

**CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC**  
**STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ)**  
**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS**  
**ANALYSIS OF OPEN RESPONSE COMMENTS: 2005**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ), which evaluates the quality of research higher degree students' experiences, was introduced in 2002. As part of the questionnaire students are asked to provide comments on the best aspects of their university experience and those that could be improved.

Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate research students in the Conservatorium of Music in 2005.

### **Degree experience: areas of best practice**

The aspects of degree experience which attracted most positive comments from postgraduate research students in 2005 were:

	% of comments received	
	2005	2004
Quality of supervision: supervisor	29%	18%
Overall satisfaction: satisfaction with research	27%	31%
Generic skills: graduate attributes	17%	10%
Research climate: supportive work environment	12%	16%
Generic skills: working independently	10%	6%
Generic skills: research skills	14%	10%

### **Degree experience: opportunities for improvement**

The areas of degree experience which postgraduate research students considered most in need of improvement in 2005 were:

	% of comments received	
	2005	2004
Research climate: interaction with other research students (Study related)	19%	21%
Quality of supervision: supervisor	15%	19%
Quality of infrastructure: funding: other (not scholarships/ PRSS)	15%	7%
Research climate: seminars/ workshops	13%	9%
Research climate: supportive work environment	13%	9%
Quality of infrastructure: funding: scholarships/ PRSS	6%	

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## **1 Introduction**

The Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ), which evaluates the quality of research higher degree students' experiences, was introduced in 2002. As part of the questionnaire postgraduate research students are asked to provide comments on the following:

- What are the best aspects of your research higher degree experience?
- What aspects are most in need of improvement?

Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate research students in the Conservatorium of Music in 2005.

In 2005 88% of students who responded to the SREQ provided comments on the best aspects of their degree experience, and 79% on those that were considered to be in need of improvement. The substantial difference in the number of positive comments received compared to those expressing the opposite opinion, possibly indicates an overall satisfaction with the degree experience of postgraduate research students in the Conservatorium of Music.

## **2 Arrangement**

1. Analysis of comments referring to best aspects of the degree course
2. Analysis of comments referring to aspects that could be improved

Within each section, responses are ranked according to the percentage of comments received for each aspect. Sample comments are provided for the six aspects that received the highest percentage of comments. For comparison, results for the previous years qualitative analysis (2002 – 2004) are provided in brackets after the 2005 results.

Only aspects that received more than 5% of comments in 2005 are included in this report. To preserve student confidentiality, sample comments are only provided if there are six or more comments relating to that aspect in the responses. Comments that may possibly identify the student are not been included in the sample comments. Comments are transcribed exactly as they appear in the original documents.

## **3 Analysis of the comments: taxonomy and process**

The manual analysis and evaluation method used by the University is based on an in-house taxonomy which allows for standardisation of reporting across the university and ease of comparison with the SREQ quantitative analysis reports. Within the taxonomy, categories used for the SREQ are identical to the SREQ factor scales, with the addition of Administration and organisation, Ethics Administration, Academic Board policies, International Office, and other administrative areas and support services. This taxonomy is under constant revision as the need to sub-divide categories and create new ones becomes apparent.

Each comment received is analysed according to the SREQ Taxonomy, with those including more than one aspect being counted in each aspect mentioned.

It should be noted, however, that the absence of favourable comments on a particular aspect of learning and teaching does not reflect that this is not an area of best practice. Rather that the students are happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting on areas in need of improvement.

#### **4 Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects<sup>1</sup>**

**Quality of supervision: supervisor** (2005: 29%)  
(2004: 18%; 2003: 35%; 2002: 29%)

- Having an excellent supervisor who is supportive, thinks critically and creatively about my topic. She also interacts on a human level very positively (largely by weekly phone discussions) and has greatly helped to revitalise progress on the doctorate as it approaches its final stages.
- X supervision, her personal support and promptness in correcting/reading my chapters, these always return with insightful and constructive comments. X has helped in developing my written communication skills and also the structuring of my topic.
- I and my supervisor, we have had a meeting every week, then we could solve any problem that raised due to my lack of experience. After all, I found out the best way to do my research is to ask for advices from my supervisor and fix what is not right.
- My supervisor has been a ray of sunshine. He kept me inspired and without his understanding, intelligence and creative way of looking at things I know that I would not have performed to my personal best. Also, it was his "no pressure attitude" and encouragement that kept me going through the "low" periods.

**Overall satisfaction: satisfaction with research** (2005: 27%)  
(2004: 31%; 2003: 20%; 2002: 18%)

- I have been able to research a very interesting topic. In the future I will be able to use the findings of my research in my musical compositions.
- Being with other committed educationalists. Supported the drive to achieve for long term educational benefits for the broader community.
- The opportunity to undertake the research.
- To be given the opportunity to exceed my wildest expectations in terms of personal academic ability.

**Generic skills: graduate attributes** (2005: 17%)  
(2004: 10%; 2003: 11%; 2002: 12%)

- improved writing skills; developing better skills in judgment and analysis of complex scholarly ideas
- The confidence that comes with the development of critical thinking skills, and oral and written skills, which can be applied to a myriad of situations other than just the research process. Easy and regular access to supervision to handle questions as they arise.
- Good access to technical expertise has helped me improve my problem solving abilities and communication skills
- Becoming more analytical in my reading skills, helpful for research

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<sup>1</sup> Number of comment received: 2005: 52; 2004: 51; 2003: 55; 2002: 17

**Research climate: supportive work environment**

(2005: 12%)

(2004: 16%; 2003: 15%; 2002: 24%)

- Ability to pursue something that I really want to do in a supportive environment
- Staff are supportive, incredibly hard-working, and are excellent in their fields. There's a very happy, relaxed but focussed atmosphere
- Support with a problem of legal/ethical nature from the department staff and legal department. Absolute reassurance and encouragement to keep going and not worry. Received this support promptly also. It made a big difference to wavy levels and continuing motivation.
- The Department has provided me with excellent technical facilities to collect data, and support in the presentation of findings.

**Other aspects mentioned included:**

*NB: all the aspects mentioned below were mentioned in less than six comments*

	<i>2005</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2002</i>
Generic skills: working independently	10%	14%	11%	
Generic skills: research skills	6%	10%	9%	6%

## **5 Analysis of comments suggesting improvements<sup>2</sup>**

**Research climate: interaction with other research students (study related)** (2005: 19%)  
(2004: 21%; 2003: 10%; 2002: 12%)

- Support of post grads and some kind promotion of interactions between post grads would be good. I don't get much interaction with other post grads at the moment.
- opportunities for p/grad collegiality, both socially and scholastically, across the whole p/grad body
- I It would be good to get together with the other post grads, but the reality is that we are all so busy and it would be very difficult to organise. one to one is probably the best way.
- Postgraduate student interaction on affiliated campuses- being away from main campus has made meeting and interacting (socially and researching) with other postgrad students difficult.

**Quality of supervision: supervisor** (2005: 15%)  
(2004: 19%; 2003: 25%; 2002: 24%)

- 1 hour contact with supervisor is not enough, every 2 weeks only. Every week for 1 hour is better. It would be better to also have contact with other supervisors regularly to share ideas/gain more knowledge.
- supervision was not constant early on; project became too big- bigger than masters; inefficient supervision in terms of administration; underpaid supervisors.
- I need my supervisor to read the papers I have written and give feedback on content, not just on formatting, punctuation etc. Progress reports do not involve any rigorous questioning, it all seems to be a formality just to say one has done it. (Semester I and II each year).
- I am still unsatisfied with my supervision arrangements. For most of my candidature, I have not had access to a supervisor who can advise me in key aspects of my work. This is because there is no such expert currently on staff at the University. The department arranged for me to have access to an external supervisor for second semester last year. That arrangement lapsed at the beginning of this year, due to a dispute over pay and conditions. I am again left without an advisor on these key issues.

**Quality of infrastructure: funding: other (not scholarships/ PRSS)** (2005: 15%)  
(2004: 7%; 2003: 6%; 2002: 12%)

- funding for overseas research - the University does provide reasonably good funds, but it needs to be improved, especially if students, like me, rely on/need to visit overseas libraries and archives.
- Funding for staff to give detailed technical assistance with aspects of research that are not the areas of expertise of the individual supervisor
- Research culture in my department is very poorly supported by senior management and receives limited financial commitment.
- Financial support in creating documentation of musical works in form of paying musicians to rehearse and record compositions.

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<sup>2</sup> Number of comment received: 2005: 47; 2004: 43; 2003: 51; 2002: 17

**Conservatorium of Music: Analysis of student experience:  
Postgraduate research students: 2005**

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**Research climate: seminars/ workshops**

(2005: 13%)

(2004: 9%; 2003: 8%; 2002: 18%)

- Lack of a wider discussion forum to stimulate the research process and sound out the difficulties and/or successes of the research experience to date.
- course structure- seminar with classical post-grads unnecessary; greater interaction between post-grads in general- no dedicated class or forum; post-grads interact more with under-grads in jazz department (performance elements);
- Size of seminar program, very demanding. Depth of research for a masters level. I found the expectation to be very high. Both of these have higher expectations than expected based on knowledge of other masters courses.
- The seminars required to be undertaken have mostly been irrelevant.

**Research climate: supportive work environment**

(2005: 13%)

(2004: 9%)

- The Conservatorium is not for the students. Facilities are too closely guarded and frequently students are denied access. Administration is unhelpful and all programs in which I was involved were so poorly organised that they sometimes did not even occur.
- More support from the Conservatorium hierarchy for ACARMPs
- A more supportive environment for those students attempting to complete their degrees via correspondence.
- Research culture in my department is very poorly supported by senior management and receives limited financial commitment.

**Other aspects mentioned included:**

*NB: all the aspects below were mentioned in less than six comments*

	2005	2004	2003	2002
Overall satisfaction: quality of degree	9%	2%		
Research climate: coursework component	9%		6%	12%
Quality of infrastructure: physical facilities: computing facilities and resources	9%			
Research climate: isolation: affiliated campuses	6%	2%	4%	
Overall satisfaction: satisfaction with research	6%		2%	
Quality of infrastructure: funding: scholarships/ PRSS	6%			