

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY: ENDING BIAS IN PGR SPACES

Survey Report & Testimonials

Cláudia Moreira

Vice-President for Postgraduate
and International Experience

Email:
c.moreira@kent.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted among the postgraduate research (PGR) community at the University of Kent. The survey aimed to gather feedback on the experiences of PGR students to better understand their needs and identify areas for improvement in the university's services and support systems. By collecting insights from this cohort, Kent Students' Union seeks to advocate effectively for enhancements that promote an inclusive and supportive environment for all PGR students.

The survey covered three key areas:

- Exploring the structures, resources, and challenges within PGR programs.
- Understanding the diverse backgrounds of the PGR community.
- Addressing critical issues such as experiences of discrimination, the dynamics of supervision, and the efficacy of complaints procedures.

This report will conclude by offering a series of recommendations aimed at improving the postgraduate research experience. Drawing from the insights and findings presented throughout the report, these suggestions will focus on addressing the key issues identified by respondents, including challenges related to supervision, discrimination, accessibility, complaints resolution and even funding. The goal is to provide actionable strategies that can enhance support, foster a more inclusive and equitable environment, and ultimately ensure that PGR students are able to thrive academically and personally within their research communities.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The survey was designed to ensure anonymity, encouraging participants to provide candid and honest feedback. By completing the form, participants consented to Kent Students' Union using their data exclusively for advocacy purposes. The data will not be shared with any external organizations but may be compiled and discussed with the University of Kent in efforts to bring about meaningful change. This report synthesizes the collected data, highlighting key trends and actionable insights to support the PGR community more effectively.

Research bias is an important consideration in this study, particularly as it was conducted by a PhD student at the University of Kent. Recognizing the potential conflict of interest, multiple measures have been taken to ensure objectivity and credibility. These include involving additional reviewers to examine and validate the findings, cross-referencing with external data sources where applicable, and maintaining transparency throughout the research process. These steps aim to mitigate bias and uphold the integrity of the report's conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative textual examination. Quantitative data provides a broad overview of patterns and trends related to experiences of discrimination, supervision dynamics and complaints procedures among postgraduate research students, while the textual analysis of open-ended responses offers deeper insights into the nuanced and personal dimensions of these experiences. Together, these methods ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, integrating statistical rigor with rich, contextual narratives.

The mixed-methods approach employed in this report was informed by a survey that was made available for over a month, targeting both PhD and Masters by research students. To ensure that the findings accurately reflected broader issues within the PGR community, we determined that a minimum of 10% of the population needed to participate. This threshold was necessary to ensure the sample size was large enough to draw meaningful conclusions, as a smaller sample might not have been able to appropriately represent the diverse experiences and challenges faced by PGR students. This approach enabled us to gather both quantitative data and qualitative insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

The template of the questionnaire used in the survey can be found in the annexes. It includes the full set of questions presented to participants, organized into three key areas: academic studies, demographic information, and student experiences. These questions are both quantitative, closed answers and open-ended ones. The template reflects the structure and wording used to ensure clarity and inclusivity while maintaining a focus on the survey's goals. Sharing the template allows transparency in the research process and provides a reference for understanding the scope and design of the survey.

REACH & DEMOGRAPHICS

The postgraduate research (PGR) community at the University of Kent consists of approximately 800 students, according to data provided by the university, representing a diverse and dynamic group engaged in advanced academic inquiry. This survey received 82 responses, equating to roughly 10% of the total PGR population. While not fully representative of the entire cohort and the individual needs of each student, this response rate provides valuable insights into the experiences and demographics of a significant subset of the PGR community, forming a basis for meaningful analysis and advocacy that can be reflective of the broader community.

The following data reaffirms the representativeness of the survey by showcasing the diverse academic and demographic makeup of the PGR community at the University of Kent. Additionally, this section will address gaps in the methodology, ensuring a transparent and comprehensive understanding of the survey's findings and its scope.

OVERVIEW OF OUR STUDENTS

The survey received a total of 82 responses, with the following breakdown of participants' academic qualifications: 68 respondents (82.9%) are pursuing a PhD, 12 respondents (14.6%) are undertaking a Master by Research, and 2 respondents (2.4%) have completed their PhD within the past year. This reflects the similar constituency of the PGR community where the majority are PhD students (approximately 760) and a smaller amount are doing a Master by Research (approximately 55 students).

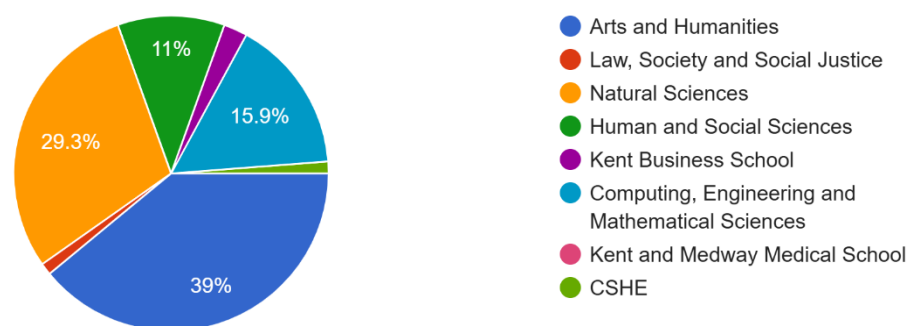


Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents from each Division

The majority of students were from the Arts and Humanities division (39%), followed by the Natural Sciences (29.3%), which represent the two largest cohorts of PGR students. Next were CEMS (15.9%) and HSS (11%), both smaller than the leading two cohorts but still ranking as the fourth and third largest groups. In contrast, KBS (2.4%) and Law (1.2%) had significantly

lower representation. While KBS has a small cohort of PGR students which can justify the lower response rates, Law's relatively low percentage is notable given its larger overall cohort size. Nevertheless, the variety of answers are positively representative of this cohort.

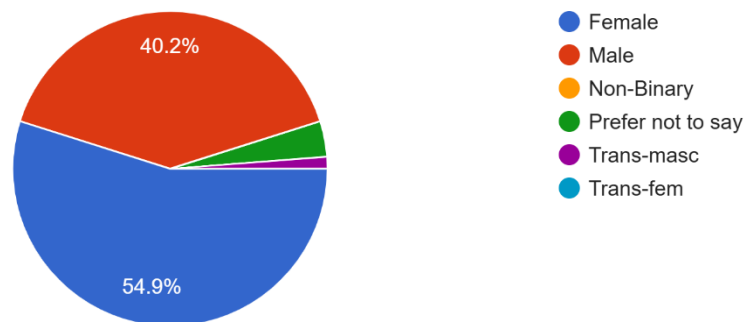


Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents by Gender

The majority of respondents to this survey identified as female, comprising 54.9% of the participants, followed by 40.2% who identified as male. Additionally, 3.7% of respondents preferred not to disclose their gender identity, and 1.2% identified as trans-masculine. These demographics provide important context for understanding the diverse perspectives and experiences reflected in the survey findings.

Although Kent Students' Union (KSU) does not possess specific data on gender ratios within the PGR community, the percentage of female respondents aligns with trends observed in other surveys and research formats, where female participants typically constitute the majority of respondents.

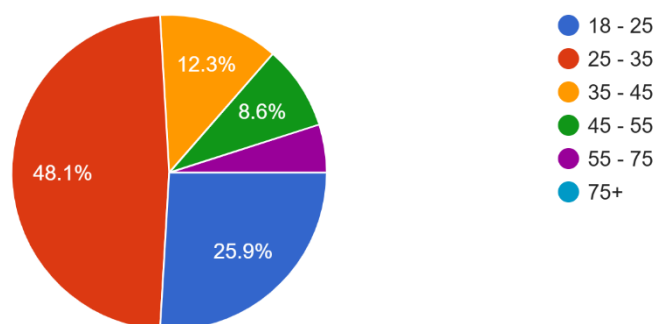


Figure 3: Percentage of Respondents by Age Group

The majority of survey respondents were aged between 25 and 35 years old, accounting for 48.1% of participants, followed by those aged 18 to 25 at 25.9%. Respondents aged 35 to 45 made up 12.3%, with 8.6% aged 45 to 55 and 4.9% aged 55 to 75. Notably, there were no respondents over the age of 75. These findings highlight the diverse age range within the PGR community, reflecting a variety of lived experiences and perspectives.

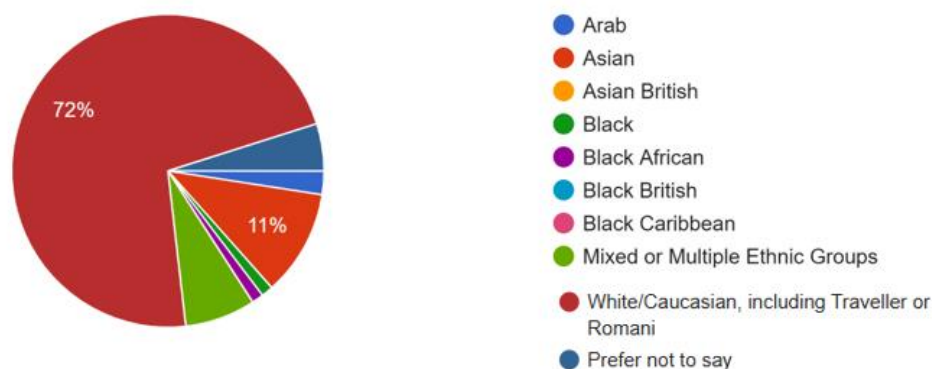


Figure 4: Percentage of Respondents by Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of respondents identified as White/Caucasian, including those of Traveller or Romani heritage, comprising 72% of the participants. Notably, Traveller and Romani communities should have been split from White/Caucasian for more accurate representation. This was followed by 9% who identified as Asian, and 7.3% who reported having a mixed or multiple ethnic background. The Arab community accounted for 2.4% of respondents, while Black and Black African individuals each represented 1.2%.

Similarly to the previous gender data analysis, Kent Students' Union¹ does not have detailed data on the ethnic breakdown of the PGR community, the percentage of respondents identifying as White/Caucasian appears consistent with trends observed in other surveys and research formats, where White participants typically represent the majority.

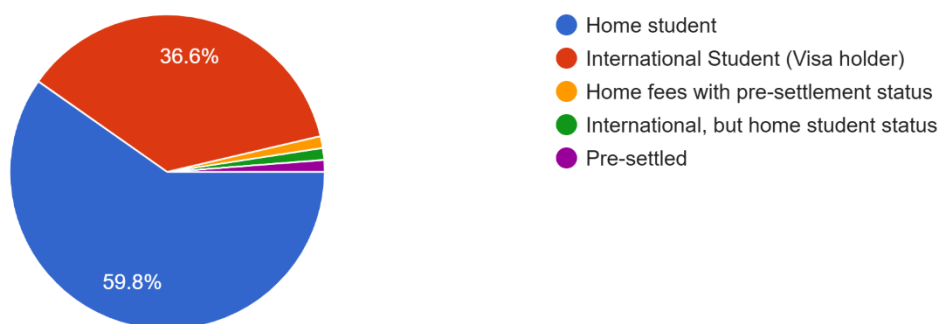


Figure 5: Percentage of International vs National Students

Another relevant demographic in a global education system is the distinction between home and international students. Among the survey respondents, 59.8% identified as home students, while 36.6% were international students holding a student visa. Additionally, 3.6% of respondents were international students but held home status or were on a pre-settled scheme.

¹ Kent Students' Union has done a Black Students Voice Project which its report can be found <https://ksu.co.uk/student-voice/black-student-voices>.

At this point, it is important to highlight that international student numbers are facing challenges and a noticeable decline. While this trend is more pronounced within the PGT community, it is also reflected in the PGR community. This suggests that the uncertainty surrounding visa policies, such as the prohibition on bringing dependents - implemented for PGT but not PGR students - is not the sole factor contributing to the decrease. A deeper examination is required to understand the broader factors influencing this trend and to address the underlying issues effectively.

The *International Student Voices Project Report* (KSU, 2025)² may offer further insights into the specific challenges faced by international students. Key issues include the high costs of visa fees in addition to tuition fees, as well as restrictive policies on employment opportunities³. Furthermore, concerns about an unwelcoming environment, cultural shocks, and negative word-of-mouth regarding the university's quality and treatment of international students could also be contributing factors. These challenges may be exacerbating the decline in international student numbers and warrant careful attention to address these underlying issues.

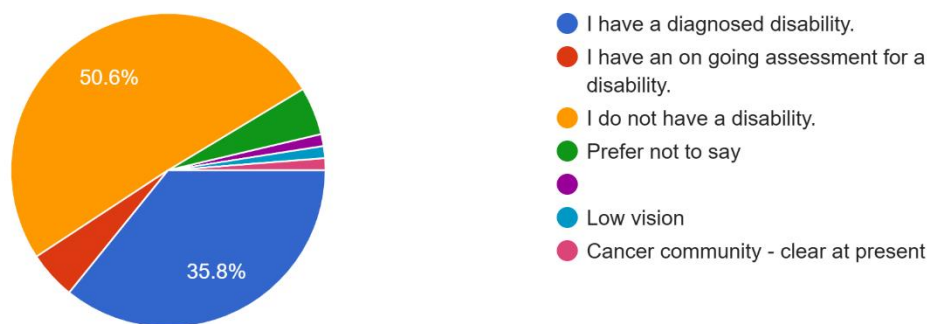


Figure 6: Percentage of Students with or without Disabilities

As will be explored later in this report, ableism emerges as the most prominent theme of discrimination. Consequently, it is crucial to examine how these demographics are distributed. Among the respondents, 50.6% indicated that they do not have a disability, while the remaining 49.4% were divided as follows: 38.2% reported having a disability, 4.9% were in the process of assessment, and 6.2% preferred not to disclose their status.

The survey further explored the various types of disabilities among respondents. Figure 7 (below) reveals that the vast majority of disabled students identify their disability as related to mental health or neurodivergence. Additionally, a notable finding is that mental health concerns are often present alongside other disabilities, such as neurodivergence or physical disabilities (both visible and non-visible). This highlights the complexity and interrelated nature of these issues.

² The project report can be found at <https://ksu.co.uk/student-voice/international-student-voices>.

³ KSU has an ongoing campaign to lobby the government for changes for international student employment rights. For more information and to sign the petition visit <https://ksu.co.uk/visa-campaign>.

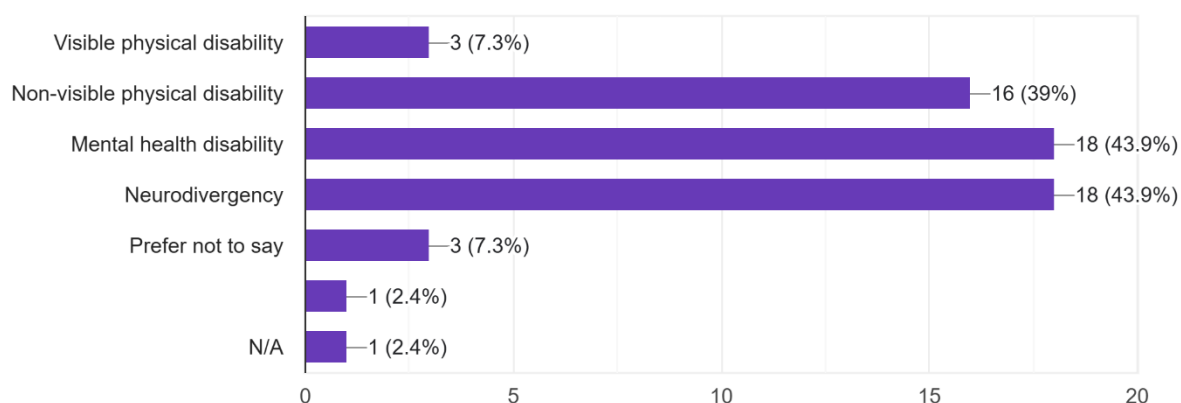


Figure 7: Different Student Disabilities

Lastly, another key demographic to consider is the source of students' funding, as elitism emerges as another significant theme of discrimination discussed in the following chapter. Among the respondents, 47.6% indicated that they receive a scholarship, 41.5% are self-funded, and the remaining participants rely on partial scholarships, student loans, or have exhausted their scholarship funding.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the survey provides a meaningful representation of the PGR community at the University of Kent. With responses from approximately 10% of the total cohort, the insights gathered reflect the diverse academic, demographic, and experiential profiles within this group. The data highlights key aspects of the community, including the distribution of students across divisions, age ranges, genders, ethnicities, and funding sources, as well as the prevalence and complexity of disabilities. While not fully representative of every PGR student, the survey captures a significant subset of the population, offering a reliable foundation for analysis and advocacy that aligns with the needs and priorities of the broader PGR community.

It is important to note that sexuality was not included as a demographic explored in this survey. However, there were highlights in open answers about feeling more discriminated because of sexual orientation than for other protected characteristics and transphobia emerged as one of the five major themes of discrimination highlighted in the findings. We acknowledge this as a significant gap in the research and recognize the need for further exploration of these issues. This gap may be addressed through the forthcoming *LGBTQIA+ Student Voice Project Report* (KSU, 2025)⁴ which will hopefully provide deeper insights into the experiences and challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ students, including those within the PGR community.

⁴ The project report can be found at <https://ksu.co.uk/student-voice/lgbtqia-student-voices>.

EXPERIENCE

The student experience encompasses the multifaceted journey of academic and social growth that defines a student's time in education. This experience is shaped not only by the challenges and opportunities encountered in the research and learning environments, but also by the support systems and institutional processes designed to guide and safeguard students along the way. For postgraduate research students, key aspects such as the quality of supervision, the conduct of people around them, and the availability of effective complaints procedures are critical in fostering a positive and equitable academic environment. This chapter explores these dimensions, delving into how they intersect to influence the broader student experience, outlining the quality of the mechanisms in place to address challenges faced during this journey and providing suggestions to improve the student experience.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination - the unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals based on characteristics such as ethnicity, age, sex, or disability - remains a significant concern in the realm of higher education. For postgraduate research (PGR) students, the impact of discrimination can be particularly profound due to the limited interaction with the broader community and the thin line between student and staff roles, affecting both their academic progression and overall well-being. This survey reveals that 22% of respondents have experienced or felt discriminated against during their studies. This subsection examines the manifestations of discrimination within the PGR context, its consequences on student experiences, and the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive academic environments to combat these inequities.

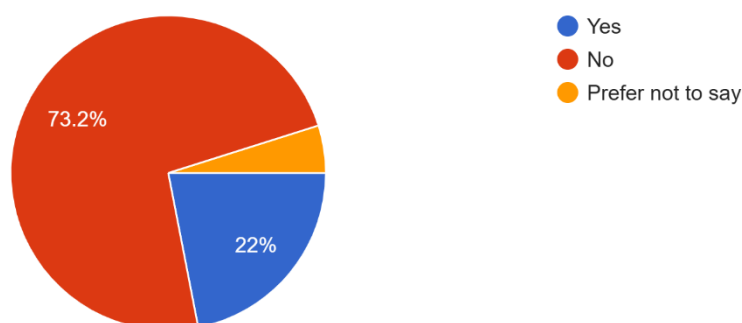


Figure 8: Discrimination Percentages from the Survey.

An analysis of postgraduate research students who reported experiencing or feeling discriminated against reveals significant demographic and contextual patterns. Among these individuals, 61.1% identify as female, while 22.2% are male. Smaller but notable groups include those who prefer not to disclose their gender (11.2%) and transmasculine students

(5.6%). These gender-based dynamics underscore the prevalence of discrimination across diverse identities and point to the need for gender-sensitive approaches in addressing inequity.

Academic disciplines also play a role, with 61.1% of those feeling discriminated against belonging to Arts and Humanities, suggesting sector-specific challenges in fostering inclusive environments. Other disciplines include Natural Sciences (22.2%), with smaller representations from Law (5.6%), Computing, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (CEMS, 5.6%), and Human and Social Sciences (HSS, 5.6%). This disciplinary variation highlights how discrimination manifests differently across academic fields.

While it is true that the majority of reported experiences of discrimination come from female postgraduate students and those in the Arts and Humanities, this correlation cannot solely be attributed to the demographic composition of respondents. The data also reflects deeper, systemic issues within academia. Sexism remains a pervasive challenge, influencing how female and gender-diverse individuals navigate academic spaces, often facing microaggressions, implicit bias, and unequal opportunities. Moreover, the specific challenges faced by Arts and Humanities students, particularly at institutions like the University of Kent, underscore how structural factors exacerbate feelings of marginalization. The reduced value placed on these disciplines - evident in funding cuts, diminished institutional support, and societal undervaluation - further compounds the sense of inequity and discrimination. Addressing these issues requires both acknowledging long-standing inequalities and critically evaluating the policies and practices that perpetuate them.

Socioeconomic and funding status appear to intersect with these experiences. However, both non-funded and funded students bring different problems to the discussion. A majority (61.1%) of affected students hold scholarships, while 38.9% are self-funded. This statistic suggests that access to financial support alone may not shield students from discriminatory experiences. Furthermore, racial and cultural identity significantly influences the PGR journey, with 72.2% of respondents identifying as white or from a travelling background, 11.1% as Asian, 5.6% as mixed race, and 11.1% preferring not to disclose their ethnicity.

Disability status is another critical factor, with 61.1% of students identifying as having a disability, 11.1% undergoing ongoing assessments, and 27.8% reporting no disability. When combined with other factors, such as gender, funding status, or academic division, these characteristics create complex intersections of identity. For instance, an international, neurodivergent, from an ethnic minority, female student in a particular division might face compounded challenges tied to cultural, cognitive, and gendered biases.

Other demographic data further enrich the understanding of this group. A majority (61.1%) are home students, while 38.9% are international, underscoring the additional hurdles international students may encounter, such as cultural adjustment or language barriers. In terms of age, most discriminated students fall into the 25–35 age bracket (61.1%), followed by

smaller groups aged 18–25 (11.1%), 45–55 (11.1%), and 35–55 (16.7%). These diverse age groups suggest that discrimination affects students at varying stages of life and career.

The interplay of these characteristics—such as gender, disability, academic discipline, and international status—demonstrates the layered and multifaceted nature of discrimination in PGR experiences, as mentioned prior. Understanding these interactions is essential to developing targeted interventions that address not just single axes of inequity, but the compounded realities faced by many students.

A further textual analysis of the qualitative responses submitted by participants reveals five predominant themes: ableism, elitism, racism, ageism, and transphobia. Additionally, respondents highlighted concerns related to a lack of institutional support, experiences of bullying, and breaches of confidentiality. These findings underscore the diverse and intersecting challenges faced by postgraduate research students, reflecting systemic and interpersonal issues that demand targeted attention and remediation.

To further illustrate the lived experiences of discrimination among postgraduate research students, we will look at quotes, given by the respondents, that provide personal insights into the challenges they have faced. These accounts reveal not only the prevalence of discriminatory practices but also their profound emotional and professional impact. Through these voices, the realities of ableism, elitism, racism, ageism, transphobia, and other forms of marginalization are brought into sharper focus, emphasizing the urgent need for systemic change and enhanced support mechanisms.

An individual analysis of these five major themes of discrimination may provide further insights into the specific challenges faced by the PGR community. By examining each theme separately, we can better understand the nuanced experiences of students and identify targeted strategies to address these systemic issues effectively.

Ableism

Ableism is a form of discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities, rooted in the belief that able-bodied individuals are inherently superior. It manifests in various ways, including systemic barriers, exclusion, and stereotypes that limit opportunities for disabled individuals. In academia, ableism can take the form of inadequate accommodations, inaccessible resources, and biases that perpetuate inequity in educational and professional settings. Below you can find some of the comments our students have made in regard to their experience.

‘After program directors violated my ILP I asked for reasonable adjustments to be made, but they doubled down and denied my reasonable adjustments. Then I had to ask my disability advisor to step in, Disability Services advocated for my ILP with the program director, and my reasonable adjustments were granted – reluctantly. The program director never approached or advised me directly about them respecting my ILP needs, but I was made aware they agreed to it via Disability Services.’

‘My primary issue is with building access. There are still huge amounts of the campus that are not properly wheelchair accessible.’

‘The lift being out of use for an extended period in Cornwallis means I’ve not accessed any training there for 2 years. The posts about it said ‘can arrange meetings elsewhere, if we have to’ which is not an inclusive attitude’

‘I feel as a neurodivergent student, the academic staff is not prepared to deal with it and the reasonable adjustments put in place in my ILP (which does not really work for anything for a PhD student) have not been appropriate dealt with, not adapting the expectation for my situation.’

A further comment also notes issues with disrespect for privacy, emphasizing how negative conversations about individual students happen freely between academic staff and how they might be prejudicial:

‘violated my privacy by sharing details from a supervisory review with other members of staff who later tried to discuss it publicly with me and then by announcing it to the entire cohort during Welcome Week introductions, and spoke negatively about my mental health history (something brought a bad reaction to medication) in front of other PGR students who then spread that as gospel.’

Elitism

Elitism is a form of discrimination that favours individuals from privileged socioeconomic or educational backgrounds, often marginalizing those from less advantaged circumstances. It is rooted in the belief that certain institutions, credentials, or social statuses are superior. In academia, elitism can manifest through biases in funding opportunities, networking access, and assumptions about a student’s capabilities based on their background, creating barriers for equitable participation and success.

‘I have also felt that my research was not relevant due to dealing with a less visible topic in an "irrelevant" country and that my publications and participations in conferences there were seen as, again, irrelevant, because it was not in the UK.’

‘I’ve been in group situations as PhD student where there is an assumption that everyone is middle class, which as a working class student is really awkward - people talk about me like I’m not there, and they talk about the working class as an abstract concept rather than people who might be in the room. I heard some really absurd and offensive statements about the expected level of education and beliefs of the working class.’

‘Supervisory team chairs brought in to be supportive treated me differently after learning I was self funded.’

‘Discrimination in the sense that we don’t get all the same opportunities or same funding. Also in my division if IT support liked you you got the equipment if not you didn’t.’

Racism, Ageism and Transphobia

Racism, ageism, and transphobia, while less prevalent in the textual analysis compared to other themes like ableism, remain significant issues. The lower frequency of these themes may be attributed to the smaller proportion of respondents who identify with these minority groups. For instance, if only a few respondents are aged 55+, it is understandable that ageism might not be as frequently mentioned as ableism, where 50% of respondents reported having a disability. However, the impact of these forms of discrimination on the individuals affected is no less profound. It is crucial to acknowledge and address these issues, as they highlight the unique challenges faced by minority groups within the PGR community, ensuring that their voices are not overlooked.

Racism is discrimination or prejudice against individuals based on their race or ethnicity, often perpetuating systemic inequities and exclusion. Ageism refers to biases or discriminatory practices against individuals based on their age, often marginalizing both older and younger members of a community, but in our case particularly affecting the older students. Transphobia is the discrimination, prejudice, or fear directed toward transgender or gender non-conforming individuals, often resulting in exclusion, harassment, and systemic barriers. Each of these forms of discrimination creates significant challenges for those affected, hindering their ability to thrive and fully participate in academic and social environments.

Here are some of the comments made by our students:

‘I think the instances of discrimination are very subtle. There is an inherent bias against people of colour. It is not that someone is actively trying to be racist but the way you are approached, spoken to, or perceived in general is coloured by prejudices.’

‘in my previous experience at MA there was a class on a film with a trans character that quickly fell into transphobia and ignorance. I was also often tokenised in class. There are a lot of events which are passively discriminatory.’

‘Ageism when I first arrived.’

This survey highlights the multifaceted challenges PGR students face, including personal and academic pressures, social integration, and the adequacy of institutional support. Central to these challenges is the pervasive issue of discrimination, which takes forms such as ableism, elitism, racism, ageism, and transphobia. These experiences, often compounded by intersecting identities, affect students’ well-being, academic progression, and sense of belonging within their institutions.

Discrimination impacts students in diverse and significant ways, from inadequate accommodations for disabilities to biases based on socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. These issues reveal systemic failures in providing equitable support and opportunities. Moreover, the survey underscores how institutional practices, such as breaches of

confidentiality and unequal access to resources, exacerbate the difficulties faced by students from marginalized groups.

Addressing these challenges is neither superficial nor optional. Even if one student feels the impact of discrimination, it reflects a failure of higher education institutions to fulfil their role. Universities, increasingly running like businesses, must recognize that each student is a valued individual with unique and complex needs. Whether viewed as centres of innovation and knowledge or as service providers, institutions must rise to the challenge of fostering inclusive environments and meeting diverse needs with care, sensitivity, and a commitment to equity.

Failure to comply with these obligations may fragilize the institution by breaching various laws and regulations in the UK, such as the Equality Act 2010, the Education Act 1994, and standards related to consumer rights and quality assurance. Such breaches could lead to legal liabilities, damage to the institution's reputation, and erosion of trust among stakeholders, including students, staff, and the wider community.

The further subsections may offer more clarity on the intersectionality of these issues.

SUPERVISION

The relationship between postgraduate research (PGR) students and their supervisors⁵ is a cornerstone of their academic success, yet it remains fraught with challenges that significantly impact the PGR experience. Recent survey findings shed light on the complexities within this dynamic, highlighting issues such as inconsistent communication, unclear expectations, and power imbalances. These challenges not only hinder academic progress but also affect the mental well-being and professional development of PGR students. This chapter delves into the survey's key insights, examining the root causes of these issues and exploring their implications for the broader academic community, with an emphasis on fostering equitable and supportive supervisory relationships.

Figure 9 (below) illustrates that while 68.3% of students reported no issues with their supervision, a significant portion - over a quarter (26.8%) - indicated they do face challenges, with an additional 4.9% preferring not to disclose their experiences. Although the proportion of students encountering difficulties might seem small at first glance, the supervisory relationship, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is critical to a PGR student's academic journey, mental well-being, and professional growth. These findings underscore deeper systemic issues in how the University of Kent supports its PGR community, highlighting the need for institutional reflection and reform to ensure that every student receives the guidance and support necessary for success.

⁵ UK Council for Graduate Education has provided a report with the views from supervisors' perspectives, available at <https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/ukrss2024>.

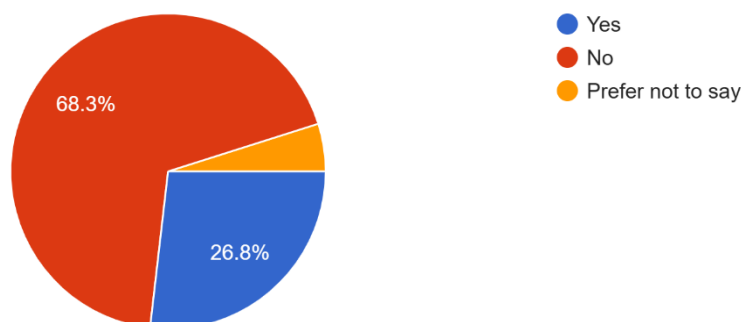


Figure 9: Supervision Problems

Through textual analysis of the open-ended survey responses, several key themes emerged regarding supervision challenges faced by PGR students. These included the instability of the university, characterized by frequent changes in supervisory arrangements, which disrupted continuity and progress. Many students highlighted a lack of appropriate supervision, not only regarding mismatches between their research needs and their supervisors' expertise, but also just difficulty in reaching out and secure appropriate feedback. Concerns were also raised about inadequate training for supervisors, resulting in inconsistent or ineffective guidance. Additionally, a recurring theme was a perceived lack of care from supervisors towards students and their research projects, leaving students feeling unsupported, including feelings of discrimination. Finally, unclear expectations regarding academic progress further exacerbated the difficulties, compounding frustration and uncertainty in the supervisory relationship.

Following are some of the comments left by respondents:

'Due to the constant restructuring, I have lost two supervisors. This has hindered my research progress as I have to adjust to the new supervisors' expectations after a period of not knowing what is happening. My current supervision team is good for my research, but I do not feel as secure or understood as I once did. This seems minor compared to other PhD stories, but for me it has forever soured my experience at Kent.'

'In three whole years (so far, of a part-time PhD) I've never had a meeting with my secondary supervisor. He never answered emails to arrange meetings, was on research leave for several terms over this time, and frequently was either always just leaving the office or not there when I tried to visit in person.'

'No supervision provided. No worthwhile feedback given on any work I've submitted. Supervisor rarely responded to my emails, not even my request to go part-time. When he did choose to respond, it took over a month for him to do so. I have received less than half my supervisions and have only had the opportunity to discuss my work on six occasions in the three years I have studied at Kent, as my supervisor preferred to discuss himself when we did have meetings. I recorded all my missed supervisions on Kent Vision, but my supervisor simply cancelled the reports.'

'I am angry because the university knew that there was a problem with my supervisor long before I arrived, but took my money regardless. I view the university as little more than a thief now. I have had to

spend the majority of my studies just fighting for the basic supervision I have paid for rather than being able to focus on my thesis. This has been very dispiriting, as I am self-funding. I have struggled with motivation, considered leaving on several occasions and have fallen behind with my work as a result.'

'supervisors who had inappropriate relationships with me and abuses of power, supervisors who were not engaged in my work or providing me with meaningful supervision, supervisors who were discriminatory'

'Conflict / differences of opinion amongst supervisory team that require middle-managing by myself.'

'I had a change of supervisor when mine left for another university. I was told the new supervisor was suggested by my previous one, which i then found out was a lie. I asked to change my supervisor and was told i need to ask him for that to be approved which put me in a very uncomfortable and unfair position.'

'I lost my first supervisor two/three years in, and while my new team is good and tries, but they didn't really believe in my thesis for 9 months, and they never took the time to review my academic CV so the past twelve months has been one part helpful, one part condescending assumptions, one part having to inform them of my academic experience.'

'Unclear expectations. Feel judged for having to work from home due to engineering works on the train.'

'My supervisor is more concerned with himself and hasn't been invested in my work or in me as a student.'

'Supervision for first 18 months was of a poor standard. Supervisor manipulative and controlling.'

A deeper breakdown of the data reveals further insights into the distribution of supervision issues across academic divisions. Among students who reported experiencing supervision issues, 50% are from the Arts and Humanities division, followed by 22.7% from Natural Sciences, 13.6% from Computing, Engineering, and Mathematical Sciences (CEMS), 9.1% from the Human and Social Sciences (HSS), and 4.5% from Law.

This pattern aligns with the broader trend identified in the previous section, where the Arts and Humanities division represented the largest proportion of respondents who have faced discrimination. These findings can also be related to higher respondent representation from certain divisions, but still provides a valuable starting point for exploring potential systemic factors within each division, including low staff morale in subjects that are less valued.

Among respondents who reported supervision issues, 50% indicated that they had not faced any forms of discrimination. However, 45.5% of these students reported experiencing discrimination, highlighting the intersection of supervision challenges and broader inequities. Additionally, 4.5% of those who reported supervision issues chose not to disclose whether they had faced discrimination. These figures underscore the importance of considering how supervision experiences may be influenced by or contribute to discriminatory dynamics within the academic environment.

Similarly to the previous section, the majority of students who reported facing issues with supervision are female, comprising 77.3% of the respondents in this category. This is followed by male students, who represent 18.2%, while 4.5% of respondents chose not to disclose their gender. These figures suggest that supervision issues may disproportionately affect female students, warranting further investigation into potential gender-based disparities in academic support and guidance.

Further demographic analysis reveals that the majority of students reporting supervision issues were home students and identified as White/Caucasian (including those of Traveller heritage). In terms of age, the spread of responses was fairly consistent across most age groups, with no reports from students aged 55 and above. When considering funding sources, the breakdown was also similar, with 54.5% of respondents being self-funded and 45.5% receiving scholarships. This data provides a clearer picture of the demographic context of the students experiencing supervision issues within the PGR community and reflects broader issues that target, in some cases, specific demographics, but also a broader issue with supervision practises.

The intersection of discrimination issues with challenges in supervision highlights a critical concern, as supervision is the cornerstone of the postgraduate research student experience. The impact on students' academic progression, well-being, and sense of belonging becomes, again, even more profound. Addressing these intertwined issues is not just important - it is essential. Institutions must recognize the pivotal role of supervision in shaping the PGR journey and take decisive action to eliminate systemic inequities.

COMPLAINTS' PROCEDURE

An effective complaints procedure is essential for addressing grievances and fostering trust within the PGR community. However, the survey results reveal significant gaps in students' understanding and confidence in these mechanisms. Many students expressed uncertainty about how to navigate the complaints process or doubted its fairness and efficacy. This section explores the PGR community's perceptions of the complaints' procedures at the University of Kent, examining the barriers to their use and the implications for student well-being and institutional accountability. By analysing these insights, this section aims to shed light on the need for greater transparency, accessibility, and trust in the university's grievance resolution systems.

Figure 10 (below) shows that while 55.6% of students reported feeling confident in their understanding of the complaints process, a notable 27.2% indicated that they do not, and a further 17.3% preferred not to say. These figures highlight a significant proportion of the PGR community who may lack the clarity or confidence needed to access and utilize these mechanisms effectively, raising concerns about the inclusivity and communication of such procedures.

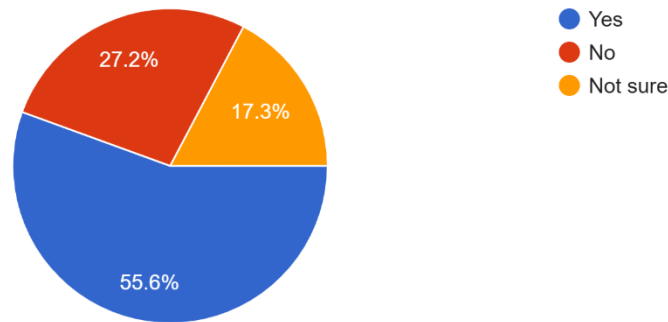


Figure 10: Students understanding of Complaints Procedures

Even among students who indicated an awareness of the complaints' procedures, many described their experiences with the process in highly critical terms. Respondents characterized it as "poor", a "horrible experience and never resolved," or noted that "it was stressful, time-consuming, and felt pointless in the end."

Further analysis of the open-ended responses reinforces these sentiments, highlighting recurring concerns about the time-intensive and ineffective nature of the process. Additionally, students expressed apprehension about potential repercussions for raising complaints, particularly when using formal channels, as well as the inability to do so anonymously, which further discouraged engagement with the procedure.

'Took 2 years to have an answer'

'I did as an undergrad when a lecturer was racist and sexist. They told me unless I was willing to put my name on the complaint there was nothing they could do. Being as I was still on that lecturers module I didn't feel I could pursue it without harming my chances of passing, and given the response I got to my initial email I didn't think the team responsible for handling the complaint would do anything meaningful anyway.'

'I raised a formal complaint with Kent Union regarding the behaviour of another PGR student. the response of both KU and the Uni (when it was passed to Student Conduct and C), whilst everyone was kind and said caring things, was woefully slow, and frankly achieved nothing practical. Nothing has changed. My voice (and everyone else who backed that complaint up) was basically ignored, no action was taken, and the one small change I asked for was refused. I am still worried every day by having to work near the person I complained about. I have zero faith in the complaints' procedures by both institutions.'

'I raised a complaint once about someone at the university but outside my department - the complaint was acknowledged as received, but I have not heard anything else about it since I submitted it in 2021.'

'Informal complaints on multiple occasions, no resolution - I was always told that they couldn't do anything if I didn't make a formal complaint - which I was hesitant to do as it would put me in a vulnerable and risky position and interfere with my ability to continue my studies.'

‘I have, both formally and informally. I have never actually experienced a resolution. I mean they said the head of the division had words with them, but the behaviour only worsened afterwards. I do not think the former program directors respected their division leadership nor took seriously the reports of discriminatory behaviour.’

‘No. Nothing changed and no one can answer my queries on student support. There is t adequate academic support in house at Kent. The external speakers used are out of touch and despite having to complain about racism and derogatory remarks on mental health from some speakers they are still used’

Further inquiry with the PGR administrative teams from each division has provided deeper insight into the systemic issues contributing to challenges faced by students. It has highlighted a lack of proper written and standardized guidance regarding complaints procedures and supervision change requests. This absence of clear protocols can leave students uncertain about their rights and the processes available to them, potentially exacerbating their difficulties and limiting their ability to seek effective resolutions. Furthermore, it leaves space for misconduct to happen.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the data gathered from this survey highlights key areas of concern, for PGR students at the University of Kent, around discrimination, supervision issues, and complaints procedures. Discrimination, in its various forms, emerged as a significant issue, with ableism being one of the most prevalent themes. Although issues like racism, ageism, and transphobia were less commonly reported, they remain important for the minority students affected. These findings underscore the need for a more inclusive and supportive environment for all PGR students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, and emphasize the importance of ongoing efforts to tackle these forms of discrimination.

The survey also revealed that supervision issues are a major concern, with many students feeling unsupported in their academic journey. The lack of standardized procedures and inconsistent treatment across different divisions, particularly in terms of supervision and resources, is a clear area for improvement. Furthermore, the complaints procedure remains a significant barrier for students seeking resolution to their issues, with a lack of clear guidance and a feeling of instability when it comes to staff changes. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive action from both the Graduate and Research College (GRC) and Kent Students' Union, but also senior leadership, to ensure that students feel supported, heard, and equipped to resolve any issues they may face.

One particularly concerning trend that emerged from the data was the apparent mistreatment of women in research, and the issues in Arts and Humanities division. This issue warrants further investigation to understand its causes and develop targeted solutions to support women in these fields. The intersection of gender and discipline-specific challenges may be contributing to a lack of adequate support for female researchers, which requires attention from both the university and broader academic community.

Graduate and Research College and Kent Students' Union

The final section of the survey focused on the awareness and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of two key entities supporting postgraduate research students at the University of Kent: Kent Students' Union (KSU) and the Graduate and Researcher College (GRC). These organizations play crucial roles in advocating for students, providing resources, and fostering a supportive academic environment. The last two survey questions explored the extent to which respondents were familiar with these bodies and their functions, offering insights into potential gaps in communication and engagement with the PGR community.

KENT STUDENTS' UNION

Kent Students' Union (KSU) is a charity dedicated to advocating for the interests of all students at the University of Kent. Its mission encompasses ensuring students' voices are heard and providing resources, services, and opportunities that enhance their university experience. Despite this broad remit, there appears to be a lack of awareness among postgraduate research (PGR) students about the specific ways in which KSU supports them.

When respondents were asked about their knowledge of KSU's work for PGR students, the majority (42%) stated they did not know what KSU does for this group. A smaller proportion (24.5%) indicated they were aware, while 18.5% acknowledged they had some knowledge but only vaguely. Notably, 14.8% of respondents did not provide an answer to this question, further highlighting potential gaps in communication or engagement.

A textual analysis of student comments suggests that many perceive KSU as primarily serving undergraduate or postgraduate taught (PGT) students. However, those who responded positively about KSU's work for PGR students frequently cited its societies, advice service, and the role of the Vice President for Postgraduates as key areas of support. These findings indicate that while some PGR students recognize and appreciate KSU's efforts, there is significant room for improvement in ensuring the visibility and accessibility of its services for this community.

GRADUATE RESEARCH COLLEGE

The Graduate and Researcher College (GRC) is a key institution at the University of Kent, committed to providing comprehensive support for research students and staff. Its mission is to enhance the research experience by offering training, workshops, and events that contribute to the academic and professional development of the postgraduate research (PGR)

community. However, survey responses indicate a mixed understanding among students about the full scope of the GRC's functions and accessibility.

When respondents were asked about their knowledge of the GRC, 56.1% believed they understood what the GRC does, while 17.1% indicated they knew vaguely. A smaller group, 13.4%, stated they did not know about the GRC's work, and another 13.4% chose not to answer the question. These figures highlight that while the majority of students are aware of the GRC, there are gaps in understanding its broader role and how to engage with its services effectively.

A textual analysis of comments further illuminates these perceptions. The majority of students associated the GRC with training opportunities and events for the PGR community. While these initiatives are well-recognized, some respondents expressed concerns about the quality of the training and workshops, suggesting a need for improvement to better meet students' needs. Additionally, a recurring theme in the comments was the limited visibility of the GRC's support beyond training. Several students mentioned they were unsure how to access the GRC for help when facing issues, perceiving the GRC as primarily a provider of training rather than a broader support hub.

These findings suggest an opportunity for the GRC to strengthen its communication and outreach efforts, ensuring that students are aware of the full range of services it provides. By addressing the feedback on training quality and increasing visibility as a source of comprehensive support, the GRC can better fulfil its mission to serve the research community at the University of Kent.

Beyond the Data: Testimonials and Recommendations

In the previous sections, this report explored the demographics of the postgraduate research community at the University of Kent and examined the reach and validity of this study. It delved into key issues such as discrimination, supervision challenges, and the lack of standardized complaints procedures, highlighting significant areas where improvements are needed to better support PGR students. These analyses have underscored the necessity of rethinking and enhancing the structures and policies that shape the PGR experience at the university.

While data-driven insights form the backbone of this report, we recognize that understanding the experiences of PGR students requires more than numbers. To capture the nuances of these experiences, this conclusion will also present direct testimonials from students. These personal accounts provide valuable context, illuminating the challenges faced by the PGR community and emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues with empathy and urgency.

Building on these findings and testimonials, the report will conclude by recommending actionable steps to address the needs identified. These recommendations aim to foster a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable environment for PGR students at the University of Kent, ensuring that their academic journeys are as enriching and empowering as possible.

FURTHER COMMENTS AND TESTIMONIALS

While data and quantitative analysis are essential for understanding the broader trends within the PGR community, we recognize that the student experience extends beyond numbers. As highlighted in the previous sections, the challenges faced by PGR students are deeply impactful on an individual level. In this subsection, we will present additional comments from students and share a selection of testimonials. These personal insights will provide a more nuanced understanding of the issues raised in the survey, emphasizing how these topics affect students on a personal and emotional scale.

In addition to the issues of discrimination, supervision challenges, and the lack of support for filing complaints, many students have expressed concerns about the instability they feel at the university, particularly due to the frequent turnover of staff and course closures. This constant change has had a significant impact on their experience, creating a sense of uncertainty and disruption that affects their academic journey, the continuity of their studies, and their overall well-being.

'I believe that given the high turnover of the admin and support team makes the process flawed, with people not knowing what to properly do.'

'My supervisors and my research itself have been the only positive experience of my PhD. My department was closed within 6 months of my starting my phd, and took me completely unaware. If I had known this would be the situation at Kent I would have looked into a different institution. I was not given that knowledge. But my Visa is through Kent, and that is not an option. At this point I honestly feel like the University of Kent is trying to pull a bait and switch scheme on me, especially with the gaslighted and withholding of information.

I have a great relationship with my supervisors and can't say enough nice things about them but the university more broadly doesn't seem to support me, and I feel isolated from other PGRs in my division as I don't feel like I fit in.'

'I do not feel welcome at Kent, not since my department was shut down part way through my first year with out any advance notice so I was not given the option to go somewhere else. This is no longer an option as my VISA is tied to Kent. I have been gaslit about the importance of my supervisors, have had to change my supervisory team once already, and have been told that my team is only guaranteed for one year. My PhD still has 2 years in it (including this year). I am less than happy with the way this has been handled, my concerns have only been well recieved by my supervisors and I am in process of figuring out how to make official complaints because I do not feel like the program that I am recieving is the one that I signed up for and am paying for.'

'I love being here. I love Kent. It is a hard place to be sometimes, with the challenge the institution faces. We have wonderful staff and students. I love my studies and my job roles. But when a problem comes up I have zero faith that it will be dealt with promptly and efficiently. That is a sad thing to say, but my experience was not a good one. I cannot rely on either Kent Union or the Uni complaints procedure. This makes me very worried for all the others who have problems.'

'Bring back my department!'

'As a student of one of the withdrawn subjects I am very concerned of what will be the lack of subject support and community for the next two years due to redundancy and teach out. Questions over this have never been satisfactorily answered in the Kent 2030 forums and Q&A sessions, and I feel there will be no real extra opportunities available, with my subject being phased out.'

Additional PGR students have also highlighted a lack of resources and opportunities, ranging from job and funding availability to community-building initiatives and even basic facilities like parking spaces or better training. Furthermore, this issue compounds with the increased cost of living and rising tuition fees, further exacerbating the challenges students face in accessing resources and opportunities.

'As a practice as research candidate there is little divisional or support via the GRC for non traditional research. Training courses are focused on the traditional thesis, not practice as research. I have looked elsewhere for this support and feel unsupported by the university in this area.'

'Fees are so high and not enough job opportunities to cover living expenses'

'More promotion for improve the research'

'I think there are opportunities for us as a natural sciences to create more of a community. Departmental tea breaks or lunch breaks that are at no cost to the University (maybe tea bags/coffee could be provided). Many universities have a 10am or 11am tea break in a common room where people can sit/chat etc. It's an easy way to get to know people and doesn't take additional time outside of your workday.'

'Please creat more opportunities to build PGR community. Mres and PhDs can be lonely but a good school culture and community can fix that. That means providing more support, creating social opportunities specifically for post grads espically as many PhDs sit between student and staff.'

‘The induction process for pgr is pretty poor’

‘Pink Zone for PhD students. Especially those of us who car share.’

‘Please work on building more community. I would love to get to know PhDs outside my department but there is no community of PhDs here everyone is separate.’

Another key issue raised by PGR students is the sense of being in a limbo between staff and student roles. Many have expressed frustration over the unequal opportunities to teach across different divisions. For instance, some divisions still offer Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) contracts, while others provide no such opportunities at all. This disparity is also closely connected to the earlier point about the lack of resources and opportunities, highlighting the uneven access to professional development and financial support across the university. Another interesting fact is that when a student does have the chance to work as an Hourly Paid Lecturer (HPL), the pay is lower than a student working at Band D rate as a student ambassador.

In addition, there are significant disparities in the access and support provided to PGR students across different divisions. For example, some PGR students have 24/7 access to their buildings, while others do not, limiting their ability to work flexibly. Similarly, while some students are provided with dedicated desk spaces, others have no such facilities, further highlighting the uneven treatment within the university. These differences extend to support for attending conferences and publishing, with some divisions offering more robust financial and academic backing than others. This inconsistency in resources and opportunities is a key concern for many students, contributing to a sense of inequality in the PGR experience, including EDI concerns.

‘Several of my negative experiences during my PhD have come from being in the inbetween legal space of being classified as both staff and student. There is an ongoing UCU campaign for the past few years, pushing to reclassify PhD students as fully staff - it would be great to see the Kent Student Union lend vocal support to that cause, as it would not only help us in tangible ways, but show an understanding that we aren't 'undergrads, but a bit older' and have an oftentimes completely different experience at and relationship with the university’

‘The University administration and staff seem to lack any and all basic respect for all non CHASE funded PGR students, but especially self funded PGR students. Their behaviour and lack of functional EDI related infrastructure strongly suggests they lack academic integrity, and most of the people I know only remain at Kent because they put in the work to try to ensure Kent is ethical and has integrity - myself included. However, I think all students are feeling the stress of being ‘parentified’ by the negligent and abusive tactics of the Administration’s constant restructuring and the EDI ignorant staff who want to pretend everything is fine, including racist, classist, misogynistic, ablest micro aggressions, the exploitation of funded students and exclusion of self funded students when it comes to experience building opportunities (paid or otherwise.)’

‘As a disabled student it is clear that the university leadership is ignorant of the accessibility needs for autistic, adhd, and other neurodivergent students. This was made clear at the end of last autumn term when the head of disability services sent myself and other autistic students a cold email declaring our established and known autism mentor without any helpful information - only a vague promise we would learn who our new mentor was in the following January. This not only triggered panic attacks and anxiety from the sudden change without warning - something that is harmful to many autistic people - but it also triggered our deep sense of social justice as the person we knew

to be dedicated to helping us was robbed of the opportunity to tell us she was leaving herself. This compounded once we learned she only left because after years of service she was still on a 0 hours contract and denied anything more stable despite the continued registration of autistic students who aren't set to graduate for years. No one blamed her for needing a secured income and schedule, autistic people especially know the importance of a routine and expectations, but we do have to wonder what our disabled students' allowance is being used for and this leads to further distrust of the university.'

As mentioned earlier, and as we will further explore through the testimonials presented here, some of our students have expressed significant dissatisfaction with their experience. Their concerns reflect a range of issues, from a lack of support and resources to feeling overlooked and undervalued within the university. The following quotes highlight the depth of these frustrations and provide a personal insight into the challenges they face.

'It has been horrible and the worst mistake of my life was to come to Kent.'

'my experience with Kent has been the worst experience of my life, having significant negative impact on my physical and mental wellbeing. I have been abused and gaslit over a long period of time and dismissed when I sought help. I am desperately trying to complete my PhD so I haven't wasted all my time and can work towards a future career, but if I knew what I know now, I never would have started and I certainly wouldn't have come to Kent - I would never recommend going to Kent to anyone, particularly those with disabilities.'

'I regret choosing Kent. The mismanagement of the University is appalling. The treatment of international students purely as money flow is appalling. The lack of material support, funding, resources, and opportunities for PGRs is appalling. The lack of community due to constant restructuring and the loss of an actual school community (remember when you got rid of our own admin teams and centralized that as well?) is appalling. The constant threat of redundancy is appalling. This isn't a university, it's an appallingly-run business.'

However, despite these concerns, we also received some positive feedback from students who have shared their appreciation for certain aspects of their experience. Additionally, many students took the opportunity to offer valuable suggestions for improvement, highlighting areas where they believe changes could be made to enhance their overall experience. These constructive insights are crucial for informing future improvements and ensuring that the PGR community feels more supported and empowered moving forward.

'My supervisors have been excellent through various difficulties I've had. Student support services have seemed to be put under ever increasing pressure and difficulties over the time I've been here, though the individuals still there have been extremely helpful.'

'Maybe make clear how the Union and PGR are connected? Been to PGR workshops, talks, etc but was completely unaware that the Union supported the PGR. Don't really see the Union being involved.'

'Kent should organize more events or a contact support international students from countries which is rare community at Kent (for instance Vietnam) so that they can connect to each other.'

'Generally my experience has been positive, though as someone with a family member who experienced significant supervisory problems at Kent, I am mindful of attempting to resolve issues from my end as quickly as I can, if I am able to. There have been instances of misunderstandings between me and my supervisors however this was fortunately able to be resolved without any complaint procedures, formal or otherwise.'

'I think, it could be useful to create a leaflet regarding how to be mindful and sensitive towards people of colour/people with special needs/people with a different sexual orientation, and distribute them to all the departments around campus. A digital version of this leaflet could be sent to all faculty and staff members of our university. A Google form could also be created to understand if faculty and staff in general actively practice inclusivity.'

TESTIMONIALS

Some students agreed to share detailed personal testimonials to provide deeper insight into their experiences, while their anonymity has been carefully preserved. However, it is important to note that even in offering these accounts, several expressed concerns about addressing supervision-related issues due to fears of being recognized and facing potential retaliation. These testimonials shed light on the profound challenges faced by postgraduate research students, emphasizing the urgency of addressing both systemic and interpersonal barriers within academia.

TESTIMONIAL 1

"I have been asked to provide a testimonial as an international Arts and Humanities PhD student at the University of Kent, which has been disappointing at best. The overall experience and feeling shared by many international students at Kent are of being a "cash cow", recruited vigorously during these times of financial crisis at the University, then arriving to find the academic experience and support is woefully inadequate and not as advertised. I am aware that students in other disciplines may have a more positive and fulfilling experience, but the shared experience of my Arts and Humanities peers - even UK students - has left most of us feeling frustrated, unheard, and unimportant.

I have been at the university for a few years, through the various redundancy and severance schemes, closure of programmes, and negative impacts of the pandemic on the student body and University alike. Like many others, I have not only lost supervisors but have also lost the research environment that was promised during recruitment. For years, as programmes have closed, funding has dried up, and staff have exited the institution, the University's webpages still boasted a thriving academic atmosphere, funding for students to undertake research activities, and world-class academic staff. Upon arrival at the University, I found that at least half the staff advertised on the school's website were no longer at the University, there was no budget to support any type of Arts Hums research, there was no research environment (no conferences, study groups, tailored training, ability to network, etc.). Instead, I found an incredibly fractured environment, with remaining staff struggling to keep themselves afloat as they took on the responsibilities of their departed colleagues and their changing contracts. They had very little time for research students as they focused on keeping their taught programmes alive and could not offer any teaching or research experience beyond sometimes commenting on my research project during inconsistent supervisions. This has had a detrimental impact on my skills development, my career prospects, and my experience as an academic. When I have approached staff about these issues, my school's response has been to say we are all struggling and this is the best the University can do; the GRC's only advice has been to branch out to other universities and ask if any academics would unofficially supervise or mentor us. I am often left wondering what we are paying the University of Kent for, if our research is independent and our only options for community and networking are to ask external academics to take pity on us?

The crisis of the constant turnover of staff at the University has been treated as though it is "no big deal". Every single Arts and Humanities PhD student I know has lost at least one supervisor at some point in the last few years, with many losing more than one, myself included. It is the most basic cornerstone of applying for a PhD that research students select a university based on the staff there. Losing a supervisor you have specifically chosen, whose expertise aligns closely with your project, is heart wrenching. Of course this happens everywhere, but the speed at which Kent is losing its academic staff is alarming - between redundancy and severance schemes, and the staff who are "safe" looking to jump ship at the first opportunity, the research environment in the Arts and Humanities at Kent is woefully lacking. We have only been offered supervision by the staff who are left here, oftentimes without expertise in our area of study, and told by our Schools and the GRC that it really is not that important - staff in other fields are capable of supervising anyone. This is insulting,

as academic staff know how important it is to have a closely aligned supervisor to work with, yet are pretending that it does not make much difference to a research project. The point of a supervisor is not only to comment on your writing, put to help students network, to think critically about the sources they consult, to suggest how to improve on a research question, etc. Being told by a supervisor “I do not really have much knowledge of your area, but I will help the best I can” not only leads to a subpar research project, but also closes the opportunity to learn from and network with that supervisor’s colleagues and gain firsthand knowledge of the that field. It feels pointless to have moved internationally to study at Kent to work with people vaguely in my sphere of research. Beyond that, the staff who are left have been saddled with the students from their departed colleagues, and often express fatigue, overwhelm, and are unable to cope with their new workload. This is yet another instance of inadequate supervision - not only have we lost our supervisors that we came specifically to Kent to work with, but we are then thrust into a situation where our new supervisors are not able to supervisor us adequately.

I have asked for an external supervisor on many occasions. Each time I was told flatly by both academic and professional staff that this was impossible - the University’s finances would not allow it. Later, at various meetings with GRC staff for PhD students in the Arts and Humanities, multiple students raised this same problem. The GRC staff told us that when a supervisor left the University, students need not take any action - the GRC would automatically find us a suitable replacement, and in the case one was not available at Kent, they would pay for an external supervisor. Students, myself included, challenged this, as it was not our experience, and the GRC staff fought back vigorously. One student raised that they lost multiple supervisors over the years to various schemes, stating how upsetting it was that they were not replaced adequately; current team was not in the student’s area of research. They asked for an external supervisor but were denied. In their explanation, they used the terms “redundancy” and “severance” interchangeably. Instead of acknowledging the problem, the head of the GRC chided the student for not understanding the difference between redundancy and severance, and gave a long, pedantic response about the difference in terms. Both the student and the rest of the group spoke up to say they understood, and this was not the point of the question, and asked for an explanation for why students were being denied supervisors. This was completely ignored, saying all students who lost a supervisor were properly and promptly looked after; this specific case must have been a “one off”. Another student, who was attending the meeting virtually, confirmed they had a similar experience - both their supervisors left and when they raised the issue with the University and asked for external supervision, they were denied. GRC again said this could not have happened, but the student screenshared their email chain with staff, some of whom were present at the meeting, confirming they would not allow the student an external supervisor. Even with this glaring evidence, University staff denied responsibility. We were each told that our experience was a “one off” and an “oversight”. This happens at most meetings for students. Not only was this never resolved, but everyone left feeling gaslit, as we all shared the same experience and reality, yet the staff so vehemently denied it had happened, and assured us there was plenty of relevant staff left at Kent to supervise all subjects. It is one thing to lose the supervisor(s) one came to Kent to work with, but it is another for staff to deny students comparable supervision because it would cost the University money.

In another instance, I heard firsthand one staff member tell another they would need to become a secondary supervisor for a handful of students who had been left without a full supervisory team for months. When the latter staff member expressed concern, the former told them, “do not worry - it is just an administrative exercise and students don’t really interact with their secondary supervisor anyway. You will not need to do anything.” While this is unacceptable, I was not even surprised. This echoes my own and many of the experiences of my peers. In June 2024, many Arts and Humanities students received an email outlining how many staff members were leaving, and were told we would automatically be provided new supervisors, no action needed on our end. By the end of the summer, I do not know a single student, myself included, who had any resolution on the loss of either their primary or secondary supervisor. In meetings with the GRC, we were told to just check KentVision, and that our new supervisors would appear there. Now, in January 2025, there are still students who do not have clarity about who their two supervisors are. When my primary supervisor left the University, my KentVision was not updated/staff took no action for over a year. When professional staff emailed the supervisors listed on my KentVision account trying to schedule a review meeting, they were met with out of office messages saying the staff member had left the University a year prior. How are we expected to have faith in the University to provide us with adequate replacements, “no action needed on the students’ end”, when this is the outcome?

Regarding the depleted research environment, I mentioned earlier, the only training and research activities for research students are either aimed broadly for everyone (such as “improving your memory”), or geared specifically for students in STEM subjects. Even those training sessions that seem like they could be beneficial for those in the Arts and Humanities often are not. For example, I once attended a workshop about conducting research abroad. I thought, perhaps naively, this might cover how to contact international libraries, universities, or how to apply for grants or funding for research activities. Instead, it was targeted only for those conducting scientific field research, focused on the ethics of conducting research with people. We each had to introduce ourselves and our subject, and the person leading the session said to me “I’m sorry, I’m not sure why you are here” as an ArtsHums student. I said the description of the workshop only offered that it was for PhD students wanting to conduct research abroad, and had not specified it was only geared toward the ethics of collecting interviews and personal information. They (very nicely) said I could leave so I did not waste my time. This is a good reflection of what we are offered as ArtsHums students - there is the guise that research activities are offered to us, but they are tailored toward the money-making students/subjects instead. What is more disappointing, other than the fact that the University boasts that it offers a research environment and activities for all students, is that we do have colleagues and friends at other UK institutions, and see firsthand what other students in our subjects are receiving as part of their tuition fees and experience. I have friends in the same subjects at other UK universities; they are required to attend weekly training events, to work on their writing, to attend study groups and reading groups. They help organise conferences, they receive tailored training to their subject areas such as intensive language classes. Their subjects are still struggling, they pay the same tuition fees as Kent students, but their university staff are still required to uphold their research environments and help their PhD students thrive and to try to prepare them for a career in their field. I feel as though I am an independent scholar, struggling to make connections, network, and trying to insert myself in other university training sessions that I have to pay for (as Kent has done away with our, already measly, research stipends). Again, I struggle to understand what my exorbitant international fees are going towards, because they certainly are not being used for my own development or benefit.

You might be asking yourself why students like me stay at Kent, if the experience outlined above is as poor as I have expressed. Whenever I (or any international student I know) has complained or expressed any sort of dissatisfaction, instead of working towards a solution, staff have told us we can “leave” or intermit until things “get better.” Unfortunately, this is not an adequate solution, but the University truly has international students over a barrel. We give up a lot to study as international students, and the reality of visa restrictions and the lives we have left to come to the UK oftentimes means we are stuck at Kent, even in poor conditions. We just have to work through the chaos so we can try to finish our degree, even if it is not what we were promised. It supports the feeling that international students are recruited for the tuition fees, but there is no further interest about their experience at the University, as many choose to stay rather than to lose their fees and years of their life without a qualification.

Many PhD students are in an interesting position; while we are students, many of us are staff in some shape or form, and are invited to staff meetings or privy to staff emails. Our supervisors and other academic and professional staff do not quite view us as students, and oftentimes speak to us as colleagues. It is no secret that the University is recruiting international students fiercely, and also seek to recruit “non-traditional” students - mature students, those from different backgrounds, or those that might not have a chance at other universities. Yet when we arrive, we are treated blanketly as traditional, UK undergraduate students - those who have just left school and have the support and homebase of nearby family, who can run back to their childhood home while they figure out Plan B if things are not going well. Instead, these non-traditional and international students, myself included, have upended their lives to come here. I, for example, quit a salaried job, broke a lease, sold my car and belongings, and took out loans to come to Kent, being sold a promise of working with a leading expert in my field. After the years of mismanagement and poor student conditions at Kent, any time I have raised an issue I have been told I can “go home” or intermit. This comes from staff who have no idea about my background - it is quite an assumption to think that any student who is victim to the poor academic environment at Kent can just magically “go back” to their old life. During one of the pandemic lockdowns, I was receiving no support and asking for help, and was told by staff I should just intermit and “go home” until the University sorts things out. This would cause me to lose the student loans I was dependent on to live, try to find a place to live and a job to support myself during an active lockdown, all because the University staff were overwhelmed. It just shows there is very little thought, training, or care for international

students. We are here for income, and staff do not seem to care what our experience is when we are here or the repercussions of us leaving.

It feels as though staff forget they are toying with people's lives - the University still continues to recruit international students relentlessly without even knowing if certain programmes will still be running the next year, sometimes with knowledge that they will be phased out. They ask students to put their trust in Kent, change their lives, and then shrug their shoulders when things go wrong. It feels criminal at times. It resembles a bait and switch tactic to promise students a world-class research environment, and once they arrive they are met with a dismal experience. For many students, it is too late to back out. Staff fail to realise (or care?) that these non-traditional and international students give up so much of their lives to come here that withdrawing is absolutely detrimental - it is not only a waste of their time and finances, but has a damaging impact on the lives they will return to. In a staff meeting last year with hundreds of attendees, one of the Executive Group members referred to Kent's financial saving grace/main recruitment strategy as the "three-for-one special" international student. It confirmed my, and so many other students', feeling that we are not here on merit, but to bolster the University's failing finances. We are not viewed as real people, but numbers. All the University cares about is recruiting and getting international students here, and once we arrive most of us are in a difficult position, where leaving the University might be even more detrimental than staying here. The University is our sponsor - they promise to provide a certain academic environment while international students promise to abide by the rules of our visa. If we leave our studies, want to switch courses or universities, or intermit for more than 59 days, our entire visa and current life is in jeopardy. We are stuck at a failing institution that cannot adequately care for us or provide what it has promised, yet if we choose to leave we are essentially starting over - being sent back to our home country wasting years of our time and money at Kent, without any type of qualification to show for it.

Like many other international students, I feel like I am too far in to leave Kent. As my supervisors have left and there is no research environment or prospects to speak of, I have asked for help and raised issues respectfully without resolution. I am stuck here until I finish my qualification and am tired and burnt out from the poor experience I have had at the University. As outlined above, each issue I have ever raised has been met with the same responses: it must be a one off, it will never happen again, give it some time and it will work itself out. When this happened at first, I had trust in the University staff and believed my experience was a "one off," that I could count on things to get better, etc. After years of the same experience over and over again, it feels as though staff do know the poor situations they have put international students in, but they continually try to push them off; after all, universities are transient places and most students leave within a few years. If staff meet every complaint or concern with "that shouldn't have happened - give it a few months and check back in" or "things will get better soon", that student will inevitably leave at some point and the concern will not have to be dealt. Every month there seems to be a new crisis, and the fate of the Arts and Humanities at Kent seems to be very dark. I do not have much hope that anything will change, but staff need to be aware that international students do not just come to Kent on a whim; their choice to come here is rooted in research, the University's recruitment promises, and our desire to better our lives through gaining a qualification here. There is no "rewind" button, many of us cannot just return to lives as normal when the experience at Kent is not as promised, and if the University is going to continue to rely on international students for its survival, it needs to do much, much better at supporting them and providing an adequate research environment, and stop the narrative that "this is just the way things are at the moment". I think the recent news stories of international students taking legal action against UK universities has sparked awareness that international students have rights and are allowed to fight back, and I sincerely hope the University of Kent reevaluates its practices and treatment of international students and their recruitment, if not for the benefit of the students, then in light of these events."

TESTIMONIAL 2

"The good stuff"

When choosing a university for my PhD I chose Kent because I had previously studied here at UG and PGT and had lecturers in mind who I felt would be a good fit to supervise my PhD. My project is by nature interdisciplinary and it was important to me to have expertise from different subject areas on my supervisory team. I was very lucky that both agreed to supervise my project and the relationship with them has been by far the best thing about being a PGR here. They both encourage me to pursue new opportunities, but are also mindful of my wellbeing (particularly given my tendency to take on too much at any one time) and regularly

check in with me about how I am managing my workload. I feel like they genuinely want to support me to do the best work that I can and are interested in what I have to say.

Kent has excellent resources for my work, and they are mostly accessible - when I have had to work from home for extended periods the university has had really good systems in place to support that and make sure I could still access the resources I need. The library is one of my favourite places on campus and has a really good variety of materials which again support the interdisciplinary nature of my work. The library search system is a little on the idiosyncratic side, but once you get used to it there are a lot of things available online which makes it easier as a commuting student.

I have been able to get involved with a variety of societies and networks on campus - I really do think there is something for everyone if you take the time to look. I made the decision to get very involved with social activities and student activism in my first year and found a ton of opportunities to connect with other students from similar backgrounds to me. Whilst as my workload has increased I have found less time to engage with these kind of extracurricular activities, I still really appreciate the mature students society and have made some great friends through their events which are very chilled and accessible.

Could use improvement

I genuinely believe Kent wants to be inclusive, there are many initiatives on campus to support that goal - the student voice projects, student networks, various advisory panels etc. That being said, there are areas where improvement is needed. For LGBTQIA+ students the campus is outwardly inclusive (the progress pride flag on Jarman makes my heart happy) but there are still religious groups operating on campus who have harassed me and other students, and who I have witnessed defacing advertising for queer friendly events. It is really disheartening and can make it feel like there is an undercurrent of hostility which is just not being addressed. Whilst I appreciate the efforts Kent makes to show support, more needs to be done to tackle the issues actually facing queer students, including making it clear that hate and harassment are just not acceptable.

The biggest problem I see as a PGR is classism and elitism. As a working class student I have been at events and in meetings with groups of PGRs and academics where the working class is talked about like an abstract concept, and I have heard some frankly insulting and reductive comments made which have given the impression people like me are not welcome, or not capable of getting this far, in higher education. I am not talking about malicious classism, but what I think would best be characterised as unconscious bias - assumptions for example about experiences students will have had (visiting galleries/going on foreign holidays), or about what 'working class people' as an amorphous category think/do/care about. I am aware of guidance on how many hours of paid work students should be allowed to undertake whilst studying full time, and the suggestion that if a student works more than a certain number of hours they should have to switch to part time. It is absurd to me that in a cost of living crisis, in 2025, it is acceptable to tell students who have to work 15-20 hours a week at least in order to make ends meet that they should then have to delay starting their career as academics in earnest by going part time because they aren't funded, or don't have parental support. I am aware that academia is very middle class, and Kent as an area is very middle class, so there is a basis for the assumptions being made, but the university needs to work on creating an inclusive environment and making it clear that classism is unacceptable - the onus should not be on students to speak up on behalf of their economic background. Kent's drive to ensure students registered as full time complete their PhD inside the set time period should not result in the stigmatisation of students who work - funding a PhD is not one size fits all.

The final major problem is one I think a lot of students will have raised - the constant uncertainty and chaos at the university is really destroying a lot of what I loved about this campus as an undergraduate. Students are disillusioned because they don't feel like they are being listened to. Staff morale is at rock bottom because they live in fear of losing their jobs and are dealing with constant changes to processes and structures. It feels like no system is given chance to work - if the problem isn't fixed by one restructure they just do another one. Students have lost faith in the university and a lot of work needs to be done to get it back. All we hear is 'the whole sector is struggling' which a) is not an excuse and b) doesn't address the problem, which is Kent's response to these problems, not the problems themselves, which we are by now well aware of. Most important of all in this is transparency - information is communicated poorly and selectively so staff and students rarely get to see the whole picture of what is going on. The atmosphere when I started here as a student was so positive and vibrant and that has just been steadily eroded over the past few years - it's genuinely been sad to watch.

Overall

I really do love being a student here, it has been such a rewarding, life changing experience, I have found myself and gained so much confidence in my time here. Writing this testimonial I have realised how much of

that is down to the people - staff and students alike. I hope the university realises the value of its people - and I truly hope it will do more to show that in future. This campus still has so much potential, there are talented people, people who care about education, about Kent, and about inclusivity, and they are being worn down. Kent keeps claiming it is changing to 'put students first' - but a huge part of student experience is interactions with staff, and more needs to be done to take care of them first, at all levels."

TESTIMONIAL 3

"As a recently submitted PhD student, I feel compelled to share my experience at the university, which was fraught with challenges related to funding, resources, and institutional support. From the outset, my time there was marked by a significant lack of support for conducting research effectively. Despite being hired to undertake research that required specialised equipment, I initially had to purchase my own equipment as the school I was under did not own what was needed. Later, when the school acquired the necessary equipment, it was nearly impossible to borrow due to restrictive policies and prioritisation issues. Undergraduate students were always prioritised and at times it was impossible to conduct experiments at a timely manner.

The lack of funding also permeated every aspect of my research journey. Conference attendance, which is a vital part of academic development, was consistently unsupported. Although I had multiple papers accepted at prestigious conferences, the school did not provide financial assistance for attendance fees, even though in our field we do not publish in Journals. This left me with no option but to either fund these trips out of my own pocket or seek alternative means. Additionally, the £250 annual research allowance which was there while I was conducting research, which should theoretically have been available to support researchers, was inaccessible and needed extensive justifications to be provided.

The institutional deficiencies extended beyond funding. Training opportunities provided through the Graduate Research College, while delivered by capable trainers, were overly generic and failed to address the specific needs of my research discipline. Trainers were unfamiliar with the specialised procedures, methodologies, and writing styles necessary for research in my field, rendering the sessions largely unhelpful. At the same time there no skill development opportunities within the school itself, making it very hard to improve research skills.

Another critical shortcoming was the absence of a research group within my school. This isolation deprived me of opportunities to present my work to other academics, receive constructive feedback, or build collaborations—all essential components of a thriving academic environment. Furthermore, there was no IT support tailored to researchers. Requests for basic IT services, such as access to essential software or equipment, were met with prolonged delays. For example, I once submitted an IT ticket in early July, which was only partially addressed in January of the following year. Even then, the wrong version of the requested software was installed, forcing me to abandon the issue altogether.

The physical research environment was equally inadequate. When the school I operated in relocated our offices, the new facilities were ill-suited for research activities. Issues ranged from inappropriate workspace conditions, including leaking windows and noisy workspace, to a lack of access to other critical facilities. This compounded the difficulties of an already challenging research landscape.

These systemic issues collectively undermined my ability to conduct meaningful research during my PhD. The lack of institutional support not only added undue financial and logistical burdens but also limited my capacity to engage fully with the academic community. While I am proud of my accomplishments despite these obstacles, the experience has highlighted serious deficiencies in the support structures for postgraduate researchers."

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CALL FOR ACTION!

While it is crucial to understand the issues and challenges our students are facing, it is equally important to act beyond just discussing the problems. This report concludes with seven key recommendations and a call for action to address these concerns effectively.

1. **Kent Students' Union Needs to Be Clearer About Their Support for PGR Students:** It is essential for Kent Students' Union (KSU) to clearly communicate the support available to PGR students. As highlighted earlier, many students are unsure of what KSU does for their specific cohort. To address this, KSU should develop targeted communication strategies, such as dedicated PGR sections on their website and Jobshop as well as the Advice Service need to understand the particularities of the PGR students better. These initiatives would help raise awareness of the services KSU offers, such as advocacy, social events, and career development resources, ensuring that PGR students can access the support they need. That better understanding should not only sit with KSU, but also the university. Therefore, we also suggest that a 'women in academia', a 'neurodivergency in academia' and a 'working class' student voice project could further infer on the issues raised by this study and suggest the university to stand behind these projects as they did for the *International Student Voice Project*, the *Black Voices Project* and the *LGBTQIA+ Students Voice Project*.
2. **Better Communications and Information Needs to Be Delivered to Students:** Communication is crucial in addressing the concerns of PGR students. Students have expressed frustration about the lack of clear and timely information, particularly regarding the availability of resources, training opportunities, and changes within the university. To improve the situation, a more proactive and transparent communication strategy should be implemented. This could include regular newsletters, a centralized platform for PGR-specific announcements, and better signposting of resources such as funding opportunities, workshops, and events. Ensuring that students are well-informed will help them feel more supported and connected to the university community without also making them feel overwhelmed with the amounts of communication. There have been students highlighting they would prefer a more direct and personal communication, moving away from digital communications, such as supervisors, who are the biggest bridge between PGR students and the university, to inform them of ongoing events and opportunities. Furthermore, we acknowledge some of these resources already exist, but if students are not aware they serve no purpose, and we stress that better communication between schools and central services is needed.
3. **Create a Postgraduate Research Advisory Board:** The establishment of a Postgraduate Research Advisory Board would provide a dedicated space for PGR students to voice their concerns, suggest improvements, and collaborate with staff to enhance the overall PGR experience. The board could consist of representatives from different divisions, as well as senior university staff, and would serve as a forum to

discuss ongoing issues, develop strategies for improvement, and ensure that the needs of PGR students are consistently addressed, following the examples of the Wellbeing Student Advisory Board (WSAB) and the International Students Advisory Board (ISAB). This body would also play a key role in fostering a sense of community among PGR students and promoting their interests at the university level.

4. **Create Written Guidance to Standardize Processes Across Divisions:** To address the inconsistencies in supervision and support that have been raised, the university should create written guidance that standardizes processes across divisions. This could include guidelines on supervision expected outcomes, complaint procedures, and the allocation of teaching opportunities. By establishing clear, written protocols, the university can ensure that all PGR students, regardless of their division, have equal access to the resources and support they need. This would also help to eliminate confusion and uncertainty, providing a more transparent and fair experience for all students. We do not deny that different subjects have different needs and that needs to also be addressed in the creation of these guidelines. ILPs also need to be revisited in ways that will be helpful to PGR students and properly implemented.
5. **Update Policies, Particularly for Supervision and Reviews:** Policies related to supervision and progress reviews should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they are meeting the needs of PGR students. Given the importance of these policies in shaping the student experience, the university should consult with PGR students and academic staff to identify areas for improvement. The policies should be designed to provide clearer expectations, consistent support, and a more structured approach to supervision. Additionally, policies should be updated to reflect evolving trends in research and the diverse needs of the PGR community. Some of the missing elements that we have noted is that there is no clear policy for supervision change request, or to guarantee in the reviews that there is space from students to talk to the chair about supervision issues.
6. **Supervision Training to Be More Regular and Inclusive:** Training for supervisors should be more frequent, comprehensive, and inclusive of all disciplines. Regular training sessions would ensure that supervisors are equipped with the necessary skills to support PGR students effectively. This training should cover not only academic guidance but also the emotional and personal support that is crucial for the well-being of students and part of their pastoral care responsibilities. Furthermore, training should be inclusive of the wide range of research being conducted across different disciplines, addressing the specific challenges faced by students in various fields. By prioritizing supervisor training, the university can create a more supportive environment for PGR students. Furthermore, supervisors need to be held accountable if not doing the appropriate training or their respective duties as supervisors.

7. **GRC to Review Their Training Scheme to Ensure It Includes Different Forms of Research and More Specific Training Provided by New Schools:** The Graduate and Research College should conduct a thorough review of their current training schemes to ensure that they cater to the diverse forms of research being undertaken by PGR students. This review should involve consultation with PGR students and academic staff to identify gaps in the current offerings. Additionally, with the establishment of new schools, the GRC should work with these departments to develop more specific training tailored to the unique needs of their students. This could include specialized workshops, networking opportunities, and targeted career development resources to better support PGR students in their research and professional growth. Schools should also be involved in fostering a better research culture and more opportunities for their students.

Suggested Bibliography

While this report focuses on presenting the findings of our survey on postgraduate researcher (PGR) experiences, we have intentionally avoided delving into detailed theoretical discussions or an extensive literature review. However, to better understand the complexities and challenges highlighted in the report, we have compiled a selection of relevant readings. These resources provide valuable context and insights into the broader problematics of PGR/student experiences, offering both theoretical and practical perspectives for further exploration.

Alphin, H.C. Jr., Lavine, J. and Chan, R.Y. (eds.) (2017) *Disability and Equity in Higher Education Accessibility*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global Scientific Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2665-0>.

Azevedo, F., Middleton, S., Phan, J.M., Kapp, S., Gourdon-Kanhukamwe, A., Iley, B., Elsherif, M. and Shaw, J.J. (2022) 'Navigating academia as neurodivergent researchers: Promoting neurodiversity within open scholarship', *Psychological Science*, 31 October. Available at: <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/gs-navigating-academia-as-neurodivergent-researchers>.

Ball, S.J. (2002) *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage*. 1st edn. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203218952>.

Bathmaker, A.-M., Ingram, N., Abrahams, J., Hoare, A., Waller, R. and Bradley, H. (2016) *Higher Education, Social Class and Social Mobility: The Degree Generation*. Cham: Springer. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=aPnCDAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&ots=dHz_n3NqM0&sig=EhY0EQDJrPSW_2-kPLBQKSfdZ7k&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

Bernstein, B. (2000) *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control, and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=V0L-6eTYUAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&ots=7jhsW48_-V&sig=svFifjl3ssKvQ6fepX6hGEgrmlU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

Bertilsson Rosqvist, H., Hultman, L. and Nygren, A. (2023) 'ADHD in higher education and academia', *Canadian Journal on Disability Studies*, 12(3), pp. 1–26. Available at: <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-221766> [Accessed 08 January 2025].

Brooks, R. (2017) 'The construction of higher education students in English policy documents', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(6), pp. 745–761. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1406339>.

Brown, N. (2021). Introduction: Being 'different' in academia. In *Lived Experiences of Ableism in Academia*, Bristol, UK: Policy Press. available from: <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447354123.int001> [Accessed 08 January 2025].

Brown, N. and Leigh, J. (2018) 'Ableism in academia: where are the disabled and ill academics?', *Disability & Society*, 33(6), pp. 985–989. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1455627> [Accessed 08 January 2025].

Chandler, C. (1996) 'Mentoring and women in academia: Reevaluating the traditional model', *NWSA Journal*, 8(3), pp. 79–100. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4316462>.

Collins, P.H. (2006) *Intersecting oppressions*. Available at: https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/13299_Chapter_16_Web_Bye_Patricia_Hill_Collins.pdf.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015) *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file

[/474227/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice.pdf](#).

Forbes, S.H., Aneja, P. and Guest, O. (2024) 'The myth of normative development', *Infant and Child Development*, 33(1), e2393. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.2393> [Accessed 08 January 2025].

Gasser, C.E. and Shaffer, K.S. (2014) 'Career development of women in academia: Traversing the leaky pipeline', *Professional Counselor*, 4(4), pp. 332–352. Available at: <http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org>.

Hensby, A. and Adewumi, B. (eds.) (2024) *Race, Capital, and Equity in Higher Education: Challenging Differential Academic Attainment in UK Universities*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51617-7>.

Lloyd, M.S. (2019) *The Ethics and Politics of Vulnerable Bodies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Available at: <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/29332/1/The%20Ethics%20and%20Politics%20of%20Vulnerable%20Bodies.pdf> [Accessed 08 January 2025].

McDermott, L. G., & Mosley, N. A. (2023). "Academia, as a whole, is structured entirely without any consideration for neurodivergency," and other things neurodivergent students want you to know. Physics Education Research Conference, Sacramento, CA. <https://doi.org/10.1119/perc.2023.pr.McDermott>.

Mellifont, D. (2021) 'Ableist ivory towers: a narrative review informing about the lived experiences of neurodivergent staff in contemporary higher education', *Disability & Society*, 38(5), pp. 865–886. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2021.1965547>. [Accessed 08 January 2025].

Niemann, Y.F., Gutiérrez y Muhs, G. and González, C.G. (2020) *Presumed Incompetent II: Race, Class, Power, and Resistance of Women in Academia*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=oarYDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=women+in+academia&ots=hQec6uL-rV&sig=BnJGPOXkSpSceFW_WvLxWGC15FA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=women%20in%20academia&f=false.

Reay, D. (2018) 'Miseducation: inequality, education and the working classes', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 27(4), pp. 453–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2018.1531229>.

Valian, V. (2005) 'Beyond Gender Schemas: Improving the Advancement of Women in Academia', *Hypatia*, 20(3), pp. 198–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2018.153122910.1111/j.1527-2001.2005.tb00495.x>.

Kent's Student Union - UoK PGR Survey

This survey is for all PGR students doing their studies at the University of Kent to give feedback on their experiences. We are looking for feedback to be able to advocate to improve the services and support provided by the university for this cohort of students.

The survey is divided in three instances:

- information regarding your studies;
- information regarding your demographic;
- information regarding your experience, particularly on discrimination, supervision dynamics and complaints procedures.

This survey is anonymous to allow you to speak freely about your experiences. By completing this form you are consenting Kent Students' Union to use your data, this will not be shared with any external organisations, but can be brought into discussion, when compiled, with the University of Kent. More information on our privacy policy can be found here: <https://ksu.co.uk/privacy>.

You are able to leave your email at the end, if you would like to be added to a mailing list and be contacted regarding PGR events and campaigns which will only be used by Kent Student's Union. If you want more information regarding the report that will be built from this survey or what are we doing to advocate for changes, please reach out to c.moreira@kent.ac.uk.

We really appreciate your feedback and participation!

1. What is your ongoing level of study? (Note this survey is not directed to undergraduates or taught master students)

Mark only one oval.

☐ Master by Research

☐ Mphil

☐ Phd

☐ Other: _____

2. What would better describe you?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ I have a scholarship
- ☐ I am self-funded
- ☐ Other: _____

3. What division are you part of?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Arts and Humanities
- ☐ Law, Society and Social Justice
- ☐ Natural Sciences
- ☐ Human and Social Sciences
- ☐ Kent Business School
- ☐ Computing, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences
- ☐ Kent and Medway Medical School
- ☐ Other: _____

4. What campus are you based in?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Canterbury
- ☐ Medway

5. What would better describe you?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Trans-masc
- ☐ Trans-fem
- ☐ Other: _____

6. What age group would you sit in?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 18 - 25
- ☐ 25 - 35
- ☐ 35 - 45
- ☐ 45 - 55
- ☐ 55 - 75
- ☐ 75+

7. Ethnicity

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Asian British
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Black African
- ☐ Black British
- ☐ Black Caribbean
- ☐ Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups
- ☐ White/Caucasian, including Traveller or Romani
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

8. What best describes you?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Home student
- ☐ International Student (Visa holder)
- ☐ Other: _____

9. Disabilities and Neurodivergence

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ I have a diagnosed disability.
- ☐ I have an on going assessment for a disability.
- ☐ I do not have a disability.
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

10. If you answer positively regarding having a disability (diagnosed or ongoing), how would you describe your disability:

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Visible physical disability
- ☐ Non-visible physical disability
- ☐ Mental health disability
- ☐ Neurodivergency
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

11. Would you say you have felt instances of discrimination in your divisions?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

12. If you answered yes, would you like to describe those instances?

13. Did you ever have problems regarding supervision?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

14. If you answered yes, would you share those experiences?

15. Do you feel like you know where to go and how to make a complaint?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

16. If you ever raised a complaint (formal or informal), how was your experience? Did it get resolved?

17. Do you know what the GRC (Graduate Research College) is and does?

18. Do you know what services and support Kent Students' Union provide for PGR's?

19. Is there anything else you would like to feedback to us regarding your student experience as a PGR at University of Kent?

20. Email (Optional)

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms