# **Professional Doctorate Experience Survey (PDES) 2021**

## **What is PDES and who is involved?**

The PDES survey is run internally by the University of Bath, open only to professional doctorate students (’prof docs’). PhD students complete the PRES survey (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey), with PDES reflecting the very different student experience of prof docs. PDES is run by the University, so no benchmarking is possible with comparators.

## **Professional doctorates**

Professional doctorates are distance-learning programmes with a heavy emphasis on professional practice. Prof docs remain in their work roles, most only coming to campus for summer schools. 85% of PDES respondents are in paid employment, with 70% of those students working more than 30 hours per week. 66% are part-time (8% of PRES 2021 respondents). Many are returning to higher education after a significant break, with 54% over 41 (7% of PRES 2019 respondents, demographic data not yet available for PRES 2021).

Contact with supervisors is more limited, and engagement with University and SU services is lower. There are around 620 prof docs registered at Bath.

Only six research programmes in the University are professional doctorates:

* Professional Doctorate in Health (DHealth)
* Professional Doctorate in Policy, Research & Practice (DPRP)
* Professional Doctorate in Education (DEd)
* Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy)
* Doctor of Business Administration in Higher Education Management (DBA)
* Doctor of Engineering in Digital Entertainment (DEng)

## **Summary**

* **Low response rate:** response was 17% (n=110), up slightly from 16% (n=99) in PDES 2019, but not close to the 28% (n=183) in PDES 2018. There were only 8 respondents from the Department of Computer Science.
* **Support:** Only 49% agreed that support for my health and wellbeing meets their needs. In PDES 2019 only 32% knew they could consult the PGR Independent Advisor at any time – that has not been asked in PDES 2021.
* **Research community:** only 45% for research culture overall – better than PDES 2019 (39%) but below PRES (54%) and more than half not viewing research culture as sufficient.
* **Mental health:** ‘are you concerned about your mental health’ question removed, replaced with ‘The support for my health and wellbeing meets my needs (for example, personal tutor, student support and counselling services)’ with almost consistently lower agreement with the statement than for PRES 2021.

## **Overall satisfaction**

Overall satisfaction for PDES 2021 was 91%, markedly up from PDES 2019 at 83% and PDES 2018 at 84%, and contrasting with PRES 2021 overall satisfaction at 80%. It is possible that a concerted effort by the University to deliver quality distance provision this year has enhanced the programme experience for many prof docs. However, the proportion of agreeing that academic support was sufficient (64%) or that they could access University support (Student Services, Careers Support, etc.) (65%) fell significantly from PDES 2019 and PDES 2018.

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| *Overall satisfaction* | | | |
| **PDES 2021** | **PDES 2019** | **PDES 2018** | **PRES 2021** |
| 91% | 83% | 84% | 80% |

## **Highlighted issues**

Areas with low agreement that provision is satisfactory (under 65%):

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| *Highlighted issues* | | | |
|  | PDES 2021 | PDES 2019 | PDES 2018 |
| Supervisor/s help identify my training and development needs | 63% | 71% | 75% |
| Final assessment procedures for my degree are clear, incl. viva | 60% | 66% | 77% |
| Transition from taught phase to research phase clear and simple | 34% | 61% | 65% |
| Frequent opportunities to discuss research with other students | 39% | 66% | 53% |
| Research ambience in department or faculty stimulates work | 49% | 36% | 52% |
| Opportunities to become involved in wider research community | 46% | 29% | 39% |
| Clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on. | 64% | 87% | 64% |
| Access to appropriate University support (Student Services, Careers support etc.) when studying remotely | 65% | 80%\* | 86%\* |
| Support for my health and wellbeing meets needs (personal tutor, student support and counselling services, etc.) | 49% | 47%\*\* | 49%\*\* |
| Academic support is sufficient | 64% | 81% | 81% |

\* PDES 2019 and 2018 closest equivalent question ‘ I feel that the administrative support I receive during my programme is sufficient for my needs’

\*\* PDES 2019 and 2018 closest equivalent question ‘I feel that the pastoral support I receive during my programme is sufficient for my needs’

## **Mental health**

The question ‘are you concerned about your mental health’ was not asked in PDES 2021, removed since PDES 2019. The question ‘The support for my health and wellbeing meets my needs (for example, personal tutor, student support and counselling services)’ hopefully an effective replacement. PRES 2021 also asked ‘have you considered leaving for any reason’ with an options for reasons, including mental health. The question was not asked in PDES 2021.

*‘Although I understand the need for high quality research practice, sometimes I feel this comes at the expense of mental health. Several students I am aware of have had to reach breaking point before the need to support their mental health is recognised.’*

**Department of Psychology PDES 2021 respondent**

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| The support for my health and wellbeing meets my needs (for example, personal tutor, student support and counselling services) – *definitely or mostly agree* | | |
|  | PDES 2021 | PRES 2021 |
| Department of Computer Science\* | 75% | 57% |
| Department of Education | 36% | 60% |
| Department for Health | 50% | 67% |
| Department of Psychology | 59% | 73% |
| Department of Social & Policy Sciences | 33% | 88% |
| School of Management | 47% | 78% |
| Institutional average | 49% (6 departments) | 63% (17 departments) |

*\** Department of Computer Science response was only 8 for this question

*I personally do not feel that many attempts have been made to check in around my mental wellbeing (particularly during the pandemic) on an individual level. We have had group spaces to talk about this, but it is generally quite difficult to share challenging experiences when other people are saying that everything is fine.*

**Department of Psychology PDES 2021 respondent**

1. **Research culture**

The largely remote and practice-based mode of study for professional doctorates makes research culture presents greater challenges to research culture than PhD study. In addition, much of the research culture provision tends to be PhD-orientated, and the cancellation of this year’s summer schools has removed the main means for prof docs to interact with peers. Unsurprisingly, respondents agreeing that they have ‘frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other students’ fell by 11%.

Yet the proportion who found that their department’s research ambience helped their work rose in every department since PDES 2019, with even the lowest scoring, the departments of **Education and Computer Science,** recording notable rises.

All departments also showed increases in those agreeing that there were opportunities to engage with the wider research community (outside the department/faculty/University), some substantial.

Importantly however, despite improved scores, the research culture average and average responses to all research culture questions were on or below 50%. The improvement should not mask the lack of satisfaction.

*‘The department needs to organise frequent research webinars to cater for distance students.’*

**Department of Education PDES respondent**

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| **Research culture average** | | | |
|  | **PDES 2021** | **PDES 2019** | **PRES 2021** |
| Frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other students | 39% | 50% | 55% |
| Research ambience in dept/ faculty | 50% | 37% | 51% |
| Opportunities to become involved in the wider research community | 46% | 29% | 55% |
| Research culture average | 45% | 39% | 54% |

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| I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my  Department/Faculty/School/University - *definitely or mostly agree (PRES: ‘am aware of opportunities’)* | | | |
|  | **PDES 2021** | **PDES 2019** | **PRES 2021** |
| Department of Computer Science\* | 63% | 40% | 52% |
| Department of Education | 31% | 22% | 67% |
| Department for Health | 55% | 38% | 56% |
| Department of Psychology | 45% | 39% | 54% |
| Department of Social & Policy Sciences | 78% | 22% | 38% |
| School of Management | 60% | 22% | 48% |
| Institutional average | 46% (6 depts) | 29% (6 depts) | 55% (17 depts) |

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| The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work *– definitely or mostly agree (PRES: the research community in my research area influences my work)* | | | |
|  | **PDES 2021** | **PDES 2019** | **PRES 2021** *(research community)* |
| Department of Computer Science\* | 38% | 20% | 71% |
| Department of Education | 38% | 33% | 50% |
| Department for Health | 60% | 38% | 72% |
| Department of Psychology | 45% | 35% | 58% |
| Department of Social & Policy Sciences | 56% | 33% | 50% |
| School of Management | 67% | 47% | 55% |
| Institutional average | 50% (6 depts) | 37% (6 depts) | 51% (17 depts) |

\* Only 8 respondents for Department of Computer Science.

## **Progression**

With professional doctorates often including taught and research phases as well as practice-based elements, progression can be more complex and different stages more distinct than for other doctoral study. The proportion of PDES respondents who agreed that final assessment procedures, including viva, are clear (60%) has consistently declined since PDES 2018 and is significantly lower than for PRES 2021 respondents (75%). The proportion agreeing was particularly low in the departments of Computer Science and Education, but it should be noted that in The Department of Computer Science response may be too low to be statistically significant (N=8 for question response).

*‘Clearer information on the expectation of a professional doctorate, in comparison to traditional PhD student. For example, the difference in terms of thesis’*

**Department of Social & Policy Sciences PDES 2021 respondent**

A number of respondents in Health, Education and Social & Policy Sciences highlighted in open comments the delays and lack of transparency with candidature, the transition from taught to research stage. The lack of communication on the different requirements and characteristics of professional doctorates compared to PhD study was also identified as an issue.

*‘the supervisors are driving a PhD process and not a professional doctorate - the guidelines for the differences need to be clearer for both supervisors and candidates’*

**School of Management PDES 2021 respondent**

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| The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me *–* *definitely or mostly agree* | | |
|  | **PDES 2021** | **PRES 2021** |
| Department of Computer Science\* | 38% | 76% |
| Department of Education | 46% | 57% |
| Department for Health | 70% | 61% |
| Department of Psychology | 59% | 73% |
| Department of Social & Policy Sciences | 78% | 75% |
| School of Management | 73% | 81% |
| Institutional average | 60% (6 departments) | 75% (17 departments) |

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| (for those with separate taught and research phases) I found the transition from the taught phase to the research phase of the programme to be*–* *definitely or mostly agree* (not applicable to PRES) | |
|  | PDES 2021 |
| Department of Computer Science\* | 50% |
| Department of Education | 24% |
| Department for Health | 56% |
| Department of Psychology | 16% |
| Department of Social & Policy Sciences | 56% |
| School of Management | 33% |
| Institutional average | 34% |

\* Only 8 respondents for Department of Computer Science.