

IMPERIAL

**Postgraduate Research
Experience Survey
(PRES) 2023**

Institutional-level Action Plan

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PRES 2023

Introduction

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is conducted biennially by AdvanceHE and allows Imperial to analyse and benchmark the experience of doctoral students.

For the purposes of this report, the Russell Group has been used as the primary benchmarking group for comparative analysis.

The PRES questions are grouped into 10 core themes and focus on students' experiences of:

- Supervision
- Resources
- Research culture
- Community
- Progression
- Responsibilities
- Support
- Research skills
- Professional development
- Overall satisfaction

PRES 2023

Headline findings

The overall response rate for Imperial is 41.7%. This is higher than the sector (30.2%) and the Russell Group (28.6%).

Imperial has **strong overall satisfaction, with 82% of respondents answering positively.**

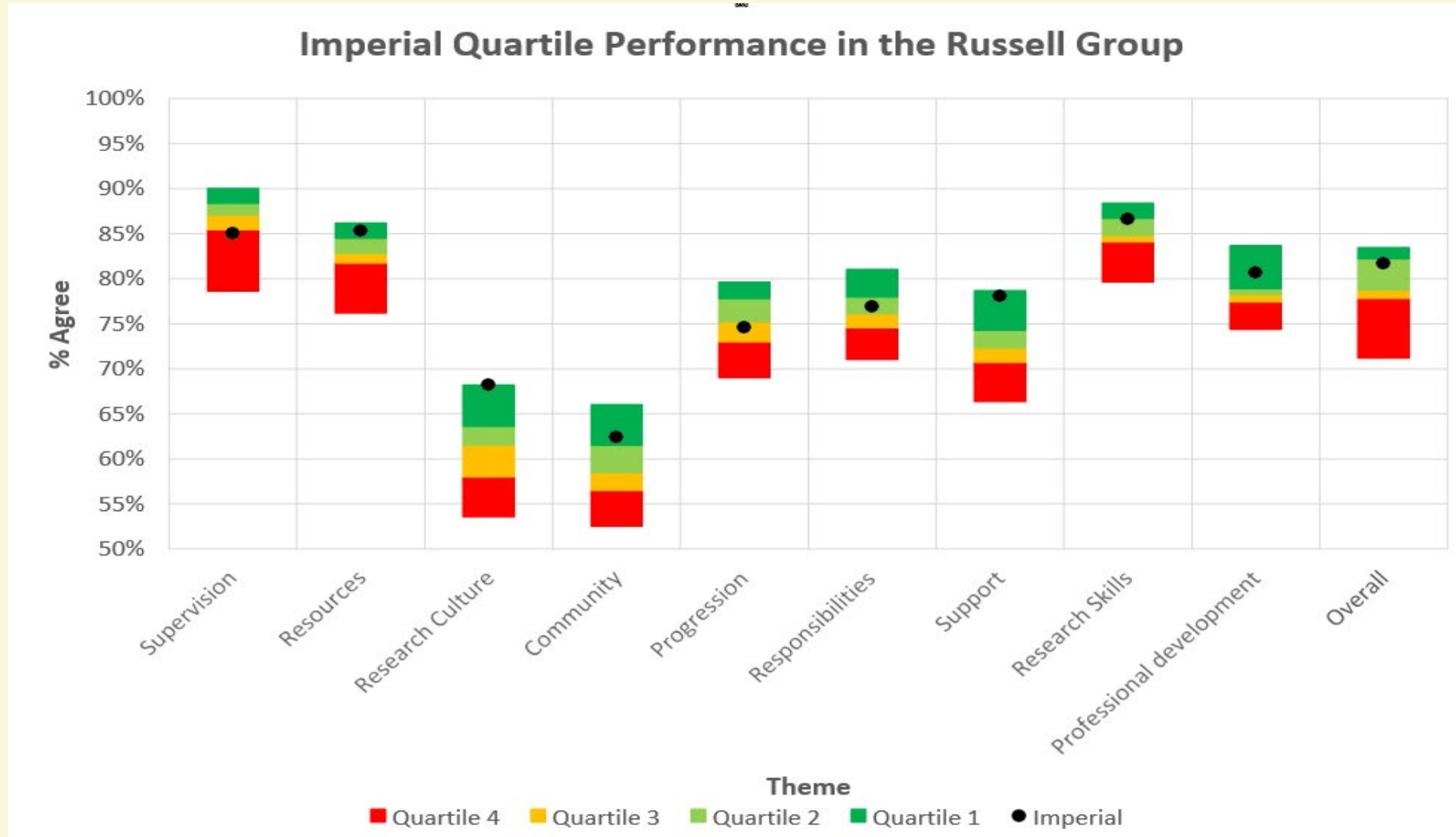
Imperial ranked in the **top quartile** for the core themes: resources, culture, community, support and professional development.

Imperial's strongest performance is in the **'Research Skills'** question category, with 87% of respondents satisfied. This is closely followed by 'Supervision' and 'Resources', both attaining a score of 85%. However, it should be noted that while the score for 'Supervision' is high, it still falls within the lowest quartile of the Russell Group institutions.

Imperial's results are higher or equal to the average scores for the Sector, the Russell Group, and London institutions across all question categories, **except for 'Supervision' and 'Progression'**, where the Imperial's scores fall below the averages for all three of these benchmark groups.

PRES 2023

Headline findings



PRES 2023

How the Action Plan was developed and approved

Following release of the PRES results to Imperial in early Autumn 2023, the Graduate School established a **Task and Finish Group** to review the data and develop a College-level Action Plan.

The primary purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to review the findings of the survey from a College perspective and to build on the College-level actions already in place following the PRES 2019 and PRES 2021 surveys.

Members of the Task and Finish Group included representatives from the Graduate School, Student Union, representation from each of the Faculties, a recipient of a President's Award for Excellence in Research Supervision, Student Services, the Registry, and a Faculty Senior Tutor.

PRES 2023

How the Action Plan was developed and approved



The Action Plan was approved at the February 2024 meeting of the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC) and received by the May 2024 meeting of the Education and Student Experience Committee.

Separately to this institutional-level Action Plan, academic Departments will be developing their own individual Action Plans.

PRES 2023

Actions – Improving your welcome and induction experience

Welcome and induction events

- To support those of you who missed the October Imperial welcome event, and those who started your research programme after October welcome, the Graduate School piloted two new spring (March 2024) doctoral student welcome events, one at South Kensington and one at White City.
- The events were successful, and the Graduate School will continue to deliver spring welcome events, moving forward.

PGR handbooks

- To improve the information provided to you during induction and through to the later stages of your research programme, the Graduate School will work with colleagues across Imperial to review existing PGR handbooks and replace these with new “stage essentials” to take effect in October 2025.

PRES 2023

Actions – Improving your welcome and induction experience

Departmental induction

To improve the information provided to you by your department about central support services and the requirements for your thesis, the Graduate School will work with Student Service to review, improve and standardise this information, to take effect for October 2025.



PRES 2023

Actions – Improving support for under-represented groups

Disabled students

- To improve awareness that departmental disability officers (DDOs) are there to support disabled doctoral students, the Graduate School will work with the Disability Advisory Service and DDOs to promote the service to students and supervisors. We will do this by October 2024.
- The Graduate School will also work with the Disability Advisory Service to review the roles and responsibilities of DDOs to ensure that supporting doctoral students is clearly set out within the scope of the role. We will do this by October 2024.
- The Imperial @able network is there to support disabled staff and students. In response to the PRES 2023, the Graduate School has included the @able network on our [Student Support Network](#) webpages. We will also reference @able within our Supervisor Cornerstone website. We will do this by June 2024.

PRES 2023

Actions – Improving support for under-represented groups

Women PhD students

- To improve the experience of women PhD students, the Graduate School has worked with the Associate Provost EDI, to establish the Women PhD Student Experience Project.
- We have delivered a workshop with women PhD students to explore, more deeply, the challenges and barriers faced by women PhD students and ideas for how Imperial can improve their experience. We have also delivered a College-wide survey to all women PhD students to corroborate the findings of the workshop and to gather further information.
- The findings of the project will be made available in June 2024.



Amending the Postgraduate Community Fund

- To ensure that the Graduate School's Postgraduate Community Fund is inclusive and accessible to under-represented groups, we have revised the criteria for the fund, which is now live on [our website](#).

Connecting with industry/companies with a good record of supporting under-represented groups

- In response to your feedback, the Graduate School will explore, develop and design new opportunities to connect doctoral students with industry and companies which have a good track record of supporting under-represented groups. We will do this by June 2025.

PRES 2023

Actions – Improving the quality of supervision

We recognise that the quality of your supervisory experience is paramount.

In response to your previous PRES feedback on supervision, the Graduate School implemented the Cornerstone Programme. Cornerstone is a dedicated CPD programme for research supervisors, which includes mandatory as well as optional training. You can read more about Cornerstone at this [website](#).

In response to the PRES 2023, we are taking the following actions to improve supervision:

- In April 2024, the Graduate School and Student Union worked together to organise a student focus group on supervisory experience and ideas for what could improve the quality of supervision at Imperial.
- In May 2024, the Graduate School consulted with departments on challenges and barriers for tackling poor supervision.
- In June 2024, the Graduate School will produce a report which brings together the findings of these activities, together with recommendations for improving supervision across Imperial.

PRES 2023

Actions – Progression and assessment

Requirements for the Thesis

- To improve clarity about what is expected for the thesis, from October 2024, all Departments will be asked to provide early-stage students with a copy of the thesis examiners' form.
- The examiners' form will also be included in the new central induction resources and the new “stage essentials” (see slide 8), to take effect from October 2025.

Supervisor feedback

- To increase the opportunity for supervisors to provide you with formal feedback on your academic as well as professional development, the Graduate School has worked with the Registry to require that supervisors must add their feedback to the MyImperial PGR Milestones workflow.

PRES 2023

Actions – Wellbeing

Pressure to publish

To address your concerns about feeling pressure to publish whilst balancing the work you need to do for your PhD, the mutual expectations document will be revised so that supervisors and students have early and regular discussions with respect to publishing.

The mutual expectations document will also signpost you to relevant training about publishing. These actions will be completed by June 2024.

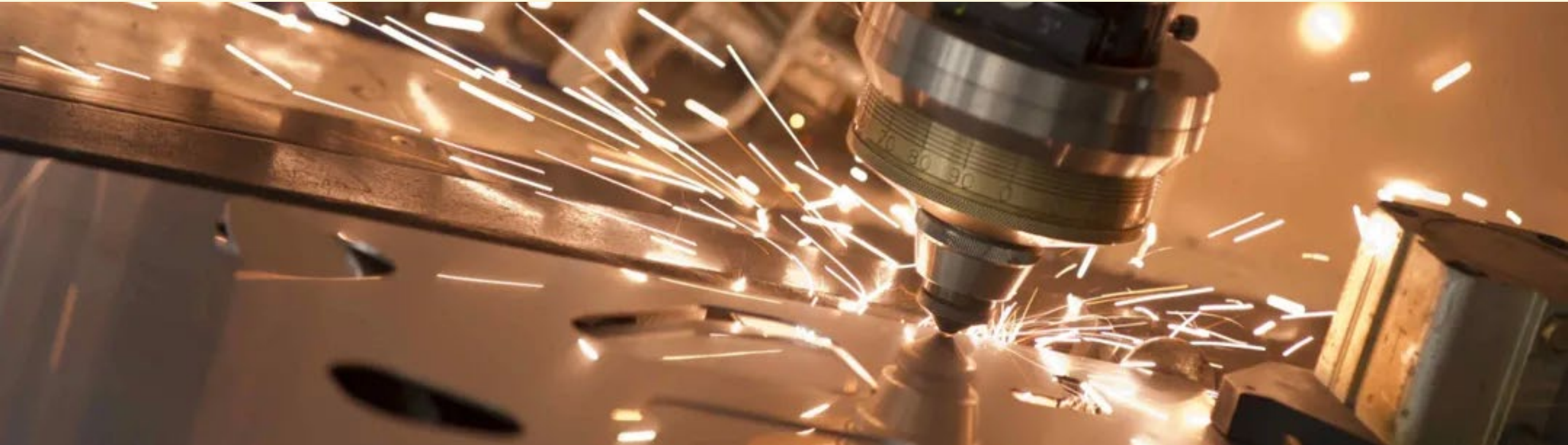


PRES 2023

Actions – Sharing best practice

The Department of Mechanical Engineering

- The Department of Mechanical Engineering achieved excellent results for the PRES 2023. To ensure that their best practice is shared with other Departments, in July 2024, the Graduate School will host a meeting of all Directors of Postgraduate Studies, where best practice highlighted within PRES 2023 can be discussed and shared.



PRES 2023

Actions – What happens next?

Thank you for completing the PRES 2023 and providing us with vital feedback on how we can enhance your experience at Imperial.

Please share this action plan with other students in your Department. The Graduate School is more than happy to attend staff-student meetings to discuss the Action Plan further – please contact Laura Lane, Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School (l.lane@imperial.ac.uk).

Finally, please note that the PRES will next run in Spring 2025. We value your feedback and hope you will find time to complete the survey, when it is circulated to you.

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