

Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) Reports

2010 Faculty responses

Summary report 1

Strategies and Initiatives for improving the research higher degree student experience

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Introduction

In response to the position paper Closing the Loop: disseminating the results and reports of the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (http://sydney.edu.au/graduate_studies_office/staff/) the SEG Research Training Committee endorsed the importance of ensuring that students were informed that their comments in these reports were being listened to, and acted upon. Accordingly, every faculty were asked to respond to their SREQ reports, and address the following issues:

- 1 Strategies and initiatives to improve the research higher degree student experience
- 2 Communication strategies for disseminating the SREQ reports to academic staff, research higher degree students and postgraduate administrative staff
- 3 Suggestions for improving the usefulness of the report
- 4 Overall response to the report

The aim of the reports was to provide the University with a range of strategies and initiatives that are being put in place to improve the research higher degree student experience.

All faculties provided responses to their SREQ reports, and these are available on the ITL SREQ website. In addition four summary reports have been compiled and made available on the Graduate Studies Office website.

This report is

Number 1: Strategies and initiatives for improving the research higher degree student experience.

This report is divided into five sections, relating directly to the SREQ factors used in reporting mechanisms across the University:

1. Quality of supervision
2. Quality of infrastructure
3. Research climate
4. Graduate attributes/ Generic skills
5. Overall Satisfaction

Each of the above sections provides information on the coverage in terms of aspects used to analyse qualitative data or student comments; trends in the analysis of qualitative data between 2009 and 2010, for both areas of best practice and areas of improvement; and a summary of strategies and initiatives reported by faculties in their responses to the SREQ reports.

Faculty reports should be consulted for details about the strategies and initiatives being put in place by each faculty. These are available at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/sreq_faculty.htm

Note

This was the first year in which reports were distributed beyond the Dean and Associate Dean within each faculty to include all academic staff, including postgraduate coordinators, all research higher degree students, and all administrative staff who were involved with research higher degree students. The response is rewarding and confirms the value of 'closing the loop'.

1 Quality of Supervision

Coverage

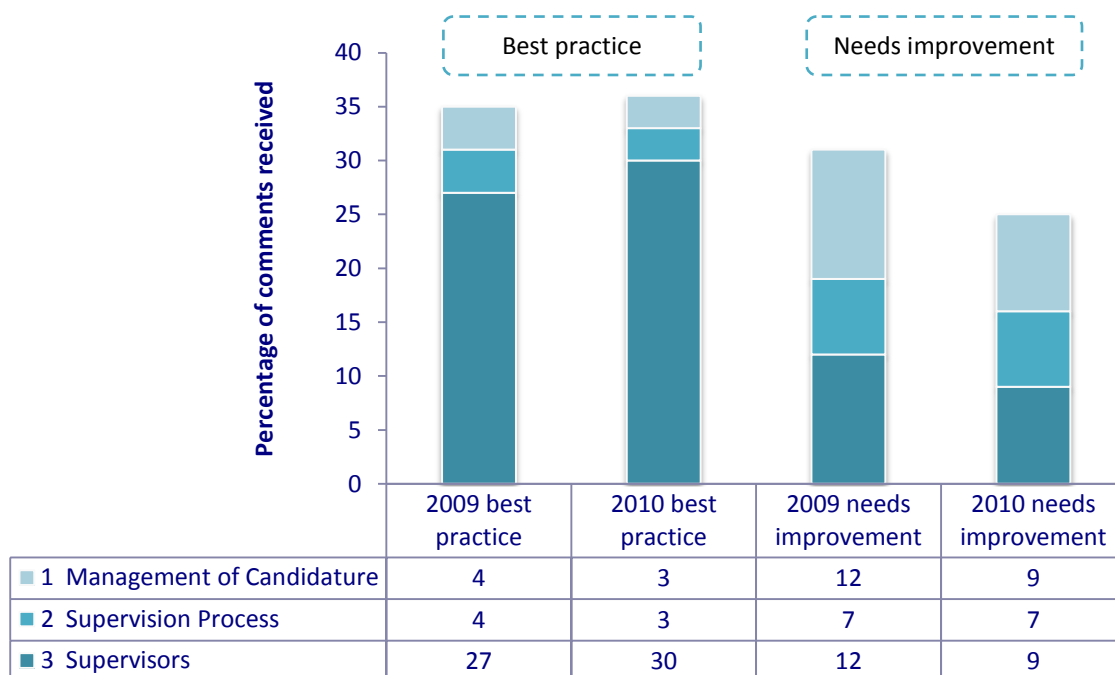
In the analysis of the qualitative data relating to the Quality of Supervision, the majority of comments fall within the following areas:

1. Management of Candidature
 - *guidance on thesis, literature review, topic etc*
 - *workload (of student)*
 - *annual progress reports*
2. Supervision processes within faculty
 - *general comments relating to supervision within the faculty/ university*
 - *evaluation of supervisors by faculty/ university*
 - *training of supervisors*
3. Supervisor(s)
 - *supervisor/ associate supervisor/ supervisory team*
 - *usefulness of meetings with supervisor*
 - *availability and frequency of meetings with supervisor (s)*
 - *communication with supervisor (s) outside regular meetings*
 - *feedback on work from supervisor(s)*
 - *understanding and empathy – understanding academic and personal problems*

Trends in qualitative data analysis

The following chart provides an indication of focus of these comments in 2009 and 2010. More comments were received in both years indicating that Supervision rated highly as area of best practice, particularly in relation to the performance, availability, and understanding of supervisors. Suggested improvements to this part of the research higher degree student experience were more evenly divided between the three main components of Supervision. There is a noticeable decrease in the percentage of comments suggesting improvements between 2009 and 2010.

Figure 1: SREQ: Quality of supervision: Distribution of comments: 2009 - 2010



Summary of strategies and initiatives

The following list summarises some of the strategies and initiatives that faculties have put in place to improve the Quality of Supervision within their faculty

- Facilitation of widespread implementation of good practice in HDR candidate management through dissemination of good practice; staff development sessions on administration and management of HDR candidates
- Development of Postgraduate portfolios: highlighting achievements, publications and conference attendance. Used in APR process.
- Reviewing and monitoring supervisory loads
- Ensuring all supervisors are on the GSO Supervisor register
- Supporting supervisors proactively through mentoring sessions, instruction tools etc
- Supervisors encouraged/ mandated to complete ITL and similar supervisor training programs
- Postgraduate coordinator available to discuss issues and difficulties with students
- Improve contact between supervisors and students through regular meetings, discussion groups, seminars and workshops for research higher degree students
- Annual Progress Reviews provide opportunities for students to discuss issues affecting progress; continuous monitoring of student progress
- Reviewing coverage and content of orientation sessions
- Provision of formal research seminars and workshops for students

2 Quality of Infrastructure

Coverage

In the analysis of the qualitative data relating to the Quality of Infrastructure, the majority of comments fall within the following areas:

1. Administration
 - *general comments on administration (faculty and university)*
 - *enrolment and admission*
 - *communication between faculty and students*
 - *postgraduate coordinator*
2. Research resources
 - *provided by faculty*
 - *provided by internal and external libraries and archive centres*
3. Finance and funding
 - *funding for resources, equipment etc*
 - *scholarships and grants*
 - *travel and conference funding*
4. Facilities
 - *workspace, buildings, office, air-conditioning, OHS issues*
 - *computing hardware and software – provision of computer, laptop, availability of software*
 - *equipment and instruments*
 - *Faculty research centre or postgraduate research room*
 - *common room – for social activities, meeting other students outside research activities*

Trends in qualitative data analysis

The following chart provides an indication of focus of these comments in 2009 and 2010. As is evident from the percentage of comments received, the provision of facilities, and the availability of funding are high on the agenda for improvement. There has been little significant change in the distribution of comments relating to Infrastructure over the past few years.

Figure 2: SREQ: Quality of infrastructure: Distribution of comments: 2009 – 2010



Summary of strategies and initiatives

The following list summarises some of the strategies and initiatives that faculties have put in place to improve the Quality of Infrastructure within their faculty.

- Ensuring all students are made aware of the resources available to them at the time of their enrolment, and during orientation including computer access, funding opportunities, facilities and resources
- Conducting needs analysis to prioritise spending on infrastructure and equipment
- Reviewing, refurbishing and increasing the number of desks, research laboratory and office space available to research higher degree students, incorporating student feedback into design etc
- Ensuring all students have access to appropriate facilities by use of an introductory checklist
- Provision of a common room for postgraduate students
- Reviewing provision of laptops, software and related computer resources
- Using student feedback to improve access to computer resources and equipment including the introduction of booking and loan systems
- Inclusion of lockable storage areas into postgraduate spaces
- Improving the way in which funding schemes are administered e.g. at Faculty rather than school level
- Reviewing faculty's fund distribution in line with UEM
- Ensure that students are provided with information regarding PRSS and other funding sources (faculty and university)
- Improving administrative services available for research higher degree students

3 Research Climate

Coverage

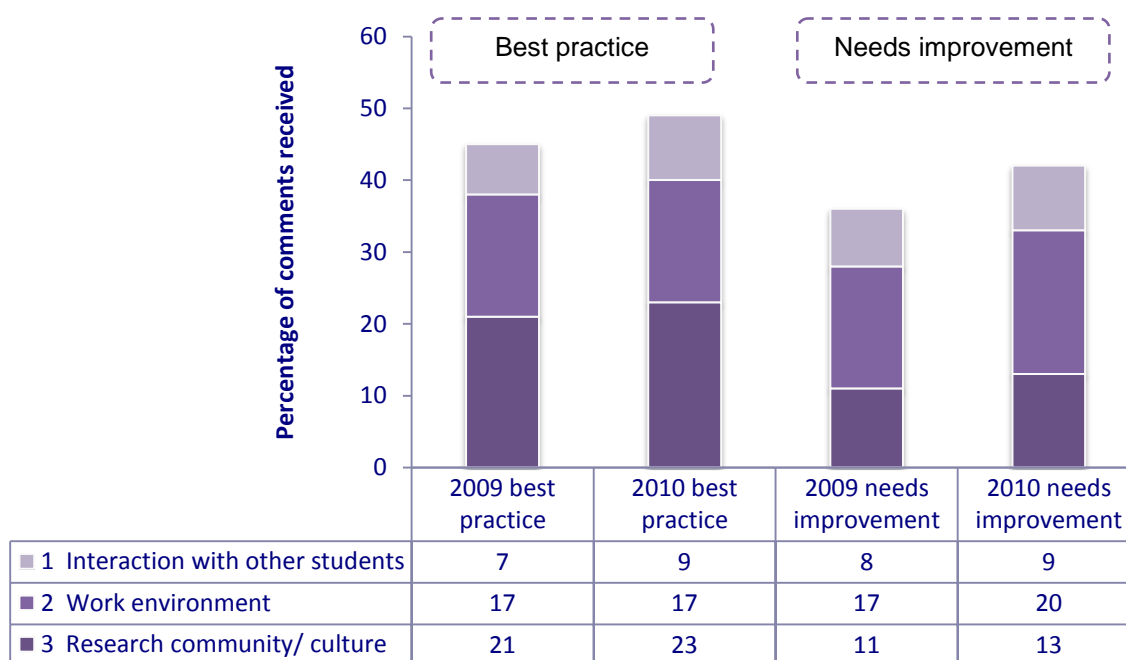
In the analysis of the qualitative data relating to the Research Climate, the majority of comments fall within the following areas:

1. Interaction with other research higher degree students (organised by faculty and by students)
 - *academic interaction*
 - *social interaction*
 - *support from peers*
2. Work environment
 - *supportive environment*
 - *challenging and stimulating*
 - *integration into faculty/ department/ school*
 - *respect as fellow researcher*
 - *induction/ orientation programme*
 - *isolation (emotional)*
 - *support for part-time , distance, international students*
3. Research community and culture
 - *general comments relating to presence of or belonging to a wider research culture*
 - *faculty seminars, workshops, and discussion groups*
 - *opportunities provided for networking/ collaborating*
 - *participation in domestic and international conferences, forums*
 - *publication opportunities*

Trends in qualitative data analysis

The following chart provides an indication of the focus of comments relating to the prevailing research climate in 2009 and 2010. As is evident, there is little significant difference between areas of best practice and suggested improvements for both Interaction with other students, and the environment in which they work and study. More comments were received in both years indicating that the research community/ culture rated highly as area of best practice.

Figure 3: SREQ: Research Climate: Distribution of comments: 2009 – 2010



Summary of strategies and initiatives

The following list summarises some of the strategies and initiatives that faculties have put in place to improve the Research Climate within their faculty.

- Holding annual postgraduate forums
 - Review and respond to SREQ, PREQ etc
 - Presentation of student research
- Seminars and workshops held on a regular basis
 - Discussion of student research with staff and external speakers
 - Involvement of students in staff lunchtime seminars and conferences
- Encourage interaction between staff and fellow research higher degree students
- Development and delivery of eCommunity site for research higher degree students
- Encouraging and mentoring students in developing publications and publications goals
- Encouragement of collaborative research between staff and students; and with world leading scholars both in Australia and overseas
- Organising visits by counsellors to remote campus locations to address psychological issues associated with isolation
- Improvement of induction and orientation activities; preparation of an 'induction book'
- Preparing research higher degree students to be competitive in the employment and job-seeking process
- Involve research higher degree students in consultation processes in areas which affect them
- Give priority to research higher degree students in tutoring and research assistance work
- Student representation on postgraduate studies and similar committees
- Dedicated mentoring programs for international students
- Provide resources to allow students to engage in social networking activities

4 Graduate Attributes/ Generic Skills

Coverage

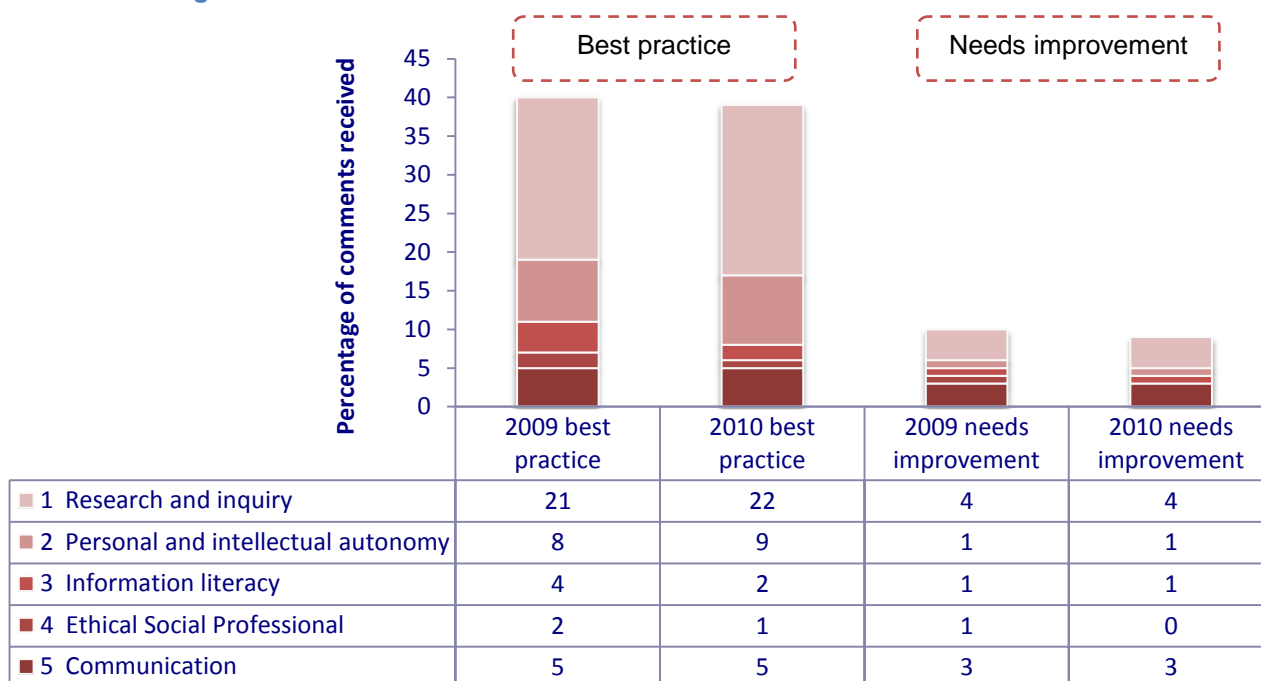
In the analysis of the qualitative data relating to Graduate Attributes, comments are distributed between the five University Graduate Attribute Clusters:

1. Research and inquiry
 - *analytical, critical, problem solving*
 - *expanding knowledge base*
 - *statistical skills*
 - *research and technical skills*
2. Personal and intellectual autonomy
 - *independent thinking and learning*
 - *planning own work*
 - *responsive to unfamiliar problems*
 - *ability to meet new challenges*
3. Information literacy
 - *using information to construct knowledge*
 - *computing skills e.g. using endnote, searching databases etc, referencing*
4. Ethical, social, professional understanding
 - *collaboration/ team work skills*
 - *ethical, social and cultural understanding*
 - *professional skills and experience*
5. Communication
 - *oral communication*
 - *written communication*
 - *presentation skills*

Trends in qualitative data analysis

The following chart provides an indication of the focus of comments relating Graduate Attributes.

Figure 4: Graduate Attributes: Distribution of comments: 2009 – 2010



Summary of strategies and initiatives

The following list summarises some of the strategies and initiatives that faculties have put in place to improve the Graduate Attributes of their research higher degree students

- Provision of units of study or programs that support development of domain knowledge, generic skills and capacity (e.g. project management)
- Fund students to attend external skills training courses e.g. at US Studies Centre
- Undertaking training needs analysis
- Targeted workshops for different disciplines
- Addressing specific needs of international students e.g. English language communication skills and academic writing skills
- Provide online courses or web access to all educational programs for research higher degree students so accessible to all including part time and off campus students
- Research methods course to be mandatory for all MPhil and PhD students
- Provide courses in advanced statistical skills, writing a research proposal and grant applications
- Introduction of a core course to provide introductory sessions on library searches and services, use of reference management software, critical literature review, poster and presentation skills
- Provision of training courses in human research ethics
- Workshops on publication writing for specific disciplinary audiences and to meet the conventions of a given research culture or style

5 Overall Satisfaction

Coverage

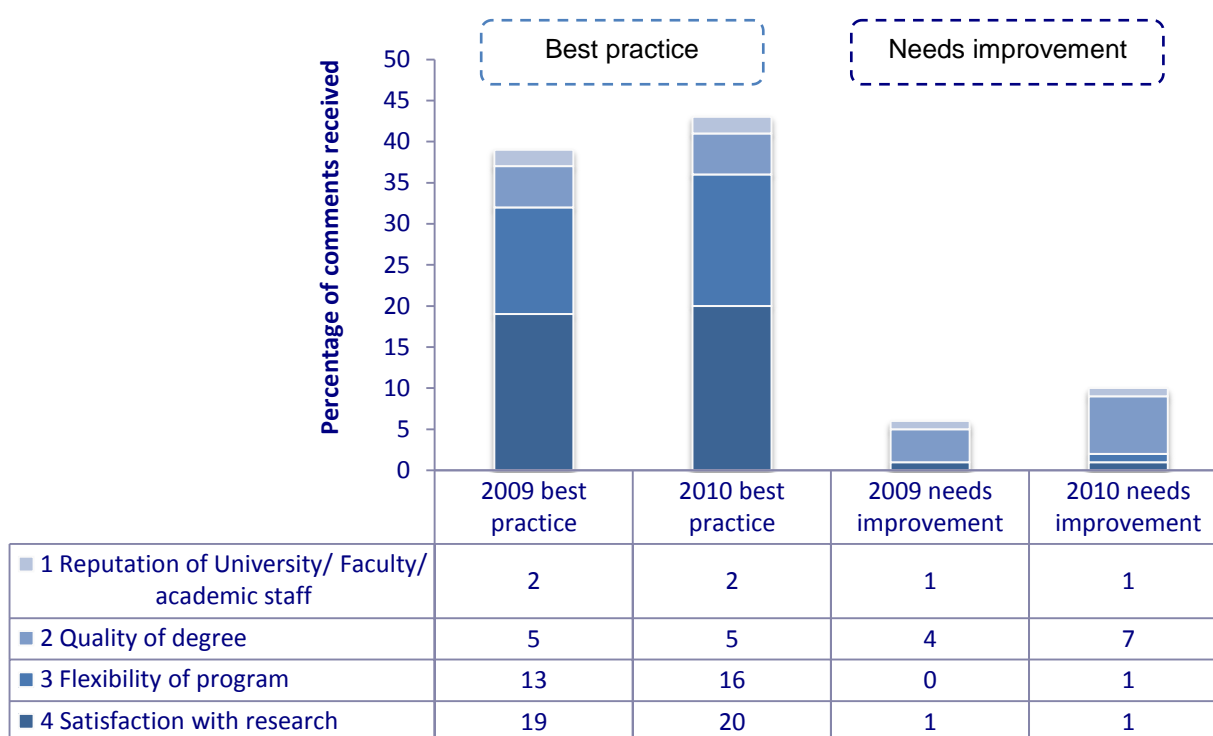
In the analysis of the qualitative data relating to the Research Climate, the majority of comments fall within the following areas:

1. Reputation/ prestige
 - of university/ faculty/ department/
 - of academic staff
2. Quality of degree/ program
 - General comments;
 - Coursework program,
 - Practical components
3. Flexibility of the program
 - freedom to follow own research
 - choose own topics
 - compared to coursework degree
 - flexible working hours
4. Satisfaction with research
 - Topic
 - contribution to field

Trends in qualitative data analysis

The following chart provides an indication of the focus of comments relating to Overall Satisfaction.

Figure 5: Overall Satisfaction: Distribution of comments: 2009 – 2010



Summary of strategies and initiatives

The following list summarises some of the strategies and initiatives that faculties have put in place to improve aspects of Overall Satisfaction, in particular the quality of the degree and the quality of students:

- Introduction of strategies to manage the size of the research higher degree program and to focus on student quality not quantity
- Expand and enhance the intellectual quality of the research higher degree program, reinforcing the coursework component
- Introduction of compulsory coursework for all research higher degree students, including one unit of research design and at least one unit each of quantitative and qualitative research methods
- Aligning coursework with student needs
- Attracting and supporting students from a diversity of social and cultural backgrounds
- Establish and award up to two indigenous PhD scholarships