

**PGR
Student
Survey.ie**

PGR StudentSurvey.ie 2025 National Report

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Acknowledgements

StudentSurvey.ie is co-sponsored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Universities Association (TUA), and Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ), formerly the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).

The StudentSurvey.ie co-sponsors wish to thank the 4,225 postgraduate research (PGR) students who gave their valuable time and insights by their participation in the 2025 PGR StudentSurvey.ie, and whose views form the results in this report.

The co-sponsors are also grateful to the StudentSurvey.ie steering committee, as well as the StudentSurvey.ie Communications Group and the StudentSurvey.ie Analysis and Impact Group. This report reflects the collaborative input and review of these and other stakeholders.

The StudentSurvey.ie co-sponsors also acknowledge the lead staff and student representatives in each of the participating higher education institutions who champion the survey in their institution.

Finally, the co-sponsors are grateful for the effort and support of all staff, faculty, and senior management in the participating institutions, whose support continues to be instrumental to the success of PGR StudentSurvey.ie and its positive impact on the higher education and research and innovation landscape in Ireland.

Co-Sponsors Foreword

StudentSurvey.ie is co-sponsored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Universities Association (TUA), and Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ), formerly the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).

Development and implementation of PGR StudentSurvey.ie is driven by the intention to inform, support, and encourage enhancement discussions and activities throughout higher education institutions, and to inform national policy.

Higher education institutions have multiple sources of data about their students. The StudentSurvey.ie dataset is a valuable component of these sources, which are used in varying and increasingly sophisticated ways to identify good practice and to inform actions to improve the student experience and promote student success.

PGR StudentSurvey.ie (Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research Students; *Suirbhé na hÉireann ar Rannpháirtíocht na Mac Léinn do Mhic Léinn Taighde larchéime*) invites responses from postgraduate research students (research masters and doctoral students) on a biennial survey cycle. PGR StudentSurvey.ie asks students directly about their experiences of higher education in Ireland, including their academic, personal, and social development. In 2025, 4,225 students from 17 higher education institutions (HEIs) participated – a response rate of 37%, well above the survey's figure of 2,721 responses recorded in 2019 fieldwork.

The survey is comprehensive and explores many aspects of the student experience of higher education. The greatest benefit is achieved when both students and staff interpreting the data have a deep understanding of the local context. Trends evident at national level may appear at local level, and local data may reveal insights of greater significance. Therefore, determining how best to use the data is an important institutional decision as well as a consideration for national policy.

As co-sponsors we aim to ensure that the results are used to enhance the student experience in every higher education institution. It is essential that students who complete the survey recognise that their feedback is heard, valued, and results in meaningful change. We encourage all readers of this report to engage with the findings, reflect on what students are saying, and respond through action.

Executive Summary

The PGR StudentSurvey.ie is designed to provide insight into the experiences of postgraduate research students, and the 2025 results highlight many positive developments.

Students have favourable views on the level and quality of supervision they receive, have a strong understanding of what is required of them, and feel they are developing strong research and other transferable skills. Overall, they rate their higher education research experience as positive.

Viewed longitudinally, there is a continued pattern of steady improvement across several key areas of the postgraduate research experience:

- The number of students with more than one supervisor has increased.
- Personalised development plans are being implemented more widely.
- Career advice is more readily available to students.
- Social isolation continues to decline, especially compared to the COVID-19 pandemic era.
- Opportunities to spend time abroad have seen an increase in recent years.

We continue to see a welcome rise in students reporting working collaboratively with a civil society organisation or public organisation. Collaboration now stands at 26% (higher than previous surveys). This shows the continued strengthening of co-operation and growth in collaborative networks between civil society and academia, which should help pave the way for future expansion in these numbers.

Positive trends still leave scope for further improvement. Our respondents have highlighted several areas in need of continued work by all stakeholders to improve the postgraduate research experience. There is increasing dissatisfaction with research facilities, and teaching and demonstration experience is neither universal nor seen as enhancing students' research experience.

Certain types of students would benefit from greater focus in the coming years. As detailed in this report, Part-time and Distance students¹ and Level 9 (Masters Research students) in particular, do not always report the levels of satisfaction one might expect when compared to their Full-time and Level 10 peers.

There are notable differences in the forms of development opportunities available. The opportunities most availed of were in areas such as training to develop research skills, attending an academic research conference, and presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference. Similarly, training to develop other transferable skills is up 5% from 2019. The opportunities least stated as taken up by students were in the areas of entrepreneurship, innovation, and industry – i.e. receiving training in entrepreneurship and innovation, taking part in a placement or internship, or working collaboratively with industry.

¹ Typically, online/e-learning.

When considering their future plans, students give highest priority to an academic career in higher education, followed by another career in higher education, or a research career in higher education. Only a small proportion of students identify a research career outside of higher education as a priority, and there is a need identified here to ensure stronger linkages between research and industry, so that research opportunities in the knowledge economy are both visible and attractive.

Concerningly, nearly one in three students (31%) have contemplated withdrawal – with financial reasons and personal/family reasons being the most cited. Field of Study may also play a role, with variations in respondents seriously considering withdrawal ranging from 17% in Generic Programmes and Qualifications to 42% in Services. Also, as age increases, there is a tendency towards increased withdrawal sentiment.

In terms of measuring the impact of this fifth iteration of PGR StudentSurvey.ie, it is again a concern that fewer than half of students agreed that their institution values and responds to feedback from students pursuing research degrees. There are some positives: the perception that feedback is valued increases slightly with age and has risen modestly since 2019 (up 3%). Nevertheless, overall, this suggests that local actions and implementations arising from PGR StudentSurvey.ie data are yet to be widely visible and understood on campus by research students.

Overall, there is much of which the Irish higher education system can be proud. And it is important to note that three in four students rated their research experience as either excellent or good (with learners being more likely to rate it as excellent as they age). A significant challenge now arising is how to embed the positive trends we are seeing, and to leverage what we know works and enhances the higher education experience, so that all students may benefit.

Readers should bear in mind that this report is complemented by a comprehensive interactive online dashboard, available at www.studentsurvey.ie. This report and the dashboard should be viewed in tandem, to maximise the reader's understanding of the results.

Introduction

The PGR StudentSurvey.ie is designed to deepen understanding of the postgraduate research student experience, focusing on areas such as supervision, research culture, resources, and professional development. The data reflects students' self-reported perceptions of their experiences.

The survey for postgraduate research students (Masters Research and Doctorate) opens every second year during February – March for a three-week fieldwork period that is specific to each institution. This reporting focuses on the results of 2025 fieldwork.

The questions have been designed to match the experiences of research students and have been pre-tested with groups of research students in several institutions. PGR StudentSurvey.ie uses the Advance-HE PRES² survey as its basis.

Why do we run these surveys?

The main reason for the surveys is to benefit each institution and its postgraduate research students by helping to improve feedback and by informing appropriate follow up action. The objectives of PGR StudentSurvey.ie are:

- To increase transparency in relation to the student experience of and engagement with higher education.
- To enable direct student input in expressing their experience and engagement with their higher education institution.
- To help institutions identify areas of strength in how students engage, so they can continue and strengthen these practices.
- To help institutions identify areas requiring further development or improvement in how students engage so that they can respond.
- To serve as a guide for continual enhancement of institutions' teaching and learning and student engagement.
- To facilitate comparison with other higher education systems nationally, sectorally, and internationally.

How are the surveys managed?

The StudentSurvey.ie initiative is managed as a collaborative partnership. It is co-sponsored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), institutions' representative bodies the Irish Universities Association (IUA), and the Technological Universities Association (TUA) and Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ).

The partnership approach in place is an important feature of the project. Working groups consisting of institutions' and students' representatives manage the national project. A project team supports the working groups and reports to the co-sponsoring organisations. An external third-party company provides the online survey system to the national partnership.

The National Research Policy Context

The Postgraduate Research Student Survey (PGR StudentSurvey.ie) provides valuable insight into the experiences of postgraduate research students and their learning journey. The policy context for postgraduate research education provided here sets that journey against some of the larger policies and drivers that have shaped the provision of post graduate research in Ireland.

Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy 2022–2030 recognises the role of talent lying, 'at the heart of the research and innovation system and our future prosperity as a people'.³ A key aim of the strategy is to maximise impact under five pillars including maximising talent across all career stages under Pillar Four. The strategy notes the importance of attracting and retaining research talent and ensuring all students are supported to acquire the skills necessary to respond to developments in research and innovation. Pillar Five of Impact 2030 sets out aims for research and innovation through all-island, EU, and global connectivity.

The *National Framework for Doctoral Education*, which was revised in 2023, underpins excellence in all forms of doctoral education in Ireland by providing a set of nine principles incorporating principles of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and mental health and wellbeing. The Framework notes that the core and essential importance of doctoral education remains the advancement of knowledge through original research – a fundamental societal value in itself, based on enquiry, the fostering of innovative thinking and the development of advanced critical skills.

For postgraduate research students to create new knowledge and acquire new skills, there is a requirement for an excellent research environment and culture to support the development of their research and learning profiles. Delivery of structured PhDs in HEIs provides a path through the postgraduate research student experience that allows students to tailor their learning to suit their specific skill requirement and journey. It also assists in preparing them to meet the research and innovation needs of the broader system, industry and enterprise post-graduation.

The research environment and culture in HEIs in Ireland is underpinned by *The Principles of Good Research Practice in Irish Higher Education Institutions*, which are informed by international best practice and acknowledges the global context in which research happens. Collaboration and researcher mobility are key features of that global context and are increasingly pertinent to postgraduate research students as international students move to Ireland to take up positions as postgraduate research students and international collaboration grows.

In 2024 the National Research Integrity Forum (NRIF) updated the *Policy Statement on Research Integrity in Ireland*, which aims to commit the main organisations in Irish research to the highest standards of integrity in carrying out and disseminating their research.

³ *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy 2022–2030*, 3.

Changes in the higher education landscape over the last decade have seen a growth in the research remit of the technological universities established under the Technological Universities Act 2018. Funding provided to higher education institutions in the technological sector in 2023 through the TU Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise (TU RISE) programme is boosting central research functions supporting the institutions' respective research and learning environment. It is also increasing postgraduate research student numbers in the technological sector and engagement with industry and enterprise in the institutions' regions.

The impact of initiatives to develop research and researchers in Ireland is being translated into success on the global stage. In 2025, Ireland noted a record drawdown of research funding from Horizon Europe to the value of €1 billion. The *European Innovation Scoreboard 2025* also scored Ireland as a 'strong innovator' whose framework conditions for innovation are "driven by strong educational attainment, international research collaboration, and digital capabilities."⁴

Key metrics informing this score include the percentage of new doctorate graduates qualifying from the Irish higher education and research system which is at 139.2% of the EU average in 2025, the percentage of the population with tertiary education standing at 205.1% of the EU average and the percentage involved in lifelong learning at 109.2% of the EU average. Maintaining and building on Ireland's overall score as a 'strong innovator' requires continued strength in the area of postgraduate research education.

Not all postgraduate research students are in receipt of government funded stipends/scholarships. Many rely on NGO or industry funding, or internal HEI funding sources, while others are self-funded. Steps taken towards further supporting postgraduate research students in recent years include an increase in stipend levels. Postgraduate research students in receipt of funding provided by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) through Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and the Irish Research Council (IRC) saw their stipends increase to €22,000 in 2023. Several other funding agencies including the Health Research Board also increased their stipend rates at that time. Since then, the IRC and SFI merged under the Research and Innovation Act 2024 to form a new funding agency, Research Ireland, which now funds across all disciplines and all career stages. Stipend rates paid by Research Ireland increased to €25,000 in 2025.

Advancements in HEIs in the area of mental health and wellbeing are supported by the *Healthy Campus Framework* launched in 2023 which offers guidelines to third-level institutions to build on existing wellbeing actions and assists with the integration of health and wellbeing across the whole campus including teaching and learning, student supports and services, staff development and policies.

Funding to the value of €47.4 million introduced in September 2020 provided support for researchers and postgraduate research students whose research activities were at risk of not being completed due to restrictions put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. By 31 December 2024, a total of 2889 COVID-19 costed extensions had been awarded to research students to ensure they could complete research impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, the pipeline of talent experienced minimum interruption and exchequer investments in research were protected.

4 *European Innovation Scoreboard 2025: Country profile Ireland*, 6.

The review of the *National Development Plan* published in 2025 commits to capital investment over the period 2026-2030 including a commitment to “additional investment being made in the higher education sector in relation to research, most substantially in relation to research infrastructure”.⁵ Any future investment in this area will enhance the environment in which researchers including postgraduate research students carry out their research and further support excellence and collaboration in their learning environments.

Finally, the European Research Area (ERA) has identified policy priorities and underpinning actions that drive excellence in research across the ERA and are informing how member states and associated countries, HEIs, research and research students carry out research and collaborate.

The most recent ERA agenda 2025–2027 focuses on policy areas such as:

- Open science, gender equality, and career sustainability in R&I.
- Strengthening research infrastructures and international collaboration.
- Reforming research assessments and boosting knowledge valorisation.

Collaboration is an important aspect of the ERA policy priorities; the work being carried out in Ireland in these areas at the larger policy level will continue to complement research across the higher education and research system and will inform the delivery of postgraduate research education.

⁵ *National Development Plan Review 2025*, 29.

Participation in the 2025 Survey

All postgraduate research students in participating Higher Education Institutions were invited to take part in the 2025 national survey. The participating institutions were:

Higher Education Institutions

- Atlantic Technological University
- Dublin City University
- Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
- Maynooth University
- Munster Technological University
- National College of Art and Design
- RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences
- South East Technological University
- Technological University of Dublin
- Technological University of the Shannon
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- University of Galway
- University of Limerick

An overview of the response data and cohort

In 2025, 4,225 students responded to the survey, a response rate of 37%. This response was slightly lower than the 2023 response of 4,350 (response rate 38.1%) but well above the 2021 figure of 3,541 (response rate 34%) and 2019 figure of 2,721 (response rate 29.9%). Some notable characteristics were as follows:

- The vast majority of respondents (91%) were studying a Level 10 Doctoral Degree, and 9% a Level 9 Masters Research degree. A total of 88% were studying Full-time, and 12% Part-time and Distance.
- As in previous years, and even allowing for overall population numbers, Females were most likely to participate in the survey. 2,450 of the respondents (58%) identified as Female, 1,474 Male (41%), and 28 Gender non-binary & prefer not to say (<.01%).⁶
- In terms of age, 45% of 2025 respondents were less than 30 years old, 33% were between 30 and 40 years of age, and the remaining 22% were over 40 years old.
- By type of institution, 77% of respondents were based in universities, with 19% in technological higher education institutions and 4% in other higher education institutions such as specialist colleges.
- Some 45% of respondents were internationally domiciled, while the majority (55%) were Irish domiciled.
- A total of 69% of the responses came from four fields of study: Natural sciences, Mathematics and Statistics (25%), Health and welfare (15%), Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (16%) and Arts and Humanities (13%). This is broadly in line with previous surveys in 2019, 2021 and 2023. A smaller number of respondents came from fields such as Information and Communication Technologies (5%), Education (5%), and Services (1%).

We thank these 4,225 students who gave their valuable time and insights in their participation.

⁶ The small number in this group (up from 2 in 2021, and 15 in 2023) represents <.01% of the sample size and indicates caution is advised in its interpretation.

Response Rates 2021, 2023 and 2025

Characteristic	2025	2023	2021
	37%	38%	34%
PGR cohort size			
PGR cohort of greater than 250 (i.e., >250)	36%	38%	31%
PGR cohort of fewer than 250 (i.e., <250)	76%	43%	63%
Study mode			
Full-time	39%	41%	36%
Part-time	25%	24%	24%
Programme type			
NFQ Level 9 (i.e., Masters by research)	30%	31%	38%
NFQ Level 10 (i.e., Doctoral degree)	37%	39%	33%
Field of study			
Generic programmes and qualifications	40%	55%	33%
Education	31%	29%	32%
Arts and humanities	38%	38%	33%
Social sciences, journalism, and information	38%	39%	33%
Business, administration, and law	38%	39%	37%
Natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics	41%	42%	37%
Information and Communication Technologies	30%	41%	32%
Engineering, manufacturing, and construction	38%	37%	35%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and veterinary	28%	39%	28%
Health and welfare	33%	35%	29%
Services	26%	26%	38%
Gender			
Female	39%	41%	33%
Male	34%	34%	42%
Gender non-binary & Prefer not to say	42%	50%	0%
Country of domicile group			
Irish domiciled	34%	34%	33%
Internationally domiciled	41%	44%	35%

Key Findings

The following were key findings from the survey:



Overall experience



75%

Overall, **75%** of respondents are happy with their research experience and roughly the same are confident of finishing their programme within the expected timescale.



Supervision

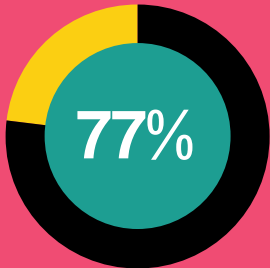
A total of **37%** of respondents reported being supervised by one supervisor, **45%** by two, and **18%** by three or more. The number of respondents having three or more supervisors continues to rise from a figure of **10%** in 2019.

Some **85%** of all respondents thought their supervisor/s provided an appropriate level of support for their research and **88%** of respondents agreed that they had regular contact with their supervisor/s appropriate to their needs.

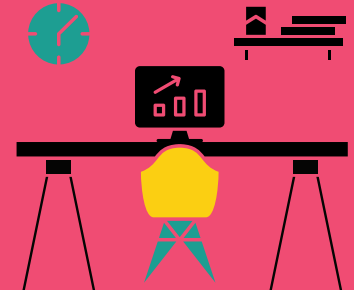
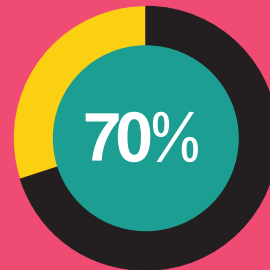




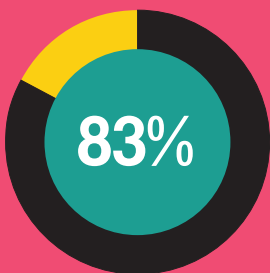
Research Infrastructure and Facilities



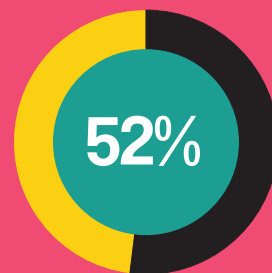
In 2025, **77%** of respondents believed there was adequate library facilities provision.



A total of **70%** of respondents felt they had a suitable working space, with 18% indicating dissatisfaction with their working space (with age an important consideration):



★★★★★
24 - 25
Year olds

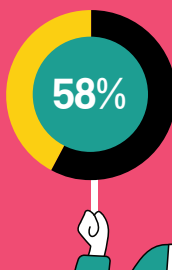


★★
40+
Year olds

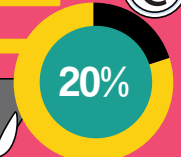
83% of 24–25-year-olds were satisfied in contrast to **52%** of those aged 40 and over). Some **63%** of respondents agreed that they had adequate provision of computing resources/facilities (again age is a factor – agreement falls to **50%** for 40 years and older). Overall satisfaction with facilities and infrastructure has declined between 2019 and 2025.



Funding

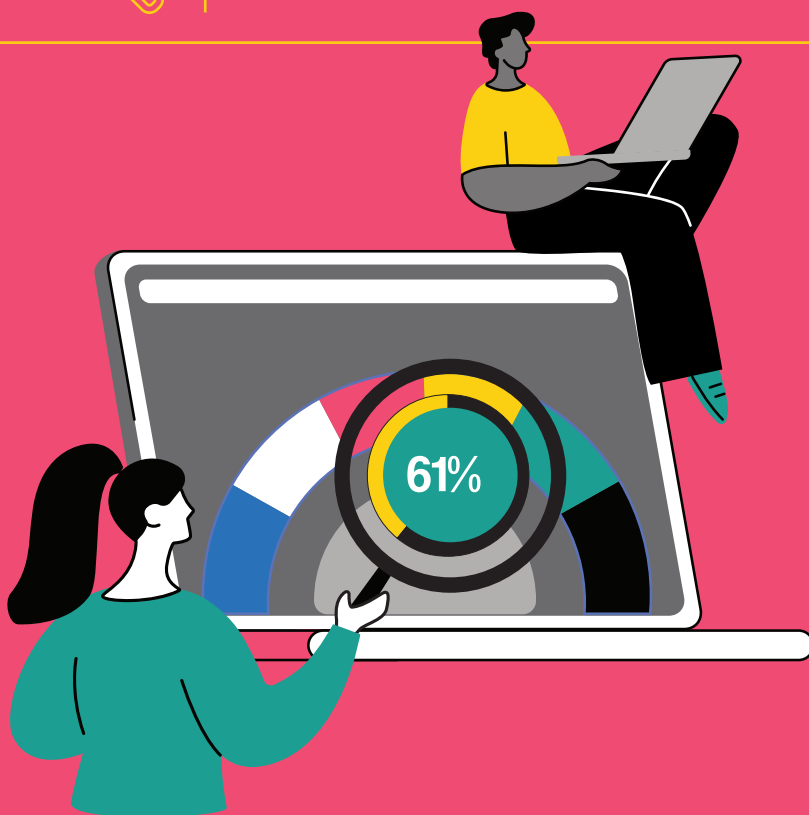


A total of **58%** of respondents were funded by a scholarship (**35%** for those aged 40 and over), and **20%** were funded by a grant. Some **5%** of respondents were funded by a scholarship covering fees only, and **7%** were employer-funded (**16%** for those aged 40 and over). A total of **17%** of respondents were self-funded (but **36%** for those aged 40 and over).





Research culture



There wasn't a strong level of agreement with statements on research culture: 61% of respondents agreed that the research ambience in their department stimulates their work (declining from 71% to 52% from the youngest to oldest cohorts) and 55% agreed that they have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community.



Progress and assessment

There are strong contrasts between Level 9 and Level 10 respondents in their view of Progress and Assessment in their institution. However overall, respondents show positive agreement with:

statements on requirements and deadlines

80%

standards

76%

assessment procedures

72%

induction/orientation being an area where a more mixed opinion is given, with

21%

feeling their needs had not been adequately met.



Development opportunities

82%

Full Time learners



Development opportunities most availed of included training to develop research skills (**80%**), although **81%** for Level 10 students drops to only **66%** for Level 9. Similarly, we see **80%** attending an academic research conference but again a figure of **82%** for Full Time learners, drops to **68%** for Part-time and Distance learners.

Other opportunities availed of included presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference (**73%**) with participation varying by mode of study (**75%** Full-time, **61%** Part-time and Distance learners). Many reported working as part of a team (**68%**). However, for working as part of a team, again there is variation by mode of study: **70%** Full-time, **50%** Part-time and Distance.

68%

Part-time and Distance learners

Those opportunities least taken up by respondents were in the areas of entrepreneurship, innovation and industry: receiving training in entrepreneurship and innovation (**20%**), putting training in entrepreneurship and innovation into practice (**12%**), taking part in a placement or internship (**21%**), and working collaboratively with industry (**26%**).



Teaching and demonstration

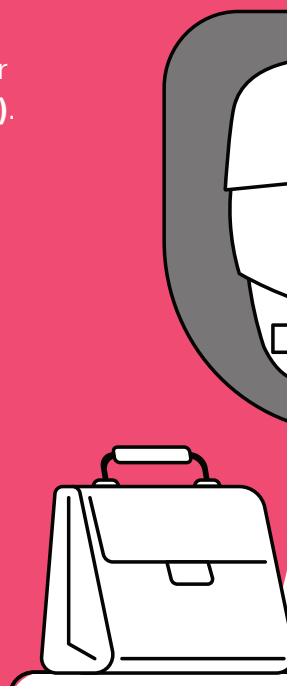
Overall, **68%** of respondents indicated they had taught or demonstrated but this is strongly influenced by mode of study: **71%** of Full-time learners responded positively versus **45%** of Part-time and Distance.



46%

of respondents reported that they have been given appropriate support and guidance for their teaching/ demonstration.

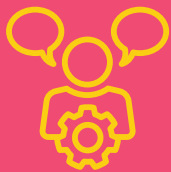
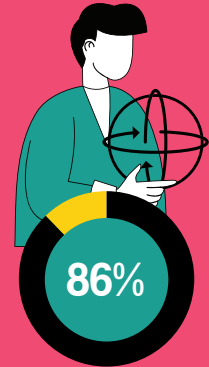
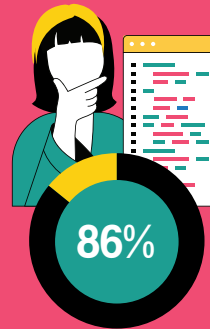
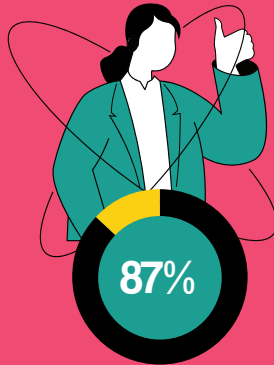
Of those who did teach or demonstrate, on average only **54%** found the experience enhancing; **56%** of Full-time learners found the experience enhancing, and even fewer Part-time and Distance learners (**40%**). Age differences are also evident: only **51%** of learners aged 40 years and over have demonstrated compared with **77%** of those aged 28–29 years. As such, Part-time and Distance learners and learners aged 40 years and over are in clear need of further experience/opportunities in this area.





Research skills and other transferable skills

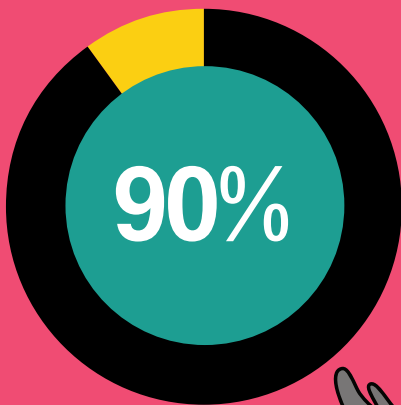
Respondents felt that they were being equipped with research and other transferable skills. A large majority agreed that skills in research methodologies, critical analysis, and understanding of research integrity have developed (87%, 86% and 88%).



Responsibilities and supports

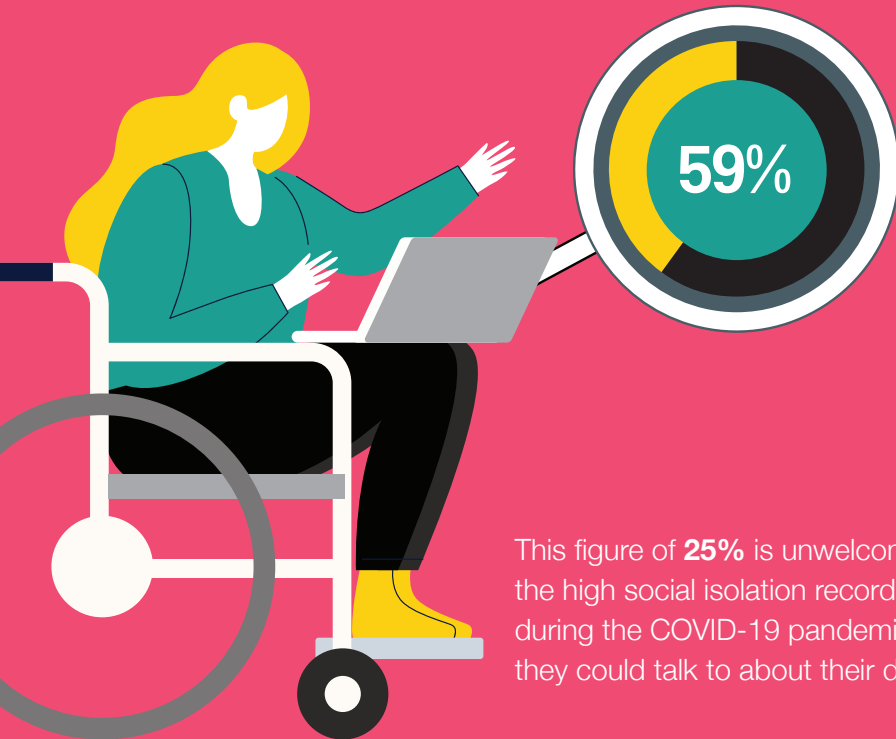
Overall, 90% of respondents understood their responsibilities as a research degree student.

Concerningly, and though showing a 3% rise from 2019, fewer than half (46%) of respondents felt that their institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students. This suggests that insights from feedback focus groups and surveys like PGR StudentSurvey.ie may not be consistently translated into action on the ground or communicated effectively to students.





Personal Outlook



Satisfaction with work-life balance stands at **59%**, which represents an improvement in this measure over the last three surveys. More training and development plans are also now in place.

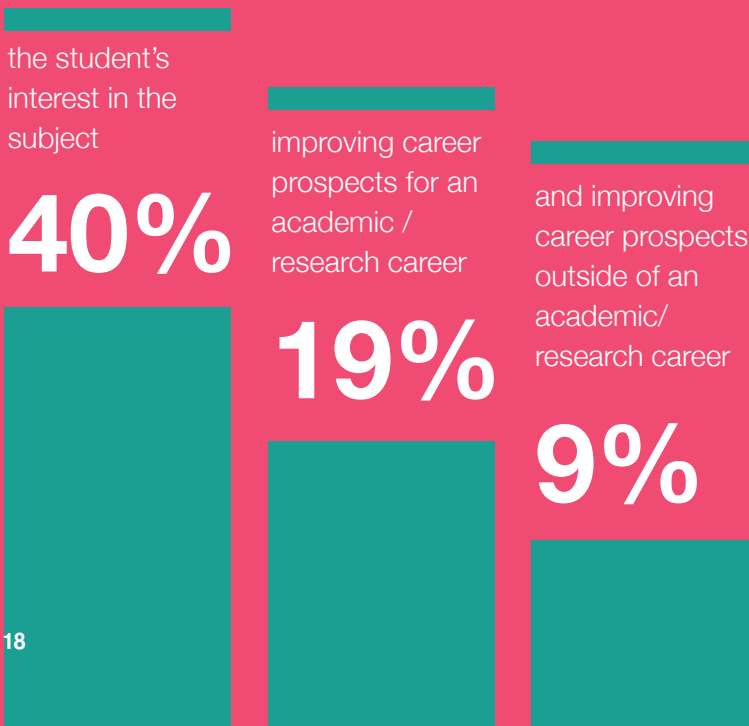
Some **25%** of respondents did not believe there was someone in their institution that they can talk to about their day-to-day problems suggesting a persistent level of social isolation on campus.

This figure of **25%** is unwelcome yet represents a continued drop from the high social isolation recorded during the pandemic in 2021. In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, **34%** did not feel there was someone they could talk to about their day-to-day problems.



Motivations

The three most selected motivations were:



We continue to see a welcome rise in students reporting working collaboratively with a civil society organisation or public organisation. Collaboration now stands at **26%** (higher than previous surveys). This shows the continued strengthening of co-operation and growth in collaborative networks between civil society and academia.



Career

The three highest priority careers given were within higher education:



an academic career in higher education

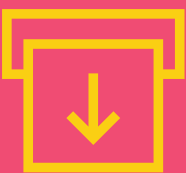


another career in higher education



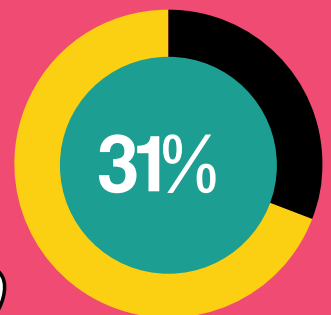
a research career in higher education coming third

A very small proportion of respondents identify a research career outside of higher education as a top priority, perhaps suggesting a low level of awareness of research careers available in industry.



Withdrawal

Overall, **31%** of respondents have seriously considered withdrawing from their research degree programme (an improvement of 6 percentage points from 2023). However, since 2019, learners in the Services field of study area have consistently reported above average rates of consideration of withdrawal and this is also found in 2025.



Responses in detail

The key findings above were based on the analysis that follows, which highlights the most salient responses found in the 2025 survey. The data is presented as descriptive statistics only and as such is not intended to suggest relationships between variables, much less to infer causality. Readers of this report should also access the PGR Data Hub, available at www.studentsurvey.ie. The PGR Data Hub includes a comprehensive interactive dashboard, and this report should be read in conjunction with the dashboard. Users can also select questions and cohorts of interest on this platform.

Analysis in the main relates to survey year 2025 but also at times includes comparison to earlier years from 2019–2023.

Survey questions and responses have been divided into fifteen sections (A-O), with some sections having up to fifteen sub-parts. The main sections are:

A Research Infrastructure and Facilities

B Funding

C Supervision

D Research Culture

E Progress and Assessment

F Development Opportunities

G Teaching and Demonstration

H Research Skills

I Other Transferable Skills

J Responsibilities and Supports

K Personal Outlook

L Motivations

M Career

N Overall Experience

O Withdrawal

The analysis also provides information across personal and course characteristics (eight items: gender, field of study, domicile group, age, NFQ level, institution type, mode of study). To facilitate clarity, and unless otherwise indicated, non-respondents to questions are excluded from this analysis.⁷

⁷ Guidance on accessing and analysing the data using customised filters is provided in the final section of this report.



Section A: Research Infrastructure and Facilities

In this section, respondents provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is 'not applicable'.

Overall agreement with statements on Research Infrastructure and Facilities sits between 63% and 77% (including those who 'mostly agree' or 'definitely agree'). Research Infrastructure and Facilities is a notable section in PGR StudentSurvey.ie as it sees a decline in respondents agreeing with each statement provided over the period 2019–2025.

"I have a suitable working space."

Some 70% of respondents felt they had a suitable working space, with 18% indicating dissatisfaction with their working space. On average, respondents over the age of 30 are more likely to disagree with the statement (83% of 24-25-year-olds expressed satisfaction in comparison to 52% for those aged 40 and over). Females (19%) are also more likely than Males (17%) to disagree with the statement. Respondents studying for a Level 9 (Masters Research) degree were also more dissatisfied (19%) than those studying for a Level 10 (Doctoral) degree (17%).

This statement has seen fluctuations in responses between 2019 and 2025, demonstrating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on how respondents engage with their physical space. In 2019, 46% 'definitely agreed' with the statement, falling to 32% in 2021 (mid-COVID-19 pandemic), and this compares with 41% in 2025.

"There is adequate provision of computing resources / facilities."

Overall, 63% of respondents agreed that they had adequate provision of computing resources/facilities. However, only 47% of Part-time and Distance respondents felt provision was adequate, perhaps suggesting that they are unable to access resources and facilities in the hours of their needs. Overall, 21% of respondents disagreed that there was adequate provision of computing resources/facilities, with dissatisfaction being higher in the Universities (22%) than in Technological HEIs (18%).

As with the availability of suitable working space, this statement has seen fluctuations in responses between 2019 and 2025. In 2019, 35% 'definitely agreed' with the statement, falling to 29% in 2021 (mid-COVID-19 pandemic), and compared with 32% in 2025.

"There is adequate provision of library facilities (including physical / online resources)."

Overall, 77% of respondents thought there was adequate library facilities provision (46% 'definitely agree', 31% 'mostly agree'), with only 13% showing disagreement. Arts and Humanities respondents were least likely to indicate 'definite' agreement with the statement (44%) but remain close to the average of 46% 'definite' agreement with the statement for all fields of study.

This statement has seen increases in 'definite' agreement over time. In 2019, 40% 'definitely agreed' with the statement, falling to 30% in 2021 (mid-COVID-19 pandemic), rising to 46% in 2023 and 2025. However, overall agreement with this statement has fallen from 79% in 2019 to 77% in 2025.

“I have access to the specialist resources and facilities necessary for my research.”

Overall, 68% of respondents agreed that they had access to the specialist resources and facilities necessary for their research, while 18% disagreed. Irish domiciled respondents were more likely to disagree (19%), than internationally domiciled (15%), a pattern that can be seen in other questions of resourcing also. Respondents in the fields of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary were among the most satisfied (82%) with their specialist resources and facilities. Arts and Humanities respondents showed less agreement with the statement – only 63% showed agreement.

In 2019, 70% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 68% in 2025.



Section B: Funding

In this section, respondents were given the option of identifying all sources of funding that were available to them. For example, a student could respond that they are funded by both a grant and self-funding. They were also asked to identify what their funding covered (e.g. fees, materials, conferences etc.). Overall, the proportion of respondents being supported by different funding sources has remained steady over time. However, respondents indicate that over time these funding sources are less likely to cover the various costs associated with study.

Some 58% of respondents were funded by a scholarship, and 20% were funded by a grant. Another 5% of respondents were funded by a scholarship covering fees only, and 7% were employer funded. A total of 17% of respondents were self-funded. Between the period 2019-2025, these overall percentages have remained reasonably stable.

Level 10 respondents were more likely than Level 9 respondents to be in receipt of a scholarship (60% vs 35%). Males were more likely than Females to be funded by a scholarship (61% vs 56%). Only 10% of Part-time and Distance respondents received scholarships compared to 65% of their Full-time peers. Respondents over 40 were well below the average of all age groups when it comes to receiving scholarships (35% vs 58%).

The results also indicate that funding provided to respondents does not cover all the costs of research respondents' activities. A total of 85% of respondents' funding covered the cost of fees, 69% covered stipend, 50% covered research materials, 53% covered the cost of travel to conferences, 28% covered other travel and 25% covered specialist training.

Between 2019 and 2025, despite stability in the proportion of students receiving financial support, and funding increases (see earlier), there have been decreases in the proportion of respondents indicating that fees, stipends, and research materials are covered by funding.



Section C: Supervision

In this section, respondents provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is 'not applicable'.

We tend to see high levels of positive agreement with the statements presented (between 77% to 88%), and this is an area that has seen increased positive agreement with statements over time. We can also see a clear trend between 2019 and 2025 in the increased number of supervisors available to research respondents.

“I am being supervised by...” [x number of supervisors].

It is particularly interesting to consider trend data for this question. In 2019, 48% of respondents had one supervisor and this has steadily declined to 37% in 2025. In 2019, 42% of respondents had two supervisors (rising to 45% in 2025). Finally, in 2019, 10% of respondents had three supervisors, compared with 18% in 2025.

Respondents were more likely to have three or more supervisors if studying for a Level 10 degree than a Level 9 degree (18% vs 16%). But more strikingly, respondents were three times more likely to have three or more supervisors if they were in a Technological HEI than a University (38% vs 13%).

“My supervisor(s) provides the appropriate level of support for my research.”

Some 85% of all respondents thought their supervisor/s provided an appropriate level of support for their research. This drops a little to 82% if the respondents are pursuing a Level 9 degree.

In 2019, 84% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 85% in 2025. However, the level of 'definite' agreement has increased by 6 percentage points in this period (56% to 62%).

“I have regular contact with my supervisor(s), appropriate for my needs.”

A total of 88% of respondents agreed that they had regular contact with their supervisor/s appropriate to their needs, and 7% disagreed. Level 10 respondents agreed more than Level 9 respondents (87% vs 86%). Internationally domiciled respondents felt better supported than Irish domiciled (89% vs 86%).

In 2019, 86% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 88% in 2025. However, the level of 'definite' agreement has increased by 6 percentage points in this period (61% to 67%).

“My supervisor(s) provides feedback that helps me to direct my research activities.”

Some 87% of Level 10 respondents agreed that they were being provided with useful feedback, in contrast to 85% at Level 9. Overall, respondents show high agreement with this question across all categories.

In 2019, 84% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 86% in 2025. However, the level of ‘definite’ agreement has increased by 5 percentage points in this same period (59% to 64%).

“My supervisor(s) help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher.”

A total of 76% of Female respondents agreed with the statement versus 78% of Males.

In 2019, 73% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 77% in 2025. And the level of ‘definite’ agreement has increased by 7 percentage points in this same period (45% to 52%).



Section D: Research Culture

In this section, respondents provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is ‘not applicable.’

Overall agreement with statements on Research Culture sits between 55% and 69% (including those who ‘mostly agree’ or ‘definitely agree’).

“My department provides access to a relevant seminar programme.”

Overall, 69% of respondents agreed with this statement and this varies by level of study: 69% of Level 10 respondents agreed, but only 57% of Level 9 respondents agreed. Universities were more likely to have access to seminar programmes (71%) than Technological HEIs (56%). Part-time and Distance respondents also appear to have less access (62%) than their Full-time peers (69%). Respondents in the fields of Social Sciences, Journalism and Information, as well as Business, Administration and Law, were most likely to report access to relevant seminar programmes (74%).

In 2019, 66% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 69% in 2025. Definite agreement with the statement has increased between 2019 (30%) and 2025 (37%).

“The research ambience in my department stimulates my work.”

Overall, 61% of respondents agreed with this statement. Respondents in a University were more likely to agree with this statement (63%), than those in Technological HEIs (52%) or Other Institutions (61%). Belief that the research ambience in a department is stimulating declines from a high of 71% to a low of 52% as respondents age.

In 2019, 59% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 61% in 2025. Definite agreement with the statement has increased somewhat between 2019 (26%) and 2025 (30%).

“I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students.”

While 62% of respondents agreed they had frequent opportunities to discuss their research with other research students, this drops to a low 52% for Part-time and Distance respondents, and a similar low of 51% for respondents over 40 years of age. 19% of Level 10 respondents and 26% of Level 9 respondents also disagreed with the statement.

This statement has seen notable fluctuations in responses between 2019 and 2025, demonstrating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on respondents’ opportunities to engage with peers. In 2021, 36% disagreed with the statement, compared with 22% in 2019, and 20% in 2025.

“I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department.”

Just over half (55%) of respondents agree that they have had opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond their department. In an era where interdisciplinary research is increasingly fundamental in securing funding, a surprising 22% of Level 10 respondents and 26% of Level 9 respondents disagree with the above statement. Even in response fields such as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which in many senses represents a globally connected research community, over 26% disagree with the statement. While few respondents in any grouping thought the question non applicable (~ <7%).

As with the previous statement, this question has seen notable fluctuations in responses between 2019 and 2025, reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 (mid-COVID-19 pandemic), 33% disagreed with the statement, compared with 26% in 2019 and 22% in 2025.



Section E: Progress and Assessment

In this section, respondents provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is ‘not applicable’.

Overall agreement with statements on Progress and Assessment sits between 66% and 80% (including those who ‘mostly agree’ or ‘definitely agree’).

In this section we see strong contrasts between Level 9 and Level 10 respondents in their view of Progress and Assessment in their institution. Overall, respondents show positive agreement with statements on requirements and deadlines, standards, and assessment procedures; but induction/orientation is an area where a more mixed opinion is given.

“I received an appropriate induction / orientation to my research degree programme.”

The responses to this question suggest that there is scope to improve induction and orientation to research degree programmes: a notable minority (21%) of Level 10 respondents and 27% of Level 9 respondents disagreed that induction and orientation was appropriate (with overall agreement at 66%).

In 2019, 61% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 66% in 2025. Definite agreement with the statement increased between 2019 (26%) and 2025 (33%).

“I understand the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress.”

In 2025, 81% of Level 10 respondents agree with this statement compared to 73% of Level 9 respondents. Compared to other age groups, respondents 23 years and younger are more likely to disagree with this statement than other age groups (16% vs 10%). They are also less likely to agree with it (72% vs 80%).

In 2019, 78% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 80% in 2025. Definite agreement with the statement has increased between 2019 (36%) and 2025 (42%).

“I understand the required standard for my thesis.”

Level 10 respondents report a notably better understanding of the standards required for their thesis compared to respondents researching a Level 9 degree (77% vs 72%). Compared to other age groups, respondents younger than 23 are more likely to disagree with this statement (23% vs an average of 13%) and similarly are less likely to agree with it (67% vs an average of 76%).

In 2019, 75% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 76% in 2025. Definite agreement with the statement has increased between 2019 (33%) and 2025 (38%).

“The final assessment procedures for my research degree are clear to me.”

In 2025, 24% of Level 9 respondents and a further 14% of Level 10 respondents and Full-time respondents disagreed with this statement, suggesting that some respondents may need their assessment procedures outlined more clearly or more than once (in general 72% of all respondents agreed with the statement). In terms of age groups, respondents younger than 23 years of age appear to be most in need of information on assessment procedures – with 21% disagreeing with the statement.

In 2019, 70% of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 72% in 2025. ‘Definite’ agreement with the statement has increased between 2023 (30%) and 2025 (35%).



Section F: Development Opportunities

In this section, respondents can indicate 'Yes', 'No' or 'Not available' to the question given.

We find that the development opportunities least taken up by respondents were in the areas of entrepreneurship and industry: putting training in entrepreneurship and innovation into practice (12%), receiving training in entrepreneurship and innovation (20%), taking part in a placement or internship (21%), and working collaboratively with industry (26%).

Those opportunities most availed of were in areas or related to research skills and conferences: training to develop research skills (80%), attending an academic research conference (80%), presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference (73%) and working as part of a team (68%).

“Have you availed of the following opportunities during your research degree programme?”

a Agreeing a personal training or development plan.

Some 58% of Level 10 respondents have agreed a personal training or development plan in contrast to 44% of Level 9 respondents. Similarly, 59% of Full-time respondents had agreed a personal training or development plan in contrast to 44% of Part-time and Distance respondents. Respondents in the field of Education (40%) were least likely to have agreed a personal training or development plan (with 57% being the average for all fields of study). Internationally domiciled respondents were more likely to have agreed a plan (65%) in contrast to Irish domiciled (51%).

There has been a strong upward trend in those availing of this personal plan: the total figure in 2019 was 43%, compared with 57% in 2025.

b Receiving training to develop my research skills.

In 2025, 81% of Level 10 respondents reported having received training to develop their research skills in contrast to 66% of Level 9 respondents. More Females than Males reported having received training (81% vs 78%). Only 74% of Part-time and Distance respondents reported receiving research skill training in contrast to an average of 80% for all modes of study.

There has been a slight upward trend in those availing of this training: the total figure in 2019 was 76%, compared with 80% in 2025.

c Receiving training to develop my other transferable skills.

A total of 65% of Level 10 respondents responded that they had received training to develop their transferable skills in contrast to only 47% of Level 9 respondents. Internationally domiciled respondents are also more likely to report having received training than Irish domiciled (67% vs 61%). Only 53% of the youngest cohort (23 years and younger) reported having received training compared to a mean of 64% for all ages.

There has been an upward trend in those availing of this training: the total figure in 2019 was 59%, compared with 64% in 2025.

d Receiving advice on career options.

Only 40% of respondents reported that they had received advice on career options. This rises to 42% for Full-time respondents but drops to 26% for Part-time and Distance respondents. Advice on career options was reported most often in the field of ICT (47%), Business, Administration and Law (46%), and Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary (47%). Advice on career options is low at 27% for the field of Education.

There has been a strong upward trend in those availing of advice on career options: the total figure in 2019 was 33%, compared with 40% in 2025.

e Taking part in a placement or internship.

Though steadily rising from earlier survey years, placement and internship levels remain low. Only 21% of Level 10 respondents and 16% of Level 9 respondents report taking part in a placement or internship. Respondents in Universities are less likely to report placements and internships (19%) in comparison to those in Technological Higher Education Institutions (23%). Only 7% of Part-time and Distance learning respondents gave a positive response to this question in contrast to 22% of Full-time respondents.

Understandably, there was low take-up of placements or internships overall in 2021 (13%), and this figure has increased to just above pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels (18% in 2019) to 21% in 2025.

f Attending an academic research conference.

In 2025, 82% of all Level 10 respondents reported attending an academic conference, though this falls to 57% for Level 9 respondents. In terms of field of study, respondents in the field of Education were most likely to report not having attended a research conference (26%). 28% of Part-time and Distance respondents had also not attended a research conference, which is a notable deterioration on 2019 figures when 21% reported not having attended one.

There has been a slight fall in those attending an academic research conference: the total figure in 2019 was 81%, compared with 80% in 2025.

g Presenting a paper or poster at an academic research conference.

In terms of presenting research, 76% of Level 10 and 48% of Level 9 respondents report having presented a paper or poster at an academic conference. Participation levels of 75% for Full-time respondents, drops to 61% for Part-time and Distance respondents.

Overall, those indicating that they had presented in 2019 was 72%, compared with 73% in 2025.

h Submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal or book.

Some 35% of Level 9 respondents have taken the opportunity to submit a paper for publication in an academic journal or book, and this rises to 56% for Level 10 respondents. Internationally domiciled respondents are more likely to have taken the opportunity to submit a paper compared to Irish domiciled (59% vs 50%). Age plays a factor, with less than 41% of respondents under 26 submitting compared to an average of 54% for all ages (For the most part, the likelihood of submission increases with age). Males are notably more likely than Females to have submitted a paper (58% vs 52%).

Those indicating that they had submitted a paper in 2019 was 50%, compared with 54% in 2025.

i Communicating your research to a non-academic audience.

Males and Females are approximately equal in their likelihood to communicate their research to a non-academic audience (51% vs 50%). This figure stands at 51% for Level 10 respondents but drops to 38% for Level 9 respondents. Respondents in Technological HEIs are more likely than those in Universities to communicate their research (55% vs 49%).

Overall, those indicating that they had communicated their research to a non-academic audience in 2019 was 47%, compared with 50% in 2025.

j Receiving training in entrepreneurship and innovation.

In terms of entrepreneurship and innovation, 20% of Level 10 respondents report having received training in these areas, as opposed to just 14% of Level 9 respondents. Only 18% of respondents in the field of Business, Administration and Law report having received training, below the average of 20% for all fields, and well below the highest level of 32% in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction. A notable gender gap between Males and Females is evident (23% vs 17%).

There has been an upward trend in those availing of this training: the total figure in 2019 was 16%, compared with 20% in 2025.

k Putting training in entrepreneurship and innovation into practice e.g. submitting an invention disclosure or filing a patent.

The percentage of respondents putting training in entrepreneurship and innovation into practice is 12% for Level 10 respondents and 10% for Level 9 respondents. Only 7% of Part-time and Distance respondents respond in the affirmative, in contrast to 12% of Full-time respondents.

l Working as part of a team.

Reports of working as part of a team are not as high as one might hope. Only 68% of respondents report that they have been working as part of a team (68% Level 10 vs 61% Level 9). This drops to 50% if they are Part-time and Distance respondents. While 79% of respondents in the field of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary, as well as 78% of respondents in the field of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics report working as part of a team, this falls to 56% in Education, and 46% in the Arts and Humanities.

There has been an upward trend in those working as part of a team: the total figure in 2019 was 65% compared with 68% in 2025.

m Working collaboratively with industry.

A total of 26% of Level 10 and 32% of Level 9 respondents report having worked collaboratively with industry. A notable difference in gender is evident in responses to this question. Some 32% of Males report working collaboratively with industry, but only 23% of Females. Only 13% of Arts and Humanities respondents report they have availed of opportunities to work collaboratively with industry (versus an average of 26% for all fields of study).

Overall, when looking at both NFQ levels there has been no change in those working collaboratively with industry: the figure in 2019 was 26%, and this remains the same in 2025.

n Working collaboratively with a civil society organisation or public organisation.

Overall, 26% of respondents report having availed of the opportunity to work collaboratively with a civil society organisation or a public organisation. In 2025, this figure further rises to 32% for those in Services and Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary, as well as 31% for those in the fields of Business, Administration and Law but drops to 23% for those in the Arts and Humanities, 19% for those studying ICT and just 17% for those pursuing Generic Programmes and Qualifications.

There has been a slight upward trend in those working collaboratively with a civil society or public organisation: the total figure in 2019 was 23%, compared with 26% in 2025.

o Spending time abroad as part of your research degree.

Some 31% of Level 10 respondents report having spent time abroad as part of their research degree in contrast to 20% of Level 9 respondents. Males are more likely than Females to have studied abroad (33% vs 28%). Full-time respondents are more likely to have studied abroad (32%) compared to just 14% of Part-time and Distance respondents.

There has been a slight upward trend in those spending time abroad as part of their research degree: the total figure in 2019 was 25%, compared with 30% in 2025. Understandably, this figure was much lower in 2021 (17%) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Section G: Teaching and Demonstration

In this section, respondents are first asked about whether they taught or demonstrated at their institution and could respond 'Yes' or 'No', and overall, two-thirds had engaged in this activity (but see qualifications below).

Subsequently, respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is 'not applicable'. In this section, we do not see strong agreement with the statements provided, with only around half of respondents agreeing that teaching/demonstration had enhanced their experience or that they had been given appropriate support for this activity.

“Please indicate whether you have taught (or demonstrated) at your institution during your research degree programme.”

Overall, 68% of respondents indicated they had taught or demonstrated. Males (71%) are more likely to have taught or demonstrated than Females (66%). Only 48% of Level 9 respondents were likely to have taught or demonstrated, compared with 70% of Level 10 respondents. However, age and mode of study appear to have far greater impact. Only 51% of respondents aged 40 years and older had taught or demonstrated, compared to 77% of 28-29-year-olds. Similarly, a discrepancy between Full-time learners and Part-time and Distance learners who had demonstrated or taught is clearly visible (71% vs 45%).

This overall agreement figure of 68% is a decrease on 2019 (71%).

“Do you agree or disagree that the teaching/demonstration you delivered enhanced your overall research experience?”

It is important to note with this statement that a notable proportion of respondents (23%) indicated that the question was not applicable to them. Of the remainder, 54% indicated agreement with the statement.

Taking account of some methodological changes to the question between 2019 and 2025, there has been no change between 2019 and 2025 of those in overall agreement with the statement.

“Do you agree or disagree that you have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching/demonstration?”

It is important to note with this statement that a notable proportion of respondents (23%) indicated that the question was not applicable to them. Of the remainder, only 46% indicated agreement with the statement. Some 47% of Full-time learners responded positively to the statement, but only 33% of Part-time and Distance learners.

Taking account of some methodological changes to the question between 2019 and 2025, there has been an increase between 2019 and 2025 of those in overall agreement with the statement.



Section H: Research Skills

Respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is 'not applicable'.

Overall, there was a strong level of agreement (sitting between 74% to 88%) with the statements presented, and these cover research methodologies, critical analysis skills, creativity and innovation, and research integrity.

“My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme.”

Overall, 87% of respondents agreed with this statement. Some 88% of Level 10 respondents and 86% of Level 9 respondents reported their skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques had developed during their programme.

Overall agreement with this statement has decreased slightly between 2019 (89%) and 2025 (87%).

“My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme.”

In total 86% of respondents agreed that their critical skills in analysing and evaluating findings and results had improved during their programme, with only 4% disagreeing. Overall agreement with this statement has decreased slightly between 2019 (88%) and 2025 (86%).

“My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme.”

Overall, 74% of respondents agreed with this statement. A total of 77% of Males reported rises in confidence in creativity and innovation during their programme in contrast to only 72% of Females. Confidence levels remained the same irrespective of mode of study (74%). Highest rises in confidence were seen in the fields of ICT (78%) and Social Sciences, Journalism and Information (78%). Business, Administration and Law showed the lowest levels in confidence at 68% (down from a high of 80% in 2019).

Overall agreement with this statement has increased slightly between 2019 (73%) and 2025 (74%). 'Definite' agreement has increased between 2019 (33%) and 2025 (38%).

“My understanding of research integrity (e.g. rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during my programme.”

Overall, 88% of respondents agreed with this statement. When it came to improvements in understanding research integrity, Level 10 and Level 9 respondents responded positively (88% and 87%). At 90%, Females were much more likely to agree with the statement than Males (85%).

'Definitely agree' for Part-time and Distance was 64% compared to only 55% for Full-time.

Overall agreement with this statement has remained stable between 2019 and 2025 (80%). 'Definite' agreement with this statement has increased between 2019 (49%) and 2025 (56%).



Section I: Other Transferable Skills

Respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is 'not applicable'.

In general, respondents were satisfied with the transferable skills developed during their programme (with responses sitting between 71% and 80%), and this includes managing projects, communication, networking, and professional development.

“My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme.”

In total, 80% of Level 10 respondents agreed their project management skills had developed during their programme – an improvement on earlier years – and in contrast to only 73% of Level 9 respondents. When we look at mode of study, Full-time respondents report the highest increase in ability to manage projects (80%), while a lower figure of Part-time and Distance respondents express agreement with the statement (74%). Arts and Humanities respondents, as well as Business, Administration and Law respondents, agree their project management skills had developed just 73% of the time. This compares to 84% at the upper end of the spectrum in Health and Welfare. Ignoring the youngest age outlier, satisfaction in this question also has an inverse relationship with age. Favourable responses from those learners aged 40 years and older stands at 73% compared to 84% for the 24–25-year-old category.

Overall agreement with this statement has remained stable between 2019 (80%) and 2025 (79%).

“My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme.”

In 2025, 77% of respondents agreed that their communication of information to diverse audiences had developed, with only 2% in disagreement with the statement. However, looking at by NFQ level, we see a clear split emerge. Some 77% of Level 10 respondents express agreement, but only 71% of Level 9 respondents. 78% of Full-time respondents expressed agreement that their ability to communicate had improved, but only 69% of Part-time and Distance respondents expressed agreement with the statement.

Overall agreement with this statement has remained stable between 2019 (77%) and 2025 (77%).

“I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme.”

Considering age, 66% of respondents 23 years or younger agree they had developed their contacts or professional networks compared to 75% of respondents aged 30/34 years. Only 59% of Level 9 respondents agreed with the statement, in contrast to 73% of Level 10 respondents. At 71%, Irish domiciled and internationally domiciled respondents show equal agreement with the statement (perhaps suggesting there is no inherent advantage to Irish domiciled respondents when it comes to networking).

Overall agreement with this statement has decreased slightly between 2019 (73%) and 2025 (71%).

“I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme.”

In 2025, 80% of Level 10 respondents agreed that they increasingly managed their own personal development during the programme, in contrast to 74% of Level 9 respondents. For the most part, the response is more affirmative with age, with agreement reaching a high of 83% in the 35-39 age group.

Overall agreement with this statement has remained stable between 2019 (80%) and 2025 (80%).



Section J: Responsibilities and Supports

Respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is 'not applicable'.

There was wide variation in responses given to these questions, with overall agreement ranging from 46% to 90%.

“I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student.”

Overall, 90% of respondents understood their responsibilities as a research degree student, with only 4% disagreeing. Internationally domiciled respondents report slightly higher comprehension of their responsibilities than Irish domiciled (92% vs 89%) but for the most part agreement with this statement is very high across all categories.

Overall agreement with this statement has remained steady between 2019 (91%) and 2025 (90%).

“I am aware of my supervisor(s)' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student.”

Some 86% of Level 10 respondents express awareness of their supervisor's responsibilities, with only 7% disagreeing. For Level 9 respondents, awareness drops to 82% with 11% disagreeing with the statement. Internationally domiciled respondents have a better awareness than Irish domiciled (87% vs 84%). Awareness of supervisor responsibilities does not notably improve with respondent's age.

Overall agreement with this statement has remained steady between 2019 (83%) and 2025 (85%).

“Other than my supervisor(s), I know who to approach if I am concerned about any academic aspect of my research degree programme.”

Overall, 70% of respondents agreed with this statement. A relatively high 19% of respondents across all gender categories disagreed with this statement. This rose to 21% of respondents in Technological HEIs, and in fields of study such as Services it reaches 27%. Even for respondents with over three years of study the level of disagreement with this statement remains high (22%).

Overall agreement with this statement has increased between 2019 (67%) and 2025 (70%).

“My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students.”

In total 21% of respondents disagree with the above statement and only 46% agreed that their institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students. This is however an improvement on recent results of 34% in 2023, 35% in 2021, and 43% in 2019 (Disagreement is also down from 23% in 2019.). Social Sciences, Journalism and Information showed particularly high disagreement – 26% disagreed that their institution values and responds to feedback. A direct age relationship is also visible: After the age of 23, the percentage who definitely agree rises linearly from 11% to 22%, as learners age from 24 to those aged 40 years and older.

Respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the final statement given.

“How aware are you of the various student supports available? (Recreation, healthcare, counselling, etc.).”

Only 36% of respondents indicated a good awareness of student supports. Most respondents had at least some awareness of vital supports such as counselling, recreation, and healthcare. However, somewhat highlighting the difference between the availability of supports and being aware of them, 17% of respondents to this question expressed an answer of ‘very little awareness’. This rose to 21% for Part-time and Distance Respondents (17% for Full-time).



Section K: Personal outlook

Respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. Respondents may also indicate that the question is ‘not applicable’.

In this section, respondents were asked about the extent to which they were satisfied with their lives and work-life balance, having someone to talk to in their institution, and feeling their programme is worthwhile. The majority expressed satisfaction with their lives and work-life balance, and a majority felt their degree was worthwhile.

“I am satisfied with my life nowadays.”

Overall, 69% of respondents agreed with this statement. In terms of age, 80% of respondents under 24 expressed the most agreement with this statement. Respondents over 40 also showed strong levels of agreement (78%). Part-time and Distance respondents were more in agreement than Full-time (81% vs 68%). In terms of Gender, 70% of Females expressed satisfaction with their lives, in contrast to 67% of Males. In total 75% of Gender non-binary & Prefer not to say also agreed that they were satisfied with their lives.

Agreement with this statement is lower in 2025 (69%) than it was in 2019 (73%).

“I am satisfied with my life within my institution nowadays.”

Overall, 67% of respondents agreed with this statement. When we look at life satisfaction within the setting of the institution we see a decline in satisfaction levels, typically by a few percentage points in most categories. All genders, for example, now show average life satisfaction levels drop from 69% to 67%. Part-time and Distance respondents drop from 81% (see previous question) to 73%. Even a high agreement of 78% expressed by respondents in the field of Education, represents a drop from 82% in the previous question.

Agreement with this statement is roughly the same in 2025 (67%) as it was in 2019 (68%).

“I am satisfied with my work-life balance.”

Overall, 59% of respondents expressed satisfaction with work-life balance (57% Female, 61% Male), while 24% expressed dissatisfaction. However, 29% of Part-time and Distance respondents were likely to disagree with this statement.

Agreement with this statement is slightly higher in 2025 (59%) as it was in 2019 (56%).

“There is someone in my institution I can talk to about my day-to-day problems.”

Overall, 25% disagreed with this statement and only 52% agreed. Agreement with the statement drops from 54% for Full-time respondents, to 47% for Part-time and Distance respondents. Only 48% of Level 9 respondents agreed with the statement (54% of Level 10). In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 34% disagreed, and 45% agreed with the statement.

Agreement with this statement is slightly lower in 2025 (52%) than it was in 2019 (56%).

“I feel that my research degree programme is worthwhile.”

In 2025, 82% of respondents agreed that their research programme was worthwhile. 83% of respondents in Technological HEIs agreed with the statement, and a similar 82% in Universities (83% in other institutions). The numbers expressing definite disagreement with the statement when broken down by institutional type does not exceed 3%.

Overall agreement with this statement has remained stable between 2019 (81%) and 2025 (82%), but definite agreement has increased from 44% in 2019 to 50% in 2025.

**Section L: Motivations**

When considering motivation for pursuing a research degree respondents could select up to three priorities in order of importance.

The three most selected motivations were the student’s interest in the subject, improving career prospects for an academic/research career, and improving career prospects outside of an academic/research career.

“My interest in my subject.”

Some 40% of respondents reported their interest in their subject as the top motivation. While 54% of Arts and Humanities respondents prioritised interest in their subject, only 32% of Health and Welfare respondents did so. There was little gender difference with 40% of Males, and 39% of Females identifying interest as a top priority.

Respondents’ interest in their subject has remained the most common motivation between 2019 and 2025 (40%).

“Improving my career prospects for an academic / research career.”

Overall, 19% of Level 10 and 15% of Level 9 respondents reported improving their academic and research career prospects as their top motivation. Part-time and Distance respondents are less likely to share this priority, with only 14% reporting it as a priority (in contrast to 19% Full-time respondents).

As a motivation, improving respondents’ career prospects for an academic/research career has remained steady between 2019 (20%) and 2025 (19%).

“Improving my career prospects outside of an academic / research career.”

Only 9% of respondents selected improving their career prospects outside of academia and research as their top motivation. For respondents over 40 this figure drops to 5% (the average for all ages remaining at 9%). For Arts and Humanities respondents, the figure drops to a low 3%.

As a motivation, improving respondents’ career prospects outside of an academic/research career has fallen slightly between 2019 (11%) and 2025 (9%).

“I was encouraged by a former academic tutor / supervisor.”

Only 2% of respondents reported the influence of a former supervisor as their top motivation. For Females the figure rises to 3% but for Males remains at 2%.

“The funding was available.”

Only 4% of Level 10 and 2% of Level 9 respondents reported the availability of funding as their top motivation. This rises to 5% for internationally domiciled respondents and falls to 1% for Part-time and Distance learners. Respondents under 24 years of age, as well as those studying ICT, are most likely to cite the availability of funding as a primary motivating factor (6% each).

“It felt like a natural step for me.”

A total of 6% of Level 10 respondents cited the feeling of their research programme being a natural step as an important motivating factor. And this falls to 2% for Level 9 respondents. 6% of Full-time as well as Part-time and Distance respondents ranked this motivation as a priority.

“I felt inspired to work with a particular academic.”

Only 1% of Level 10, and 2% of Level 9 respondents report their top motivation as being inspired to work with a particular academic (passion for their subject being a much stronger priority). Irish domiciled and internationally domiciled respondents show an equally low 1%. However, in the field of Education we see reports of motivation from inspirational figures rise to 4% – albeit from a low sample size.

“Professional development or training.”

Some 5% of Part-time and Distance respondents report their motivation as being driven by the desire for professional development or training, compared to only 3% of Full-time respondents. Similarly, 6% of Level 9 respondents, show a higher prioritisation of professional development and training than their Level 10 peers (3%). Some 6% of respondents in the fields of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction also highlight a prioritisation of professional development or training as a primary motivator, but only 1% of Arts and Humanities do – albeit this figure is from a low sample size.

“Other.”

Other motivations are rarely highlighted by members of any group with respect to pursuing a research degree, although for respondents in Education a small percentage are motivated by other (unstated) motivations (4%).

**Section M: Career**

In this section, respondents were asked to select the top three types of careers they have in mind for when they finish their research degree in order of priority.

The three highest priority careers given were within higher education: an academic career in higher education, another career in higher education, or a research career in higher education (the latter coming third). Interestingly, a very small proportion (1%) of respondents identify a research career outside of higher education as a top priority.

“Academic career in higher education.”

Overall, 35% of respondents indicated this career as their top priority. Some 40% of Respondents in Technological Higher Education Institutions ranked an academic career in Higher Education as a number one priority, as opposed to 34% in Universities. 36% of Level 10 respondents selected an academic career in higher education as their top priority. This dropped to 24% for Level 9 respondents. A total of 34% of Females and 36% of Males selected this career as a top priority.

This figure has remained consistent between 2019 (36%) and 2025 (35%).

“Research career in higher education.”

Although 35% of respondents selected an academic career in higher education as their top priority, on average only 11% explicitly indicated that a research career in higher education was a top priority for them. Only 6% of respondents studying at Level 9, and 3% of respondents studying Part-time and Distance respondents indicated that they saw a research career in higher education as a top priority. Respondents in the fields of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics were more likely to prioritise a research career than any other field of study (16%).

This priority has remained consistent between 2019 (11%) and 2025 (11%).

“Other career in higher education.”

A total of 18% of Level 10 respondents favoured some other career in higher education as a top priority in contrast to 13% for Level 9 respondents. Similarly, 19% of Full-time respondents chose this option. However, only 6% of Part-time and Distance respondents were likely to select other careers in higher education as a top priority. Some 23% of ICT respondents and 27% of respondents in Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, also ranked this as a number one priority.

This priority has seen a slight fall between 2019 (20%) and 2025 (18%).

“Research career outside higher education.”

Only 1% of respondents prioritised a research career outside higher education. This doubles to 2% for respondents who are Part-time and Distance respondents, but overall, this is a very low priority for nearly all respondents.

“Teaching (at a level below higher education).”

Only 1% of Level 10 and 2% of Level 9 respondents prioritised teaching at a level below higher education as a top career choice. Even in a field of study such as Education, only 4% pick teaching as a priority (by contrast 41% would opt for an academic career). Teaching at a level below higher education is not signalled as a priority by most respondents.

“Returning to, or remaining with, an employer who is sponsoring your degree.”

Only 3% of Level 10 and 4% of Level 9 respondents prioritised returning to or remaining with the employer who is sponsoring their degree. This figure rises to 8% for Part-time and Distance respondents, and 9% for respondents studying in the field of Education.

“Returning to, or remaining with, an employer who is not sponsoring your degree.”

Only 2% of respondents at Level 10 and 3% of Level 9 respondents indicated that they would prioritise returning to or remaining with an employer who is not sponsoring their degree (less than those receiving sponsorship). This figure rises to 4% for respondents in the field of Health and Welfare, and 7% in the field of Education. When looked at by mode of study, 9% of Part-time and Distance respondents indicated they would prioritise returning to an employer who was not sponsoring them. By contrast, only 1% of Full-time respondents picked this option.

“Self-employment (including setting up your own business).”

Just 5% of Level 9 respondents indicated that they would prioritise self-employment when they finish their research degree, in contrast to 3% of Level 10 respondents. Some 4% of Part-time and Distance respondents indicated they would prioritise self-employment, compared to 3% of Full-time respondents. Males were twice as likely to indicate that they would prioritise self-employment than Females (4% vs 2%).

“Any other professional career.”

Compared to Level 10, Level 9 respondents were twice as likely to prioritise other professional careers (6% vs 3%). No difference between Irish domiciled and internationally domiciled respondents can be detected (3% prioritise a professional career in each category).

“Not sure or not decided yet.”

Some 8% of Level 9 respondents indicated that they had not yet decided what career they had in mind, in contrast to 6% for Level 10 respondents. Gender disparities are notable when looking at this indecision: Females register a figure of 7%, and Males 5%.

“Other.”

The option to select other when considering career types not addressed in the earlier questions attracted on average only 2% of the respondents. 4% of respondents 40 years and older prioritized a different career type, in contrast to 2% average for all groups.

**Section N: Overall Experience**

In this section, respondents were asked to evaluate their overall experience and identify the extent to which they are confident they will complete their qualification in the expected time. Three quarters of respondents are happy with their research experience and roughly the same are confident of finishing their programme within the expected time.

“How would you evaluate your entire research experience at this institution?”

In total 76% of Level 10 respondents rated their research experience as either excellent or good. A similar, though lower, 74% figure can be seen for Level 9 respondents. For Universities, the figure stands at 76%, but for Technological HEIs the figure falls to 73%. For Full-time respondents the figure stands at 75%, while for Part-time and Distance respondents the figure rating their experience as good or excellent rises to 81%. Overall age plays a factor: 22% of 26–27-year-olds rate their experiences as excellent, versus 35% for those 40 years and older.

Evaluation of research experience has remained steady between 2019 and 2025.

“I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme within my institution’s expected timescale.”

A total 78% of Level 10 Respondents and 80% of Level 9 respondents agree with this statement although on average 13% disagree that they will meet their institution’s expected timelines. Confidence in meeting deadlines is greater for internationally domiciled respondents (80%) than Irish domiciled (76%).

Respondents are slightly more confident in 2025 (78%) of completing on time than those in 2019 (74%).



Section O: Withdrawal

In this section, respondents were asked if they had ever seriously considered withdrawing from their research degree programme, and if so, the reasons for their withdrawal.

“Have you ever seriously considered withdrawing from your research degree programme?”

Overall, 31% of respondents have seriously considered withdrawing from their research degree programme. This is an improvement of 6 percentage points on results for 2023, but it should be noted that the proportion of respondents providing no response to this question has increased by an equivalent 5 percentage points over the same time. The proportion explicitly reporting that they had not considered withdrawal has remained steady over the period 2019 (53%) to 2025 (54%).

Overall, across all respondents, reasons given for withdrawal were financial (13%), personal or family (13%), health (8%), employment (5%), to transfer to another institution (4%) and other (6%) though it should be noted that these reasons are substantially outside the influence or control of HEIs.

Above average rates for specific categories of PGR students likely to consider withdrawal, were:

Part-time and Distance respondents, 35%

In total, 35% of Part-time and Distance respondents have seriously considered withdrawing from their research degree programme. Some 8% of respondents considered withdrawal for financial reasons, and 17% for personal or family reasons. Some 8% also considered withdrawal for health reasons, 5% for employment, and 3% for transfer to another institution. Another 6% considered withdrawing for other reasons.⁸

Technological HEI respondents, 34%

Some 34% of respondents in Technological HEIs have seriously considered withdrawing from their research degree program. Some 13% of respondents considered withdrawal for financial reasons, and 14% for personal or family reasons. Some 8% also considered withdrawal for health reasons, 6% for employment reasons, and 5% for transfer to another institution. Another 7% considered withdrawing for other reasons.

Females, 33%

A total of 33% of Females have seriously considered withdrawing from their research degree program. Some 14% of respondents considered withdrawal for financial reasons, and 13% for personal or family reasons. Some 9% considered withdrawal for health reasons, 5% for employment reasons, and 4% for transfer to another institution. Another 7% considered withdrawing for other reasons.

⁸ The remainder gave no response. A similar no response is evident in the other categories that follow.

Level 10 Respondents, 32%

A total of 32% of Level 10 respondents have seriously considered withdrawing from their research degree program. Some 14% of respondents considered withdrawal for financial reasons, and 13% for personal or family reasons. Some 8% considered withdrawal for health reasons, 5% for employment reasons, and 4% for transfer to another institution. Another 6% considered withdrawing for other reasons.

Field of Study

Variations in the numbers who have considered withdrawal can also be seen when we look at Field of Study; for example, only 17% of Generic Programmes and Qualifications have seriously considered withdrawal as opposed to 42% in the field of Services. While in some cases the sample size is small and requires caution, the Services field of study has been consistently above average since 2019 when it comes to respondents reporting that they have seriously considered withdrawal.

Discussion

The PGR StudentSurvey.ie is designed to provide insight into the experiences of postgraduate research students, and the 2025 results highlight many positive developments.

Most research students rate their overall experience as either excellent or good. Research students are particularly happy with the levels of supervision they receive, and there has been an increasing trend in student agreement with positive statements on supervision. A continued overall growth in the number of students supported by more than one supervisor accompanies this trend, although the precise impact of increased supervision for researchers requires further analysis.⁹

This shift away from single supervision, in conjunction with some of the policy actions highlighted above, and a continued reported increase in the use of personal development and training plans, may help explain the rise in work-life balance figures we are also seeing.

Interestingly, students in Technological HEIs were almost three times more likely to have three or more supervisors than those in a University (38% vs 13%). The precise reason for this difference is unclear but if it holds that three supervisors are better than two then this suggests scope for more supervision support in the university sector.

Some potentially quick wins to improve student experience identified in this survey include improved induction and orientation procedures, as well as reminding students of thesis standard requirements, supervisor responsibilities, and assessment procedures (including final assessment). Many students, particularly Part-time and Distance students and Level 9 students remain in need of personal training and development plans. Understanding of thesis requirements tends to improve with age, suggesting that more support for younger students would be useful in helping them understand requirements and deadlines.

Some 25% of all respondents disagreed with the statement that they had someone they could talk to about their day-to-day problems, suggesting an unwelcome degree of social isolation in the experience of third-level education. This figure nonetheless represents a clear and very welcome improvement on a figure of 34% in 2021.

Seminar programmes do not appear to be as embedded in the research culture of higher education as they could be. And there remains scope to give students more formal opportunities to discuss their research with other research students (In particular, Technological HEIs have an opportunity to follow up on these results to increase student access to seminar programmes). Similarly, departments and schools have room to improve structured opportunities for students to become involved in the wider research community. Cross-department student-led seminar programmes may be one way of approaching this issue. This may also help reduce feelings of social isolation reported by some respondents.

⁹ For some advantages and challenges see: Pyhältö, K., Tikkanen, L., & Anttila, H. (2023). The more the merrier? PhD supervisors' perspectives in engaging in co-supervision. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 61(6), 1460–1471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2258853>

Improving student experience is a critical stated objective of HEIs, yet while supervisor feedback is generally valued, fewer than half of students (46%) feel their institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students. Also of concern is the finding that nearly one in three students (31%) have contemplated withdrawal. Overall, across all respondents, reasons given for withdrawal were financial (13%), personal or family (13%), health (8%), employment (5%), to transfer to another institution (4%) and other (6%) but it should be noted that these reasons are substantially outside the influence or control of institutions.

Part-time and Distance students were more satisfied with their life than Full-time students (81% vs 68%), but overall results nevertheless show a need for greater support for Part-time and Distance students across other indicators. For example, in terms of computing resources most respondents agreed that they had adequate provision irrespective of institute type. However, fewer than half of Part-time and Distance students felt provision was adequate. This survey shows that the presence of resources, or educational opportunities and offerings in an institution does not necessarily guarantee uptake by Part-time and Distance students, and more consideration needs to be given by HEIs to how the overall experience of this cohort can be improved and their requirements understood.

In terms of gender, broad similarity of experience can be registered in many responses. Nevertheless, at times differences do stand out. For example, only 37% of Females report having received advice on career options, in contrast to 45% of their Male peers. Females, more prevalent in underfunded areas such as the Arts and Humanities, are also less likely than Males to be in receipt of scholarships (56% vs 61%) and more likely to have to self-fund than other groups (19% vs 14%). In contrast, more Females than Males report having received training to develop their research skills (81% vs 78%). Understanding, explaining, and closing unnecessary variances in such reporting remains critical to an equal higher-level education offering.

All HEIs rely on a pipeline of well-prepared entrants supported by strong teaching at earlier levels. However, a career in teaching and preparing learners for higher education ranks very low as a priority among respondents, even among those studying Education. By contrast, many express strong interest in academic careers within higher education. This suggests that the teaching profession itself is not viewed as unattractive, but that more could be done to make teaching pathways leading to higher education more appealing.

Several responses in this survey show notable variations when age is considered, with responses sometimes changing linearly from youngest cohort to oldest, or vice versa. More research needs to be done into understanding how the learners experience changes with age, and whether what works for one age group, can be made work for all.

An issue that continues to come up in this survey is that higher education is producing graduates who express strong preferences for careers in higher education, even though academic opportunities remain limited. This mismatch between demand and availability raises concerns about graduate expectations and career readiness. National policy actors, academic institutions, and employers should work together to promote the visibility and appeal of research and professional careers beyond academia.

Employers seeking PGR graduates could improve their appeal by enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of high-skills career offerings/opportunities. This survey suggests that employers could strengthen their appeal by building strong research partnerships with higher education institutions and by offering more research placements for Level 9 and Level 10 students. Employers should also take note that students are more likely to return to an employer who has sponsored them, than an employer that has not.

Finally, we are continuing to see a welcomed rise in students reporting working collaboratively with a civil society organisation or public organisation. Collaboration now stands at 26% (higher than previous surveys). This shows the continued strengthening of co-operation and growth in collaborative networks between civil society and academia, which should help pave the way for future expansion in these numbers.

A significant challenge now arising is how to embed the positive trends we are seeing, and to leverage what we know works and enhances the higher education experience, so that all students may benefit.

Further Information

The PGR StudentSurvey.ie Data Hub, available at www.studentsurvey.ie provides access to survey data for 2019, 2021, 2023, and 2025. Users can explore results through interactive dashboards, selecting questions and cohorts of interest. Data on response populations are also available, and the interface allows non-respondents to be included or excluded from analysis. Tooltips highlight where response numbers are low to guide interpretation.

Queries or requests for additional information are welcome and can be directed to Dr Kieran McNally¹⁰ via info@studentsurvey.ie.

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