



PRES Action Plan 2017/18

The BU Doctoral School Board at its meeting on 21 September resolved that schools scoring less than 80% in any section of PRES 2017 should “specify action to address these specific areas” in a report to the Doctoral School.

The School of Social Sciences notes that its “overall satisfaction” score in PRES stands at 86%, close to the Bangor University average of 87%. This marks an improvement of 13 percentage points compared to the preceding PRES 2015.

Social Sciences will address specific areas which were below 80% by targeted action. These steps follow from discussions and decisions on the School’s Board of Studies, its Postgraduate Board, including student representatives, and a special meeting to which all postgraduate research students have been invited. This action plan has been discussed with staff and postgraduate researchers and responses have been fed in.

1. **Supervisor helping with training and development needs** (Q2.4, 79%)

Supervisors to discuss those with students in their fortnightly meetings. Those needs can also be flagged up at the thesis committee. Postgraduate researchers can be pointed towards e.g. participation at disciplinary conferences and workshops, presentations in the School’s Seminar Series, attendance of postgraduate modules and – importantly – workshops run by the Doctoral School.

2. **Resources** (Q4.1, 75% and Q4.4, 57%)

Q1.1 “I have a suitable working space” – The School is currently not in a position to provide each postgraduate researcher with a personal room, their own lockers or similar. PhD candidates do however share a postgraduate candidate room in which there are desktops with computers. Most working there seem to be somewhat

satisfied with the situation (based on meeting of Director of Postgraduate Studies with postgraduate researchers in the student room on 24 October).

Q4.4 Access to specialist resources – In Social Sciences there is little use of specialist resources and what is required seems in place. Supervisors to continue facilitating access to interview rooms or recording equipment as necessary. The School supports postgraduate researchers in accessing software like NVivo.

3. **Research culture** (Q 6.1-6.4, ranging from 46 to 69%) – action has been taken.

Q6.1: School provides a “good seminar programme” (score of 69%): Supervisors to stress the importance of participating in the seminar programme: through attendance and presentation of the postgraduate candidates’ own research. Some of them use the opportunity to present.

Q6.2: Opportunity to discuss own research with other research students (46%). This can be achieved in part by postgraduate candidates attending research training modules talking about their own work. Postgraduate candidates were assured of the School’s support when wanting to set up a “candidate-led” discussion group. It may take the form of a fortnightly journal club, or a regular discussion of their own research, or self-organized presentations of first year research candidates.

However, it is felt that the initiative and organization lies best with postgraduate researchers themselves. PhD candidates were also encouraged to attend the new “PhTea” events organized centrally by Bangor University.

Q6.3: “research ambience” (54%). See actions in relation to 6.1 to 6.3.

Q6.4: “opportunity to become involved in the wider research community” (54%).

School and supervisors to continue offering postgraduate researchers opportunities to attend and present at conferences and workshops, for example the annual WISERD and WCCSJ conferences. PhD candidates are also pointed towards membership in academic associations, which typically offer discounted fees.

Supervisors to share access to professional networks with their postgraduate researchers. Some staff have co-authored articles with postgraduate researchers.

4. **Progress and assessment** (Q8.1- 8.4): – School to continue to offer its own inductions for postgraduate students (Q8.1, 69%), for autumn and January intake, and to point students towards the handbooks for postgraduate students as well as the inductions and workshops organized by the Doctoral School. – Students understanding the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of their process (Q8.2, 71%). The supervisors are to explain those requirements and deadlines to their postgraduate researchers in the first place at their regular

meetings. Supervisors to talk about the standards required for the thesis (Q8.3, 64%) and point students to exemplary theses in their field. Measures above will also clarify the final assessment procedures (Q8.4, 71%). The School will hold a specific workshop for final year postgraduate researchers to explain the Viva procedure and related aspects. Supervisors already organize mock-Vivas for candidates to prepare them.

5. Q10.1: **feedback from research students valued and responded to** (57%) – A special meeting of the Director of Postgraduate Studies with the postgraduate researchers took place on 24 October to discuss PRES, wider experiences and needs, as well as the School's responses. The group suggested to self-organize presentations of first year postgraduate researchers. In support, the group was provided with the feedback sheet used by staff for student presentations in class. The School was asked to provide support to attend conferences (see below Q14.3). Some postgraduate researchers complained about recognizing their answers to open questions in the PRES report. Students were given the contact for Jo Caulfield from the Student Engagement Unit and the School's Director of Studies raised the point with the Engagement Unit. The Unit responded immediately by taking the report from the intranet.

Q10.2: **students understanding the responsibilities as a research degree student** (71%): the school invites participation in the postgraduate research training modules, which also cover research ethics. Postgraduate researchers are to be encouraged by supervisors to take advantage of the seminars organized by the Doctoral School. Supervisors to discuss responsibilities with their tutee at their meetings.

Q10.4: **knowing who else, other than the supervisor, to approach with concerns** (79%): Postgraduate researchers were allocated personal tutors and thesis committee chairs, they can also address the Director of Postgraduate Studies. The responsibilities of the personal tutor and the Director of Postgraduate Studies were part of the induction at the start of the semester.

6. Q14.3: **developing contacts or professional networks** (69% score) – School and supervisors to facilitate access to conferences. Supervisors to share their network access with research students. Students can become members of academic associations.
7. Q21.1-21.3: **personal outlook**. Satisfaction "with life nowadays" (64% score) and with "work-life balance" (71%) may improve when the measures mentioned above

are taken. “Someone ... to talk to about my day-to-day problems” (64% score): The supervisor but also the personal tutor to be approachable and to assist.

Students and staff had ample of discussion of PRES and its results. It was felt that some of the questions are not very helpful, especially Q21.1 satisfaction “with life nowadays” and the “work-life balance” item (Q21.2). Similarly, the “research ambience” (Q6.3) question was seen as very vague. “Specialist equipment” (Q4.4) is rarely needed in Social Science at all (and in the Humanities generally). We would ask the Student Engagement Unit to consider their value.

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