

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research Students (ISSE-PGR)

Implementation of the 2018 pilot national survey









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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The national collaborative partnership, established for the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), consists of institutions, their representative bodies, students' representatives and national agencies. Partners are extremely grateful to the efforts of the working group who gave willingly of their time to research, develop and implement the pilot ISSE-PGR survey. They also appreciate the activities undertaken by student leaders and staff within participating institutions to raise awareness and understanding of the survey and to promote participation by the diverse range of postgraduate research students.

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Foreword from the national ISSE Steering Group

This report provides details of the first national activity to comprehensively seek the views of postgraduate research students enrolled in Irish higher education institutions. As such, it represents a significant milestone for this important community of students and associated staff. It builds on the extensive work undertaken to establish and embed the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) since its national pilot in 2013. The established ISSE is offered to students enrolled on taught programmes, i.e. first year and final year undergraduates and students pursuing taught postgraduate studies, on an annual basis. More than 163,000 students have participated in the (taught) survey from 2013 to 2018.

evelopment and implementation of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) originated in a recommendation of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030¹ which was published by the Department of Education and Skills in 2011, following significant consultation. The recommendation sought to establish a national student survey, with results to be published and effective feedback mechanisms to be put in place. A unique collaborative partnership of institutions, state agencies and students' representatives was established to implement the ISSE. That partnership has proved very effective to ensure that operation of the survey and increasing uses of the resulting data are embedded in discussions and activities relating to enhancing the student experience for the benefit of all parties.

The collaborative partnership chose to develop a specific survey to reflect the experiences of postgraduate research (PGR) students and used



1. https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030-Summary.pdf

experiences gained through implementation of the ISSE to ensure that the process was effective, with desk research into international examples, expert review and pre-testing with representative target student groups, leading to this first pilot involving twenty four higher education institutions. A detailed overview of results is provided in this report in order to illustrate the potential of analysing similar data collected from future iterations of the survey.

Sustained effort has been put into consultation with institutions' staff and students thus far, and this report will form a key comprehensive prompt for further consultation with the postgraduate research community during the 2018-2019 academic year. The ISSE Steering Group has agreed that fieldwork for the first 'non-pilot' iteration of the PGR survey will take place in February – March 2019. It will seek to build upon lessons learned from the pilot and aims to firmly establish the ISSE-PGR as a key, and growing, source of high quality information to inform enhancement activities.

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CHAPTER 1 Policy context, rationale and project governance

1.1 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

"The quality of the postgraduate researcher education in our institutions is vital to the development of our human and knowledge capital [...] In addition to contributing to knowledge, postgraduate researcher education drives participants to develop their own research skills that can be applied in a range of environments, in academia or industry, at home or abroad."

"Higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students, and use this feedback to inform institutional and programme management, as well as national policy." National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 ³

Implementation of this pilot national survey for postgraduate research students sits at the crossroads of several important national strategic objectives. Students' engagement in the quality of their education is critical to both their own experience and to continuous improvement of provision for future students. A better student experience can be reasonably expected to translate into a better educated graduate. As the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020⁴ notes, "The quality of provision in higher education is crucial to ensuring that graduates have the right skills, competences and experience in order to contribute fully to future economic, social and cultural development".

This statement applies to postgraduate research students as much as it applies to students pursuing taught programmes. Undertaking a research degree programme is the critical first step for those wishing to develop careers as researchers, whether that is in enterprise or academia, in a dedicated research position or one in which the research skills that they have learnt are brought to bear in a wider role. Regardless of the ultimate setting, competences required of researchers are continually evolving: research integrity and open science, for example, are ever more centre stage. It is thus essential for Ireland's national research system that those who carry out research here, from the very beginnings of their career, receive an educational experience that equips them with the capability and confidence to conduct their research to the highest possible standards.

In terms of the performance of Ireland's research system and its contribution to wider national development, the National Strategy for Higher Education and Innovation 2020 both point to the need for a pipeline of researchers to support Ireland's economic and societal growth. Innovation 2020 forecasts that 40,000 research and development personnel will be needed in the enterprise sector alone by 2020. It contains a specific action relating to postgraduate enrolments, as well as one focused on the quality of postgraduate researcher education and training. This latter action picks up the recommendation of the National Strategy for Higher Education that "A consistent quality framework

^{2.} http://hea.ie/policy/research-policy/innovation-2020/

^{3.} http://hea.ie/resources/publications/national-strategy-for-higher-education-2030/

^{4.} https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/higher-education-system-performance-framework-2018-2020.pdf

should be developed for Irish PhD education, based on critical mass".

Ireland's National Framework for Doctoral Education⁵ was launched in 2015 and is endorsed by all higher education institutions and the main research funders in Ireland.

Its purpose is to:

- Facilitate consistent excellence in the quality of postgraduate education and training, including research undertaken at Master's and Doctoral levels
- Enable and encourage higher education institutions to work more closely in the delivery of an improved learner experience and outcome
- Maximise the employability of Doctoral graduates across a broad range of employment sectors by ensuring that the acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge is complemented by the development of transferable skills
- Underpin the international standing of the Irish Doctoral award.

Gathering and applying information on the PGR student experience will greatly help advance the intent of the Framework.

It is also a natural and intended progression of the established survey for taught students (ISSE) that commenced in 2013. When that survey instrument was developed, it was recognised that the experience of postgraduate research students, at both Master's and Doctoral levels, would logically differ materially from that of students receiving a predominantly taught education. The established ISSE has enjoyed very impressive participation since its conception with 10.9% of the target population participating in the 2013 pilot, a figure which has steadily risen each year to 28.0% in 2018. This leads to a cumulative data set of more than 163,000 responses since 2013.

Development and implementation of the pilot ISSE-PGR survey has built upon the shared understanding gained by the partnership through experiences with the (now established) ISSE and the process has benefitted significantly by this. The high response rate achieved in pilot fieldwork may suggest that the process has been effective and it is incumbent on partners to build further on this positive pilot phase.

Critically of course, the results of the established ISSE have been used by institutions to identify practice that is effective and to tackle any issues that are limiting the student experience. For example, data sets from the ISSE have informed institution-wide curriculum review, led to enhancement of support services such as a Mathematics support centre, and informed institutional self-evaluation for internal enhancement purposes and for structured discussions with national agencies. Further details are included in annual reports⁶ from the ISSE and in a series of short video testimonies⁷ from partners across higher education.

1.2 WHY FOCUS ON STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES RATHER THAN SATISFACTION?

In advance of the rollout of the (now established) ISSE survey in 2013, research was undertaken to explore the merits of such an approach to educational quality. This work found that student engagement with 'college' life is important in enabling them to develop key capabilities such as critical thinking skills, analytical competencies and intellectual development⁸. Students who engage in the life of the institution have a higher quality experience than those at institutions where engagement is not promoted. Whilst some question items in the established ISSE enquire about student satisfaction, the primary focus is on student engagement⁹. There is widespread consensus among project partners that the wider "engagement"/"partnership" focus of the survey has generated significant benefits and that the focus is aligned well with the ethos and aspirations of the Irish higher education system.

Like the established ISSE, the results of the pilot ISSE-PGR are intended to add value at institutional level by enabling appropriate staff and students to consider the experiences of this particular cohort at their institution.

^{5.} http://research.ie/resources/publications/national-framework-for-doctoral-education/

^{6.} http://studentsurvey.ie/survey-results/

^{7.} http://studentsurvey.ie/videos/

^{8.} Pascarella E., Terenzini P. (2005). How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco

^{9.} http://studentsurvey.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ISSE_Survey_final2013.pdf

It also allows them to consider their results within a wider national context. And, because the UK Postgraduate Research Experience Survey has been used as a broad instrument template (naturally modified where appropriate for national differences), it allows them to draw international comparisons. Greater value again will be realised in the future when there are multiple datasets. This will help institutions to gauge the impact of any specific initiatives that have been tried and to identify local trends in need to further examination.

1.3 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives, therefore, for developing and undertaking a pilot national postgraduate research student survey match those defined for the established ISSE, but as relevant to the experiences of postgraduate research students, i.e.:

- To increase transparency in relation to the student experience in higher education institutions
- To enable direct student input on levels of engagement and satisfaction with their higher education institution
- To identify good practice that enhances the student experience
- To assist institutions to identify issues and challenges affecting the student experience
- To serve as a guide for continual enhancement of institutions' teaching and learning and student engagement

- To document the experiences of the student population, thus enabling year on year comparisons of key performance indicators
- To facilitate benchmarking with higher education institutions and systems internationally.

1.4 PROJECT GOVERNANCE

The governance and management structures for the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) are designed to ensure wide representation of partner higher education institutions, sponsoring organisations and student representative bodies. A national Steering Group is in place with representatives from universities, institutes of Technology and project co-sponsors (HEA, IUA, THEA and USI). A specific working group was established in May 2017 to develop the ISSE-PGR pilot instrument and to oversee its rollout. It is regarded as important to maintain the collaborative partnership which has proved highly effective to date. Members were nominated by participating organisations and the ISSE Project Manager supported operation of the group and ensured appropriate consistency with existing ISSE activity.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the governance structures for the overall ISSE initiative.

Terms of reference and membership of the specific PGR working group are provided in Appendix 3.



Figure 1 Governance and management

Co-sponsors



CHAPTER 2 Methodology

2.1 RESEARCH INTO EXISTING PRACTICE INTERNATIONALLY

The working group determined that, in line with the existing taught ISSE approach, the focus of any survey instrument should be on student engagement and experiences rather than surveying specifically for student satisfaction with their programme. Furthermore, a conscious decision was made to balance the needs and aspirations of project partners by working towards developing a survey appropriate to the experience of postgraduate research students in Ireland, whilst also seeking to maintain significant elements of comparison with international measurements where possible. With these principles in mind, desk research was undertaken to compare a range of existing surveys offered to postgraduate research students, both nationally and internationally.

Determining the optimum time to survey students was one of the questions to be addressed. In some international examples, the survey was conducted only when the student had completed their programme e.g. Princeton Graduate Student Survey or in the case of the Australian Postgraduate Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) approximately four months after the student had completed their programme. In the United Kingdom's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), students are surveyed within their programme every other year. Having the survey carried out within the student programme was deemed to be the most useful model since any areas for enhancement can be addressed while the student is still attending the institution.

The working group examined the content of each of the survey instruments and mapped the elements ('Aspects') surveyed therein. The group then compared these themes to the areas which the ISSE-PGR wished to examine. Having reviewed international practice, the working group ultimately determined that the Irish postgraduate research student survey should be based on the United Kingdom Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).

2.2 DESIGN OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

2.2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE UK POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE SURVEY (PRES)

PRES is a nationwide UK survey of research degree students, organised by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), now part of the UK's Advance HE Agency. The survey is run every alternate year in every institution across the UK which has postgraduate research students. The aim of the survey is to help institutions to enhance the quality of postgraduate research (PGR) degree provision by collecting feedback from current PGR students in a systematic and user-friendly way.

In the PRES, students are asked to rate the quality of their course, how well elements of it have met their expectations, and the extent of their agreement with a range of items within the following themes:

- Supervision: the supervisory relationship including supervisor's knowledge and skills
- **Resources:** working space, library provision etc.
- **Research Culture:** departmental community and research ambiance
- Progress and Assessment: formal and informal monitoring processes and examination procedures
- Responsibilities: responsibility of both student and the supervisor
- **Research Skills:** tools, methodologies, creativity and research integrity

Professional Development Opportunities the availability and uptake of relevant transferable skills training

2.2.2 RATIONALE FOR USING THE PRES AS A "CORE BASE" FOR THE ISSE-PGR

By aligning the ISSE-PGR to the PRES survey, many of the results from the ISSE-PGR can be used to evaluate postgraduate research provision for individual institutions and nationally alongside other higher education provision internationally. Results can be broken down by discipline, gender, mode of study and home/EU/international domiciles, helping individual institutions to target enhancement activities where they are most needed. The results can be used to inform sector bodies and policy makers about the experiences of these students' cohorts.

Furthermore, PRES

- Has been designed and tested in conjunction with experts from across the higher education sector and was deemed to be very close to meeting the desired specification of the ISSE-PGR
- Explores the student experience and their engagement with student supports, rather than being focussed on satisfaction per se
- Uses themes that were deemed to be relevant to the objectives of the ISSE-PGR
- Uses a well-balanced mix of open and closed questions, with many question items seeking the opinions of respondents in relation to the key components of the student's experience.

The final question set used for the ISSE-PGR pilot in 2018 shares many common items with the UK PRES whilst also including items specific to the national context, such as elements of the *National Framework* for Doctoral Education.

The final question set for the ISSE-PGR pilot addresses each of the following aspects of the student experience:

- Research Infrastructure and Facilities
- Supervision
- Research Culture
- Progress and Assessment
- Research Skills

- Other Transferable Skills
- Responsibilities and Support
- Motivations
- Career Aspirations
- Overall Experience

2.3 TARGET STUDENT COHORT

When a national survey for students was initially being developed in 2012-2013, the intention was to invite all postgraduate students to take part. Pre-testing of the (then draft) survey questions was undertaken with students from a range of disciplines, institutions, and programmes using focus groups and cognitive interviews. While the results of pre-testing found that the questions were appropriate for students pursuing taught programmes, it was evident that that question set did not reflect the experiences of students pursuing research degrees. Therefore, research students were not invited to participate in subsequent fieldwork. The national steering group made a commitment at that time to develop a survey, in due course, which would be suitable to measure the experiences of postgraduate research students. This led to the establishment, in 2017, of the working group to develop such a survey.

The group determined that all students enrolled on research degree programmes in participating institutions would be invited to participate in the national pilot survey. Accordingly, all students enrolled on programmes leading to Master's Degree by Research (NFQ¹⁰ Level 9) or Doctoral Degree (NFQ Level 10) were invited to take part whether pursuing their studies on full-time or part-time / remote basis.

In line with existing practice for the taught survey, certain limited non-sensitive demographic data were extracted from institutions' student record systems. These data represent a subset of the data regularly submitted by institutions to the HEA Student Record System. Use of this demographic data meant that students were not required to input these data in addition to responding to a relatively large number of question items. However, responses to the questions could be anonymously linked to the demographic variables which enables analysis of the resulting collated data set using these variables.

^{10.} www.nfq.ie National Framework of Qualifications

2.4 PRE-TESTING OF QUESTION ITEMS

Extensive pre-testing of question items was undertaken prior to fieldwork for the national pilot. The outcomes of expert review, focus group discussions and cognitive interviews informed determination of the final question set to be offered to students nationally. This pre-testing followed the rigorous process used to test the survey for taught students in 2012-2013 which is described in greater detail in the report of that pilot¹¹.

One of the major difficulties associated with surveybased research is non-response or non-completion of questionnaires. This can lead to incomplete data which limits the ability to report generalised results or conclusions. Non-response can occur for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, ambiguity / lack of clarity of question items; lack of relevance to intended respondents; inability of respondents to complete questions; or lack of respondent interest / understanding of potential benefits of collection of the data. It is regarded as important, therefore, to effectively pre-test survey questions in advance in order to minimise the risk of such difficulties occurring. Informed by review of the literature and the experience of developing the taught survey, a number of methods were used to pre-test the question items with postgraduate research students who were selected to be representative of the target population. These methods include structured focus group discussions and individual cognitive interviews¹².

Focus groups and cognitive interviews were undertaken in nine institutions in total: five universities and four institutes of technology. Interviews were conducted with a range of postgraduate students with representation from: different fields of study; full-time and parttime; at different stages of progress towards their research degree (course year); enrolled on Master's by Research and Doctoral programmes; traditional and mature students; Irish and international students; and from institutions with different population sizes. Each institution involved in pre-testing issued invitations to their students to take part. Students were informed of the purpose of the pre-testing activities, of the guarantee that their comments would not impact their studies in any way, and were invited to provide signed consent in advance of pre-testing activities.

2.4.1 OUTCOMES FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND COGNITIVE INTERVIEWS

In focus groups, students were asked to individually complete and review the questionnaire (presented on paper) prior to a shared structured discussion of the nature of questions asked, whether they understood the questions, and if they had interpreted them in a consistent way. Participants were also asked about the overall length of the questionnaire, about any questions perceived to be unnecessary, and about any potential additional areas to be included.

Cognitive interviews seek to explore the processes used by respondents when completing the questionnaire. Cognitive interviewing combines cognitive theory and survey methodology to understand the processes used by the target group when responding to individual questions. During pre-testing of the question items, participating students took part in one to one interviews where they sought to complete or review the questionnaire and to identify items which presented challenge or uncertainty when seeking to respond.

All focus group and cognitive interviews were audiorecorded with contemporaneous notes being taken during the discussion. The researcher conducting the interviews reviewed these afterwards and provided detailed feedback of the findings to the ISSE-PGR working group. The working group used feedback from pre-testing with students to determine the final question set to be used in pilot fieldwork.

Students involved in pre-testing were largely unanimous that the survey was comprehensive and reflected their experiences as postgraduate researchers. The length of the survey was felt by students to be appropriate and the vast majority were unable to identify any question items which they perceived to be unnecessary. Students expressed the view that the majority of questions were clear and unambiguous and that they were comfortably able to respond to these items. This indicates that the survey had good face and content validity. Two elements of the questionnaire presented greatest challenge and were addressed prior to national fieldwork for the pilot.

12. Dillman, D. (2000), Mail and Internet surveys: The Tailored Design Method, Wiley, New York

^{11.} http://studentsurvey.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ISSE_Survey_final2013.pdf

Drennan, J. (2003) Cognitive Interviews; verbal data in the development and pre-testing of questionnaires. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 42

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

Question items about funding of research degrees prompted greatest discussion in focus groups. Whilst it was frequently initially suggested that additional question items were needed to accurately capture the diversity of funding scenarios, the most commonly agreed outcome of these discussions was that a separate - and, most likely, infrequently run - survey may be appropriate to adequately collect data on this topic on a future occasion. Wording of the funding-related questions was amended by the working group prior to national fieldwork. The items used in fieldwork are found from item 5 onwards in the Aspect of Research Infrastructure and Facilities.

The other main change to the questionnaire arising from focus groups and cognitive interviews relates to the sequence in which different sections, subsequently labelled as "Aspects", were presented to respondents. Questions about supervision were presented first in the questionnaire used for pre-testing. Some students expressed concerns that presenting these items as the first questions led to some risk of students being reluctant to engage with the rest of the survey. Other students wondered if these initial questions, based predominantly on individual relationships, created an undue risk of biasing subsequent responses by introducing either a particularly positive or negative mind set from the beginning. When this issue was pursued in later focus groups, the vast majority of students indicated an amended sequence (subsequently used in fieldwork with Supervision presented as the second aspect) would not alter their responses to individual items.

2.4.2 INITIAL FEEDBACK FROM INSTITUTIONS (PRE-FIELDWORK)

The draft questionnaire used with student focus groups and cognitive interviews was also circulated to institutions for feedback. The majority of responses from institutions reflected on the comprehensive nature of the survey with some uncertainty as to whether the survey was overly long. Feedback from staff most closely involved with postgraduate research students demonstrated some awareness of the operation of the (established) taught survey and the resulting data and there was a positive response to the plan to implement a national survey for the postgraduate research cohort. The most common issue raised by staff was about different terminology used in different institutions. These issues were tested with students in the focus groups and cognitive interviews, previously described, and some question items were amended to reflect the most widely understood terminology. A specific explanatory note was added to the question stem for Research Culture which reflects potential interpretations of the term 'department'.

2.5 STUDENT CONFIDENTIALITY – IMPORTANCE AND APPROACH

Students are guaranteed confidentiality when invited to participate in the survey. This confidentiality has been given significant consideration in the context of relatively small target populations in smaller institutions or in specialised disciplines. It is felt that the risk of breaching confidentiality is of a much greater scale for the postgraduate research population than for the much larger target populations for the taught survey. It is regarded as essential that students feel sufficiently confident to report accurately on their experiences. It is, nevertheless, potentially challenging to identify the appropriate balance between this key principle and providing institutions with sufficiently disaggregated data to enable focussed discussion and potential action in order to support enhancement activities.

Institutions have received results which present collated percentage responses for those questions with defined response options, and anonymised free text responses to questions seeking additional comments. Quantitative results are presented for Research Master's (NFQ Level 9) and for Doctoral (NFQ Level 10) cohorts. Tables of results are populated only where the number of respondents is 10 or greater. This means that, in addition to publication of national level results from the pilot survey, most of the participating institutions have received some level of anonymised data from their own students. Qualitative data (open text comments) have been cleaned to remove any names which may have been included and are provided to institutions without any associated demographic data. Additional analysis of institutional data may be undertaken by the project manager, confidentially and solely by request of an institution. These protocols are regarded as necessary to ensure due consideration of these matters within institutions, particularly for the pilot phase of the project.

2.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In developing ISSE-PGR, the aim was not to create a tool that provided a measure of student experience in the psychometric sense, but to create a survey that would provide a representative account of student experiences though an examination of the frequency of different experiences. Therefore factors such as internal reliability, criterion / predictive validity etc., are less relevant to the development and implementation of the various aspects. However, the key challenge was to ensure the relevance of the items to the experience being assessed, with a focus on face, content and ecological validity.

The content validity of the ISSE-PGR rests on the use of UK Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) in the development of the new instrument. This decision was taken to allow for comparison of the Irish student experience with that of the UK, but also to provide a credible base for the questions included in the survey. As an established survey tool, used in a comparable jurisdiction, it is acceptable to assume that the PRES items provide a basis to examine Irish students' experiences. The work completed by the ISSE-PGR Group ensured that the face validity of the scale items was acceptable, with relatively minor changes made to item wording (including the addition of items not present in PRES) and response sets to ensure that the content and structure of the survey reflected the Irish experience and context.

This process also supported the ecological validity of the items, though a challenge remains to ensure the items reflect students' real world experiences given the variation that exists in that experience across disciplines and institutions. However, the process of pre-testing the question items with student groups (though focus groups and cognitive interviews) also contributed to confidence in the validity of the ISSE-PGR tool. Given that the intent is not to use ISSE-PGR as a measure of experience, it is not intended to examine issues of construct or criterion/predictive validity.

In conclusion, the use of PRES and the refinement of the survey items through the work of the ISSE-PGR Group and pre-testing with student groups, ensures an acceptable level of confidence in the validity of the data from the pilot study.

Initial expert review of the data from the pilot survey identifies a number of results that accord with expectation and perceptions of the experience of postgraduate research students, both in terms of comparison with UK PRES results and with prior use of PRES questions by a small number of institutions. In addition, a detailed statistical assessment of responses to the survey is being undertaken. This assessment will examine internal consistency, the extent to which individual question items contribute to each aspect, and make observations and possible recommendations on wording of questions and the response scales to be used in future iterations. The independent analysis will be published on www.studentsurvey.ie to coincide with formal publication of this national report in November 2018.

CHAPTER 3 Results from the 2018 National Pilot Survey

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents quantitative results from national pilot fieldwork for the Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research (ISSE-PGR). It includes an overview of the demographic profile of respondents and of the overall target student population. National level responses to questions are then presented with questions grouped according to particular "Aspects" of the student experience.

Results are presented for all national respondents enrolled on programmes leading to research degrees and by responses from students studying at NFQ¹³ Level 9 (i.e. Master's Degree by Research) and at NFQ Level 10 (Doctorate).

These results are followed by equivalent results for groupings determined by the size of the postgraduate research student population / cohort. These groupings have been used for presentation of data rather than grouping by institution-type, which is more common in other reporting contexts. The decision to use cohort size to group institutions reflects the distribution of postgraduate research students between institutions. According to a Postgraduate Research Student factsheet¹⁴ published by the Higher Education Authority using student data from 2016-2017, 81% of postgraduate research enrolments were in universities, 15% were in institutes of technology and 4% were in other institutions. Population sizes ranged from circa 400 to more than 1700 in universities and from circa 10 to almost 500 in institutes of technology. Cohorts in other institutions ranged from less than 20 to more than 200. Given this variation, it is felt that results grouped according to size of postgraduate research population are more useful when seeking to compare the findings for different sub groups of respondents.

3.2 RESPONSE RATES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 2,983 postgraduate research students responded to the 2018 national pilot survey. This represents an overall national response rate of 32.5%. This is regarded as a very positive response to the pilot and suggests that logistical and promotion arrangements operated effectively (these were designed to align closely with practice for the existing ISSE) and that postgraduate research students are prepared and willing to provide feedback on their experiences.

Examination of response rates for sub groups of the PGR population indicates that the demographic profile of respondents closely matches the profile of the overall target population.

36.5% of female students responded to the survey compared to 28.3% of male students. 31.7% of target students in cohorts of more than 250 responded compared to 37.2% of target students in smaller cohorts. 35.3% of full-time students responded whereas only 19.8% of their part-time / remote counterparts took part. Response rates for broad fields of study (which are based on ISCED¹⁵ classifications) range from 28.9% to 34.4% when broad field of study with particularly small numbers of students nationally are excluded i.e. 37.5% of Services students responded (n=24) and 51.1% of students on programmes classified as Generic programmes and qualifications (n=23) took part.

^{13.} The Irish National Framework of Qualifications, https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-(NFQ).aspx

^{14.} http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/02/20180306PG-facsheet.pdf

^{15.} http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED)

Table 3.1 Demographic profile

Characteristic	Popula	ation	Resp	onses	Response Rate (%)
National	918	2	29	83	32.5%
Gender					
Female	4694	51.1%	1711	57.4%	36.5%
Male	4488	48.9%	1272	42.6%	28.3%
Institution-cohort					
Cohort > 250	7860	85.6%	2491	83.5%	31.7%
Cohort < 250	1322	14.4%	492	16.5%	37.2%
Mode of Study					
Full-time	7523	81.9%	2654	89.0%	35.3%
Part-time / remote	1659	18.1%	329	11.0%	19.8%
Field of Study					
Generic programmes and qualifications	45	0.5%	23	0.8%	51.1%
Education	470	5.1%	136	4.6%	28.9%
Arts and humanities	1204	13.1%	393	13.2%	32.6%
Social sciences, journalism and information	908	9.9%	292	9.8%	32.2%
Business, administration and law	830	9.0%	269	9.0%	32.4%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	1984	21.6%	630	21.1%	31.8%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	466	5.1%	152	5.1%	32.6%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	1422	15.5%	448	15.0%	31.5%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	175	1.9%	60	2.0%	34.3%
Health and welfare	1614	17.6%	556	18.6%	34.4%
Services	64	0.7%	24	0.8%	37.5%
Programme type *					
Master's Research (Postgraduate)	1302	14.2%	403	13.5%	31.0%
PhD (Postgraduate)	7880	85.8%	2580	86.5%	32.7%
Course year **					
1st Year	1945	21.2%	756	25.3%	38.9%
2nd Year	1869	20.4%	627	21.0%	33.5%
3rd Year	1718	18.7%	600	20.1%	34.9%
4th Year	1490	16.2%	432	14.5%	29.0%
5th Year	727	7.9%	222	7.4%	30.5%
6th Year	623	6.8%	153	5.1%	24.6%
7th Year	212	2.3%	57	1.9%	26.9%
8th Year	165	1.8%	41	1.4%	24.8%
9th Year	42	0.5%	3	0.1%	7.1%
Continuous	3	0.0%	1	0.0%	33.3%
Master's 3+	26	0.3%	7	0.2%	26.9%
PhD 5+	362	3.9%	84	2.8%	36.5%

* Many Institutes of Technology currently register students on Master's by research programmes prior to any subsequent transfer to PhD programmes
 ** The record of course year is maintained differently between institutions e.g. some institutions record first year of a postgraduate programme as 5 (fifth year, typically, enrolled at the institution) rather than 1 (first year of new postgraduate programme)

3.3 ASPECTS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

The following sections present percentage responses to question items grouped according to different aspects of postgraduate research experiences. Results are presented for all respondents nationally, followed by responses from students on research programmes leading to Master's Degrees by research (NFQ Level 9) and from students on research programmes leading to Doctoral degrees (NFQ Level 10). Equivalent figures are provided for student researchers based in institutions with total PGR populations of more than 250 and of less than 250, respectively. It is noted that these results do not distinguish between respondents at different stages of progress towards their research degrees.

3.3.1 RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

81.8% of participating students 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that they have a suitable working space. 81.0% report similarly positive responses with regard to library facilities. A lower proportion of respondents 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that they have access to specialist resources and facilities.

Do you agree or	disagree with	All responses			Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250			
the following sta	itements	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	
I have a suitable	Definitely disagree	4.3%	6.1%	4.1%	4.2%	3.9%	4.2%	5.1%	7.9%	3.0%	
working space	Mostly disagree	8.4%	6.8%	8.6%	8.8%	7.3%	8.9%	6.6%	6.4%	6.8%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	5.5%	4.2%	5.7%	5.7%	3.9%	5.9%	4.1%	4.5%	3.8%	
	Mostly agree	34.9%	32.6%	35.3%	34.6%	30.9%	34.9%	36.5%	34.2%	38.3%	
	Definitely agree	46.9%	50.3%	46.3%	46.7%	53.9%	46.1%	47.6%	47.0%	48.1%	
There is adequate	Definitely disagree	4.8%	5.0%	4.8%	4.7%	2.8%	4.9%	5.3%	6.9%	4.1%	
provision of computing	Mostly disagree	12.1%	11.0%	12.3%	12.0%	7.8%	12.3%	13.0%	13.8%	12.4%	
resources / facilities	Neither agree nor disagree	10.2%	8.6%	10.4%	10.5%	10.6%	10.5%	8.5%	6.9%	9.8%	
	Mostly agree	34.7%	32.5%	35.1%	35.1%	30.2%	35.5%	32.8%	34.5%	31.6%	
	Definitely agree	38.2%	42.9%	37.4%	37.7%	48.6%	36.8%	40.3%	37.9%	42.1%	
There is adequate	Definitely disagree	3.3%	2.8%	3.4%	3.4%	1.6%	3.5%	3.2%	3.9%	2.6%	
provision of library facilities	Mostly disagree	8.0%	9.2%	7.8%	7.2%	6.5%	7.3%	11.8%	11.7%	11.8%	
(including physical / online resources)	Neither agree nor disagree	7.7%	8.2%	7.6%	7.5%	4.9%	7.7%	8.8%	11.2%	7.0%	
	Mostly agree	39.0%	40.5%	38.8%	38.7%	38.4%	38.7%	40.8%	42.4%	39.5%	
	Definitely agree	42.0%	39.2%	42.4%	43.2%	48.6%	42.8%	35.5%	30.7%	39.1%	
I have access to the	Definitely disagree	4.3%	5.4%	4.1%	3.9%	1.6%	4.1%	6.1%	8.8%	4.1%	
specialist resources and facilities	Mostly disagree	10.2%	9.5%	10.3%	9.5%	5.4%	9.8%	14.1%	13.2%	14.8%	
and facilities necessary for my research	Neither agree nor disagree	13.6%	13.9%	13.6%	13.3%	10.3%	13.6%	15.2%	17.2%	13.7%	
	Mostly agree	43.1%	40.9%	43.4%	43.8%	42.7%	43.9%	39.5%	39.2%	39.6%	
	Definitely agree	28.8%	30.3%	28.5%	29.5%	40.0%	28.6%	25.1%	21.6%	27.8%	

The majority (61.1%) of participating students are in receipt of a scholarship whereas almost one in five (18.1%) are self-funded.

My research is funded by (please select all that apply)*		All	respons	ses	Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250		
		Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
Scholarship	Yes	61.1%	52.6%	62.4%	61.1%	43.2%	62.6%	61.0%	61.1%	60.9%
Scholarship (fees only)	Yes	6.5%	8.7%	6.2%	6.3%	7.4%	6.3%	7.6%	10.0%	5.7%
Self-funded	Yes	18.1%	21.7%	17.6%	18.8%	26.8%	18.1%	14.9%	17.1%	13.3%
Grant	Yes	17.0%	16.5%	17.1%	16.4%	18.4%	16.3%	19.8%	14.7%	23.7%
Employer-funded	Yes	8.8%	10.0%	8.6%	8.8%	11.6%	8.6%	8.6%	8.5%	8.6%

* Multiple responses allowed. Table shows averages of non-blank responses.

Almost all respondents report that their fees are covered by the funding (95.6%), with a high proportion (78.1%) indicating that a stipend is also included. Few students (approximately a quarter) report that funding covers travel to other labs or institutions, or specialist training are covered by their funding.

My funding covers (please select all that apply)*		All	respons	es	Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250			
		Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	
Fees	Yes	95.6%	93.9%	95.9%	95.6%	92.5%	95.8%	95.9%	95.1%	96.6%	
Stipend	Yes	78.1%	65.8%	80.0%	78.4%	63.2%	79.6%	76.5%	68.0%	83.1%	
Research materials	Yes	58.0%	57.3%	58.1%	55.9%	55.7%	55.9%	68.1%	58.6%	75.5%	
Travel to conferences	Yes	58.3%	53.3%	59.1%	56.9%	48.3%	57.6%	65.1%	57.6%	70.9%	
Other travel (labs / other institutions)	Yes	27.1%	25.5%	27.4%	26.0%	24.1%	26.2%	32.8%	26.6%	37.5%	
Specialist training	Yes	24.2%	22.0%	24.6%	23.6%	19.5%	23.9%	27.4%	24.1%	29.9%	

* Multiple responses allowed. Table shows averages of non-blank responses.

3.3.2 SUPERVISION

The vast majority of participating students have one or two supervisors. 82.9% 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that their supervisors provide appropriate levels of support whereas 71.7% 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that their supervisors help them to identify training and development needs.

Do you agree or o	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements	All responses			Cohort > 250			Cohort < 250		
(This question ster for the first item)	m is not used	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
I am being supervised	One supervisor	47.3%	36.7%	48.9%	52.3%	52.9%	52.2%	22.0%	22.3%	21.8%
by	Two supervisors	43.0%	50.5%	41.8%	40.3%	38.0%	40.4%	56.8%	61.6%	53.1%
	Three or more supervisors	9.7%	12.8%	9.2%	7.4%	9.1%	7.3%	21.2%	16.1%	25.1%
My supervisor(s)	Definitely disagree	3.3%	4.0%	3.2%	3.2%	3.2%	3.2%	3.9%	4.8%	3.3%
appropriate level	Mostly disagree	6.6%	6.1%	6.7%	6.8%	6.5%	6.8%	5.8%	5.7%	5.8%
of support for my research	Neither agree nor disagree	7.1%	4.8%	7.4%	7.3%	4.8%	7.5%	6.0%	4.8%	6.9%
	Mostly agree	28.4%	24.5%	29.0%	29.0%	27.4%	29.1%	25.6%	21.9%	28.4%
	Definitely agree	54.5%	60.6%	53.6%	53.7%	58.1%	53.4%	58.8%	62.9%	55.6%
I have regular contact	Definitely disagree	2.7%	3.3%	2.6%	2.6%	2.2%	2.7%	3.1%	4.3%	2.2%
with my supervisor(s), appropriate for my	Mostly disagree	6.2%	4.8%	6.4%	6.4%	4.3%	6.5%	5.2%	5.3%	5.1%
needs	Neither agree nor disagree	7.3%	6.8%	7.4%	7.6%	9.7%	7.5%	5.6%	4.3%	6.6%
	Mostly agree	24.1%	25.3%	23.9%	24.5%	29.6%	24.0%	22.4%	21.5%	23.0%
	Definitely agree	59.7%	59.7%	59.7%	58.9%	54.3%	59.3%	63.8%	64.6%	63.1%
My supervisor(s)	Definitely disagree	3.1%	4.1%	2.9%	2.9%	2.7%	2.9%	3.7%	5.3%	2.6%
provides feedback that helps me to direct my	Mostly disagree	5.5%	4.1%	5.7%	5.7%	4.3%	5.8%	4.6%	3.8%	5.1%
research activities	Neither agree nor disagree	7.8%	7.4%	7.9%	7.8%	8.1%	7.7%	7.9%	6.7%	8.8%
	Mostly agree	27.9%	24.4%	28.5%	28.8%	28.6%	28.9%	23.2%	20.7%	25.2%
	Definitely agree	55.8%	60.1%	55.1%	54.8%	56.2%	54.7%	60.6%	63.5%	58.4%
My supervisor(s)	Definitely disagree	4.7%	5.6%	4.6%	4.8%	5.9%	4.7%	4.4%	5.3%	3.7%
meip me to identify my training and	Mostly disagree	10.2%	8.6%	10.5%	10.2%	9.1%	10.3%	10.4%	8.2%	12.1%
my training and development needs as a researcher	Neither agree nor disagree	13.4%	12.4%	13.6%	14.0%	16.7%	13.7%	10.6%	8.7%	12.1%
	Mostly agree	28.9%	25.9%	29.3%	29.1%	26.9%	29.3%	27.7%	25.0%	29.7%
	Definitely agree	42.8%	47.5%	42.1%	42.0%	41.4%	42.0%	47.0%	52.9%	42.5%

3.3.3 RESEARCH CULTURE

More than two thirds of respondents (66.9%) 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that their department provides access to a relevant seminar programme, with 59.2% expressing agreement that the research ambience stimulates their work. 53.0% of students agree that they have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community.

Do you agree or disagree with	Al	l respons	ses	Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250			
the following state	ements	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
My department	Definitely disagree	5.6%	7.7%	5.3%	5.2%	4.5%	5.3%	7.4%	10.4%	5.0%
provides access to a relevant seminar	Mostly disagree	11.8%	13.0%	11.6%	11.4%	13.6%	11.2%	14.1%	12.4%	15.3%
programme	Neither agree nor disagree	15.7%	21.2%	14.8%	14.4%	18.1%	14.1%	22.3%	23.9%	21.1%
	Mostly agree	36.8%	33.1%	37.4%	37.8%	31.6%	38.3%	31.8%	34.3%	29.9%
	Definitely agree	30.1%	25.1%	30.9%	31.2%	32.2%	31.1%	24.5%	18.9%	28.7%
The research ambience	Definitely disagree	6.2%	8.2%	5.9%	6.1%	6.7%	6.0%	6.9%	9.6%	4.9%
in my department stimulates my work	Mostly disagree	13.1%	15.1%	12.8%	13.0%	15.6%	12.8%	13.9%	14.6%	13.3%
, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	Neither agree nor disagree	21.5%	18.6%	21.9%	21.8%	17.3%	22.2%	19.9%	19.7%	20.1%
	Mostly agree	33.7%	29.7%	34.3%	33.8%	27.4%	34.4%	32.9%	31.8%	33.7%
	Definitely agree	25.5%	28.4%	25.1%	25.3%	33.0%	24.7%	26.4%	24.2%	28.0%
I have frequent	Definitely disagree	6.6%	9.2%	6.2%	6.7%	10.1%	6.4%	6.2%	8.4%	4.5%
opportunities to discuss my research with other	Mostly disagree	15.2%	14.5%	15.3%	15.6%	13.5%	15.8%	13.2%	15.3%	11.6%
research students	Neither agree nor disagree	16.1%	12.1%	16.7%	16.6%	12.4%	17.0%	13.4%	11.9%	14.6%
	Mostly agree	33.4%	30.0%	33.9%	33.0%	30.3%	33.2%	35.3%	29.7%	39.6%
	Definitely agree	28.7%	34.2%	27.8%	28.1%	33.7%	27.6%	31.9%	34.7%	29.9%
I have opportunities	Definitely disagree	6.9%	8.9%	6.6%	6.7%	8.4%	6.6%	7.9%	9.3%	6.8%
to become involved in the wider research	Mostly disagree	17.8%	16.4%	18.0%	18.1%	14.5%	18.4%	16.6%	18.1%	15.4%
in the wider research community, beyond my department	Neither agree nor disagree	22.2%	25.3%	21.8%	22.4%	28.5%	22.0%	21.3%	22.5%	20.3%
	Mostly agree	31.9%	29.8%	32.3%	31.5%	27.4%	31.9%	33.8%	31.9%	35.3%
	Definitely agree	21.1%	19.6%	21.3%	21.2%	21.2%	21.2%	20.4%	18.1%	22.2%

3.3.4 PROGRESS AND ASSESSMENT

59.3% of participating student 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that they received an appropriate induction / orientation. Three quarters understand the requirements and deadlines for monitoring progress and almost the same percentage understand the required standard for their thesis. Slightly fewer (69.4%) are clear about final assessment procedures.

Do you agree or c	Do you agree or disagree with	All responses			Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250			
the following state	ements	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	
I received an	Definitely disagree	9.7%	12.0%	9.4%	9.8%	12.3%	9.6%	9.4%	11.7%	7.6%	
appropriate induction / orientation to my	Mostly disagree	15.7%	14.3%	15.9%	16.0%	15.6%	16.0%	13.9%	13.2%	14.5%	
research degree programme	Neither agree nor disagree	15.4%	13.8%	15.7%	16.0%	16.2%	15.9%	12.6%	11.7%	13.4%	
	Mostly agree	34.2%	34.6%	34.1%	34.3%	32.4%	34.5%	33.2%	36.6%	30.5%	
	Definitely agree	25.1%	25.3%	25.1%	23.9%	23.5%	24.0%	30.8%	26.8%	34.0%	
I understand the	Definitely disagree	3.4%	6.8%	2.9%	3.5%	8.9%	3.1%	3.0%	4.9%	1.5%	
requirements and deadlines for formal	Mostly disagree	10.2%	12.7%	9.8%	10.6%	17.9%	10.0%	8.2%	8.3%	8.2%	
monitoring of my progress	Neither agree nor disagree	10.8%	8.6%	11.1%	11.4%	8.9%	11.6%	7.8%	8.3%	7.5%	
	Mostly agree	40.9%	37.1%	41.5%	40.7%	31.8%	41.4%	41.8%	41.7%	41.8%	
	Definitely agree	34.7%	34.8%	34.7%	33.8%	32.4%	33.9%	39.2%	36.9%	41.0%	
I understand the	Definitely disagree	3.8%	7.8%	3.2%	3.7%	9.4%	3.3%	4.4%	6.3%	3.0%	
required standard for my thesis	Mostly disagree	10.0%	12.4%	9.7%	10.8%	17.8%	10.2%	6.3%	7.8%	5.2%	
,	Neither agree nor disagree	12.1%	13.0%	11.9%	12.6%	12.8%	12.6%	9.5%	13.1%	6.7%	
	Mostly agree	42.5%	37.8%	43.3%	43.0%	36.1%	43.5%	40.3%	39.3%	41.0%	
	Definitely agree	31.5%	29.0%	31.9%	29.9%	23.9%	30.4%	39.5%	33.5%	44.0%	
The final assessment	Definitely disagree	4.1%	8.5%	3.3%	3.9%	9.4%	3.4%	4.9%	7.8%	2.6%	
procedures for my research degree are	Mostly disagree	12.5%	15.8%	11.9%	12.8%	17.8%	12.4%	10.6%	14.1%	7.9%	
research degree are clear to me	Neither agree nor disagree	14.1%	16.3%	13.8%	14.1%	15.6%	14.0%	14.0%	17.0%	11.6%	
-	Mostly agree	40.8%	37.6%	41.3%	41.1%	35.6%	41.5%	39.3%	39.3%	39.3%	
	Definitely agree	28.6%	21.8%	29.7%	28.1%	21.7%	28.6%	31.3%	21.8%	38.6%	

3.3.5 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

80.0% of respondents have attended academic conferences and 75.7% receive training in research skills. 42.3% have agreed a development plan and only 18.0% take part in an internship or placement. 70.5% have presented a paper or poster at an academic research conference.

Have you availed of the	following	All	respons	ses	Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250		
opportunities during you research degree progran	r nme?	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
Agreeing a personal training or	Yes	42.3%	39.5%	42.7%	41.2%	33.5%	41.9%	47.4%	44.8%	49.4%
development plan	No	40.9%	42.7%	40.7%	41.9%	48.9%	41.4%	35.9%	37.3%	34.7%
	Not avail.	16.8%	17.8%	16.7%	16.8%	17.6%	16.8%	16.7%	17.9%	15.8%
Receiving training to develop	Yes	75.7%	70.6%	76.5%	75.2%	67.0%	75.8%	78.4%	73.6%	82.1%
my research skills	No	18.9%	24.7%	18.0%	19.4%	28.4%	18.7%	16.4%	21.4%	12.5%
	Not avail.	5.4%	4.8%	5.5%	5.5%	4.5%	5.5%	5.2%	5.0%	5.3%
Receiving training to develop	Yes	59.2%	52.3%	60.3%	59.4%	49.7%	60.2%	58.3%	54.5%	61.3%
my other transferable skills	No	33.0%	39.0%	32.0%	33.2%	42.9%	32.4%	32.0%	35.6%	29.1%
	Not avail.	7.8%	8.8%	7.6%	7.4%	7.4%	7.4%	9.7%	9.9%	9.6%
Receiving advice on	Yes	30.5%	28.2%	30.9%	30.8%	28.4%	31.0%	29.0%	28.0%	29.8%
career options	No	58.6%	62.8%	58.0%	58.7%	65.3%	58.1%	58.4%	60.5%	56.9%
	Not avail.	10.9%	9.0%	11.2%	10.6%	6.3%	10.9%	12.6%	11.5%	13.4%
Taking part in a placement	Yes	18.0%	16.6%	18.2%	18.0%	19.4%	17.9%	18.1%	14.1%	21.2%
or internship	No	61.0%	59.9%	61.2%	61.2%	56.6%	61.6%	60.0%	62.8%	57.9%
	Not avail.	21.0%	23.5%	20.6%	20.8%	24.0%	20.5%	21.8%	23.1%	20.8%
Attending an academic research	Yes	80.0%	67.5%	82.0%	80.6%	66.5%	81.7%	77.4%	68.3%	84.4%
conference	No	17.0%	27.2%	15.3%	16.4%	27.3%	15.6%	19.6%	27.2%	13.7%
	Not avail.	3.0%	5.3%	2.6%	3.0%	6.3%	2.7%	3.0%	4.5%	1.9%
Presenting a paper or poster	Yes	70.5%	56.2%	72.7%	70.4%	50.6%	72.0%	70.8%	61.1%	78.3%
at an academic research	No	26.1%	39.3%	24.0%	25.9%	43.8%	24.5%	26.8%	35.5%	20.2%
contenee	Not avail.	3.4%	4.5%	3.3%	3.6%	5.7%	3.5%	2.4%	3.4%	1.5%
Submitting a paper for	Yes	50.7%	37.8%	52.7%	50.8%	34.7%	52.1%	50.2%	40.5%	57.7%
publication in an academic	No	45.3%	56.9%	43.4%	45.1%	60.2%	43.9%	45.9%	54.0%	39.6%
Journal of Book	Not avail.	4.1%	5.3%	3.9%	4.1%	5.1%	4.0%	3.9%	5.5%	2.7%
Communicating your research	Yes	45.9%	37.9%	47.2%	46.3%	33.5%	47.4%	43.8%	41.7%	45.4%
to a non-academic audience	No	48.2%	54.7%	47.2%	47.6%	56.3%	46.9%	51.2%	53.3%	49.6%
	Not avail.	5.9%	7.5%	5.7%	6.1%	10.2%	5.7%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
Receiving training in	Yes	17.0%	11.2%	17.9%	17.3%	10.2%	17.8%	15.4%	12.1%	18.0%
entrepreneurship and	No	68.9%	70.7%	68.6%	69.6%	75.6%	69.1%	65.2%	66.3%	64.4%
Innovation	Not avail.	14.1%	18.1%	13.5%	13.1%	14.2%	13.0%	19.3%	21.6%	17.6%
Putting training in entrepreneurship	Yes	7.3%	5.3%	7.7%	7.1%	2.8%	7.4%	8.7%	7.6%	9.6%
and innovation into practice e.g. submitting an invention disclosure	No	76.3%	76.2%	76.3%	76.9%	80.1%	76.6%	73.4%	72.7%	73.8%
or filing a patent application	Not avail.	16.4%	18.4%	16.1%	16.1%	17.0%	16.0%	17.9%	19.7%	16.5%

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS FROM THE 2018 NATIONAL PILOT SURVEY

Almost two thirds of respondents have opportunities to work as part of a team whereas 25.6% have worked collaboratively with industry, 23.3% collaboratively with a civil / public organisation and 21.9% have had the opportunity to spend time abroad as part of their research degree programme.

Have you availed of the following opportunities during your research degree programme?		All responses			Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250		
		Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
Working as part of a team	Yes	64.3%	62.9%	64.5%	64.4%	69.3%	64.0%	63.8%	57.2%	68.8%
	No	28.5%	30.0%	28.3%	28.6%	26.1%	28.8%	28.2%	33.3%	24.2%
	Not avail.	7.2%	7.2%	7.2%	7.0%	4.5%	7.2%	8.0%	9.5%	6.9%
Working collaboratively	Yes	25.6%	35.9%	24.0%	23.6%	30.3%	23.0%	35.7%	40.8%	31.8%
with industry	No	60.2%	52.7%	61.4%	62.0%	57.7%	62.4%	51.0%	48.3%	53.1%
	Not avail.	14.2%	11.4%	14.6%	14.4%	12.0%	14.6%	13.3%	10.9%	15.1%
Working collaboratively with	Yes	23.3%	24.1%	23.2%	23.2%	25.6%	23.0%	23.6%	22.8%	24.3%
a civil society organisation or public organisation	No	62.7%	62.7%	62.7%	62.7%	60.8%	62.9%	62.3%	64.4%	60.6%
	Not avail.	14.1%	13.2%	14.2%	14.0%	13.6%	14.1%	14.1%	12.9%	15.1%
Spending time abroad as part	Yes	21.9%	12.4%	23.4%	23.1%	14.2%	23.9%	15.8%	10.9%	19.7%
of your research degree	No	65.5%	73.0%	64.3%	64.6%	71.0%	64.1%	70.1%	74.8%	66.4%
	Not avail.	12.6%	14.6%	12.2%	12.3%	14.8%	12.0%	14.1%	14.4%	13.9%

Almost three quarters of respondents have taught or demonstrated with 66.7% of all respondents agreeing that this enhanced their research degree experience. About half of participating students agree that they were given appropriate support and guidance for this activity.

Have you availed of the following opportunities during your research degree programme?		All responses			Co	hort > 2	50	Cohort < 250		
		Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
Please indicate whether	No	27.5%	35.3%	26.3%	26.0%	37.5%	25.1%	35.0%	33.3%	36.3%
you have taught (or demonstrated) at your institution during your research degree programme:	Yes	72.5%	64.7%	73.7%	74.0%	62.5%	74.9%	65.0%	66.7%	63.7%
Do you agree or disagree	Definitely disagree	7.9%	7.4%	7.9%	7.9%	10.1%	7.8%	7.4%	5.3%	9.2%
that the teaching / demonstration vou	Mostly disagree	11.9%	8.1%	12.5%	12.8%	13.4%	12.7%	7.4%	3.9%	10.3%
delivered enhanced your overall research	Neither agree nor disagree	13.6%	13.7%	13.5%	14.0%	14.3%	13.9%	11.3%	13.2%	9.7%
experience?	Mostly agree	26.8%	23.2%	27.3%	26.8%	15.1%	27.6%	26.7%	29.6%	24.3%
	Definitely agree	39.9%	47.6%	38.8%	38.5%	47.1%	37.9%	47.2%	48.0%	46.5%
Do you agree or disagree	Definitely disagree	11.2%	7.7%	11.6%	11.4%	6.8%	11.7%	9.9%	8.4%	11.2%
that you have been given	Mostly disagree	20.6%	19.0%	20.8%	21.0%	25.4%	20.7%	18.1%	14.2%	21.4%
appropriate support and guidance for your teaching / demonstration?	Neither agree nor disagree	18.6%	19.4%	18.5%	18.8%	18.6%	18.8%	17.8%	20.0%	16.0%
	Mostly agree	30.2%	27.5%	30.5%	30.4%	26.3%	30.7%	28.7%	28.4%	28.9%
	Definitely agree	19.5%	26.4%	18.5%	18.4%	22.9%	18.1%	25.4%	29.0%	22.5%

3.3.6 RESEARCH SKILLS

The vast majority of students (87.9%) 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that their skills in conducting research have developed and (87.4%) that their critical analysis and evaluation skills have developed during their programme. 83.5% agree that their understanding of research integrity has developed.

Do you agree or disagree with the		All	respons	ses	Co	hort > 2	250 Cohort < 2			:50
following statement	S	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme	Definitely disagree	1.3%	1.9%	1.2%	1.3%	2.4%	1.2%	1.3%	1.5%	1.2%
	Mostly disagree	2.6%	1.9%	2.7%	2.7%	1.8%	2.7%	1.9%	2.0%	1.9%
	Neither agree nor disagree	8.2%	9.7%	8.0%	8.6%	11.2%	8.4%	6.3%	8.3%	4.7%
	Mostly agree	40.7%	41.6%	40.6%	41.5%	45.6%	41.1%	37.2%	38.2%	36.4%
	Definitely agree	47.2%	45.0%	47.5%	45.9%	39.1%	46.5%	53.2%	50.0%	55.8%
My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme	Definitely disagree	1.1%	1.3%	1.1%	1.1%	1.8%	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.2%
	Mostly disagree	2.8%	2.7%	2.8%	3.0%	3.6%	2.9%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
	Neither agree nor disagree	8.6%	10.8%	8.3%	8.8%	13.0%	8.5%	7.6%	8.9%	6.6%
	Mostly agree	40.5%	42.0%	40.2%	41.6%	43.2%	41.5%	34.7%	41.1%	29.7%
	Definitely agree	46.9%	43.1%	47.5%	45.4%	38.5%	46.0%	54.6%	47.0%	60.5%
My confidence to be	Definitely disagree	2.7%	3.0%	2.6%	2.8%	3.6%	2.8%	2.0%	2.5%	1.6%
creative or innovative has developed during my	Mostly disagree	8.4%	8.7%	8.4%	8.7%	11.4%	8.5%	7.2%	6.5%	7.8%
programme	Neither agree nor disagree	16.6%	14.4%	17.0%	17.5%	18.1%	17.5%	12.0%	11.4%	12.5%
	Mostly agree	39.1%	39.2%	39.1%	39.5%	40.4%	39.5%	37.0%	38.3%	35.9%
	Definitely agree	33.2%	34.6%	32.9%	31.4%	26.5%	31.8%	41.8%	41.3%	42.2%
My understanding	Definitely disagree	1.4%	1.1%	1.4%	1.5%	1.2%	1.5%	1.1%	1.0%	1.2%
of 'research integrity' (e.g. rigour, ethics,	Mostly disagree	3.2%	4.6%	3.0%	3.0%	4.2%	2.9%	3.9%	5.0%	3.1%
transparency, attributing the contribution of others)	Neither agree nor disagree	12.0%	10.6%	12.2%	12.5%	12.7%	12.4%	9.4%	8.9%	9.8%
has developed during my programme	Mostly agree	37.4%	38.1%	37.3%	38.3%	44.2%	37.9%	32.8%	33.2%	32.4%
	Definitely agree	46.1%	45.5%	46.2%	44.7%	37.6%	45.3%	52.8%	52.0%	53.5%

3.3.7 OTHER TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

77.7% of respondents 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree that their ability to communicate effectively to diverse audiences has developed. 79.7% report similarly positive views about their ability to manage their own professional development.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements		All	respon	ses	Co	hort > 2	.50	Co	hort < 2	ort < 250	
		Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	
My ability to manage	Definitely disagree	1.4%	0.8%	1.5%	1.5%	1.2%	1.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.8%	
projects has developed during my programme	Mostly disagree	5.6%	6.8%	5.4%	5.9%	6.6%	5.9%	4.2%	7.0%	2.0%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	15.4%	12.6%	15.8%	16.0%	12.0%	16.3%	12.1%	13.1%	11.4%	
	Mostly agree	41.0%	40.0%	41.2%	42.2%	47.6%	41.8%	35.1%	33.7%	36.2%	
	Definitely agree	36.6%	39.7%	36.1%	34.3%	32.5%	34.5%	47.9%	45.7%	49.6%	
My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme	Definitely disagree	1.0%	0.8%	1.1%	1.1%	0.6%	1.1%	0.9%	1.0%	0.8%	
	Mostly disagree	5.8%	6.7%	5.6%	5.9%	8.6%	5.7%	5.1%	5.1%	5.2%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	15.4%	14.4%	15.6%	15.9%	16.7%	15.9%	13.1%	12.6%	13.5%	
	Mostly agree	41.6%	42.5%	41.4%	42.0%	45.7%	41.7%	39.8%	39.9%	39.7%	
	Definitely agree	36.1%	35.6%	36.2%	35.1%	28.4%	35.7%	41.1%	41.4%	40.9%	
I have developed	Definitely disagree	3.1%	6.9%	2.5%	2.8%	6.0%	2.6%	4.2%	7.6%	1.6%	
contacts or protessional networks during my	Mostly disagree	9.5%	9.9%	9.5%	10.0%	11.4%	9.9%	7.3%	8.6%	6.3%	
programme	Neither agree nor disagree	16.8%	15.9%	17.0%	17.1%	15.7%	17.2%	15.3%	16.2%	14.6%	
	Mostly agree	38.0%	35.2%	38.4%	37.9%	35.5%	38.1%	38.1%	34.8%	40.7%	
	Definitely agree	32.6%	32.1%	32.6%	32.1%	31.3%	32.2%	35.0%	32.8%	36.8%	
I have increasingly	Definitely disagree	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%	0.6%	1.5%	1.1%	2.0%	0.4%	
managed my own professional development	Mostly disagree	4.5%	3.8%	4.6%	4.8%	4.8%	4.8%	2.9%	3.0%	2.7%	
during my programme	Neither agree nor disagree	14.4%	13.6%	14.5%	15.0%	19.6%	14.6%	11.2%	8.5%	13.3%	
	Mostly agree	40.7%	42.0%	40.5%	41.0%	45.2%	40.6%	39.6%	39.2%	39.8%	
	Definitely agree	39.0%	39.2%	39.0%	37.7%	29.8%	38.4%	45.3%	47.2%	43.8%	

3.3.8 RESPONSIBILITIES AND SUPPORTS

The vast majority of participating students (88.5%) understand their responsibilities as research students, with somewhat fewer (81.2%) aware of their supervisors' responsibilities. Only 39.3% of respondents are 'quite a bit' or 'very much' aware of (non-academic) supports available. Slightly more respondents express positive views than negative views of whether their institution responds to and values feedback from research degree students but almost two in five 'neither agree nor disagree'.

Do you agree or disagree with the		All	respons	ses	Co	Cohort > 250			Cohort < 250		
following statement	S	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	
l understand my responsibilities as a research degree student	Definitely disagree	1.2%	1.6%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	2.0%	0.4%	
	Mostly disagree	4.1%	4.3%	4.1%	4.5%	5.9%	4.3%	2.6%	3.0%	2.3%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	6.2%	6.2%	6.2%	6.7%	8.3%	6.6%	3.9%	4.4%	3.5%	
	Mostly agree	42.1%	39.8%	42.5%	43.1%	43.8%	43.0%	37.3%	36.5%	38.0%	
	Definitely agree	46.4%	48.1%	46.1%	44.6%	40.8%	44.9%	55.1%	54.2%	55.8%	
I am aware of my supervisor(s)' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student	Definitely disagree	2.0%	3.5%	1.7%	1.9%	3.0%	1.8%	2.4%	3.9%	1.2%	
	Mostly disagree	7.2%	8.9%	7.0%	7.4%	13.6%	6.9%	6.5%	4.9%	7.7%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	9.6%	8.1%	9.9%	10.0%	7.7%	10.2%	7.8%	8.4%	7.3%	
	Mostly agree	39.8%	36.6%	40.3%	40.4%	39.1%	40.5%	37.0%	34.5%	39.0%	
	Definitely agree	41.4%	43.0%	41.1%	40.4%	36.7%	40.7%	46.3%	48.3%	44.8%	
Other than my	Definitely disagree	7.5%	10.1%	7.0%	7.4%	9.0%	7.2%	7.9%	10.9%	5.5%	
supervisor(s), I know who to approach if I	Mostly disagree	15.3%	16.0%	15.2%	15.7%	19.8%	15.4%	13.1%	12.9%	13.3%	
am concerned about any academic aspect	Neither agree nor disagree	13.8%	11.4%	14.1%	14.3%	14.4%	14.3%	11.2%	9.0%	12.9%	
of my research degree	Mostly agree	31.3%	24.7%	32.3%	31.9%	25.7%	32.3%	28.4%	23.9%	32.0%	
J 3	Definitely agree	32.2%	37.8%	31.3%	30.8%	31.1%	30.7%	39.4%	43.3%	36.3%	
How aware are you of the	Very little	19.8%	19.9%	19.8%	19.4%	18.5%	19.4%	22.2%	21.2%	23.0%	
various student supports available? (Recreation,	Some	40.9%	35.6%	41.7%	41.9%	38.7%	42.2%	35.5%	33.0%	37.5%	
healthcare, counselling,	Quite a bit	28.4%	28.8%	28.4%	28.3%	27.4%	28.4%	29.0%	30.0%	28.1%	
etc)	Very much	10.9%	15.6%	10.1%	10.4%	15.5%	10.0%	13.3%	15.8%	11.3%	
My institution values and responds to	Definitely disagree	7.9%	8.2%	7.9%	8.0%	8.7%	8.0%	7.6%	7.7%	7.5%	
teedback trom research degree	Mostly disagree	14.3%	9.9%	15.0%	14.4%	6.8%	15.0%	13.6%	12.4%	14.6%	
students	Neither agree nor disagree	38.9%	38.6%	39.0%	40.2%	46.0%	39.7%	32.8%	32.5%	33.1%	
	Mostly agree	27.2%	25.4%	27.4%	26.6%	18.6%	27.3%	29.7%	30.9%	28.7%	
	Definitely agree	11.7%	18.0%	10.7%	10.8%	19.9%	10.0%	16.3%	16.5%	16.1%	

3.3.9 MOTIVATIONS

Almost half (46.6%) of respondents who answer any Motivations question indicate that their interest in the subject area is their top reason for pursuing a research degree. 19.4% of respondents state that improving their academic / research career prospects was their main motivation.

Please select your top three		All	respons	ses	Co	hort > 2	50	Co	hort < 2	:50
research degree *	uing a	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
My interest in my subject	Highest priority	46.6%	39.4%	47.8%	47.7%	37.7%	48.5%	41.4%	40.8%	41.8%
	2	17.8%	16.8%	17.9%	17.9%	18.0%	17.9%	17.1%	15.9%	18.0%
	Lowest priority	10.7%	12.8%	10.3%	11.0%	18.0%	10.4%	9.2%	8.5%	9.8%
Improving my career prospects for an academic / research	Highest priority	19.4%	22.6%	19.0%	18.4%	17.4%	18.5%	24.7%	26.9%	23.0%
	2	22.9%	22.8%	22.9%	22.9%	20.4%	23.1%	23.0%	24.9%	21.5%
career	Lowest priority	12.4%	9.8%	12.8%	12.4%	6.0%	12.9%	12.0%	12.9%	11.3%
Improving my career	Highest priority	11.6%	17.1%	10.8%	11.5%	22.8%	10.6%	12.5%	12.4%	12.5%
an academic / research	2	12.5%	15.8%	12.0%	12.7%	19.8%	12.2%	11.6%	12.4%	10.9%
career	Lowest priority	9.5%	9.5%	9.5%	9.0%	6.0%	9.3%	11.6%	12.4%	10.9%
I was encouraged by a former academic tutor / supervisor	Highest priority	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.6%	3.0%	3.6%	5.0%	4.5%	5.5%
	2	9.2%	11.4%	8.9%	8.6%	11.4%	8.4%	12.3%	11.4%	12.9%
	Lowest priority	10.2%	11.4%	10.1%	10.0%	9.6%	10.1%	11.2%	12.9%	9.8%
The funding was	Highest priority	3.3%	4.1%	3.1%	3.2%	2.4%	3.3%	3.5%	5.5%	2.0%
available	2	9.5%	12.2%	9.1%	9.3%	13.2%	9.0%	10.7%	11.4%	10.2%
	Lowest priority	15.2%	15.8%	15.1%	14.9%	14.4%	14.9%	16.85	16.9%	16.8%
It felt like a natural	Highest priority	8.0%	7.1%	8.1%	8.1%	8.4%	8.1%	7.2%	6.0%	8.2%
step for me	2	13.8%	9.0%	14.6%	14.3%	6.6%	14.9%	11.6%	10.9%	12.1%
	Lowest priority	18.0%	13.6%	18.7%	18.4%	13.8%	18.8%	16.2%	13.4%	18.4%
I felt inspired to work	Highest priority	1.3%	0.3%	1.4%	1.3%	0.6%	1.3%	1.3%	0.0%	2.3%
with a particular academic	2	3.8%	2.4%	4.0%	3.9%	1.2%	4.1%	3.1%	3.5%	2.7%
	Lowest priority	6.5%	6.3%	6.5%	6.8%	9.0%	6.6%	4.8%	4.0%	5.5%
Professional	Highest priority	4.7%	4.1%	4.8%	5.0%	5.4%	5.0%	3.1%	3.0%	3.1%
development or training	2	9.0%	8.4%	9.0%	8.7%	8.4%	8.7%	10.3%	8.5%	11.7%
	Lowest priority	14.4%	16.8%	14.0%	14.5%	21.0%	14.0%	14.0%	13.4%	14.5%
Other	Highest priority	1.3%	1.6%	1.3%	1.3%	2.4%	1.2%	1.3%	1.0%	1.6%
	2	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	1.1%	1.2%	1.1%	0.4%	1.0%	0.0%
	Lowest priority	1.8%	3.3%	1.6%	1.6%	2.4%	1.5%	3.1%	4.0%	2.3%

* Multiple responses allowed. Table shows average of non-blank responses. Lowest represents 3rd choice.

3.3.10 CAREER ASPIRATIONS

39.4% of respondents who answer the question about Career Aspirations indicate that an academic career is their highest priority, with a research career outside higher education the second most frequent priority (22.7%).

Please select the top three types		All	respons	ses	Co	Cohort > 250			Cohort < 250		
of career you have ir you finish your resea	n mind for when rch degree *	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	
Academic career in	Highest priority	39.4%	36.7%	39.8%	38.7%	20.4%	40.2%	42.7%	50.5%	36.6%	
higher education (either research and teaching.	2	16.8%	16.2%	16.9%	16.7%	18.0%	16.6%	17.5%	14.6%	19.7%	
or teaching only)	Lowest priority	10.5%	9.0%	10.8%	10.8%	10.2%	10.9%	9.1%	8.1%	9.8%	
Research career in	Highest priority	11.9%	10.1%	12.2%	12.0%	12.0%	12.0%	11.3%	8.6%	13.4%	
higher education	2	27.1%	20.8%	28.0%	27.6%	16.2%	28.5%	24.3%	24.7%	24.0%	
	Lowest priority	9.4%	7.9%	9.6%	9.4%	10.2%	9.4%	9.3%	6.1%	11.8%	
Other career in	Highest priority	1.0%	0.8%	1.0%	1.0%	1.2%	1.0%	0.9%	0.5%	1.2%	
higher education	2	3.0%	2.7%	3.0%	3.0%	1.8%	3.1%	2.9%	3.5%	2.4%	
	Lowest priority	7.3%	6.8%	7.3%	7.0%	3.0%	7.4%	8.4%	10.1%	7.1%	
Research career outside higher education (e.g. in a private research organisation, a charity or in an industrial environment)	Highest priority	22.7%	20.8%	23.0%	23.2%	27.5%	22.8%	20.1%	15.2%	24.0%	
	2	19.6%	15.1%	20.3%	20.1%	17.4%	20.3%	17.0%	13.1%	20.1%	
	Lowest priority	15.4%	14.2%	15.6%	15.5%	12.6%	15.7%	15.0%	15.7%	14.6%	
Teaching (at a level below higher education)	Highest priority	1.1%	1.4%	1.0%	1.0%	1.2%	1.0%	1.5%	1.5%	1.6%	
	2	3.1%	4.9%	2.9%	3.0%	4.8%	2.9%	3.8%	5.1%	2.8%	
	Lowest priority	6.1%	6.0%	6.1%	5.9%	4.8%	6.0%	7.1%	7.1%	7.1%	
Returning to, or	Highest priority	3.3%	3.8%	3.2%	3.5%	5.4%	3.4%	2.4%	2.5%	2.4%	
remaining with, employer who is sponsoring your	2	3.8%	4.9%	3.7%	3.6%	6.0%	3.4%	5.1%	4.0%	5.9%	
degree	Lowest priority	3.5%	4.1%	3.5%	3.5%	5.4%	3.3%	4.0%	3.0%	4.7%	
Returning to, or	Highest priority	1.7%	2.5%	1.6%	1.7%	4.2%	1.5%	1.5%	1.0%	2.0%	
remaining with, employer who is not sponsoring	2	2.1%	2.2%	2.1%	2.1%	1.2%	2.2%	2.0%	3.0%	1.2%	
your degree	Lowest priority	2.3%	3.8%	2.0%	2.1%	3.6%	2.0%	2.9%	4.0%	2.0%	
Self-employment	Highest priority	3.7%	4.1%	3.7%	3.8%	4.2%	3.8%	3.3%	4.0%	2.8%	
(including setting up your own business)	2	6.6%	9.9%	6.1%	6.5%	9.6%	6.3%	7.3%	10.1%	5.1%	
, ,	Lowest priority	9.9%	11.0%	9.7%	10.2%	10.8%	10.1%	8.6%	11.1%	6.7%	
Any other	Highest priority	5.5%	8.5%	5.0%	5.2%	9.0%	4.9%	6.9%	8.1%	5.9%	
professional career	2	9.4%	13.2%	8.8%	9.4%	14.4%	9.0%	9.5%	12.1%	7.5%	
	Lowest priority	13.7%	12.1%	14.0%	14.1%	13.2%	14.1%	12.2%	11.1%	13.0%	
Not sure or not	Highest priority	7.2%	9.3%	6.9%	7.3%	12.6%	6.8%	6.9%	6.6%	7.1%	
decided yet	2	2.4%	3.6%	2.2%	2.2%	3.6%	2.1%	3.3%	3.5%	3.1%	
	Lowest priority	11.9%	14.8%	11.5%	11.8%	15.6%	11.5%	12.6%	14.1%	11.4%	
Other	Highest priority	2.6%	1.9%	2.7%	2.7%	2.4%	2.7%	2.4%	1.5%	3.1%	
	2	1.5%	1.6%	1.5%	1.3%	1.2%	1.3%	2.4%	2.0%	2.8%	
	Lowest priority	1.4%	1.1%	1.5%	1.3%	0.6%	1.3%	2.2%	1.5%	2.8%	

* Multiple responses allowed. Table shows average of non-blank responses. Lowest represents 3rd choice.

3.3.11 OVERALL EXPERIENCE

75.8% of respondents overall evaluate their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' with similar results across NFQ levels 9 and 10, and different cohort sizes. A slightly lower proportion (72.7%) are confident that they will complete their research degree within the timescale expected. The reader is reminded that that these proportions reflect respondents at all stages (course years) of their research degree programmes.

		All	respons	ses	Co	hort > 2	.50	Cohort < 250		
		Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10
How would you evaluate your entire research experience at this institution?	Poor	5.3%	7.1%	5.0%	5.3%	6.6%	5.2%	5.3%	7.5%	3.5%
	Fair	18.9%	15.3%	19.5%	19.0%	16.9%	19.1%	18.5%	13.9%	22.0%
	Good	51.4%	50.7%	51.5%	52.0%	49.4%	52.2%	48.1%	51.7%	45.3%
	Excellent	24.4%	27.0%	24.0%	23.7%	27.1%	23.4%	28.1%	26.9%	29.1%
I am confident that I will	Definitely disagree	5.8%	6.6%	5.7%	5.5%	7.9%	5.3%	7.4%	5.5%	8.9%
complete my research degree programme	Mostly disagree	10.3%	9.6%	10.4%	9.8%	11.0%	9.7%	12.8%	8.5%	16.3%
within my institutions expected timescale:	Neither agree nor disagree	11.1%	10.2%	11.3%	11.0%	10.4%	11.1%	11.7%	10.0%	13.0%
	Mostly agree	38.1%	32.1%	39.0%	39.2%	29.3%	39.9%	32.5%	34.5%	30.9%
	Definitely agree	34.7%	41.5%	33.6%	34.5%	41.5%	33.9%	35.7%	41.5%	30.9%

Almost 60% of respondents have not seriously considered withdrawing from their research programme, and where people have, it has been mainly for financial or personal / family reasons.

Have you ever seriously		All	respons	ses	Co	hort > 2	:50	Co	Cohort < 250			
considered withdrav research degree pro	ving from your ogramme?*	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10	Total	NFQ 9	NFQ 10		
No, I have not seriously considered withdrawing	Yes	59.2%	57.5%	59.4%	59.7%	58.2%	59.9%	56.3%	57.0%	55.7%		
Yes, for financial reasons	Yes	17.3%	19.5%	17.0%	16.4%	18.8%	16.2%	21.6%	20.0%	22.9%		
Yes, for personal or family reasons	Yes	16.7%	18.6%	16.5%	16.1%	18.8%	15.9%	19.9%	18.5%	20.9%		
Yes, for health reasons	Yes	8.2%	7.1%	8.4%	7.9%	7.3%	7.9%	9.7%	7.0%	11.9%		
Yes, for employment reasons	Yes	7.9%	7.9%	7.8%	7.7%	9.1%	7.6%	8.6%	7.0%	9.9%		
Yes, to transfer to another institution	Yes	4.8%	4.1%	4.9%	4.6%	1.8%	4.8%	6.2%	6.0%	6.3%		
Other (please state)	Yes	7.9%	7.7%	8.0%	7.9%	8.5%	7.9%	7.9%	7.0%	8.7%		

* Multiple responses allowed. Table shows average of non-blank responses.



CHAPTER 4 An exploration of results for different groups of PGR students

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores data from the pilot ISSE-PGR from a number of different perspectives, identifying notable differences therein. Commentary is based on data from the pilot survey and should not be interpreted as a comprehensive identification of the most important issues for postgraduate research students enrolled in Irish higher education. Further fieldwork will complement the evidence base and further analysis and interpretation should be undertaken to determine the importance of specific issues or influencing factors.

A range of perspectives are used to explore the data, including gender, NFQ level, field of study, size of cohort, country of domicile (Irish or non-Irish), mode of study (full-time or part-time / remote). In many cases, no notable issues are evident at national level from the pilot data and, accordingly, only a selection of these analyses is presented here. Certainly, at institutional level, it may be appropriate to interpret data from multiple iterations of fieldwork before committing time and resources to address issues which could, potentially, be present solely in one data set. This does not prevent immediate responses to issues which may be addressed readily. Once again taking account of experiences gained with data from taught students, some issues may be immediately apparent whereas others become evident as ongoing trends or notable changes are identified over consecutive iterations.

Analysis of data generated from the next fieldwork period will enable further detailed interpretation of the experiences of sub-groups of the PGR student population. Nevertheless, the data from pilot fieldwork is explored here in order to demonstrate the significant benefits of collecting information on the experiences of postgraduate research students directly from those students and, indeed, to suggest areas of interest to explore in future iterations.

Reference to positive responses in this chapter refers to responses of 'mostly agree' and 'definitely agree'. Differences noted in this chapter have been tested for statistical significance (greater than 95%). However, as is common with large datasets, many results are found to be statistically significant due to the large number of responses. Only one result from all of the charts in chapter 4 is not statistically significant. This item is marked with an asterisk in chart 4.4.5. In future iterations, further analysis could be undertaken to determine the results which identify the "educationally most important" differences.

4.2 FIELD OF STUDY

The following commentary explores the data using broad fields of study as defined by ISCED¹⁶. These are listed in table 3.1 on page 15. The breakdown of responses is also shown in figure 4.2.

16. http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced



Figure 4.2 Number of respondents by field of study

4.2.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS BY FIELD OF STUDY

Funding

The percentage of respondents in receipt of funding varies by field of study from 46.3% to 95.0%. Only 46.3% of those registered on Education research degree programmes are in receipt of funding. However, Education students secure most funding by employer, at 20.1%, while all other fields record 11.3% or less.

Participating students report that there are notable variations in activities covered by funding. For example, the proportion reporting that their funding includes research material ranges from 32.0% (Education) to 76.3% (Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics) and the proportion reporting that funding covers travel to conferences ranges from 36.1% (Education) to 71.0% (Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics).

Research Culture

When asked whether they agree that the research ambience of their department stimulates their work, 43.1% of respondents from Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary respond positively, whereas 66.6%. of Health and Welfare participants respond likewise.

Progress & Assessment

There is a notable variance in responses by field of study in relation to the statement 'received appropriate induction / orientation to my research degree programme' with positive responses ranging from 50.8% (Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary) to 66.1% (Business, Administration and Law).

Respondents also express varied views of regarding their understanding of requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of progress. The greatest variance is between:

- Arts and Humanities respondents, where 69.9% mostly / definitely agree, and
- Business, Administration and Law respondents, where 81.8% mostly / definitely agree.

Development Opportunities

There are some notable differences in engagement with development opportunities. For example,

- 31.4% of Education respondents report 'agreeing a training or development plan' whereas 52.4% of Information and Communication Technologies students do likewise
- Positive responses to receiving training in entrepreneurship range from 5.0% (Education) to 32.2% (Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction)
- Reported opportunities to work as part of a team range from 37.8% for Arts and Humanities respondents to 78.2% for Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics
- Reported opportunities to work collaboratively with industry range from 7.7% for Social Sciences, Journalism and Information to 47.9% for Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction students
- Between 48.8% (Education) and 88.0% (Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics) of respondents have taught or demonstrated during their research degree programme.

Overall Experience

The percentage of respondents who state that their entire research experience is 'good' or 'excellent' ranges from 69.2% for Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics to more than 80% for Social Sciences, Journalism and Information, and for Health and Welfare.

4.3 SIZE OF PGR COHORT

Results in this report are presented for all respondents and by groupings based on size of population cohort rather than by institution-type. Given the distribution of postgraduate research students between institutions, this grouping is deemed by the working group to be more informative to institutions' enhancement discussions. Responses are collated into two groups, namely, responses from students in institutions where the total enrolled postgraduate research population is greater than 250 and those where the total population is less than 250. These groupings may be varied for future iterations of the survey, subject to evaluation of the pilot and feedback from institutions.

4.3.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS BY COHORT SIZE

Overall, there is little difference between responses from the two groups. However, there are apparent differences between the supervisory arrangements and for some elements of Research Culture and of Development Opportunities, specifically:

- 69.0% of respondents from larger cohorts 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree they have access to a relevant seminar programme whereas 56.3% of those from smaller cohorts agree with the statement
- 35.7% of participating students in cohorts of < 250 report taking opportunities to collaborate with industry, while 23.6% of students in cohorts of > 250 report availing of the same opportunities
- 52.3% of respondents from institutions with > 250 students indicate that they have single supervisors, while 22.0% of respondents from cohorts < 250 students report having single supervisors¹⁷.

^{17.} The question about the number of supervisors was added to the supervision section of the "PRES" base questionnaire with the intention of providing additional information for the Irish national context. Once institutions have had the opportunity to interpret their own data, further consultation is required to determine the usefulness of this question item for future iterations of the survey.



Figure 4.3.1 Research Culture and cohort size





4.4 MODE OF STUDY: FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME / REMOTE

4.4.1 WHY EXAMINE RESULTS FOR PART-TIME / REMOTE STUDENTS?

Overall postgraduate research student numbers declined in Ireland from 2011-12 to 2013-14 and have slowly increased since then. However, part-time numbers have increased year on year in the same time period. The part-time PGR cohort now accounts for almost 19% of total enrolments¹⁸ in Ireland as shown below.

Currently, there is no national definition of what constitutes part-time study, and institutions must define the criteria for part-time as a proportion of total effort required for full-time studies. For the purpose of the ISSE-PGR survey, students were not required to indicate their mode of study, and institutions provided this information as part of the non-sensitive demographic data taken from institutions' student record systems.

Part-time postgraduate research students are a unique cohort within the PGR community. They are a diverse group; many are in full-time employment with significant caring and financial commitments as reported for PRES in the UK (Newmann & Rodwell 2009¹⁹, Gardner & Gopaul 2012²⁰) and, as evidenced from the ISSE-PGR pilot, they have a very distinct experience of PGR studies. This section provides more detail than other sections due to the greater number of differences evident in the response data.

4.4.2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR FULL- AND PART-TIME STUDENTS

The following charts illustrate percentage positive responses which represent the sum of 'mostly agree' and 'definitely agree', or where respondents have indicated a 'yes'.

As may be expected, there are notable differences in experiences of certain aspects of research degree programmes when comparing those completing their studies full- and part-time. However, with regard to the overall experience, there is little difference between part- and full-time response, and both cohorts report similar levels of confidence that they will compete within the expected timeframe. Part-time students indicate a less positive experience of working space and computing resources/facilities, compared to their fulltime counterparts.

In regards to supervision, there is little difference between the part-time and full-time PGR student experience, with both groups reporting similar experiences for each question item including supervisory support and regular contact.

As illustrated in figure 4.4.3, for questions pertaining to research culture, part-time respondents report a less positive experience, particularly in relation to opportunities to discuss their research with other research students, and opportunities to become involved in the wider academic community, beyond their own department.

Academic Year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Total PGR enrolments	10367	9565	9280	9606	9773	9802
Full-time	8874	8063	7727	7945	8043	7962
Part-time	1493	1502	1553	1661	1730	1840
Part-time % of total enrolments	14.40	15.70	16.73	17.29	17.70	18.77

Figure 4.4 PGR enrolments by mode of study

^{18.} Table replicated from HEA Key Facts and Figures 2016-17.

Available at: http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/02/HEA-Key-Facts-And-Figures-2016-17-FINAL.pdf

^{19.} Neumann, R. & Rodwell, J. 2009. The 'Invisible' Part-Time Research Students: A Case Study of Satisfaction and Completion.

Studies in Higher Education, 34(1), pp. 55-68.

^{20.} Gardner. S. K. & Gopaul. B. 2012. The Part-Time Doctoral Student Experience. International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 7, pp. 63-78.




Figure 4.4.3 Research Culture by mode of study



CHAPTER 4 AN EXPLORATION OF RESULTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PGR STUDENTS

It is of interest to note that, as shown in figure 4.4.4, a higher proportion of part-time students indicate understanding of the standard required for their thesis, as well as the procedures for final assessment.



Figure 4.4.4 Progress and Assessment by mode of study

Part-time students report less engagement with development opportunities in their institutions than their full-time counterparts.

Figure 4.4.5 Development Opportunities by mode of study



* The differences in results between full-time and part-time respondents are statistically significant (p<0.05) **other than** for 'working collaboratively with a civil society organisation or public organisation'

While a slightly higher percentage of part-time respondents (45.5%) than full-time (40.3%) have considered withdrawing from their programme, the difference seems to be related mostly to personal and family reasons (16.3% for full-time, 20.6% for part-time). Financial reasons also featured highly for both cohorts (17.2% and 17.8% respectively).

Improving career prospects broadly, appears to be a greater driver for the full-time cohort, while the part-time cohort appear to be more motivated by professional development or training.

In terms of career aspirations, a greater percentage of part-time respondents (39.0%) indicate they plan to return to, or remain with, their employer compared to full-time (14.1%).

4.5 COUNTRY OF DOMICILE

Country of domicile is recorded for all students in higher education and refers to the country of permanent address prior to entry to the programme of study. Although it is not an exact match, this can be used, to some extent, as a proxy to distinguish between Irish students and non-Irish students. If the student has been residing in Ireland for 3 of the 5 years previous to registering for their current course of study, their domicile is recorded as Ireland. To explore the data in this section, we will refer to those respondents where Ireland is country of permanent address prior to entry to the programme of study as Irish domiciled and the remainder as non-Irish domiciled.

4.5.1 SUMMARY FOR COUNTRY OF DOMICILE

Responses from Irish domiciled and non-Irish domiciled participants are similar for the vast majority of question items in the ISSE-PGR.

Supervision

Overall, responses relating to Supervision are broadly similar for Irish and non-Irish respondents. However, non-Irish students reported more positive experiences of supervision for each of these question items. The most marked difference is where 6.8% more non-Irish students chose mostly agree or definitely agree that their supervisor/s helps to identify training and development needs as a researcher.

Research Culture

Non-Irish respondents report that they mostly / definitely agree by a margin of 7.4% percent that their department provides access to a relevant seminar programme and by 6.4% that the research ambience stimulates their work.

Motivations

Survey respondents were asked to select their top three motivations for pursuing a research degree from a list (and prioritise them 1-3 but we are not investigating this aspect). Table 4.5.3 below shows that while there are differences between the absolute numbers of respondents who choose specific motivations for their decision to pursue a research degree, the same four motivations are most frequently selected (as part of the top three reasons) by both groups.

Motivations	lrish Domicile	Non-Irish Domicile
Interest in my Subject	73.9%	78.0%
Improving my career prospects for an academic /research career	52.1%	61.0%
It felt like a natural step	42.5%	33.5%
Improving my career prospects outside of an academic /research career	35.0%	30.3%

Figure 4.5.3 Percentage of respondents who choose statement as one of top three motivations



Figure 4.5.1 Supervision by domicile





CHAPTER 4 AN EXPLORATION OF RESULTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PGR STUDENTS

Career Aspirations	Irish Domicile	Non-Irish Domicile
Academic Career in Higher Education	65.2%	70.2%
Research Career outside Higher Education	55.8%	62.1%
Research Career in Higher Education	45.3%	55.6%
Other Professional Career	30.5%	24.2%

Figure 4.5.4 Percentage of respondents who choose statement as one of top three career aspirations

Survey respondents were asked to select the top three types of career they had in mind when they finished their research degree (and prioritise them 1-3 but we are not investigating this aspect). There are differences between populations in the absolute number of respondents choosing particular options. The same four career aspirations are most frequently selected (as part of the top three) by both groups.

In addition to the differences already outlined in this section, it is noted that 12.6% more non-Irish respondents are fully or part-funded by a scholarship than their Irish counterparts (69.9% and 57.3%, respectively).

In terms of availing of Development Opportunities:

- 13.4% more non-Irish than Irish report agreeing a personal training or development plan
- 8.1% more non-Irish domiciled than Irish domiciled report receiving advice on career options
- 10.7% more non-Irish domiciled than Irish domiciled report receiving training in entrepreneurship and innovation
- 6.3% more non-Irish domiciled than Irish domiciled report putting training and entrepreneurship into practice

CHAPTER 5 Results of the national pilot in an international context

5.1 INTRODUCTION

When considering results from the pilot ISSE-PGR, it is useful to interpret the data in a wider context. As described in Chapter 2, development of the ISSE-PGR instrument took account of a range of examples internationally and the UK Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) was chosen as an appropriate "core base" for the questionnaire. Accordingly, in this chapter, results from the 2018 ISSE-PGR pilot are presented alongside PRES results from 2017²¹. Comparisons between both surveys is possible because of the close alignment of many questions.

The main aim of the ISSE-PGR survey is to ascertain, from postgraduate research students, their experiences of postgraduate research education in Ireland. It is anticipated that this data will support institutions in identifying practice and provision that is affective, and areas for future developments and enhancements within the Irish higher education context. While it is not the intention of ISSE-PGR to benchmark the Irish PGR education system against the UK, it is useful to compare the "year 0" ISSE-PGR results against the well-established PRES survey results. In future years, as the ISSE-PGR dataset grows, it is likely to prove more beneficial to measure national performance over time as a means of identifying where survey results have led to enhancement of practice in the national context. It is important to take account of cultural and contextual differences when considering comparisons of data from different countries. Institutions in the UK and elsewhere volunteer to participate in the PRES whereas all public higher education institutions in Ireland (i.e. those under the remit of the Higher Education Authority) with enrolled postgraduate research students participated in the 2018 national pilot of the ISSE-PGR. Other influences on the context for postgraduate research experiences include the proportional mix of fields of study in different countries and participating institutions, the levels of funding available to institutions in different higher education systems, and the consistency of transnational students' perceptions of response terms such as 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree'. Nevertheless, careful comparison of data offers insights into the experiences and perceptions of students in different countries.

It is also important to remember that, rather than being detached exercises, student engagement / experience surveys are a tool in directing quality enhancement measures nationally and at institutional level. It is noteworthy that the PRES began as a pilot in 2007 and the current version of the questionnaire has been in use since 2013. Results show year on year improvements in all of its core areas. Whilst questions have been amended over time, a number of striking comparisons between PRES 2007²² and PRES 2017 data support the view that increased focus on specific issues contributes to enhancement. It is acknowledged that multiple other factors have impacted on higher education over a decade. However, wording of question items that are closely related illustrate some striking changes between results from an initial iteration in 2007 to those from a decade later as referenced in this chapter.

21. PRES 2018 results were not available at the time of writing this report.

22. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/postgraduate-research-experience-survey-2007

5.2 RESULTS FROM IRELAND AND THE UK (PILOT ISSE-PGR AND PRES 2017)

The following charts detail the 2018 ISSE-PGR pilot and the 2017 UK Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results, where comparisons are possible. Charts illustrate percentage positive responses which represent the sum of 'mostly agree' and 'definitely agree'.

Responses to a large number of comparable questions are not presented here as results from Ireland and the UK appear similar. Differences noted in this chapter have been tested for statistical significance (greater than 95%). However, many results are found to be statistically significant due to the large number of responses. This should not be misinterpreted as automatically meaning "educationally significant". Only two results from the charts presented in chapter 5 are not statistically significant. These items are marked with an asterisk in chart 5.2.5.1.

5.2.1 RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

For questions about research infrastructure and facilities, ISSE-PGR respondents report more positive experiences²³ of their working spaces compared to PRES respondents (3.7% more positive by ISSE-PGR respondents). For the other three questions of this aspect, there are larger differences in responses, with UK PRES respondents indicating more positive views on computing resources / facilities (6.2% higher), provision of library facilities (5.6% higher) and access to specialist resources (8.2% higher) than respondents in Ireland.



Figure 5.2.1 Research Infrastructure and Facilities – Ireland and UK

23. Percentage positive responses represent sum of 'mostly agree' and 'definitely agree'

CHAPTER 5 AN EXPLORATION OF RESULTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PGR STUDENTS

5.2.2 SUPERVISION



Figure 5.2.2 Supervision - Ireland and UK

Overall, results for supervision are broadly similar for the UK and for Ireland. However, UK respondents report more positive experiences of supervision for three of these question items, namely:

- UK responses are 4.7% higher than ISSE-PGR for positive responses about the level of contact with supervisor/s
- 4% more UK participants 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree' that their supervisor provides feedback that helps to direct research activity
- 3.9% more UK respondents mostly agree or definitely agree that supervisor/s helps to identify their training and development needs.

CHAPTER 5 AN EXPLORATION OF RESULTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PGR STUDENTS

5.2.3 RESEARCH CULTURE

Figure 5.2.3 Research Culture - Ireland and UK



Note: The first question in this section, relating to department seminar series, is worded differently in each survey. This may increase any variation in how the question is interpreted by different respondents.

ISSE: My department provides access to a relevant seminar programme.

PRES: My department provides a good seminar programme.

In all questions relating to the research culture of the department in their institution, a greater proportion of UK respondents report positive experiences. Most noteworthy, there is a 7.3% difference between UK and Irish responses about departmental level seminar programmes and an 8.3% difference in opportunities to become involved in the wider research community.

5.2.4 PROGRESS AND ASSESSMENT



Figure 5.2.4 Progress and Assessment - Ireland and UK

There are noteworthy differences in responses for questions relating to progress and assessment.

- The percentage of ISSE-PGR respondents who mostly / definitely agree that they received appropriate induction orientation to their research degree programme is 17.6% lower than for UK respondents
- The proportion of respondents who mostly / definitely agree that they understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of their progress is 10.5% lower for Ireland than for the UK
- 5.1% fewer ISSE-PGR respondents mostly / definitely agree that they understand the required standard for their thesis
- 6.4% fewer ISSE-PGR respondents mostly / definitely agree that the final assessment procedures are clear to them.

5.2.5 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Figure 5.2.5.1 Development Opportunities - Ireland and UK

Communicating your research to a non-academic audience

Submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal or book

Presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference

Attending an academic research conference

Taking part in a placement or internship

Receiving advice on career options *

Receiving training to develop other transferable skills

Receiving training to develop my research skills *

Agreeing a personal training or development plan



Note: The wording of the question stem for Development Opportunities is different in each survey:

ISSE: Have you availed of the following opportunities during your research degree programme?

PRES: Please indicate which of the following opportunities you have experienced during your research degree program.

Differences in two bars marked with * are not statistically significant (p>0.05)

ISSE-PGR respondents indicate that they are much more engaged in dissemination activities than their UK counterparts as well as in other transferable skills training. It is worth noting that,

- 7.8% more ISSE-PGR respondents report communicating their research to non-academic audiences
- 14.3% more ISSE-PGR respondents report submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal or book
- 10% more ISSE-PGR respondents report presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference.

In addition, the proportion of ISSE-PGR respondents who report having taken part in a placement or internship is 6.5% higher than for UK participants.

CHAPTER 5 AN EXPLORATION OF RESULTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PGR STUDENTS



Figure 5.2.5.2 Taught or demonstrated - Ireland and UK

A much higher proportion of ISSE-PGR respondents indicate involvement in teaching / demonstrating (20.6% more ISSE-PGR respondents have been involved in teaching / demonstrating compared to their UK counterparts), although the proportion mostly / definitely agreeing that they have been the appropriate supports to do so is 10.7% lower.

CHAPTER 5 AN EXPLORATION OF RESULTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PGR STUDENTS

5.2.6 RESEARCH SKILLS



Figure 5.2.6 Research Skills - Ireland and UK

For questions relating to research skills, differences between ISSE-PGR and UK responses are relatively small (less than 2.8%), with the exception of one question which asks respondents if they agree that their confidence to be more creative or innovative has developed during their programme. 7.3% fewer ISSE-PGR respondents mostly / definitely agree with this statement compared to UK respondents.

5.2.7 OTHER TRANSFERABLE SKILLS



Figure 5.2.7 Other Transferable Skills - Ireland and UK

There are small differences in responses to questions relating to transferable skills. The largest difference pertains to the statement 'my ability to manage projects has developed during my programme' for which 3.8% more PRES respondents mostly / definitely agree.

It is interesting to note only a small difference in responses relating to the statement 'my ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme'. 2.5% more PRES respondents agree with this statement, despite ISSE-PGR respondents reporting considerably more frequent engagement with dissemination activities (see figure 5.2.5.1).

5.2.8 RESPONSIBILITIES AND SUPPORTS



Figure 5.2.8 Responsibilities and Supports - Ireland and UK

There are notable differences in responses relating to responsibilities and supports. Looking at specific questions,

- The proportion of ISSE-PGR respondents mostly / definitely agreeing that they are aware of their supervisor/s responsibilities towards them as a research degree student is 5.6% lower than for the UK
- 14.5% fewer ISSE-PGR respondents agree that they know who to approach if they are concerned about any academic aspect of their research degree programme
- 23% fewer ISSE-PGR respondents agree that their institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students.

5.2.9 OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Figure 5.2.9 Confidence to complete - Ireland and UK



One question item from the Overall Experience aspect is directly comparable between Ireland and the UK.

A lower percentage of respondents to the ISSE-PGR survey mostly / definitely agree that they are confident that they will complete their research degree programme within their institution's expected timescale (9.1% fewer ISSE-PGR respondents compared to responses from the UK).



5.3 INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

As outlined at the start of this chapter, comparison of results from the ISSE-PGR pilot with results from the UK Postgraduate Research Experience Survey provides a useful, but limited, additional context in which to begin to interpret findings from the pilot survey. It is not the intention to directly compare Irish higher education to higher education in another jurisdiction but, rather, to facilitate greater understanding of what data from the ISSE-PGR may be telling us in order to maximise the potential of the data to inform continued enhancement of the PGR experience over time. Broadly, many results from Ireland compare favourably with the UK, particularly when considering the trajectory of results over time. There are also aspects of students' experiences which appear to prompt early consideration and further exploration. The reader is reminded that results for many questions which could be compared between Ireland and the UK are not presented here. Thus, this chapter does not seek to provide a comprehensive comparison. The focus in this chapter is on questions where results are different in order to prompt further reflection and exploration of the data set.

CHAPTER 6 **Review of the national pilot**

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an initial review of implementation of a pilot survey for postgraduate research students. It is hoped that the report itself will act as a prompt for more detailed consultation and consideration in order to inform future iterations of surveys for this important cohort of students. This detailed consideration of next steps will be informed by a series of interactions with participating institutions and other partners during autumn 2018.

6.2 EXTENSION OF THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Development and implementation of a national pilot survey for postgraduate research students took place in the context of significant experience of similar activities relating to the survey for students pursuing taught programmes (ISSE). The national collaborative partnership model adopted in 2012-2013 has proved highly effective and has facilitated greater progress than would be feasible for any single actor of the partnership. The decision of the ISSE Steering Group to act upon the commitment to develop and implement a survey that reflected the experiences of postgraduate research students benefited from experiences gained in the intervening years and the increased shared understanding and mutual trust demonstrated over that time.

The postgraduate research community (of staff and student researchers) were relatively uninformed of the detail of working practices employed to facilitate the ISSE for taught students, as the operation of fieldwork and analysis of resulting data had little direct impact, in most cases, on their day to day experiences and responsibilities. When the ISSE Steering Group requested participation in a specific working group to develop and implement a survey for postgraduate research students, institutions and other partners were invited to nominate members. Terms of reference and membership of the group are provided in Appendix 3.

The working group is chaired by a member of the national ISSE steering group and the new survey was titled "ISSE for postgraduate research students", or "ISSE-PGR", in order to clearly communicate that it is closely linked to the ethos, aims and operational practices of the known ISSE survey for taught students. The explicit visibility of the four co-sponsoring organisations was designed to clearly signal the collaborative intent and, importantly, the active support of each organisation. It was felt important to reiterate this context as an extension of the collaborative partnership model which has proved so beneficial to date.

6.3 FEEDBACK ON THE SURVEY (POST-FIELDWORK)

As stated at the start of this chapter, further discussions and considerations will take place with stakeholders prior to any subsequent iteration of the ISSE-PGR but this report provides an early overview of feedback that has been provided in the immediate months after the conclusion of pilot fieldwork.

6.3.1 FEEDBACK FROM INSTITUTIONS

Following fieldwork, participating institutions were invited to provide feedback on the survey instrument and their experiences of the process to implement pilot fieldwork. The majority of feedback received reflected the relative success of the pilot, as evidenced by the response rate of 32.5%. Many comments stated that the process to implement the survey and to encourage participation of PGR students had worked well. A number of specific issues were raised and will be incorporated into future planning and activities by the working group.

Regarding the survey instrument itself, there was significant consensus that the question set appeared comprehensive and that question items to facilitate international comparability should continue to be included alongside items appropriate to the national context. There were no concerns expressed about the overall survey length and there were several requests to consider adding question items to address student mental health and wellbeing - a topic which is receiving increasing focus within institutions and beyond. These comments were complemented by an awareness that students will continue to respond to requests to participate in the survey only if they are convinced that results are being actively analysed and acted upon in an appropriate manner. It is important to appreciate that it is common for students to be invited to take part in surveys by multiple sources within institutions, including surveys designed by fellow students undertaking research projects. If institutions wish to collect data on the experiences of postgraduate research students using this national survey, it is essential that the benefits of participation are evident.

In terms of the process to implement the survey, the pilot identified some improvements to be considered. Some of these are applicable within institutions and some apply to actions by the national partnership. As outlined in section 2.3, limited non-sensitive demographic data from institution's student record systems were provided to the external contractor to enable invitations to be issued to the target cohort of students and to match their responses to these demographic variables whilst maintaining anonymity. These demographic data represent a non-sensitive subset of data submitted by institutions to the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Some institutions used the most recent HEA data extract to populate the data provided to the external contractor. This led to some potential of excluding students who had registered on research degree programmes since the previous HEA return had been submitted. This issue may be more prevalent for new postgraduate research students than for other cohorts. It is noted that it is entirely an institutional decision when to generate the demographic data for the external survey contractor so, in some cases, it may be more accurate to generate that file immediately before it is required by the contractor. Such a decision would ensure that the most recent entrants to postgraduate research programmes are invited to take part.

The majority of institutions reported effective leverage of experiences and procedures to promote the existing ISSE for taught students. In many cases, effective existing practice (to monitor and report anonymous response rates centrally and to proactively encourage specific disciplines or other units to focus efforts to promote participation) was "simply" extended to the target postgraduate research cohort with significant impact. It was also observed that these students can spend most of their time on-campus in specific discrete locations and that specific promotional materials should be developed and disseminated accordingly. Other comments on practical implementation included the fact that explicit communication strategies and plans proved effective and that similar consideration should be given to developing a plan (or checklist) for postfieldwork actions to ensure effective communication and feedback.

Whilst the timing of fieldwork for postgraduate research students could be quite flexible, it was reported that the February-March timing used for the pilot did not cause any particular difficulties for these students and that the institutional benefits of coinciding with awareness and promotional activities for the established survey proved very significant.

6.3.2 FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

The survey includes a number of question items which request open text responses. Each aspect (section) of the survey includes an open text question item. These are regarded as necessary in order to accommodate collecting relevant data on the diverse postgraduate research experience.

Given the importance of student confidentiality (as outlined in section 2.4), it is worth clarifying that these open text responses were reviewed by the external survey contractor to remove any names that may have been included. This "data cleaning" was undertaken before any data files were returned to institutions. The resulting open text data were returned to institutions without other demographic variables. Nevertheless, care is required when considering dissemination of open text responses at institutional level. This is particularly the case in smaller institutions or smaller units of institutions where the risk of identifying individuals is greater for the relatively small postgraduate research population than for other student cohorts. Taking this care into account, there is great potential value in analysing open text responses as these comments offer a rich context in which to interpret quantitative data.

Analysis of open text responses offers a particularly valuable insight into students' experiences and perceptions and these questions should be prioritised by institutions seeking to explore the data in detail. This report of the pilot fieldwork does not seek to analyse the open text data for each aspect but it would be appropriate to explore such data in future years. In addition to the open text questions for each aspect, the pilot questionnaire included a question item which asked students for their views on the survey itself. 463 students provided responses to this question, representing 15.5% of total respondents. Analysis of open text responses to the pilot ISSE-PGR in this report limits itself to the question item about students' perceptions of the survey. The process undertaken can be summarised as coding individual responses; reducing / grouping codes to categories; and then developing themes.

The responses to the open-ended questions were analysed using qualitative content analysis (see Mayring, 2000²⁴). The focus of the process was the identification of categories of themes that captured an aspect of the data that related to the question students' responded to. Themes were identified through a process by which responses were reviewed to isolate concrete ideas that reflected patterns in the responses returned by students. The credibility of the process (See Elliott et al., 1999²⁵) was ensured in two ways. All of the data were reviewed by one researcher to ensure consistency of interpretation throughout the process. In addition, the researcher ensured that they returned to the data to repeatedly test the interpretations as they developed, ensuring that the themes identified were clearly evident and grounded in the data. As part of this process, a number of representative quotes were selected to illustrate the main themes. The main themes arising can be grouped as relating to: positive reactions to the development of a survey for postgraduate research students; suggestions to include questions relating to mental health or wellbeing; various fundingrelated issues; and suggestions about the relevance or wording of question items for students at different stages of their research degree or for those studying full-time or part-time.

24. http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089/2385

 https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robert_Elliott/publication/227613552_Evolving_Guidelines_for_publication_of_qualitative_research_ studies_in_psychology_and_related_fields/links/54a0a96b0cf256bf8bae1b75/Evolving-Guidelines-for-publication-of-qualitative-research-studiesin-psychology-and-related-fields.pdf A good survey, insightful questions asked. Would be interesting/nice to see results of survey once complete and good to receive feedback on any changes that this may bring.

1) Make the relevance of doing this survey clear. Who will this information inform, why are we doing it, and the main folks on whose desk the information will land? 2) Just an encouragement to make the results publicly available in an unbiased report, and who it has informed. Overall, it was a good survey, questions were well balanced, and easy to answer.

Great survey! I hope this will actually go towards the improvement of the experience for future research students at my institute and elsewhere! We always feel like we don't really have a voice in our situation & we are at the mercy of the college, stuck half-way between student & staff member with little influence on our conditions!

It might be good to address emotional well-being and mental health more in the survey – as this is a really important factor influencing student engagement and progress. Has not asked sufficient questions about lack of funding and need to balance that with increasing costs of living with the result that a majority of research students are taking multiple additional jobs to pay rent. Mental health is a prominent issue with postgraduate students and this survey could be a good place to assess this topic. How students were affected and the supports they received etc.

We are bombarded by surveys from students and the first reaction is to delete them because the subjects are annoying and the surveys are badly framed and poorly worded. This survey is rather good, not as loaded as most and providing opportunity for feedback and comments.

More questions about students' financial situations, health, the issues that impact our research & our well-being.



CHAPTER 7 ISSE-PGR – next steps

The development and implementation of a pilot national survey for postgraduate research students in a relatively rapid timeframe was possible because of the national collaborative partnership which was already in place. This partnership was adapted to fulfil the commitment made to gather data on the experiences of this important cohort of students and the data collected from the pilot demonstrates the potential of implementation of regular comparable surveys in the future.

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PGR SURVEYS

It is recommended that future surveys are conducted for the postgraduate research population and that, specifically, a first "non-pilot" iteration takes place in the 2018-2019 academic year. It is regarded as important to build upon the learning gained from the pilot and to minimise the risk of the detail of such learning dissipating in the busy environment of higher education institutions.

Accordingly, it is recommended that, following detailed review, an updated version of the survey is offered to all postgraduate research students in 2019. Feedback from institutions and from students, and the results of an external assessment of the question set used in the pilot (as referred to in section 2.5), should be used to amend the survey in order to maximise the quality and expected accuracy of any data generated therefrom. Subject to results of the review, it is anticipated that additional question items relating to mental health and wellbeing will be considered for inclusion in the survey. The complexities and inconsistencies of various funding streams were identified by students as issues of concern. These issues were identified in focus groups during pre-testing of the (then draft) questionnaire and led to considerable amendment of the questions used in national fieldwork. As outlined in section 6.3.2, these issues continued to be highlighted by respondents when asked about their views on the survey itself. It is felt by the working group that funding-related matters are very complex and that to seek to address all possible variations in questions of the ISSE-PGR would create undue risk of overwhelming the other valuable data collected by the survey and, potentially, increasing any risk of bias for respondents then proceeding to other aspects of the survey. It is recommended, therefore, that ISSE co-sponsors (namely the HEA, IUA, THEA, USI) engage with relevant stakeholders to explore greater consistency and / or communication regarding various funding streams.

7.2 TIMING OF FIELDWORK AND OPERATIONAL MATTERS

From experiences to date, it appears beneficial to ensure that timing of fieldwork for the ISSE-PGR coincides with fieldwork for the established ISSE. Fieldwork for each participating institution takes place for three weeks during a national fieldwork window from the beginning of February to the end of March. Each institution determines the most appropriate three week period in consultation with internal staff and student stakeholders and taking consideration of other items in the academic calendar. The technical processes to invite students to take part, to monitor anonymous response rates and to return data to institutions will continue to align with processes in place for the established ISSE. Some improvements in communication (within institutions and from the national partnership) can be anticipated as all partners learn from the experience of the pilot survey. When the detail of templates for the return of data have been agreed, it is expected that anonymised institutional results from the ISSE-PGR can be provided to institutions earlier than was the case for the pilot year.

7.3 TARGET STUDENT COHORT AND FREQUENCY OF FIELDWORK

Decisions on the target student cohort and the frequency of future fieldwork are, to some extent, interrelated. There are risks to surveying any population on a repeated basis without ensuring that results of previous surveys have been visibly acted upon. Therefore, it may be problematic to seek to survey a "typical" PhD student each year for four years. There may be value for the institution in terms of quality assurance and enhancement but there may be little visible benefit for the target respondents.

From discussions up to the time of writing this report, implementation of a survey for the entire postgraduate research student population in alternate years may offer a way forward which allows effective gain of further experience while acknowledging a realistic timeline for provision of feedback to students. However, further discussion and consultation will be required to ensure that any such decisions are appropriately informed.

The collaborative partnership will discuss these issues and related matters during the 2018-2019 academic year. After the conclusion of fieldwork for the first "non-pilot" survey, and consideration of lessons learned at that time, the partners will determine the most appropriate and effective way to proceed in future years.

APPENDIX 1 Question items for the 2018 pilot survey

Section A: Research Infrastructure and Facilities

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about research infrastructure and facilities?	

_		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
A.1	I have a suitable working space							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
A.2	There is adequate provision of computing resources / facilities							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
A.3	There is adequate provision of library facilities (including physical / online resources)							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
A.4	I have access to the specialist resources and facilities necessary for my research							

A.5	My research is funded by [Please select all that apply]								
	Scholarship			Grant					
	Scholarship (fees only)			Employer-funded					
	Self-funded								

A.6	My funding covers [Please select all that apply]								
	Fees			Travel to conferences					
	Stipend			Other travel (labs / other institutions)					
	Research materials			Specialist training					

A.7	If you have any additional comments about research infrastructure and facilities, please write them in here

Section B: Supervision

		One supervisor	Two	superv	isors	Three or more supervisors			
B.1	I am being supervised by								
Do y	ou agree or disagree with the following st	atements about supervis	sion?						
				Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
B.2	My supervisor(s) provides the appropria my research	ate level of support for							
				Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
B.3	I have regular contact with my supervise my needs	or(s), appropriate for							
				Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
B.4	My supervisor(s) provides feedback that research activities	t helps me to direct my							
			_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
B.5	My supervisor(s) help me to identify my development needs as a researcher	r training and							
			<u> </u>	<u> </u>	· .				
В.6	If you have any additional comments ab	out supervision, please v	write t	hem	in here	5			

Section C: Research Culture

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the research culture? [Note: Where we have used the term 'department' please answer with respect to your centre, school, institute, graduate school, or other unit where you are primarily based or attached for your research]

			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
C.1	My department provides access to a relevant seminar							
	programme							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
C.2	The research ambience in my department stimulates my work							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
C.3	I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students							

-

			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
C.4	I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department							
C.5	If you have any additional comments about research culture, ple	ase	write t	hem in	here			

Section D: Progress and Assessment

Do y asses	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about induction, progression arrangements and assessment?								
		Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable		
D.1	I received an appropriate induction / orientation to my research degree programme								
		Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable		
D.2	I understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress								
		Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable		
D.3	I understand the required standard for my thesis								
		Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable		
D.4	The final assessment procedures for my research degree are clear to me								
D.5	If you have any additional comments about induction, progressic	on arrange	ments	and ass	essmei	nt, plea	se		

write them in here

Section E: Development Opportunities

Have	Have you availed of the following opportunities during your research degree programme? [select all that apply]								
		Yes	No	Not avail.					
E.01	Agreeing a personal training or development plan								
E.02	Receiving training to develop my research skills								
E.03	Receiving training to develop my other transferable skills								
E.04	Receiving advice on career options								
E.05	Taking part in a placement or internship								
E.06	Attending an academic research conference								
E.07	Presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference								
E.08	Submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal or book								
E.09	Communicating your research to a non-academic audience								
E.10	Receiving training in entrepreneurship and innovation								
E.11	Putting training in entrepreneurship and innovation into practice e.g. submitting an								
	invention disclosure or filing a patent application								
E.12	Working as part of a team								
E.13	Working collaboratively with industry								
E.14	Working collaboratively with a civil society organisation or public organisation								
E.15	Spending time abroad as part of your research degree								

E.16	Please indicate whether you have taught (or demonstrated) at your institution during your research degree programme		, 	/es	No		
		L Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
E.17	Do you agree or disagree that the teaching / demonstration you delivered enhanced your overall research experience?						
		Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
E.18	Do you agree or disagree that you have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching / demonstration?						
E.19	If you have any additional comments about development opportur	nities (i	ncluding	; teachii	ng /		

demonstrating), please write them in here

APPENDIX 1

Section F: Research Skills

Do y	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about development of research skills?							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
F.1	My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
F.2	My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
F.3	My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
F.4	My understanding of 'research integrity' (e.g. rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during my programme							
F.5	If you have any additional comments about research skills develo	opme	ent, pl	ease w	rite the	m in he	ere	

Section G: Other Transferable Skills

Do yo	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about development of other transferable skills?							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
G.1	My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
G.2	My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
G.3	I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
G.4	I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme							

G.5	If you have any additional comments about development of other transferable skills, please write them in
	here

Section H: Responsibilities and Supports

Do yo	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about responsibilities and supports?							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
H.1	I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
H.2	I am aware of my supervisor(s)' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student							
			Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
H.3	Other than my supervisor(s), I know who to approach if I am concerned about any academic aspect of my research degree programme							

H.4	Who / what unit would you approach? (please provide the unit or role rather than an individual name)							
					Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
H.5	How aware are you of the various student supports available? (Recreation, healthcare, counselling, etc)							
		_	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
H.6	My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students							

H.7	If you have any additional comments about student / staff responsibilities and supports, please write them
	in here

Sections I and J: Motivations

Please	e select your top three motivations for pursuing a research degree from the following list, and prioritise					
these	these by writing 1, 2 or 3 (1=highest, 3=lowest priority)					
1.1	My interest in my subject					
1.2	Improving my career prospects for an academic / research career					
1.3	Improving my career prospects outside of an academic/research career					
1.4	I was encouraged by a former academic tutor/supervisor					
1.5	The funding was available					
1.6	It felt like a natural step for me					
1.7	I felt inspired to work with a particular academic					
1.8	Professional development or training					
1.9	Other (Please specify):					

Career Aspirations

Please	Please select the top three types of career you have in mind for when you finish your research degree, and					
priori	tise these by writing 1, 2 or 3 (1=highest, 3=lowest priority)					
J.1	Academic career in higher education (either research and teaching, or teaching only)					
J.2	Research career in higher education					
J.3	Other career in higher education					
J.4	Research career outside higher education (e.g. in a private research organisation, a charity or in an industrial environment)					
J.5	Teaching (at a level below higher education)					
J.6	Returning to, or remaining with, employer who is sponsoring your degree					
J.7	Returning to, or remaining with, employer who is not sponsoring your degree					
J.8	Self-employment (including setting up your own business)					
J.9	Any other professional career					
J.10	Not sure or not decided yet					
J.11	Other (Please specify):					

σ

Definitely agree

lot ppli

Neither agree nor disagree Mostly agree

Aostly lisagree

Section K: Overall Experience

К.З

		Poo	Fair	Goo	Exce
K.1	How would you evaluate your entire research experience at this institution?				
К.2	What aspects / elements of your research degree programme are most valuable?				

What aspects of your research degree experience could be improved?

K.4	I am confident that I will complete my research degree
	programme within my institution's expected timescale

Have you ever seriously considered withdrawing from your research degree programme? [select all that apply]		
K.5	No, I have not seriously considered withdrawing	
К.6	Yes, for financial reasons	
К.7	Yes, for personal or family reasons	
К.8	Yes, for health reasons	
К.9	Yes, for employment reasons	
K.10	Yes, to transfer to another institution	
K.11	Other (please state)	

L.1 This is the first national survey for postgraduate research students. If you have any comments about the survey itself, including any aspects to be removed or added to the question set, please write them in here.

Thank you for your time in completing this survey.

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APPENDIX 2 Participating institutions

Students from the following institutions participated in the ISSE-PGR national pilot in 2018.

INSTITUTIONS WITH PGR COHORTS GREATER THAN 250

Dublin City University Dublin Institute of Technology Maynooth University National University of Ireland Galway Trinity College Dublin University College Cork University College Dublin University of Limerick

INSTITUTIONS WITH PGR COHORTS LESS THAN 250

Athlone Institute of Technology Cork Institute of Technology Dundalk Institute of Technology Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Institute of Art, Design and Technology Institute of Technology Blanchardstown Institute of Technology Carlow Institute of Technology Sligo Institute of Technology Tallaght Institute of Technology Tralee Letterkenny Institute of Technology Limerick Institute of Technology Mary Immaculate College, Limerick National College of Art and Design Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Waterford Institute of Technology
APPENDIX 3 Terms of reference and membership for the ISSE-PGR working group

The objectives of the working group are:

- i. To conduct desk-based research on institutional / national / international examples of surveys used to capture data on the experiences of students undertaking postgraduate research
- ii. To design a survey instrument that effectively meets the needs of postgraduate research students, institutions and other stakeholders, and to test its validity and reliability
- iii. To recommend which cohorts of students should be invited to participate and how frequently the survey should be implemented
- iv. To recommend any preferred timelines and logistical approaches to survey implementation, the return of data to institutions and any data analysis / structure undertaken prior to that return
- v. To maximise understanding and awareness within partner organisations by dissemination of information on survey rationale, development and implementation

To achieve these objectives, the following competences are required within the group:

- Appreciation of the experiences of research students in Irish higher education institutions
- Understanding of the implementation of surveys for research students at local, national and international levels
- Appreciation of the potential value of resulting data to inform quality enhancement activities at local, sectoral and national levels
- Awareness of the objectives, currency and developmental influences of other surveys, nationally and internationally
- Ability to apply, and document, psychometric testing to test survey reliability and validity
- Ability to effectively communicate the rationale, development and implementation of the survey to target audiences at various levels of seniority within institutions and other partners

OPERATION

The Research Survey group will be chaired by a member of the Project Plenary Advisory Group (this group has subsequently been renamed as the ISSE Steering Group), reflecting the standard structure of project working groups. The group will report to the Plenary Group via the chair.

The group is expected to meet on a regular basis during the period from April to November 2017 and will determine an appropriate frequency of meetings. The appropriate timing of survey fieldwork will be determined by the group and may be influenced by the fieldwork for the existing ISSE which takes place during February and March each year.

At the initial meeting, the group agreed the following phased timeline for developments:

- Research of existing practice
- Development of draft questions
- Testing with students
- Consultation with institutions and other partners
- Approval and implementation

Subject to progress of each phase, the group agreed to aim to complete development and approval during the 2017-2018 academic year leading to potential implementation in 2018-2019.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ISSE-PGR WORKING GROUP

Jennifer Brennan Technological Higher Education Association

Thomas Butler PhD student, representing the Union of Students in Ireland

Lucy Byrnes National University of Ireland, Galway

Emer Cunningham University College Dublin

Mary Deasy Institute of Technology Tallaght

Michael Frain University of Limerick

Suzanne Guerin University College Dublin and ISSE Steering Group

Raasay Jones Irish Research Council

Rachel Keegan Dublin City University

Mary McNamara Dublin Institute of Technology

Nicki O'Connor Higher Education Authority

Sean O'Reilly ISSE Project Manager

Lewis Purser Irish Universities Association and ISSE Steering Group

Joseph Stokes Dublin City University





www.studentsurvey.ie