be strongly improved.

Unknown

”

Recommendations for College

C18. Ensure all research students are assigned at least one member of staff to work as a mentor with a wellbeing remit. This staff member must meet individually with their students one-on-one when they first arrive at Imperial.

C19. Ensure supervisors and their students discuss, agree and sign mutual expectations along with a 'Wellbeing Plan' for the student, on their first meeting.

Recommendations for Union

U13. Explore how to create wellbeing related volunteer roles within postgraduate research communities who will have a remit including community building events.

U14. Collaborate with GSU to run a campaign targeted specifically at postgraduate research students to tackle unhealthy working cultures.

Recommendations

Metric	2019 score	2017 score	Global Average	Russel Group Average
--------	------------	------------	----------------	----------------------

Supervision	83%	83%	88%	88%
--------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----

For College

C1. Ensure supervisor training and sharing of best practice is regular and standardised (working with CHERS and potentially training/sharing with PGRs). This includes monitoring/ limiting the ratio of students to supervisor.

C2. Provide students the opportunity to discuss supervision concerns in confidence with an assigned mentor, thereby increasing accountability (e.g. 3-6 month catch ups, see Rec C9).

For Union

U1. Survey PGR students to review their experience with their supervisor and underpin what best practice supervisors are undertaking e.g. outlining work/life balance, how often feedback is given, structure of relationship.

U2. From this, develop guidelines (working with college) to specify how supervisor-PGR relationships should work, with the aim for increased consistency across college.

Resources	86%	88%	81%	82%
------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----

For College

C3. Provide and enforce a minimum standard policy for PGR students' working conditions; to include heating, natural light, ventilation, access to a working computer and limit overcrowding.

For Union

U3. DPE to look at the condition and availability of PGR spaces and environments through the College Space Sharing Programme.

U4. Lobby for the new Academic Strategy to focus on the current condition of PGR spaces/ equipment (especially computers) and review how often this should be updated/revisited.

Research Culture	67%	68%	63%	65%
-------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----

For College

C4. Provide financial support for the newly established GSU Community Hub which has been set up to enable/increase cross-faculty collaboration and interaction.

For Union

U5. Support the GSU to improve PGR social engagement and community building, across departments and faculties.

Metric	2019 score	2017 score	Global Average	Russel Group Average
Induction, Progress and Assessment	78%	79%	79%	78%

For College

C5. Ensure termly inductions due to varied starting points.

C6. Ensure consistency of information regarding assessment and progression (e.g. ESA/LSR/ thesis expectations) across departments and people.

For Union

U6. Support and be present at termly inductions and welcome events.

Responsibilities

78% 78% 78% 78%

For College

C7. Include the Mutual Expectations document in PGR handbooks and highlight this in induction/ departmental welcome talks. Revise annually and send out to continuing students, and new students.

C8. Ensure supervisors are aware of the Mutual Expectations document, and are actively encouraged to go through the document at an early meeting with their students.

For Union

U7. Work with College departments to identify student reps and highlight their importance/ structure to the college.

For College

C9. Roll out the successful mentor programme across departments where each PGR student is assigned a 'mentor' who is a member of academic supervision staff.

C10. Create simple termly evaluation/feedback forms for PGR students and a more detailed version at the end of each year, which could lead to further follow-up, if necessary (to address supervisor, department and college wide issues) (Utilise Lecturer and Module Evaluation group or create equivalent).

C11. Increase awareness of the mental health first aiders and wellbeing support staff and reps available in each department / campus.

For Union

U8. Deputy President (Education) and Representation Coordinator to work with Postgraduate Research reps and College to implement mentor programme and expedite creation and implementation of evaluation/feedback forms.

U9. Increase awareness of the Union Advice Centre for students who are struggling with larger academic issues. Include this within rep training so reps can help signpost.

Metric	2019 score	2017 score	Global Average	Russel Group Average
Research Skills	87%	87%	86%	86%
For College				
C12. Supervisor (/and research group) to discuss necessary research skills and ways to acquire them (e.g. internal/external/online courses, Graduate School's Professional Development Programme).				
C13. Support (financially, where applicable) and encourage participation in internal/external/online courses, Graduate School's Professional Development Programme.				
C14. Encourage supervisors to promote creativity in research by encouraging time at the HackSpace or other Imperial innovation centres in order to promote a culture of exploration and creativity.				
For Union				
U10. Work with the GSU and Graduate School to provide events and opportunities to promote exploration and creativity among PGR students in non-academic environments and in order to increase sense of community.				
Professional Development	80%	79%	79%	79%
For College				
C15. Ensure a commitment to deliver Graduate School courses on other campuses outside of South Kensington.				
C16. Encourage the Graduate School to incorporate science communication courses in partnership with the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication.				
C17. Discuss and encourage professional development activities through coordination with, and expansion of, the highly praised Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication.				
For Union				
U11. Advertise development opportunities available to students through the Union e.g. Graduate School/CLCC courses and Emerging Leaders by promoting print materials in H-Bar/Postgrad only spaces and using targeted emails.				
U12. Work with the GSU to uncover what opportunities students would like to see and collaborate on attainable ideas.				
Wellbeing	61%	-	60%	59%
For College				
C18. Ensure all research students are assigned at least one member of staff to work as a mentor with a wellbeing remit. This staff member must meet individually with their students one-on-one when they first arrive at Imperial.				
C19. Ensure supervisors and their students discuss, agree and sign mutual expectations along with a 'Wellbeing Plan' for the student, on their first meeting.				
For Union				
U13. Explore how to create wellbeing related volunteer roles within postgraduate research communities who will have a remit including community building events.				
U14. Collaborate with GSU to run a campaign targeted specifically at postgraduate research students to tackle unhealthy working cultures.				



Find us:

Beit Quadrangle
Prince Consort Road
London
SW7 2BB
Registered Charity No: 1151241

Contact us:

Tel: 020 7594 8060
Email: union@imperial.ac.uk
Reception: Level 2, Beit Quad

Connect with us:

 [ImperialCollegeUnion](https://www.facebook.com/ImperialCollegeUnion)
   [@icunion](https://www.linkedin.com/company/imperial-college-union)