

CLOSING THE LOOP: DISSEMINATING RESULTS AND REPORTS FROM THE STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ)

At the request of SEG Research Training Committee, ways in which the University can engage with the data from the SREQ and PREQ have been investigated. It was decided to concentrate on the SREQ data since this exemplifies the current student experience, whereas the PREQ provides the views of graduates who have left the university in the previous year.

"Last year I gave detailed comments and nothing was done so I'm not even going to bother this time"

Comment from research higher degree student, Faculty of Arts, SREQ 2010

Introduction

The Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is the tool by which evidence about the current research higher degree student experience is gathered. The qualitative and quantitative data from the questionnaire contributes to quality enhancement and improvement processes, input into strategic planning at both institutional and faculty level, and closes the loop in the quality improvement cycle, by providing students with proof that their comments are reaching the intended audience, and validating the time and effort that they dedicate to completing the surveys (Symons, 2006).

Qualitative data collected through the SREQ is analysed, evaluated and reported back to faculties and senior management thus contributing to both institutional and faculty responses to student feedback. Dissemination of the strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement gained through listening to the student voice, currently takes place through the preparation of faculty and institutional reports, which are distributed to the following stakeholders:

- DVC Research
- DVC Education
- Director, Academic Affairs
- Deans and relevant Associate Deans
- SEG Research Training Committee

In this paper, I will make a case for closing the loop in the evaluation and quality cycle by disseminating SREQ reports as widely as possible across the University – to staff and students; and by using the data to inform strategic planning and other activities to improve the research higher degree student experience. Recommendations for achieving this goal are at the end of the paper.

Harnessing the power of the student voice

Poindexter (2006) argues that for an higher education institute to be successful, it must listen to the voices of the students and incorporate what they are saying about their experiences into their priorities. He further maintains that if it does not effectively use this information it risks failure in meeting student satisfaction and expectations. The student voice is a powerful instrument which should be harnessed to provide us with information on their total university experience. The often forthright narratives available through qualitative data, not only complement and confirm the quantitative data, but also provide us with a better understanding of the issues that are important to students (Palermo, 2004; Scott, 2006). The repeated pattern of themes occurring within comments reflects shared experiences for each group of students (Richardson, 2003), presents a important insight into both faculty and institutional practices and procedures, as well as inputting into quality enhancement and improvement processes.

Collecting and analysing the student voice:

Together with all other Australian universities, Sydney collects data about the experiences of its recent research higher degree graduates' through the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). In addition to this externally instituted and designed survey instruments, the University uses its own student satisfaction survey, administered while students are still at the university, the SREQ, to evaluate the quality of research higher degree students' experiences.

Instituted in 2002, the SREQ is distributed to all currently enrolled research higher degree students in the second semester of each year. In 2010, a response rate of 72% was achieved – the highest response rate achieved since the beginning of the survey. Students are asked to respond to statements linked to the SREQ factors using a 5 point Likert Scale to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. In addition to the closed questions, students are asked to provide comments on their perception of their experiences of research training.

The complexity of any student feedback system, and the requirement to maintain validity and reliability of the data collected, necessitates the establishment of a central mechanism to coordinate and monitor survey content and conduct (Palermo, 2004), as well as to provide an unbiased reporting system. To this end, the Institute for Teaching and Learning is responsible for the analysis and reporting of the quantitative data, whilst the Graduate Studies Office is responsible for the analysis and reporting of the open response comments (qualitative feedback or written observations).

These comments are kept in a searchable database which currently consists of approximately 28 000 individual comments which range in length from short phrases of up to five words to one and a half A4 pages of text. The number of comments received each year is growing – from 2508 in 2002 to 4587 in 2010, thus providing a complex and unique database of information about students' perceptions of their research higher degree experience. A measure of the importance that is placed on these comments, and the possible realisation by students that their opinions are valued, is found in the high percentage of students who are taking the time to provide constructive and worthwhile observations on their experiences – an average of 75-80% of all respondents. Another important fact to note is consistently more respondents comment on areas of best practice than suggest improvements. Due to the fact that the SREQ surveys the whole cohort of research higher degree students each year, and consequently very similar respondents over a 3-4 year period, it provides a benchmark for the student experience, over the life of a research higher degree.

Palermo (2003) and Scott (2006) both argue that collecting students' comments in itself is not sufficient to provide information on what research higher degree students are saying about their experiences, and more importantly, on how we are performing as a university. Vital to the dissemination of these comments to interested parties, is their analysis into meaningful data at both a faculty and institutional level.

When analysis of the SREQ qualitative data began, it was realised that simply providing a list of student comments to each faculty would not provide them with adequate information on the research higher degree student experience. Few faculties have the time or the resources to thoroughly analyse and study the comments to ascertain their strengths, weaknesses and areas in need of improvement. Additionally, if the analysis were to be undertaken by a single academic staff member within the faculty, concerns may be raised about the neutrality of the reports. Therefore, a centralised system for analysing, evaluating and reporting student feedback was developed. Using a combined automated and manual analysis, together with an in-house taxonomy developed specifically for the purpose (Symons, 2007 and 2008), it allows each faculty to receive its own unbiased individual report, together with a comparison from previous years; and provides cross-institutional perspectives on the student experience at both faculty and institutional level.

However the time and energy spent in the collection and analysis of this valuable information would be wasted if it was simply filed away and not disseminated to those who could use it at both faculty and institutional level.

Disseminating the student voice

Currently, reports based on the analysis of the SREQ are reaching a small audience of stakeholders: faculties, senior management, and strategic working parties:

Faculty reports

Since 2002, each faculty at the University has been provided with a report on the most common aspects of the research higher degree student. A comparison is provided with previous years, and sample comments from the reporting year are included. Student confidentiality is maintained by excluding comments that may identify students, particularly in faculties with small student numbers. Evidence of improvements in the student experience, as exemplified by a reduction of adverse comments and/or an increase in positive comments, or the absence of concerns raised in previous years, are highlighted in the executive summary of the report. Since 2008, reports have been aligned directly to the SREQ factors, and have included comparative qualitative and quantitative data for the previous 5 years. Reports are publicly available through the University website at http://sydney.edu.au/learning/evaluating/sreq_or.shtml.

Institutional reports

Institutional reports, identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement at the wider university level have been made available since 2009, with reports on the research higher degree graduate experience, as received through the PREQ, being made available since 2010.

Informing strategic initiatives

The formation of strategic working parties in late 2010 provided another vehicle for disseminating the student voice, and using it to inform decision making on the following areas: Supervision, the development of a four year funded PhD, and financial planning. The most recent SREQ results were interrogated for relevant survey item responses and written observations and provided as an information package for members (See Attachment One: *Supervision Working Party: Information Package: SREQ data*).

Closing the loop

Just as important as ensuring that staff are alerted to student feedback, and that they address the issues that emerge promptly, is that students are shown directly that their feedback is being listened to by those who can implement suggested changes. This final step in 'closing the loop' in the quality enhancement cycle is critical (Scott, 2000). However, not only do we need to complete the cycle as far as the students are concerned, but also for members of the academic staff who are not privy to the reporting and committee structure within their own faculties.

The importance of 'closing the loop' cannot be understated. If students do not see action being taken from the feedback they provide on their experiences, they become sceptical, and less likely to respond to future surveys (Watson, 2003). We also need to ensure that students know that their comments are being taken seriously, and that they are not writing them simply to have them filed away on a dusty shelf in an office, never to see the light of day. With our large number of faculties, and a diverse student body, it is imperative to use a range of methods to ensure that as many students as possible are made aware that their feedback is being not only listened to, but also acted upon (Watson, 2003). Some of the means by which the student voice could be disseminated, and the loop closed are suggested below:

Divisional Forums on the research higher degree student experience

In 2007, the Dean of Graduate Studies, together with the Institute of Teaching and Learning and the Office of the PVC Teaching and Learning, prepared a report on the research higher degree student experience (*Analysis of student research experience questionnaire (SREQ) – areas of best practice and suggested improvements*) and used it as the basis for a series of College based forums which discussed the results and suggested future strategies to improve the experience of postgraduate research students. At these forums attendees were advised of the value of informing students that these were the direct consequence of their responses to the SREQ. It is suggested that these forums, at a Divisional level, should be reinstated to discuss and disseminate results from the SREQ and PREQ. Expected outcomes from Divisional forums might include a publishable written response to the results which would include, for example, context, current activities and a SWOT analysis. These reports would be published on the Graduate Studies Office website, and distributed to the SEG Research Training Committee and the Academic Board.

Presentation to Faculty research committees

Staff from the Graduate Studies Office, together with staff from the ITL, could be invited to present the SREQ results to faculty research or similar committees. These presentations could be tailor made to individual faculties, and included fine grained data i.e. down to survey item or sub-category level (for the qualitative data). Student representatives could be invited to attend these meetings. Reports could also be downloaded to faculty or departmental online discussion boards.

Distribution of faculty and institutional reports

As already mentioned, at a **faculty level**, reports are sent to the Dean and relevant Associate Dean and Postgraduate coordinators, as well as the DVC Research, DVC Education, Director, Academic Affairs, and members of SEG RTC. It is proposed that this distribution list be increased to include the following:

- Head of school/ department
- Student representatives
- Postgraduate student associations (faculty level)
- Postgraduate administrative units
- Chair, Academic Board

At an **institutional level**, it is proposed that the distribution list should also include SUPRA and the Academic Board.

Information about the SREQ, and the reports, is provided through links in the Postgraduate Studies Handbook, and from the Graduate Studies Office website. It is proposed to also suggest that a link be provided from the SUPRA website.

Portfolio statements

The ITL currently provides fine grained data relating to the Unit of Study Evaluations for portfolio statements compiled by the Director, Financial Management and Analysis. It is currently possible to interrogate the SREQ quantitative data by survey item and this may be used in the portfolio statements. At the qualitative data level, it is possible to provide data to a sub-category level (e.g. understanding and empathy of supervisors; faculty research centres such as PGARC; IT support; conference participation and funding). Examples of the type of information that can be provided are at Attachment One: Supervision Working Party: Information Package data from SREQ.

It is proposed that further investigation take place into the type of information required on research training for input into portfolio statements.

Resource implications

In considering any strategies for disseminating the results of the SREQ to students and staff, and ensuring that the loop is closed by letting students know that they are being listened to and their concerns acted upon, it is necessary to take into consideration the resource implications in terms of staffing and report turnaround time.

Analysis of the qualitative data, the writing of faculty and institutional reports, and information gathering for strategic initiatives, AUQA and other stakeholders, is currently undertaken by 0.5 EFTSL in the Graduate Studies Office.

Based on the time taken in previous years, it is envisaged that all faculty and institutional reports should be completed by the beginning of Semester Two 2011. Reports will be completed in divisional groupings as follows:

1. Division of Arts and Social Sciences, Law, Education and Social Work
2. Division of Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
3. Division of Science, Veterinary Science and Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
4. Division of Architecture, Design and Planning, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney Conservatorium of Music
5. Division of Business
6. Engineering and Information Technologies
7. Health Sciences

NB: For the purposes of the 2011 reports, based on results of the 2010 SREQ, the School of Economics will be included in the Division of Business report.

Therefore, faculty and divisional discussion of SREQ results should take the above into consideration, and consult with the Executive Officer, GSO before convening of forums and similar dissemination avenues.

Recommendations

- 1 Divisional forums to be convened to discuss and disseminate results from the SREQ and PREQ. Outcomes of these forums to be provided as a publishable report to be distributed to stakeholders, and be made available on the GSO website.
- 2 Staff from the Graduate Studies Office, together with staff from the ITL, to be invited to present the SREQ results to faculty research or similar committees.
- 3.1 Faculty reports on the research higher degree student experience (SREQ) be distributed to the following stakeholders:
 - DVC Research
 - DVC Education
 - Director, Academic Affairs
 - Chair, Academic Board
 - SEG Research Training Committee
 - Dean and relevant Associate Dean
 - Postgraduate coordinators
 - Heads of schools/ departments
 - Student representatives
 - Postgraduate student associations (faculty level)
 - Postgraduate administrative units
 - SUPRA
- 3.2 Institutional reports on the research higher degree student experience (SREQ) be distributed to the following stakeholders:
 - DVC Research
 - DVC Education
 - Director, Academic Affairs
 - Chair, Academic Board
 - SEG Research Training Committee
 - SUPRA
- 3.3. Links to information about the SREQ, and the reports be provided through links in the Postgraduate Studies Handbook, the Graduate Studies Office website and the SUPRA website.
- 4 Further investigation is required into the type of information required on research training for input into portfolio statements.
- 5 Faculty and divisional discussion of SREQ results should consider turnaround time for reporting the results, and consult with the Executive Officer, GSO before convening of forums and similar dissemination avenues.

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Attachment: Supervision Working Party: Information Package: SREQ data

SREQ: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA FROM 2009

The following information from the SREQ is provided as an indication of research higher degree students' experiences of Supervision during their studies, but more particularly in 2009. No distinction is made between the experiences of domestic and international students. This data is available from the ITL website for the quantitative data, and from the Graduate Studies Office for the qualitative data.

SREQ QUANTITATIVE DATA

The following excerpts from the University SREQ reports for 2009, provide information on the student responses to items relating to Supervision: as an overall results, and more detailed i.e. item by item. Information on how to read these reports is provided after the end of the Detailed SREQ report

OVERALL SREQ Report

The University of Sydney
2009 Postgraduate Research Students

N = 2444
response = 61%

	University Average	Broad Agreement	Agreement	Disagreement
Supervision Scale	+47.4	91%	75%	9%

DETAILED SREQ Report

Q1 Supervision is available when I need it

N	%	value	responses	
1033	43.1	+100	Strongly Agree	
1041	43.4	+50	Agree	
172	7.2	0	Neutral	
119	5.0	-50	Disagree	
34	1.4	-100	Strongly Disagree	
45	Missing			0% 50% 100%

Q5 My supervisor(s) make(s) a real effort to understand difficulties I face


N	%	value	responses	
896	37.5	+100	Strongly Agree	
1011	42.3	+50	Agree	
316	13.2	0	Neutral	
114	4.8	-50	Disagree	
52	2.2	-100	Strongly Disagree	
55	Missing			0% 50% 100%

Q13 My supervisor(s) provide(s) me with additional information relevant to my topic






N	%	value	responses	
742	31.1	+100	Strongly Agree	
1045	43.8	+50	Agree	
382	16.0	0	Neutral	
167	7.0	-50	Disagree	
48	2.0	-100	Strongly Disagree	
60	Missing			0% 50% 100%

Q18 I am given good guidance in topic selection and refinement






N	%	value	responses	
498	20.9	+100	Strongly Agree	
1122	47.0	+50	Agree	
474	19.9	0	Neutral	
223	9.3	-50	Disagree	

69	2.9	-100	Strongly Disagree	
58	Missing			0% 50%






Q22 My supervisor(s) provide(s) helpful feedback on my progress

N	%	value	responses	
788	33.2	+100	Strongly Agree	
1074	45.3	+50	Agree	
325	13.7	0	Neutral	
117	4.9	-50	Disagree	
69	2.9	-100	Strongly Disagree	
71	Missing			0% 50% 100%

Q26 I have received good guidance in my literature search

N	%	value	responses	
354	14.9	+100	Strongly Agree	
1033	43.5	+50	Agree	
637	26.8	0	Neutral	
270	11.4	-50	Disagree	
83	3.5	-100	Strongly Disagree	
67	Missing			0% 50% 100%

Q36 Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my supervision

N	%	value	responses	
950	40.1	+100	Strongly Agree	
997	42.0	+50	Agree	
230	9.7	0	Neutral	
130	5.5	-50	Disagree	
65	2.7	-100	Strongly Disagree	
72	Missing			0% 50% 100%

Reading the Overall report

Broad Agreement: This is the proportion of students who responded indicating they 'broadly agreed', i.e. did not 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree', with the item statement.

Agreement: This is the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with the SREQ item statement once the reversed items had been adjusted. This figure removes the neutral responses from the measure of 'Broad Agreement' described above.

Disagreement: This is the proportion of students who either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the SREQ item statements once the reversed items had been adjusted.

Reading the Detailed report

This is a detailed report of students' responses to each item on the SREQ. It includes a breakdown of scores for each value on the five-point response scale for every SREQ item. The questionnaire asked students to respond to statements using a 5 point Likert scale to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item. The scale ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree with a neutral mid-point.

N: This is the total number of responses (sample size) for that particular item.

%: This is the proportion of the students who assigned each rating (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) for the item.

Value: This is the recalibration of the 5 point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) to the +100 to -100 scale.

SREQ QUALITATIVE DATA

This section provides information on those areas of Supervision that were considered by respondents to the 2009 SREQ to be either of best practice or in need of improvement. This data expands that provided in the University SREQ 2005 – 2009 report, issued in October 2010, providing a more detailed analysis of each of the sub-categories and components relating to Supervision, and of relevance to the Supervision Working Party of the SEG Research Training Committee – i.e. Management of candidature; Supervision process; and Supervisors. Illustrative sample comments for each sub-component are provided after the statistical tables.

The following information should be taken into consideration when reading this section of the Information Package:

- It is important to remember, when looking at the results of the analysis of this data, that the absence of favourable comments on a particular aspect of research higher degree training does not reflect that this is not an area of best practice. Rather, it could be interpreted that the students were happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting about areas in need of improvement.
- It should also be noted that research higher degree respondents to the SREQ, have consistently provided more comments relating to areas of best practice than those requiring improvement: In 2009, the number respondents to the SREQ who provided written observations/ comments was:

Best practice	1876
Needs improvement	1653

- Based on the premise that a comment is what is written by an individual respondent in response to one of the open response questions, and a tally in the statistics being a specific phrase or sentence referring to one aspect of the student experience, the total number of times an aspect is mentioned in any one set of comments is calculated as a percentage of comments received in the year of the survey. As a general rule, only those aspects which receive over 5% of comments from the whole cohort (i.e. domestic and international combined) are considered significant enough to be included as specific issues in faculty and university reports. However, they have been included in this package as an indication of the importance placed on each component by respondents.
- In cases when an it is not apparent that a comment refers specifically to one or more supervisors, those that contain the word 'supervision' are categorised under Supervision process: general comments.

1 STATISTICS

1.1 Supervision process	Best practice		Needs improvement	
	n=	%	n=	%
Supervision process	68	4%	111	7%
- General comments	68	4%	87	5%
- Evaluation of supervisors	0	0%	16	1%
- Training of supervisors	0	0%	8	0.48%

1.2 Supervisors	Best practice		Needs improvement	
	n=	%	n=	%
Supervisors	509	27%	196	12%
- Supervisor(s)	411	22%	78	5%
- Associate Supervisor	4	0.21%	8	0.48%
- Availability, frequency of meetings	32	2%	55	3%
- Usefulness of meetings	13	1%	6	0.36%
- Feedback on work	32	2%	37	2%
- Understanding and empathy	17	1%	11	1%

1.3 Management of candidature	Best practice		Needs improvement	
	n=	%	n=	%
Management of candidature	68	4%	121	7%
- Guidance (topic selection, literature search, etc)	67	4%	83	5%
- Progress reports/ review	0	0%	13	1%
- Workload	0	0%	25	2%

2 ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE COMMENTS

2.1 Supervision process

2.1.1 Areas of best practice

General comments

- Good supervision in my department
- Good supervision was provided. This helps me control my research direction and quality as show me the prospective

2.1.2 Areas needing improvement

General comments

- Availability of good supervisors. Although I was really passionate about certain research areas, the lack of supervisors who are able to offer good supervision (e.g. able to offer guidance when needed) in that area discouraged me in choosing to do research in that area
- How bad supervisory problems are handled. In particular, how to handle supervisory situation when there is a breakdown of supervisor relationship. This is not clear and rights of both parties are unclear

Evaluation of supervisors

- Supervision - there are no standards by which supervisors are assessed. If they are going to take on students outside their research area, they should make an effort to understand the methodology and the issues investigated
- More proactive faculty involvement in ensuring the quality and frequency of supervision, nobody else in my faculty other than my supervisor has ever contacted me to ask whether my experience is even meeting minimum standard benchmarks, let alone check whether I am satisfied with my relationship with my supervisor

Training of supervisors

- Novice supervisors need more formal education about balancing their research priorities and the students
- The University has to educate supervisors how to supervise and nurture students. The supervisors have their duty of care and accountability for their research students. Unfortunately, some supervisors have no such concept at all

2.2 Supervisors

2.2.1 Areas of best practice

Supervisor(s)

- Having fantastic supervisors because quality guidance is important for a newbie researcher!
- My supervision is excellent. I feel very supported, but not overpowered. My supervisor makes me feel valued and also that my research is worthwhile

Associate Supervisor

- The best part of my higher degree experience is the experience and guidance I have from one of my co-supervisors and the meetings with other students supervised by her
- External co-supervision allows me to interact with a wider group of researchers in my field. I find this provides the intellectually stimulating and community like environment that is somewhat lacking in my department

Availability, frequency of meetings

- my supervisor meets with me on a weekly basis. This is fantastic because a daily basis would be too stressful, and a less frequent basis would be less productive
- I can talk to my supervisor whenever I need his supervision

Usefulness of meetings

- Discussing issues with supervisor. These aspect is good as it improve and add more knowledge in my research

- While I don't talk to my supervisor every day, he is almost always available. This allows me to do my own work and seek help just whenever required. In addition our weekly meeting provides good motivation to always push forward and keeps good focus in my work

Feedback on work

- Most of supervisor's advice or feedback has been highly relevant and helpful in shaping my theoretical research
- My supervisors respond very quickly and provide me with good extra materials and provide good feedback. Helps cut down time on my side

Understanding and empathy

- I have 2 supervisors. Both very good. One is more accessible and very supportive. I feel empowered by her comments good and bad. She understands how my research project validates my career
- The best aspect to date is the support and understanding I have received from my supervisor. She has been a wonderful 'sounding board' for all manner of discussion, and has had the wisdom to 'ground' me when I've gone off on a tangent. She facilitates opportunities for me to exercise my intellect, and has the strength not to be threatened by that, instead, she celebrates it!

2.2.1 Areas needing improvement

Supervisor(s)

- My main supervisor does not have a lot of expertise in the research I am doing so the experience has been very isolating for me
- Supervision! Overall I have felt that my supervisor's lack of engagement has had only negative effects on my research

Associate Supervisor

- Head supervisor is good. But associate supervisor is not responsible. The associate supervisor did not have a clear mind about how my research should progress and was not qualified enough to supervise
- The varied role of associate supervisors because the main supervisor seems to have a much larger workload and greater responsibility

Availability, frequency of meetings

- Supervision no doubt. I find it very difficult to organise uninterrupted quality time with my supervisors when they are available. It is a critical issue. The supervisors seem to be overworked and overloaded and the result of that is a diminished quality of experience for me
- Supervision. My supervisor is often very busy or absent and so I sometimes am not sure what to do. This is particularly the case because I am in my first year of my PhD

Usefulness of meetings

- Supervision meetings are most in need of improvement. Supervision meetings should be scheduled every fortnight. This is regardless you have done some writing or not. This time should allow enough time for a feedback on thesis writing or some other issues (discussing useful literature, updating on changes in research, methodology framework etc) that are essential for the progress during candidature
- Supervision. Although these are regular meetings, they are very rigid in structure/formal in structure (1-4 senior researcher: 1 student) notes are taken. Meetings tend to be very negative and non productive. I walk away feeling very unmotivated and often discouraged

Feedback on work

- It would be good if I can have some in-depth discussions about the content/context of my research with my supervisors. The feedback that I received for the 60-page literature review is some minor grammatical editing and a few rather general suggestions
- The feedback from the supervisors are usually too general, not specific or clear enough for me to improve my writing

Understanding and empathy

- The supervisor's input, interest and effort is very much needed for the successful and timely completion of the project. However, unfortunately, I so unlucky that both of my supervisors extremely lack to provide me the

necessary technical and academic support. They should always follow up the progress of the student and should be accountable for the student's success or failure

- Secondly my experience, and anecdotal evidence from other students, suggests that the quality of supervision is patchy and it is rather obvious that far too many supervisors do not take enough responsibility for the progress and welfare of student they take under their wing

2.3 Management of candidature

2.2.1 Areas of best practice

Guidance

- The quality of supervision from my supervisors. They are interested in my topic, know a lot about the subject, and guide me with my Literature Review search and Methodology.
- Professional guidance is provided from my supervisors and admin staffs that I am able to commence my research almost from the same day I arrived. The guidance I received includes free access to databases, suggestions on research topics, and improvements on modelling along the way

2.2.1 Areas needing improvement

Guidance

- Selection of topic and research area is not given enough attention. Although it is PhD by research (unlike the American system) it would be important if students could get enough time to brain storm and select their own topic
- Background literature. I feel that when a topic and/or research area is proposed the student should be given a list of readings to read so that the student is familiar with the entire topic before he/she starts work. I personally jumped head-first into calculations and I am still not very confident in understanding the background theory, despite all the calculations that I have done

Progress reports

- Also, the Annual Progress form is quite clumsy and unnecessarily time consuming. Can't this be done online? Can't the questions be framed more appropriately?
- I think the first year of the research is very difficult, particularly in terms of completing the progress report as it is a first time experience. For me this was last year and I had to constantly seek help from a senior PhD student telling me what to do. Maybe this area could be improved. I don't think the progress report will be as much of an issue for me this year as I've already submitted one and have a fair idea of what I need to do

Workload

- Clear objective outline of appropriate workload for a PhD student
- Being realistic about my timelines. Things always take longer than anticipated