

Final Report

Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

September 2013

SERI 

**INSIGHT
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

Final Version

**Plymouth University Postgraduate
Research Experience Survey 2013**

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

SERIO, a research unit at Plymouth University, has been asked by the Graduate School to undertake an analysis of the responses to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2013. The PRES is a survey of postgraduate research students across UK institutions which collects data on a variety of different elements of the student experience.

This report is based on an analysis of data submitted by 379 respondents from Plymouth University. Findings are compared against the aggregate findings for all participating institutions in the higher education sector, based on a total of 48,401 responses¹.

Respondents were asked about their experience with a range of issues including: supervision; resources; research culture; progress and assessment; and responsibilities.

2. Supervision

Over 70% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their supervision in each of the four areas explored. Satisfaction levels were highest with regards to the skills and subject knowledge of the supervisor (86%) and lowest when it came to help with identifying training and development needs (74%).

3. Resources

Plymouth University respondents expressed most satisfaction with the availability of computing resources and facilities in the university (77% compared to 74% for the sector as a whole). While over 60% of Plymouth University respondents also agreed that there were adequate library facilities, working space and specialist resources, the figures were slightly lower than for the sector as a whole. In particular 67% of Plymouth respondents felt they had access to necessary specialist resources compared to 73% of respondents nationally.

4. Research Culture

A majority of respondents indicated that they felt satisfied with all four aspects of the research culture in their department and there were no substantial differences between the responses for Plymouth University and the overall responses for the sector. Satisfaction was highest with department seminar programmes, (which 71% agreed were good) and lowest for opportunities to become involved in the wider research community (61%).

5. Progress and Assessment

Over three quarters of Plymouth University respondents indicated that they understood the progression and assessment processes and criteria in each of the four areas reviewed in the survey, a slightly higher proportion in each case than the sector as a whole. However 11% disagreed with the statement that they had received an appropriate induction.

¹ Please note: percentages quoted in the Executive Summary may not be based on these figures due to missing responses.

6. Responsibilities

A large majority of respondents indicated that they understood their own (88%) and their supervisor's (82%) responsibilities. However only 58% indicated that they felt the institution values and responds to feedback, while 10% indicated that they did not know who to approach, other than their supervisor(s) if they were concerned about any aspects of their programme.

7. Research Skills and Professional Development

Respondents were generally very positive about the role of their programme in developing their research and professional skills. Over 80% of respondents indicated that their research skills, their confidence in being creative and innovative, and their understanding of research integrity had increased while being on their programme. Similarly 85% of respondents indicated that they had increasingly managed their professional development while on their programme (compared to 78% for the sector overall).

8. Opportunities

In general Plymouth University respondents appeared to be more engaged with academic opportunities than their peers in other institutions. Over three quarters of respondents (77%) had attended an academic research conference, compared to 70% of sector respondents, while 65% had presented conference papers, compared to 57% of sector respondents. However only 7% of Plymouth respondents had participated in a placement or internship and only 25% had received advice on career options.

9. Motivations and Future Plans

Interest in a subject was the key motivation for respondents doing a research degree (36%) followed by a desire to improve their career prospects (30%). A majority of respondents intended to pursue an academic career in HE after they graduated. About 21% indicated that they intended to pursue a non-research pathway outside HE.

10. Conclusions and Implications

Overall the findings from the Plymouth University PRES present a broadly positive picture of research student satisfaction. Not only did a majority of students consistently agree with the positive statements in each theme, but 85% of respondents indicated they were satisfied with their experience overall (compared to 81% of for the sector overall).

However, the findings do suggest that there are certain areas where the university could look to further improve the student experience:

- **Individual Support.** While a majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the support provided by their supervisors, the proportion tended to be below that for the sector as a whole. This suggests that the university may want to consider prioritising supervision as an area for improvement.

- **General Support.** Respondent satisfaction with accessing resources in Plymouth University was generally lower than for the sector as a whole, with the exception of computing facilities. The findings also suggest that the university could consider doing more to stimulate the research culture by promoting and developing opportunities for students to discuss work with their peers and to engage in the wider research community.
- **Professional and Academic Development.** The proportion of Plymouth University students who had accessed development opportunities, such as attending academic conferences or presenting academic papers, tended to be above that for the sector as a whole. However, the university might want to consider how it can provide more non-academic vocational opportunities, given the low proportion of respondents who had taken part on a placement or received advice on career options.
- **Student Feedback.** A large minority of respondents did not agree that the university values and responds to feedback from research students. Consequently, the university might consider what more it can do to further publicise its responses to the feedback it receives.

Main Report

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

SERIO, a research unit at Plymouth University, has been asked by the Graduate School to undertake an analysis of the responses to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2013. The PRES, which is delivered by the Higher Education Academy, is a survey of postgraduate research students across UK institutions, undertaken on a biannual basis. Feedback is collected on a variety of different elements of the student experience, including supervision, resource availability, and the development of research and professional skills.

1.2 Methods

This report is based on an analysis of data submitted by 379 respondents from Plymouth University. Findings are compared against the aggregate findings for all participating institutions in the higher education sector. Due to limitations on space not all these comparisons are included in the report but the research team have endeavoured to outline figures for both the university and all institutions where substantial differences exist. A total of 48,401 responses were received to the survey nationally.

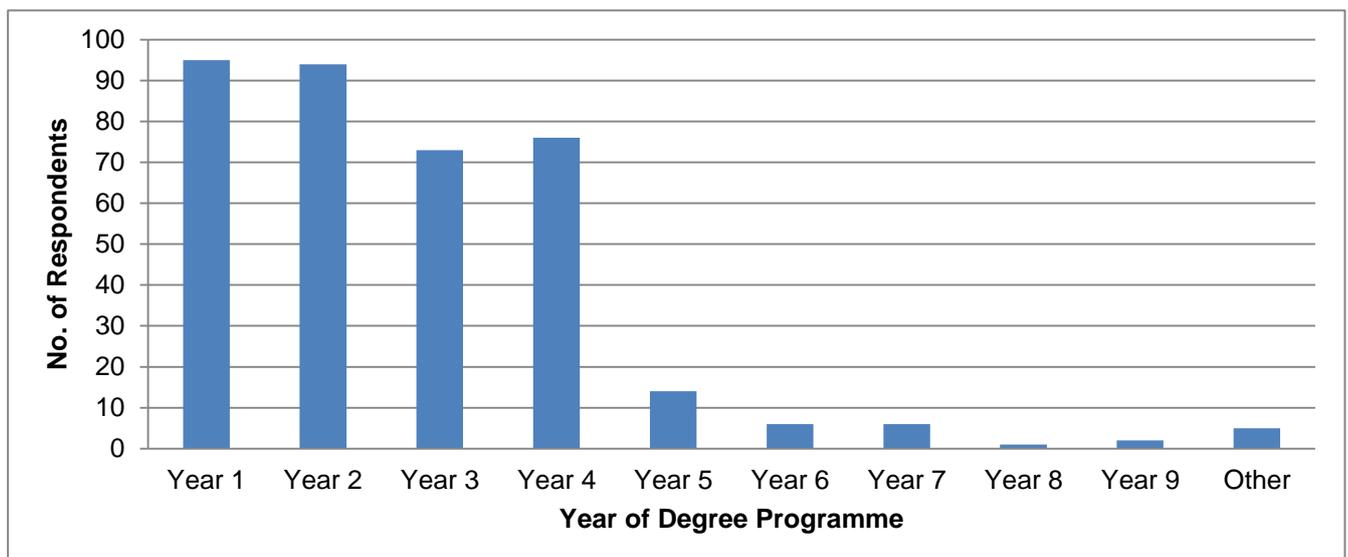
Changes have been made to the way the multiple choice response options have been worded in the 2013 survey, making comparisons with earlier surveys problematic. Consequently no comparisons have been made with the 2011 survey in this report.

2. Survey Analysis

2.1 Respondent Profile

379 research students from Plymouth University responded to the survey. The majority of respondents (68%) indicated that they were full-time students, with 29% part-time and 3% who didn't respond. 70% of the respondents were face-to-face learners based at the University, while 25% were distance learners, and 5% did not respond. As can be seen from Chart One, the vast majority of students (91%) were in the first four years of their degree programme, the largest percentage of these in their first two years (50% of overall respondents).

Chart One: Respondent Breakdown by Year of Degree Programme



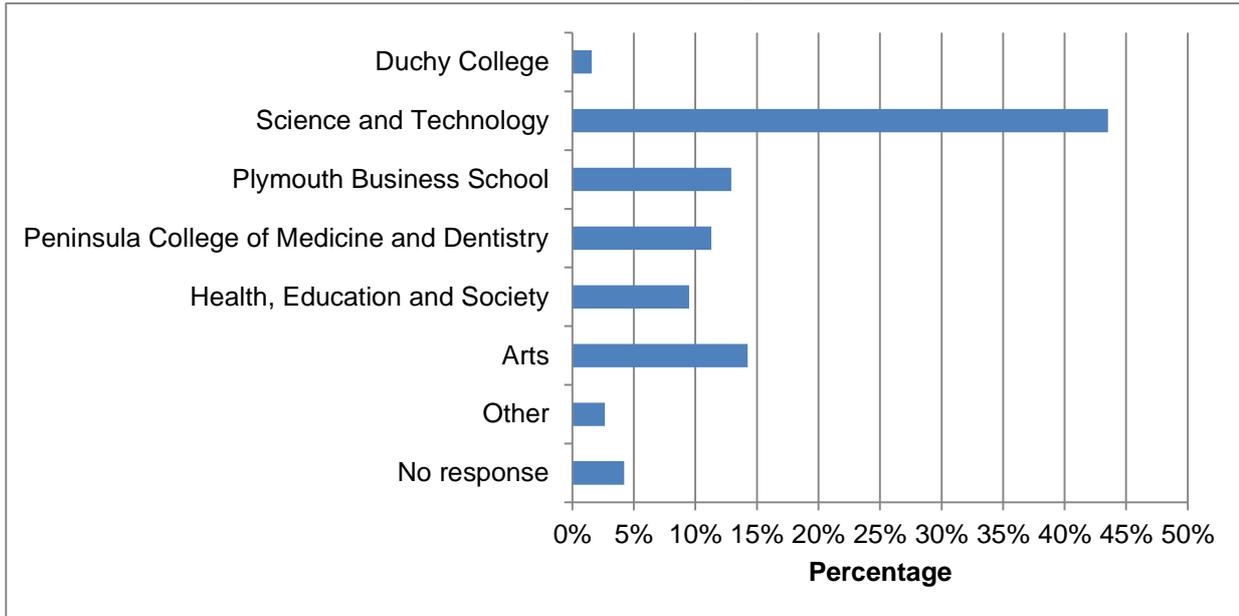
Base: All Respondents (n=372, missing=7)

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Just over half the respondents (52%) were registered on a PhD programme, with the following most popular programme being an MPhil with a transfer to PhD (37% of respondents).

All Colleges and Faculties across the University were represented, however as demonstrated in Chart 2 the Faculty of Science and Technology had by far the highest proportion of representation with 44% of respondents indicating that they belong to them, while Duchy College had the lowest proportion of representation, with just 2% of respondents.

Chart Two: Respondent Breakdown by Faculty/College



Base: All Respondents (n=379)

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Other key points to note about the respondent profile include:

- The gender split was relatively equal, with 51% of respondents being male and 46% female, with 2% of respondents not answering or preferring not to say.
- 58% of students were home students, with another 10% coming from other parts of the EU, 29% of respondents from outside of the EU and 3% people who preferred not to say.
- A majority of respondents (52%) were aged 35 or below. 10% 25 year or younger, while 5% were above the age of 55.
- 8% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability.

Further information about the respondent profile, including tables is contained in the technical annex.

2.2 Supervision

Summary of Key Points: Supervision

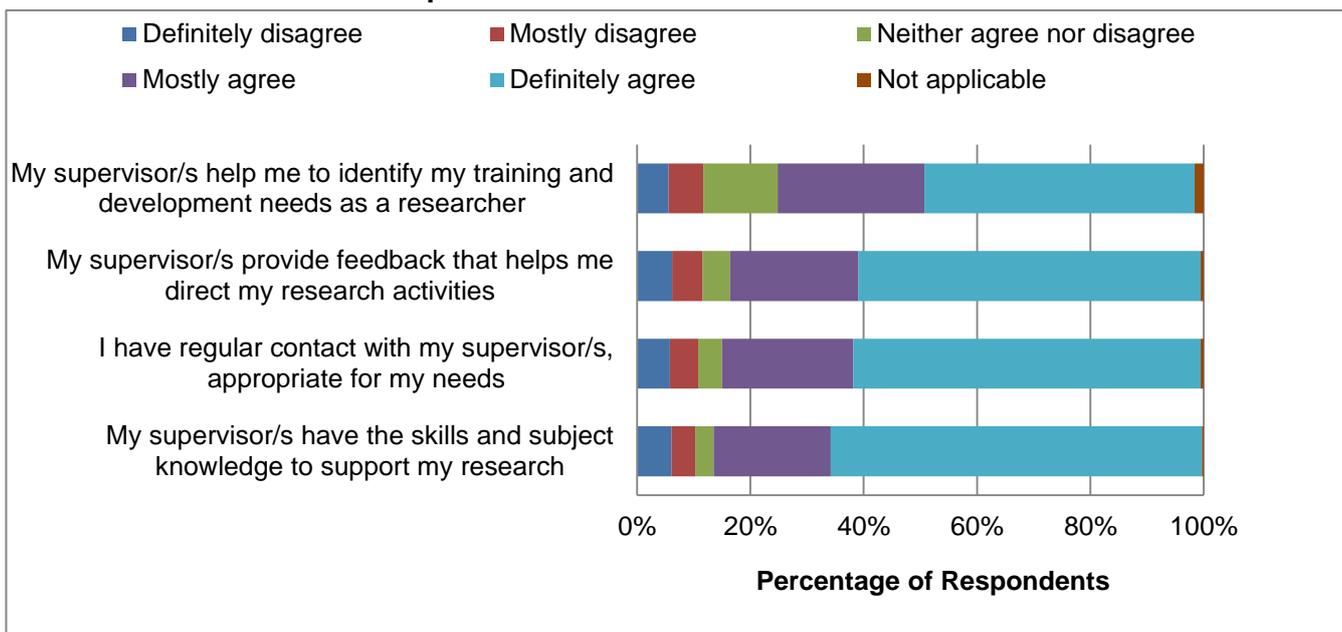
- Over 70% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their supervision in each of the four areas explored.
- Satisfaction levels were highest with regards to the skills and subject knowledge of the supervisor (86%), although this was generally lower than for the sector as a whole (89%).
- Conversely, satisfaction levels were lowest for help with identifying training and development needs (74%), although this was above the overall sector figure of 71%.

All respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with various statements about the supervision they had received during their research degree programme on a scale from 'definitely agree' to 'definitely disagree'.

As Chart Three shows the majority of respondents were satisfied with the supervision they had received during their research degree, with over 70% answering 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree' to all statements, and of these answers the largest proportion being 'definitely agree'. Some key points to note are:

- The respondents had the highest level of agreement with the statement that their supervisors had the "skills and knowledge to support them in their research", with 86% of respondents choosing 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree'.
- Respondents were generally very positive that "the contact with the supervisors was appropriate to their needs" and "the feedback provided helped to direct their research", with the percentage of respondents agreeing with the statements at 84% and 83% respectively.
- The proportion of respondents who agreed that their supervisors helped them to "identify their training and development needs" was notably lower than the number of positive responses to the other statements, with only 73.6% of respondents agreeing with the statement. While, the percentage of people disagreeing was at a similar level to the previous statements, there was a higher percentage of respondents (13%) "neither agreeing nor disagreeing" with the statement.

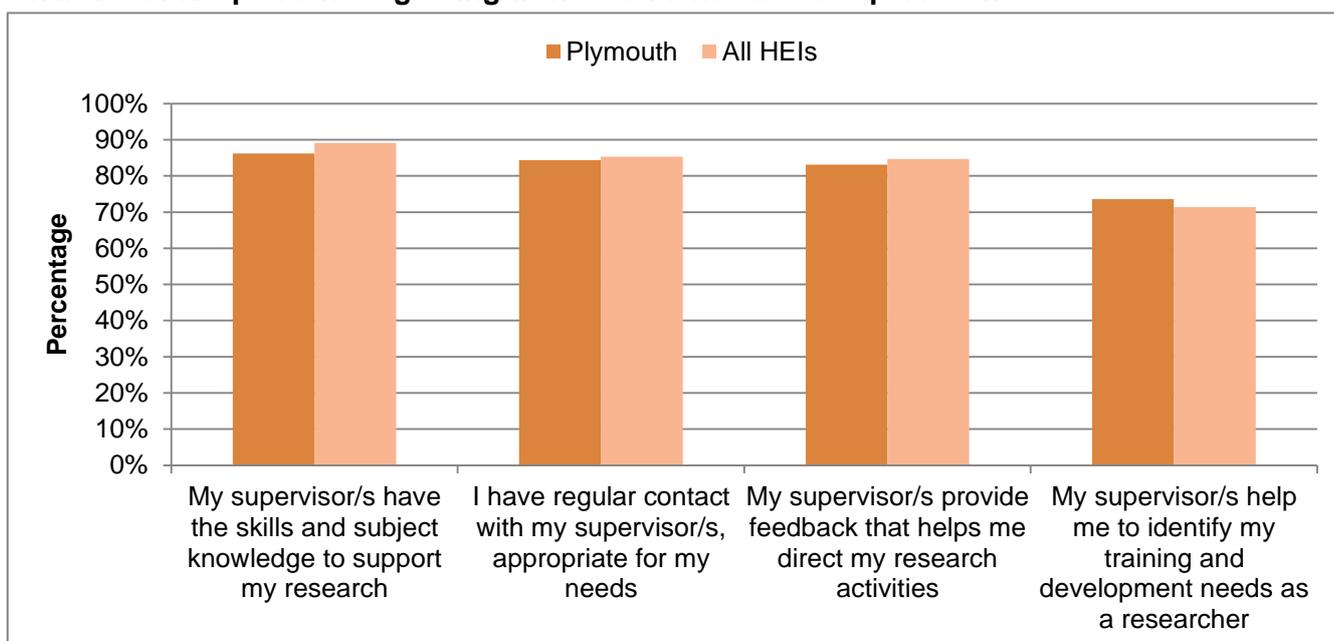
Chart Three: Feedback on Supervision



Base: All respondents (n=377, missing=2), except “My supervisor/s help me to identify my training needs...” (n=375, missing=4); “My supervisor/s provide feedback...” (n=372, missing=7).
 Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

As shown in Chart Four, Plymouth University had a slightly lower percentage of respondents agreeing with the statements about supervision compared to the sector as a whole. The exception being the identification of training and development needs, where 74% of Plymouth University respondents agreed, compared with 71 % of respondents overall.

Chart Four: Respondents Agreeing with Statements about Supervision



Base: All Valid Responses
 Source: Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Text Box One: Supervision

“Excellent supervisors: each has own area of expertise which greatly aids my needs.”

“I think that some training in how to support students with some form of illness or disability is vital. When I needed help the university provided it but I really didn't know who to go to in the first instance.”

“I have had little contact with my supervisor, I think its because I'm part-time. Also i have not met with my second supervisor at all yet.”

“My supervisor provides excellent support, making himself available outside of regular hours and maintaining regular contact with me.”

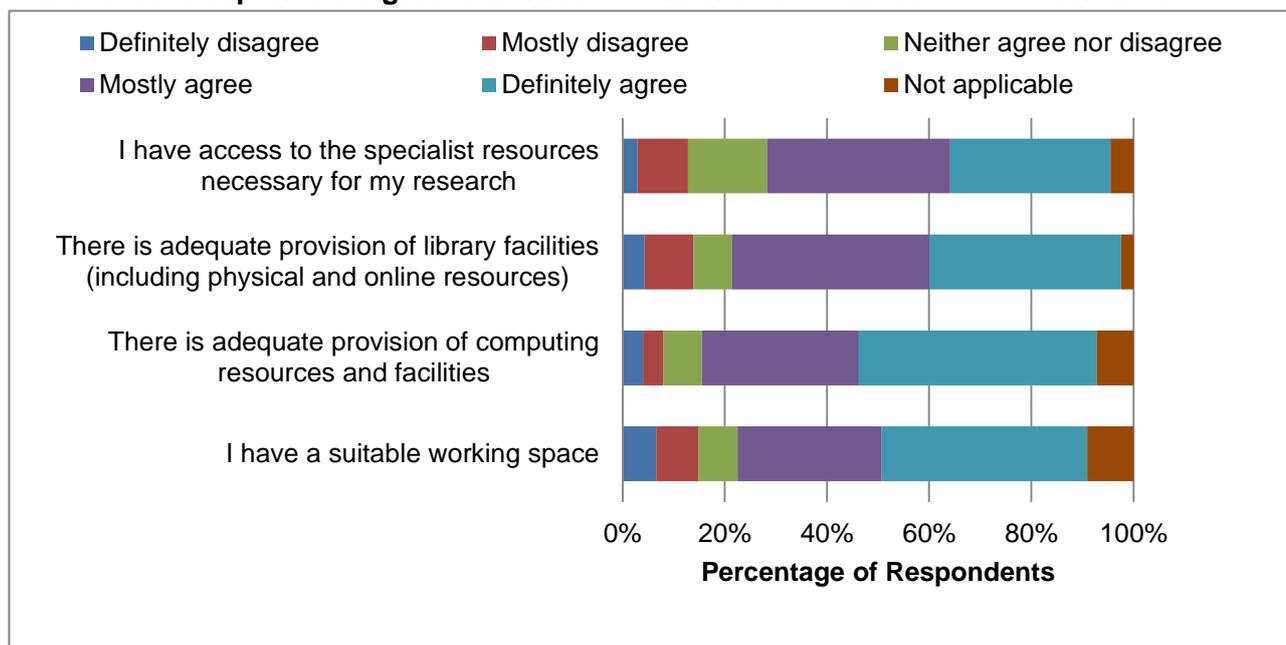
“One of my supervisors was really great and very helpful throughout the Ph.D. Another was basically hard to reach, took months to respond to deadlines and put little effort into helping.”

Respondents provided some additional comments on the support they had received from their supervisor. Good contact and availability was one of the main explanations for respondents having a positive view of their supervisor (7 respondents), while three respondents praised the expertise of their supervisor. Conversely eight respondents complained that their supervisors were hard to reach, did not contact them or had not taken any interest in their work. Three respondents felt they needed support in other areas outside the subject area thesis (such as professional support or simply how to write a PhD), while the same number felt they were pressured into work that does not support their research project. Many respondents had more than one supervisor and perhaps unsurprisingly, seven respondents felt the support varied in quality depending on the supervisor. Some of these responses are included in Text Box One.

2.3 Resources**Summary of Key Points: Resources**

- A majority of respondents agreed that they had adequate provision in relation to: specialist resources; library facilities; and working space, although these proportions were lower than for the sector overall. In particular 67% of Plymouth respondents felt they had access to necessary specialist resources compared to 73% of respondents nationally.
- 77% of Plymouth respondents felt there was adequate provision of computing resources and facilities, compared to 74% for the sector as a whole.

The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with various statements regarding the availability and quality of resources. As Chart Five shows the overall responses to the statements were positive, with the majority of Plymouth respondents choosing 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree' for each statement.

Chart Five: Respondent Agreement with Statements about the Resources Available

Base: All respondents (n=374, missing=5), except: "There is adequate provision of library facilities" (n=375, missing=4); "I have suitable working space" (n=376, missing=3).

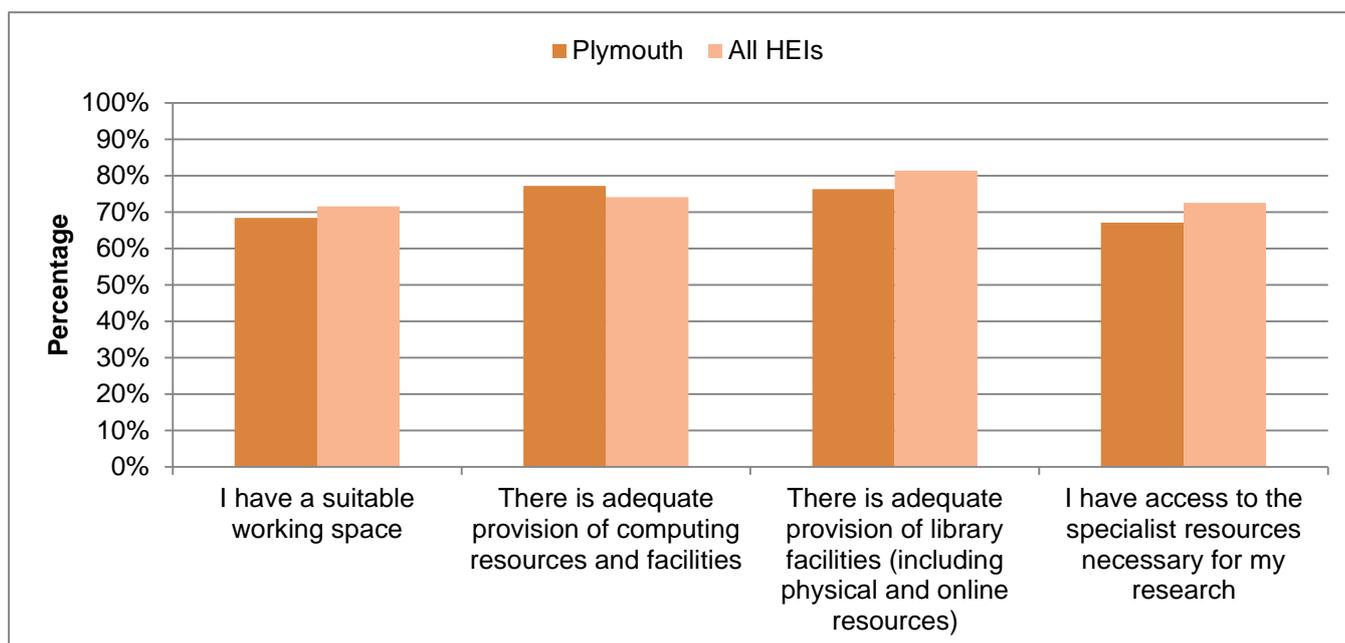
Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Some key points to note are:

- The statement with the highest level of agreement was "there is an adequate level of computing resources and facilities", with 77% of respondents "definitely/mostly agreeing" and only 8% of respondents "mostly" or "definitely disagreeing". Plymouth University had a higher percentage of agreement than the overall survey results, where 74% of respondents agreed with the statement and 12% disagreed.
- Overall respondents were less positive about their access to the specialist resources necessary for their research. 67% agreed with this statement, the lowest for the four resources, and over 5% below the proportion of sector respondents who agreed (73%). This figure can be partly explained by the high number of neutral responses, with 16% stating "neither agree nor disagree".
- However the statement with the highest level of disagreement concerned whether research students had a suitable working space, with 15% of respondents disagreeing with the statement and 68% agreeing that the working space is suitable.

As Chart Six shows, students from Plymouth were less satisfied with the resources available to them than respondents from the sector as a whole, with the exception of the computing resources.

Chart Six: Respondents who 'Mostly agreed' or 'Definitely Agreed' with the Statements about the Resources Available, for Plymouth University and The Whole Sector



Base: All Valid Responses

Source: Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Some respondents provided additional comments regarding the issues they had faced with accessing or using university resources. The key themes mentioned were:

- Limited supply of essential articles and books in the library facilities (24 respondents).
- Difficulties in accessing resources from outside the campus (10).
- Disruptive office facilities, often due to be open plan offices (10).
- Limited workplace facilities (9).
- Lack of insufficient online facilities (8).

2.4 Research Culture

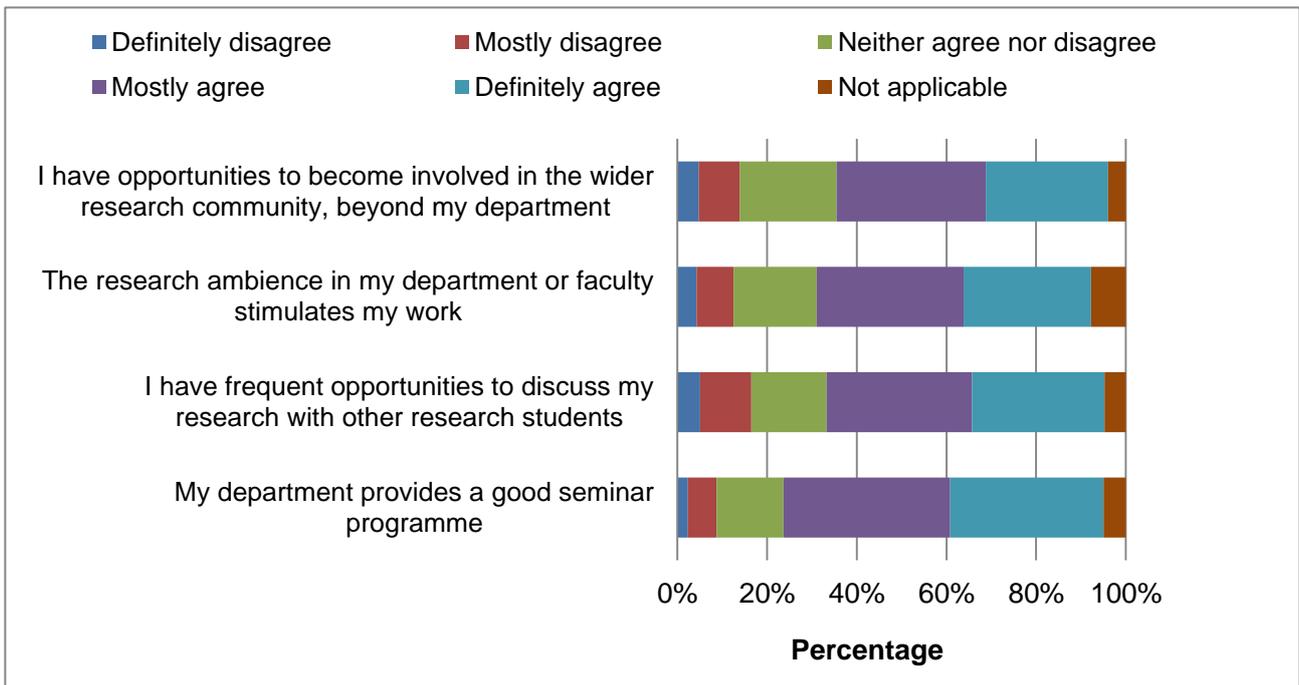
Summary of Key Points: Research Culture

- A majority of respondents indicated that they felt satisfied with all four aspects of the research culture in their department.
- Satisfaction was highest with department seminar programmes, which 71% agreed were good. However only 61% of respondents felt they had opportunities to become involved in the wider research community.

The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with four statements relating to the research culture in their department, with department relating to the centre, school or institute that they were primarily attached to (as displayed in Chart Seven). Key points to note include:

- A majority of respondents “mostly” or “definitely agreed” with each of the four statements.
- Respondents expressed the highest level of agreement with the statement that their department is providing a good seminar programme”, with 71% choosing ‘mostly agree’ or ‘definitely agree’, and just 9% indicating they ‘mostly’ or ‘definitely disagreed’.
- Levels of agreement were slightly lower for the other three statements with 62% agreeing that they had “opportunities to discuss their research with other research students”, and 61% agreeing that the research ambience in their department or faculty stimulates their work. Students expressed the most dissatisfaction with opportunities to discuss their research with other students, with a notable 17% of respondents disagreeing with the statement.
- 61% of respondents expressed some form of agreement with the statement that they had “opportunities to become involved in the wider research community” beyond their department. Over a fifth of respondents (22%) “neither agreed nor disagreed” with this statement.
- There were no substantial differences between the responses for Plymouth University and the overall responses for the sector.

Chart Seven: Extent to which Respondents Agree with Statements about Research Culture



Base: “I have opportunities to become involved...” (n=375, missing=4); “The research ambience in my department...” (n=373, missing=6); “I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research...” (n=376, missing=3); “My department provides a good seminar programme” (n=377, missing=2).

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Text Box Two: Research Culture

“Very pleased with the seminar programme and visiting speakers. Lecturers in my school are excellent at providing opportunities for PhD students to involve with others aspects of research, teaching, presenting, sharing, and wider research opportunities.”

“I cannot emphasise enough how supportive the marine biology and ecology research centre is. A fantastic department to be involved with.”

“I am doing my degree part-time and there are very little support seminars that part-time students can access because we work. The part time students are not catered for.”

“As part time researcher, I don't take full advantage of the research ambience at my department although it seems to be adequate in stimulating research work.”

As with the last sub-section, respondents made additional comments about the research culture. The most common theme that arose was the problems faced by part-time students in participating in the university's research culture (7 respondents). Similarly, five respondents felt that the research culture was either inapplicable to, or difficult to engage with, for respondents outside Cornwall. Although one respondent working abroad felt that they had good contact with the university. A selection of responses is included in Text Box Two.

2.5 Progress and Assessment

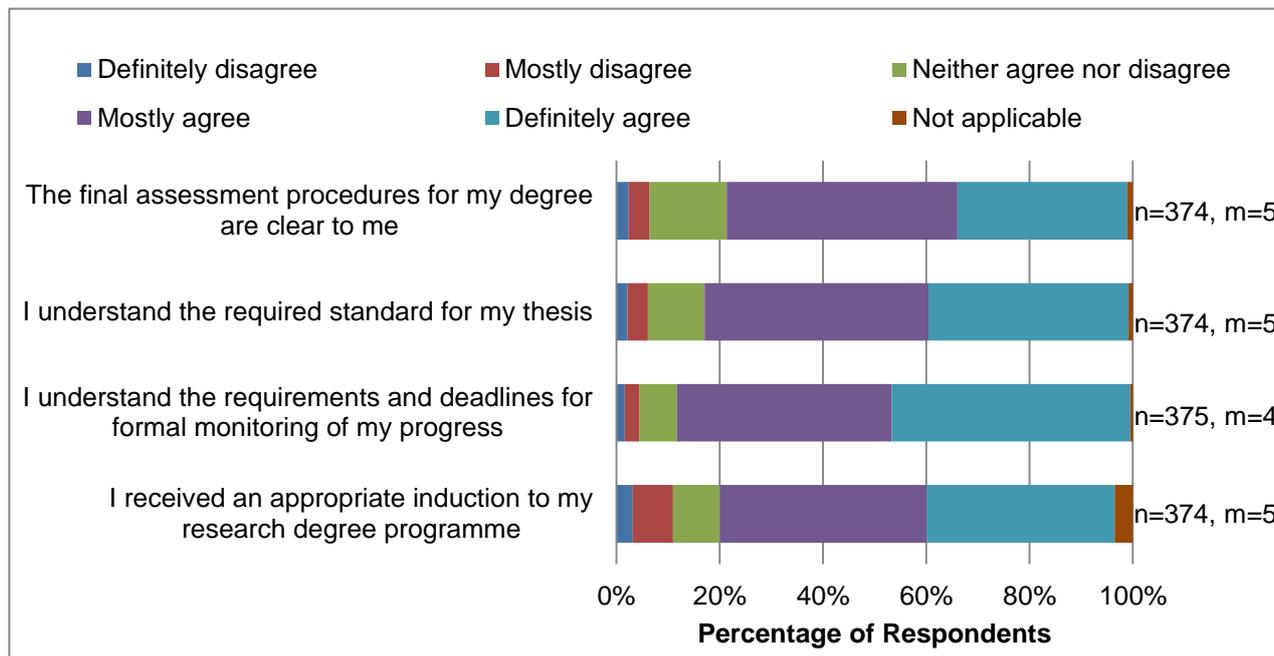
Summary of Key Points: Progress and Assessment

- Over three quarters of Plymouth respondents indicated that they understood the progression and assessment processes and criteria in each of the four areas reviewed in the survey. In each case there was a higher proportion than for the sector overall.
- While 77% of respondents agreed that they had received an appropriate induction, over a tenth of respondents disagreed with the statement.

The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to their induction, progression arrangements and assessment. The overall response was positive, with over 75% of respondents choosing 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree' for all statements, as shown in Chart Eight. Key points to note include:

- 88% of respondents agreed that they understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of their progress, which was the highest level of agreement in the section, followed by “I understand the required standards for my thesis” (82%).
- Levels of agreement were somewhat lower for the remaining two statements, but still above 75%. 78% of respondents agreed that the final assessment procedures for their degree were clear to them, while 77% felt they had received an appropriate induction. Interestingly 11% “mostly” or “definitely disagreed” with the statement that they had received an appropriate induction.

Chart Eight: Extent to which respondents Agree with Statements about Progression and Assessment

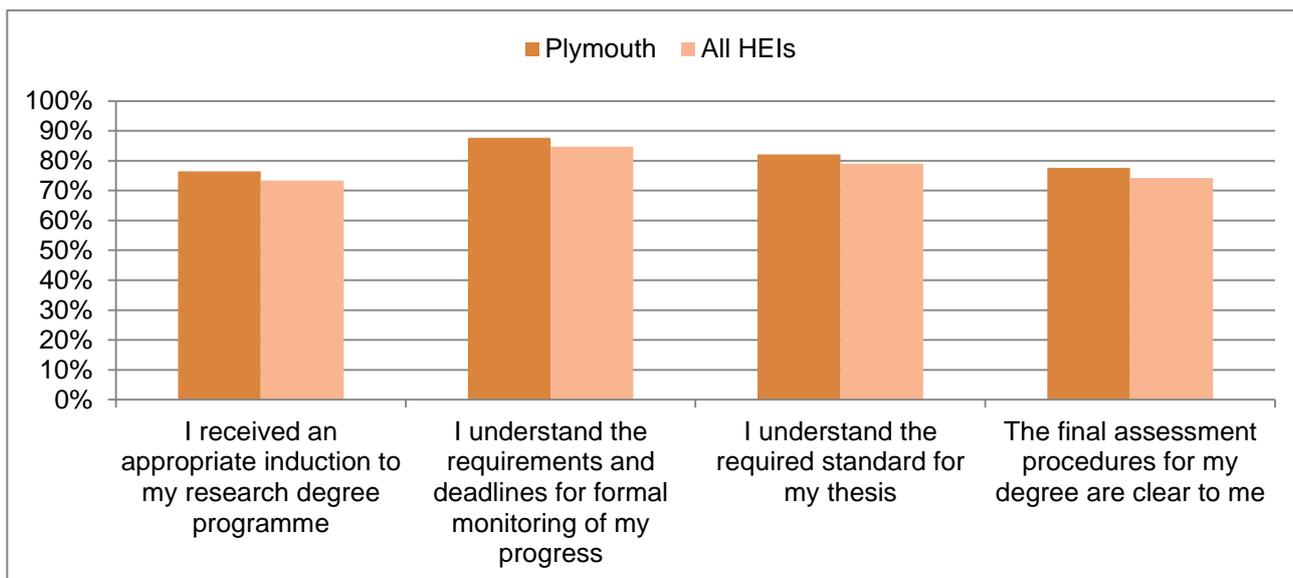


n=number of responses, m=missing

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

As demonstrated in Chart Nine, Plymouth University had a higher proportion of respondents who agreed with the statements about their progression and assessment than the sector overall (by between 3% and 4% for each statement).

Chart Nine: Respondents who 'Mostly agreed' or 'Definitely Agreed' with the Statements Relating to Progression and Assessment from Plymouth University and The Whole Sector



Base: All Valid Responses

Source: Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Twelve respondents provided additional comments relating to the induction new research students receive. Six felt that the induction could have been improved, while three had not attended an induction, while the same felt that the induction they had attended was very good.

2.6 Responsibilities

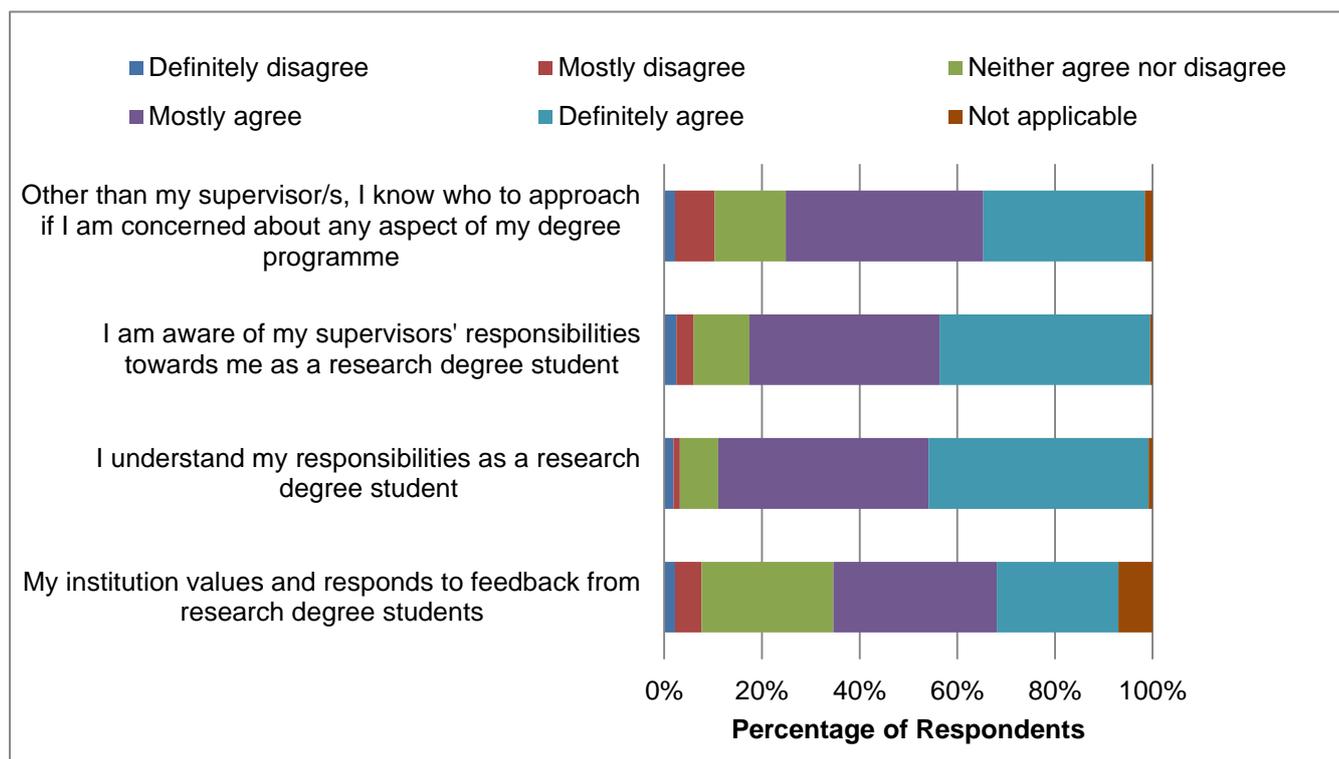
Summary of Key Points: Responsibilities

- Understanding of responsibilities was generally high. 88% of respondents indicated that they understood their responsibilities as a research student, while 82% indicated that they were aware of their supervisor's responsibilities towards them.
- A much smaller proportion of respondents (58%) felt that the institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students. In addition, a small but notable proportion of respondents disagreed with the statement that they know who to approach to, other than their supervisor, if they are concerned with any aspect of their degree programme.

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with various statements about responsibilities. Chart Ten shows the responses to each statement. The key points to note are:

- Respondents were most confident when it came to understanding their own responsibilities as a research student, with 88% agreeing with this statement (over half of whom "definitely agreed"), roughly the same as for the sector as a whole (88%).
- 82% of respondents were also in agreement that they were aware of their supervisor's responsibilities toward them as a research student, and only 6% of respondents 'mostly disagreed' or 'definitely disagreed'. However the proportion for the sector as a whole was higher at 86%.
- A somewhat lower proportion of respondents, but still a large majority (74%, compared to 76% for the sector as a whole), agreed with the statement that "other than my supervisors, I know who to approach if I am concerned about aspects of my degree programme". Respondents expressed the highest level of disagreement (10%) with this statement
- Respondents were least positive about the statement the university "values and responds to feedback from research degree students". The lowest proportion of respondents (58%) indicated that they agreed with this statement (slightly higher than for the sector as whole at 58%), while 27% "neither agreed or disagreed" and 8% disagreed.

Chart Ten: Respondent Agreement and Disagreement with Statements about Responsibilities



Base: "Other than my supervisor/s, I know who to approach..." (n=369, missing=10); "I am aware of my supervisors' responsibilities towards me..." (n=367, missing=12); "I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student" (n=371, missing=8); "My institution values and responds to feedback..." (n=370, missing=9).

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

2.7 Research Skills and Professional Development

Summary of Key Points: Research Skills and Professional Development

- **Research Skills:** Over 80% of respondents indicated that their research skills, confidence and understanding had developed during their time on the programme.
- **Professional Development:** 85% of respondents indicated that they had increasingly managed their professional development while on their programme (compared to 78% for the sector overall) and over 80% felt their ability to communicate information and manage projects had developed (compared to 76-77% for the sector overall).
- **Professional Contacts and Networks:** A lower proportion of Plymouth respondents (73%) felt they had developed professional networks and contacts, although this was still above the figure for the sector overall (68%).

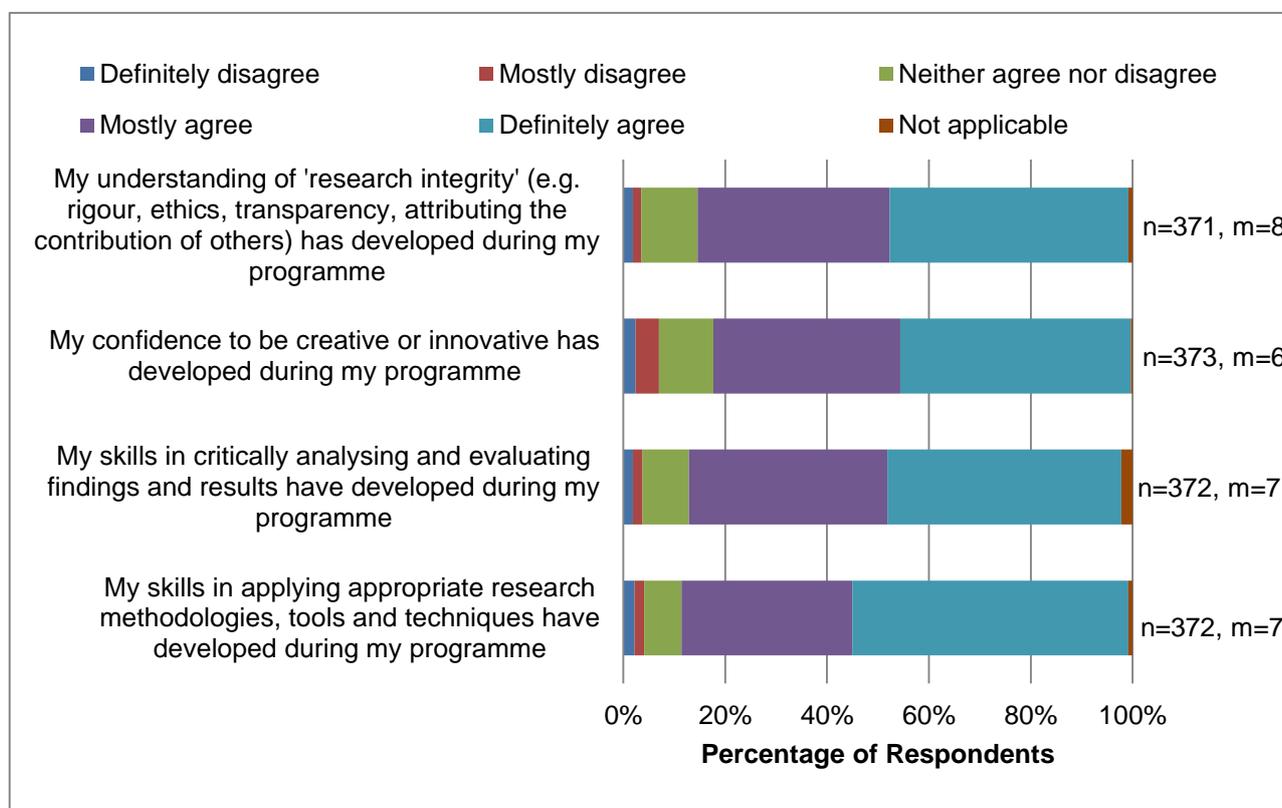
2.7.1 Research Skills

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements relating to their research skills development. The overall response was very positive, with over 80% of respondents choosing 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree' for each statement (Chart Eleven).

As demonstrated in Chart Eleven, the statement to which the respondents expressed the highest level of agreement (88%) was "my skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme". 85% of respondents agreed that their skills in analysing and evaluating findings have developed, while a similar proportion (85%) indicated that their understanding of 'research integrity' had developed.

The respondents expressed the highest level of disagreement that their confidence to be creative or innovative had developed through their programme, with 7% 'mostly' or 'definitely' disagreeing. Respondents from Plymouth University did express a higher level of agreement for this statement than the sector average though, with 82% in agreement compared to 78% of respondents to the overall survey. Other than this finding there was little difference in the responses from the research students at Plymouth University compared to the responses from the overall survey.

Chart Eleven: Extent to which Respondents Agreed or Disagreed with Statements about their Research Skills Development



n=number of responses, m=missing

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Additional comments tended to focus on the support provided to help develop research skills. Five respondents each referred to different research and teaching support programmes, which three respondents felt were useful, while two felt they were either too basic or not creative enough. Two respondents commented on how their supervisors had helped them to gain skills, while one cited The Graduate Office as a source of useful courses. Three respondents suggested more training in specific areas including:

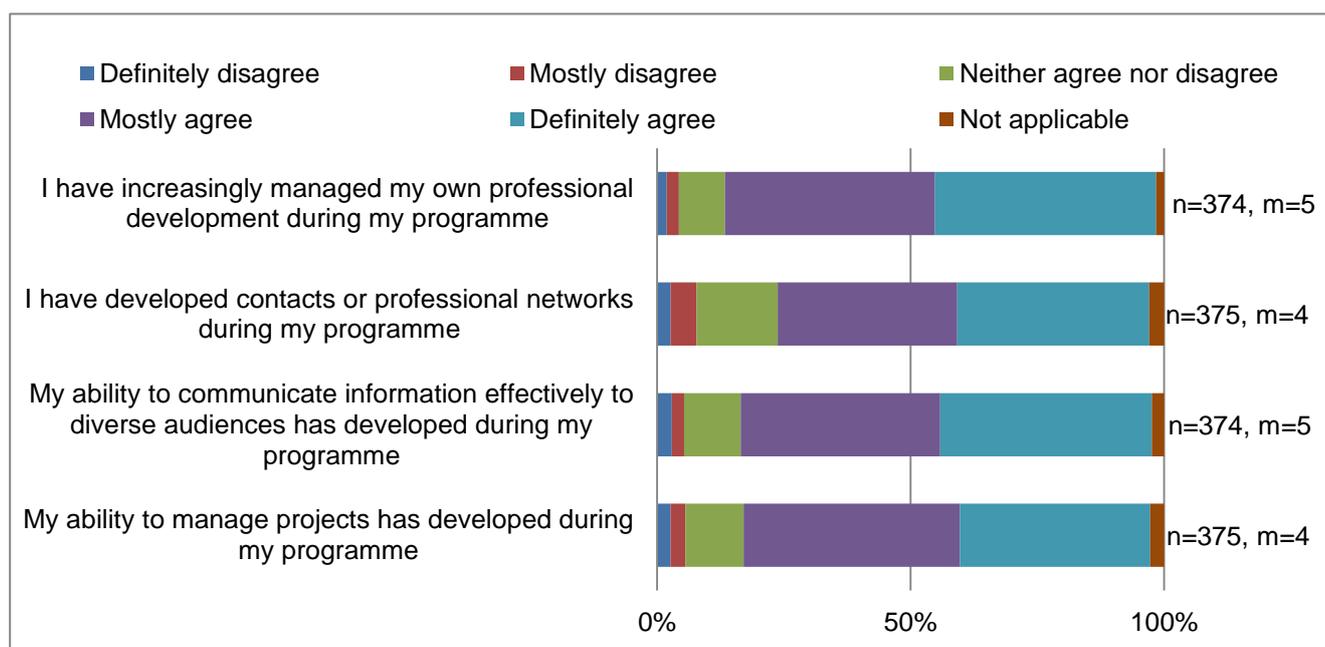
- Literature reviews (including critical literature reviews) (2 respondents).
- An introductory course on the philosophy of science, research and ethics (1).

2.7.2 Professional Development

The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to their professional development. The findings are displayed in Chart Twelve and the key points to note include:

- Respondents expressed the highest level of agreement with the statement that they have increasingly managed their own professional development during their programme with 85% indicating that they “mostly” or “definitely” agreed”.
- The majority of respondents were in agreement with the statements “my ability to manage projects has developed during my programme” (80%) and “my ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences had developed during my programme” (81%).
- The lowest level of agreement was for the statement relating to the development of contacts and professional networks, where 73% of respondents agreed that they had developed contacts during their programme.

Chart Twelve: Extent to which Respondents Agreed or Disagreed with Statements about their Professional Development

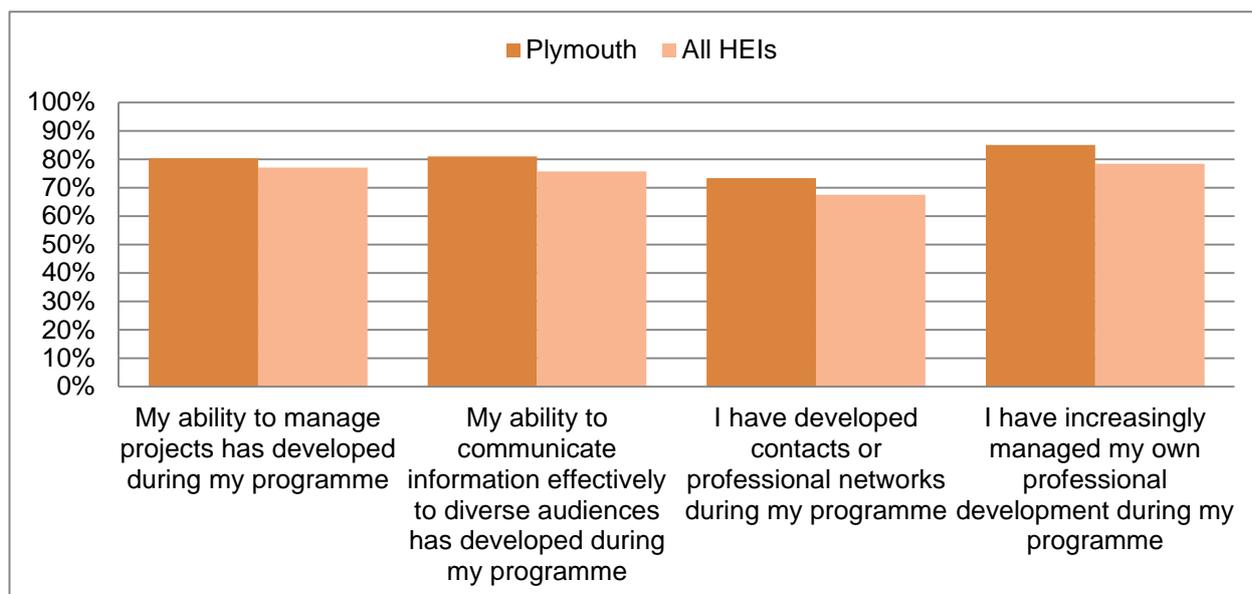


n=number of responses, m=missing

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Plymouth had a slightly higher than average level of agreement for each statements than the overall sector results, as demonstrated in Chart Thirteen. The most prominent difference is in the level of agreement for the statement “I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme”; where 85% of respondents from Plymouth University indicated they ‘mostly’ or ‘definitely’ agreed, compared to 78% of overall respondents.

Chart Thirteen: Respondent Agreement Statements on Professional Development for Plymouth and Sector



Base: All Valid responses

Source: Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

2.8 Opportunities

Summary of Key Points: Opportunities

- Over three quarters of respondents (77%) have attended an academic research conference, but only a quarter have received advice on career options during their time on the programme, and a mere 7% have participated in a placement or internship.
- Just over a half of Plymouth respondents (53%) have taught or undertaken a demonstration compared to 52% of respondents from the sector overall. 58% of these respondents agreed that they had been given appropriate support and guidance with their teaching.
- While a majority of respondents who had teaching experience agreed that they had received appropriate guidance, just under a quarter (23% or 45) disagreed.

Respondents were asked to indicate any opportunities they had experienced throughout their research degree programme from a number of options as shown in Table One.

As Table One demonstrates, over three quarters of respondents had attended academic research conferences, whilst a majority had received research skills training, presented a

paper to a conference, agreed a personal development plan, and received training on transferable skills.

The opportunities least accessed by research students were taking part in a placement or internship, with only 7% of respondents having experienced this, and receiving advice on career options, which only a quarter of respondents had done.

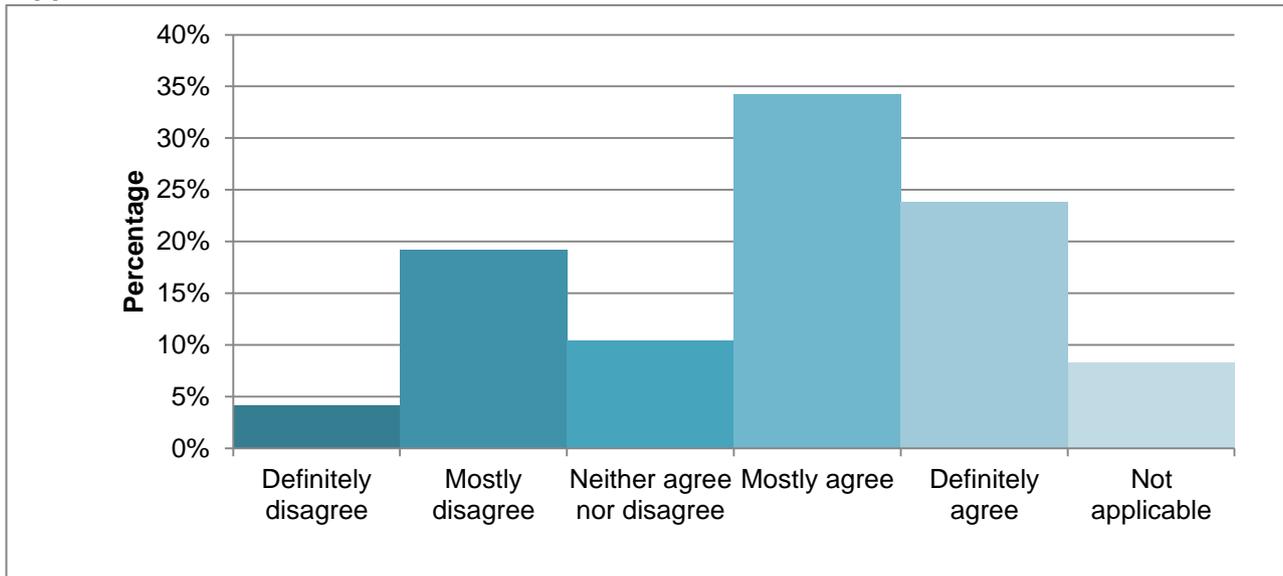
A larger proportion of Plymouth respondents had accessed a majority of the opportunities listed than respondents from the sector as a whole, the exceptions being: receiving advice on careers; taking part on a placement; and receiving training on research skills.

Table One: Opportunities Experienced by Respondents during their Research Degree Programme

Opportunities Students have Experienced During Degree Programme	Plymouth		All HEIs	
	Number	%	Number	%
Agreeing a personal training or development plan	204	54%	21207	44%
Receiving training to develop my research skills	273	72%	36222	75%
Receiving training to develop my transferable skills	190	50%	22783	47%
Receiving advice on career options	95	25%	12935	27%
Taking part in a placement or internship	28	7%	4421	9%
Attending an academic research conference	290	77%	33984	70%
Presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference	248	65%	27636	57%
Submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal or book	173	46%	16915	35%
Communicating your research to a non-academic audience	149	38%	16505	34%

Source: Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Just over half (53%) of respondents had taught or demonstrated at Plymouth University during their research degree programme. The 193 respondents who had taught were asked to what extent they agreed that they had been given appropriate support and guidance for their teaching. As shown in Chart Fourteen, a majority of these respondents agreed with the statement (58%, 112), while just under a quarter (23%, 45) “mostly” or “definitely disagreed” that they had received appropriate support and guidance.

Chart Fourteen: Extent to which Teaching Respondents Felt they had Received Appropriate Support and Guidance

Base: All Responses (n=193)

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

2.9 Motivations and Future Plans

Summary of Key Points: Motivations and Future Plans

- Interest in a subject was the key motivation for respondents doing a research degree (36%) followed by a desire to improve their career prospects (30%).
- Just over half of respondents intended on pursuing an academic career in higher education after they graduated, while 14% hoped to pursue a research career.

The respondents were asked to indicate their main motivation for pursuing a research degree. The two most common motivations were an interest in the subject (36%) and improving their prospects for an academic/research career (30%). Seven of the respondents who selected “other” stated that they had a range of motivations such as “a direct combination of interest, encouragement, funding, and pure chance”.

Table Two: Respondents Motivations for Pursuing a Research Degree Programme

Motivation	%	No.
My interest in the subject	36%	135
Improving my career prospects for an academic/research career	30%	110
It felt like a natural step for me	12%	46
Improving my career prospects outside of an academic/research career	7%	27
I was encouraged by a former academic tutor/supervisor	5%	20
The funding was available	4%	15
I felt inspired to work with a particular academic	1%	6
Other	3%	12

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Base: All respondents (n=371, missing=4)

Respondents were asked what type of career they had in mind for when they complete their research degree (Table Three). Over half of the respondents (52%) were looking for an academic career in higher education, either researching and teaching or just teaching. Only 11% of respondents were looking for a career in research outside higher education. About 21% indicated that they intended to pursue a non-research pathway outside of HE. Of the 13 respondents who selected "other" four indicated that they had already retired and are "pursuing the research for purely personal reasons".

Table Three: Types of Careers Respondents have in Mind.

Types of Careers	%	No.
Academic career in higher education (either research and teaching, or teaching only)	52%	191
Research career in higher education	14%	52
Research career outside higher education (e.g. in a private research organisation, a charity or in an industrial environment)	11%	40
Returning to or remaining with employer who is sponsoring your degree	8%	28
Any other professional career	5%	17
Self-employment (including setting up own business)	4%	13
Teaching (at a level below higher education)	2%	6
Other	4%	13
Don't know	3%	11

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

Base: All respondents (n=371, missing=4)

2.10 Overall Experience

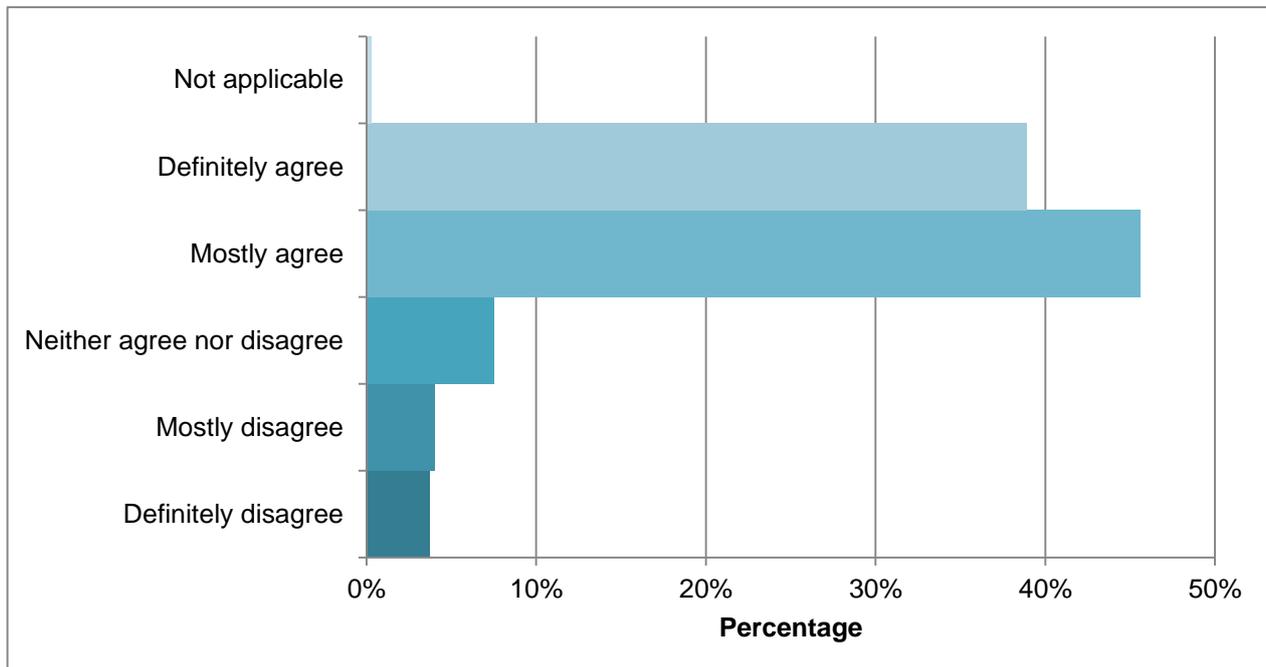
Summary of Key Points: Overall Experience

- 85% of respondents expressed satisfaction overall with their degree programme, a higher proportion than for the sector as a whole (81%).
- A higher proportion of Plymouth respondents (83%) were confident they would complete their research degree programme, than respondents for the sector as a whole (80%).

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that overall they were happy with the experience of their research degree programme (Chart Fifteen). The vast majority (85%) agreed with the statement although the proportion of respondents who 'mostly agreed' (46%) was higher than that who 'definitely agreed' (39%).

The level of agreement from Plymouth University was slightly higher than that of the overall survey, where 81% of respondents indicated that they 'mostly' or 'definitely' agreed that they were satisfied with the overall experience of their research degree programme.

Chart Fifteen: Respondent Satisfaction with Experience on the Degree Programme



Base: All Respondents (n=375, missing=4)

Source: Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2013

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that they were confident they would complete their research degree programme within the institution's expected timescale. 83% of Plymouth respondents agreed, higher than the sector average of 80%.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Introduction

Overall the findings from the Plymouth University Postgraduate Research Experience Survey provide a broadly positive picture of research student satisfaction, as demonstrated by the finding that a majority of students consistently agreed with the positive statements. Furthermore satisfaction also appears to be above the sector average, with 85% of respondents indicating they were satisfied with their overall experience, compared to 81% of sector respondents. However, the findings do suggest that there are certain areas (such as supervision) where Plymouth may be performing below the sector average. The findings, therefore, also provide a useful indication of key areas, where the university could potentially look to improve the student experience.

3.2 Key Findings and Implications

The responses point to a number of key findings, with potential implications for university policy, across a number of key themes:

Individual Support

- While a majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the support provided by their supervisors, the proportion tended to be below that for the sector as a whole. Similarly, fewer Plymouth respondents indicated they were aware of their supervisor's responsibilities, or who to go to in the absence of a supervisor, than respondents for the sector as a whole. This suggests that the university may want to consider prioritising supervision as an area for improvement.
- The finding that satisfaction levels were lowest when it came to the identification of training needs is reinforced by some of the feedback from the open responses where respondents felt they were not receiving enough support in areas outside their subject area thesis. However Plymouth respondents did appear to indicate higher levels of understanding with regards to the progression and assessment processes than respondents for the sector as a whole.

General Support

- Respondent satisfaction with accessing resources in Plymouth was generally lower than for the sector as a whole, with the exception of computing facilities. Feedback from the open responses suggests that the limited availability of texts in the library and online is a key issue, as is overcrowded working space and limited off-campus access.
- Satisfaction levels were particularly high with regards to the department seminar programmes (at 71%), but the findings suggest the university could consider doing more to stimulate the research culture by promoting and developing opportunities for students to discuss work with their peers and to engage in the wider research community.

Professional and Academic Development

- The survey findings suggest that Plymouth respondents have a high level of confidence that their degree programme has improved both their research and professional skills. Levels of agreement with positive statements in this area were consistently above 80%, with the exception of “developing contacts or professional networks”, and were either on the same level or above that for the sector as whole.
- Similarly, the proportion of Plymouth students who had accessed development opportunities, such as attending academic conferences or presenting academic papers, tended to be above that for the sector as a whole. However, the university might want to consider how it can provide more non-academic vocational opportunities, given the low proportion of respondents who had taken part on a placement (7%) or received advice on career options (25%).

Student Feedback

- A large minority of respondents did not agree that the university values and responds to feedback from research students. The large proportion of respondents (27%) who “neither agreed nor disagreed” with the statement suggests that many students are unaware of how student feedback is acted upon and the university might consider what more it can do to further publicise its responses to the feedback it receives.

Appendix One: Technical Annex

Annex Table One: Breakdown of Respondents by Age

	%	Base
25 years old or younger	10.0%	38
26-30 years old	24.3%	92
31-35 years old	17.2%	65
36-40 years old	15.8%	60
41-45 years old	13.2%	50
46-50 years old	7.7%	29
51-55 years old	5.0%	19
56 years old or older	5.3%	20
No response	1.6%	6

Annex Table Two: Breakdown of Respondents by Type of Degree Course

	%	Base
PhD	51.7%	196
MPhil with transfer to PhD	36.9%	140
Master in research	4.0%	15
MPhil	0.8%	3
PhD by published work	0.5%	2
New Route PhD	0.0%	0
Other	1.6%	6
No response	1.1%	4



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