



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Education and Social Work

The Research Training Experience
(Research Higher Degree Students)

Student Research Experience Questionnaire 2002 – 2008
*Including the focus of written observations received from
respondents to the 2008 survey*

With attachment:

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (2006 – 2008)

- *Quantitative data 2006 – 2008 (2005 – 2007 graduates)*
- *Qualitative data 2008 (2007 graduates)*

June 2009

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Executive summary

Data on research higher degree students' perceptions of their research training experiences are gathered each year using the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ). The purpose of the SREQ is to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of research higher degrees.

Analysis of this data provides a comprehensive picture of trends in the student experience, and the performance of the Faculty in relation to two of the University's Key Performance Indicators for Research: Supervision, and Overall Satisfaction with the research higher degree; and other related areas: Infrastructure; Research Climate; and Generic Skills.

Written observations, from respondents to the survey, about their experiences provide evidence to support the Faculty SREQ quantitative data results (percentage agreement scores), and provide detailed information about key issues in the areas of best practice and suggested improvements, during their research training experience.

The analysis of qualitative data reported in this document is based on written observations received from **all** respondents to the SREQ. Faculties are advised that if they are interested, it is possible to supply copies of the written observations in the following groupings¹:

- by subject matter: general (Quality of Supervision) to specific (Supervisor(s))
- by degree
- by code

Key results for 2008

The following results are an indication of those areas of the student experience that were of significance to research higher degree students during 2008. The KPI linked results reflect the experiences of respondents in relation to specific items in the survey; the qualitative data reflects the analysis of written observations provided by respondents in answer to open ended questions on the best areas of their experience and those that were considered to be in need of improvement.

Quality of Supervision (Section 1, pp 10 – 12)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the *Supervision Scale* continue to decline, and at 76% are the lowest since 2006, but are still higher than the previous lowest score of 74% in 2005. Domestic students experience better outcomes than their international counterparts. The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 28% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisors
- 9% were satisfied with the guidance they received regarding their thesis, including: literature review; topic; format etc.
- Sample comment: *"Quality of guidance from supervisors, predominantly re: thesis structure and theoretical constructs"*

Suggested improvements

- 25% of respondents to the SREQ suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- Of these, 9% were unhappy with their supervisor(s); whilst a further 7% would have preferred more frequent meetings to discuss progress
- Sample comment: *"The unavailability of the supervisors is the big problem I got. I don't have sufficient support from them, which slows down my progress"*

¹ Please contact Rachel Symons (r.symons@usyd.edu.au or 9351 6560) to discuss your requirements.

Quality of Infrastructure (Section 2, pp 13 – 15)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the *Infrastructure Scale* have increased considerably since the commencement of the SREQ in 2002. The current score of 54% represents an increase of 27% since 2002 (37%). In 2007 and 2008, international students recorded better outcomes for this scale than their domestic counterparts. The University average for this scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 21% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- 7% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the facilities provided by the Faculty (office space, desk, computers); whilst 9% were happy with library services and the availability of relevant electronic journals and databases.
- Sample comment: *"The access to library facilities and a convenient office space. They help reduce the tiresome aspects of research"*

Suggested improvements

- 52% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Comments were divided between:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; funding for conferences; and parking fees (11%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space, particularly for part-time students; computer resources, including provision of textual analysis software (23%)
 - Administration, including: enrolment, general administrative issues, communication (12%)
- Sample comment: *"Combined faculty difficult; limited space, rooms too small, intense competition for resources within faculty. Lack of parking. Difficulty in accessing computers"*

Research Climate (Section 3, pp 16 – 19)

FACULTY SCORES

The current score of 54% for the *Climate Scale* is the highest since 2002, and represents an overall increase of 13% since the lowest scores were recorded in 2005 and 2003 (41%). Between 2004 and 2007 domestic students recorded better outcomes than their international counterparts, but this situation was reversed in 2008. The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 42% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 12% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students; whilst 9% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- A supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 15% of respondents
- Sample comment: *"Meeting with colleagues at overseas conferences - it provides stimulation and encouragement"*

Suggested improvements

- 36% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- 16% thought that the Faculty could provide more opportunities for interacting with their fellow students; whilst 6% considered that this could be achieved through a wider range of seminars
- The lack of a supportive work environment, and a feeling of isolation from staff and students within the faculty/ department was the focus of 9% of comments received.
- Sample comment: *"Activities to unite students, especially those who don't take coursework- possibly making it a requirement to meet in student groups to write, brainstorm... I think this lack of professional and social contact makes the faculty a lonely place for many and reduces the productivity- faculty members could actively encourage students to get involved in social events, personally invite them to events"*

Generic Skills (Section 4, pp 20 – 22)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have remained in the low 70s since 2006, and currently sit at 73%. The experiences of domestic and international students appear to be identical. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 28% of respondents considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 7% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- The provision of coursework in research methodology, together with additional training in research was the subject of 8% of comments received
- 7% of respondents considered that knowledge of their subject area had been expanded
- Sample comment: *“Doing this research has given me a chance to explore areas of knowledge in depth. This self-directed approach is a good life-long learning skill and has set me up for future research possibilities”*

Suggested improvements

- 8% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience, including: oral and written communication skills; organisational skills; research skills; and help in English language proficiency for international students.
- Sample comment: *“My skills with the technicalities of electronic research need improvement”*

Overall Satisfaction (Section 5, pp 23 – 24)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Overall Satisfaction Item have remained over 75% for the past 3 years, and currently sit at 80%. Previously scores ranged between 57% and 68%. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%. Domestic students continue to record better outcomes than their international counterparts.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 18% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience
- The majority of these (11% of comments received) were satisfied with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.
- Sample comment: *“The opportunity to excel within the area of educational research- to be able to make a difference, to continue to broaden the horizons of change”*

Suggested improvements

- 8% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience
- Sample comment: *“The lack of time to fully do justice to all aspects of my research project which is occasioned by my working full time”*

Rachel Y. Symons

Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)

June 2009

r.symons@usyd.edu.au

Glossary

The following terms and phrases are used throughout the report

SREQ	Student Research Experience Questionnaire Administered to postgraduate research students annually, during second semester
PREQ	Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire Administered to graduates in the year after completion of studies
Supervision Scale Infrastructure Scale Climate Scale Generic Skills Scale	The University of Sydney Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is based upon the items included in the nationally administered Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). These items have been shown to cluster together to form factor scales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision • Climate • Infrastructure • Generic Skills <p>Within the report, this naming convention is used to identify information relating to the analysis of the quantitative data (survey items)</p>
Faculty Scores Percentage agreement	SREQ item responses are combined and reported in terms of the proportions of students who agreed or disagreed that their research higher degree experience was positive in the areas of: Supervision; Generic Skills; Infrastructure; Climate; and Overall Satisfaction
Qualitative data Focus of written observations	Students' written observations received in response to open ended questions in the SREQ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the best aspects of your research higher degree experience? Please explain why these aspects are good • What aspects are most in need of improvement? Please explain why
Percentage of comments received	The number of times an aspect is mentioned within written observations of respondents received from respondents is presented as a percentage of the total number of comments received from respondents to the SREQ in any particular year.

Conceptual framework

Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ)

In 2002 the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) began collecting data for The University community on research higher degree students' perceptions of their research training experiences. This data is gathered each year using a survey specifically developed for this task, the "Student Research Experience Questionnaire" (SREQ). The purpose of the SREQ is to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of research higher degrees. The SREQ is based on a national survey of research higher degree students, the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). Some of the information gathered by the SREQ survey also contributes to two of the University's Key Performance Indicators for research. These KPIs are the quality of Supervision, and Overall Satisfaction with the research higher degree.

The survey gathers data on students' perceptions of the quality and frequency of supervision, intellectual and social climate, infrastructure, approaches to research, and generic skills development in their research higher degree, as well as their perceptions of the administration and student support services. The ITL analyses this data and provides a range of reports to staff and students of the university through this web site.

Students are asked to respond to statements using a five point Likert Scale to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. As part of the questionnaires, students are also asked to comment on the following questions:

- What are the best aspects of your research higher degree experience? Please explain why these aspects are good
- What aspects are most in need of improvement? Please explain why

Quantitative and qualitative data from the SREQ provide evidence of the success of University and Faculty initiatives to improve the overall student experience in general and the student experience of research training in particular.

Focus of the Report

Based on the answers to the SREQ, this report seeks to provide an analysis of observable trends in the postgraduate research student experience in the Faculty of Education and Social Work between 2002 and 2008. The report also provides detailed information on the key issues highlighted in the analysis of the 2008 SREQ qualitative data.

Information is arranged by the SREQ Factor Scales (Supervision; Infrastructure; Climate; Generic Skills; and Overall Satisfaction, which, taken together, comprise the student experience of research training in the Faculty.

Focus of written observations from respondents

By examining the foci of the students' comments in the 2008 SREQ, this report seeks to highlight areas that were of best practice in the students' experience, together with those that have been suggested as areas of improvement.

The views of the research higher degree students, on their overall experience at the University, as received through the open response comments, are a valuable insight into what is important to them; what they consider to be areas of best practice; and what they consider are in need improvement.

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 learning and teaching 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.

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) 2006-2008

Faculty scores from the 2006 – 2008 Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ); together with a list of comments received in answer to the open response questions in the 2008 survey, are provided as an attachment to this report. Since less than 20 graduates responded to this survey, it is not possible to provide a detailed analysis of their responses. Further information on the PREQ is available at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/preq/>

Notes

1 Quantitative data analysis

Minimum sample size for reporting

The minimum recommended sample size for SREQ reporting is 20 valid responses. This is the same convention applied to reporting the CEQ and SCEQ. In aggregated degrees where less than 20 valid responses have been received a report is still provided however a warning message notes that the results should be interpreted with caution. Reports are not provided for samples with fewer than 5 respondents. This is necessary to ensure anonymity of respondents².

Number of respondents to the SREQ 2002 – 2008³

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic students	80	117	120	101	114	117	139
International students		8	10	3	11	28	27
Overall	80	125	130	104	125	145	166

2 Qualitative data analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data is based on responses to the open questions received from respondents to the SREQ.

Number of respondents who answered the open questions SREQ 2002 - 2008

<u>Areas of best practice</u>	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic	72	118	109	88	95	100	116
International				1	14	20	21
Total	72	118	109	89	109	120	137

<u>Suggested improvements</u>	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic	67	82	93	77	90	99	99
International				1	15	22	23
Total	67	82	93	78	105	121	122

n=the number of comments received in answer to the relevant 'open response' question

NB: Separate qualitative data for international students did not become available until 2005

3 Reliability of quantitative and qualitative data

The following information on the reliability of statistical data in the above tables should be taken into consideration when reading this report:

Quantitative and qualitative data: Where the number of respondents is less than 5 results are excluded from the report as they are unlikely to be reliable

Quantitative and qualitative data: Where the number of respondents is between 5 and 20 results should be viewed with caution. The minimum sample size recommended for statistical analysis is 20

² Retrieved from ITL SREQ website *Using the report page* at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/reportpage.htm>

³ Data retrieved from the ITL SREQ website results and reports for the Faculty of Education and Social Work on 01.06.09 <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/secure/rrr.cfm>

3 Illustrative sample comments

Comments are recorded as they appear in the original documents. However, minor spelling, grammatical and transcription errors have been corrected. [sic] indicates that the word appears exactly as provided by the student, and that it is not possible to ascertain an exact interpretation of the original meaning. 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. Supervisor(s) names, where included by the respondent, have been replaced by XXX, YYY or ZZZ.

4 Analysis of comments

The components of categories and sub-categories used in the analysis of qualitative data are based on:

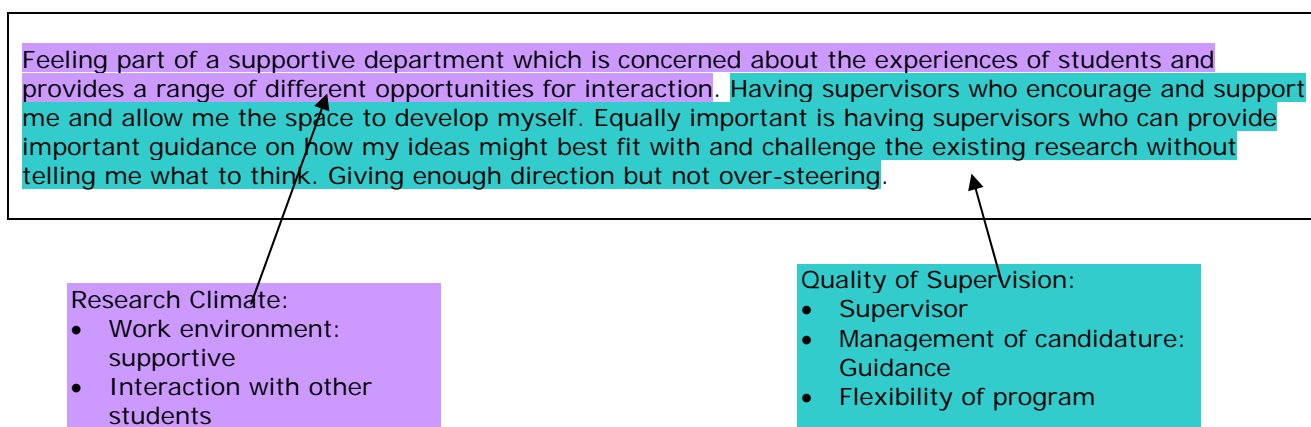
- Characteristics that define the area of the student experience
- SREQ survey items
- recurring themes in students' comments and have been developed over many years of analysing qualitative data from students' surveys.

Together, they represent the range of features of each aspect which are considered to be essential to student satisfaction with their research training experience

5 Counting of comments

Each comment is analysed according to the *Taxonomy for analysing qualitative data from the SREQ*⁴, which is based on the Factors used in the SREQ. 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 the report.

For example, the following comment is counted as ONE COMMENT RECEIVED; but as it is mentioned in Research Climate (Work environment: supportive; Interaction with other students); and Quality of Supervision (Supervisor; Management of candidature: guidance; Flexibility of program); the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 5 aspects in one comment.



⁴ Available from Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)

1 Quality of Supervision

Coverage

The *Supervision Scale* covers aspects of supervision including: supervision being available when needed; understanding by the supervisor(s) of difficulties; provision of additional information relevant to the thesis topic by the supervisor; provision of guidance in topic selection and refinement; provision of helpful feedback on progress; provision of good guidance in literature search; and overall satisfaction with quality of supervision.

SREQ Survey items

1	Supervision is available when I need it
5	My supervisor(s) make(s) a real effort to understand difficulties I face
13	My supervisor(s) provide(s) me with additional information relevant to my topic
18	I am given good guidance in topic selection and refinement
22	My supervisor(s) provide(s) helpful feedback on my progress
26	I have received good guidance in my literature search
36	Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my supervision

Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 sub-categories within *Quality of Supervision*, against which students' comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the research student experience of Supervision. The components of these sub-categories are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments

- Supervision (Supervisor/ Associate Supervisor; availability and frequency; evaluation of supervisor by student; feedback on work)
- Management of Candidature (guidance on thesis, literature review; topic etc; workload)
- Progress reports (value of process; structure)
- Flexibility of program
- Pressure to complete (e.g. within set time frame)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Supervision Scale continue to decline, and at 76% are the lowest since 2006, but are still higher than the previous lowest score of 74% in 2005. Domestic students experience better outcomes than their international counterparts. The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

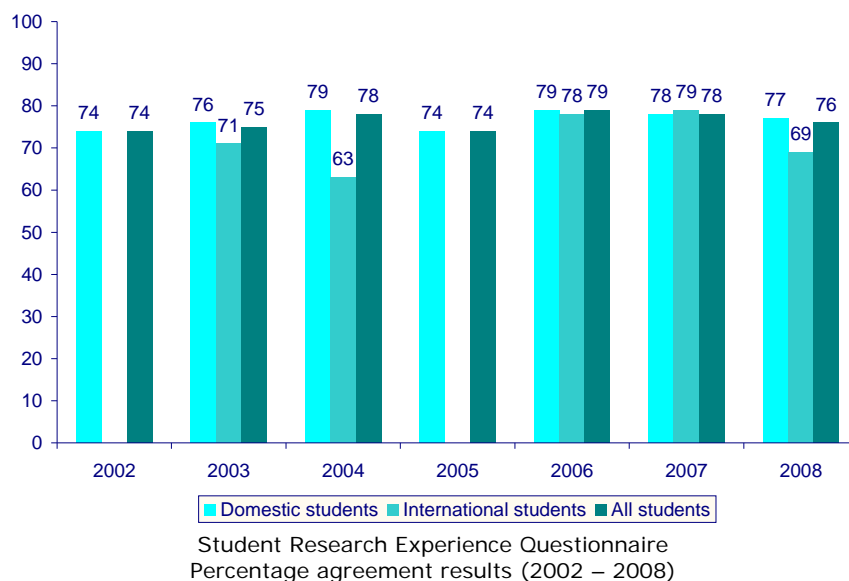
- 28% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisors
- 9% were satisfied with the guidance they received regarding their thesis, including: literature review; topic; format etc.

Suggested improvements

- 25% of respondents to the SREQ suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- Of these, 9% were unhappy with their supervisor(s); whilst a further 7% would have preferred more frequent meetings to discuss progress

1.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with relevant Supervision Scale survey items in the SREQ.



1.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement under the heading of Quality of Supervision. The trends provide an indication of student satisfaction with this area of their experience between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			61%	42%	43%	47%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	50%	50%	57%
	All	44%	44%	41%	61%	43%	49%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			26%	21%	20%	22%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	7%	18%	35%
	All	39%	37%	22%	26%	19%	25%

1.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

1.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
Supervision			
- Satisfied with performance of supervisor(s)	35%	48%	37%
- Supervisor(s) available for regular meetings			
- Supervisor(s) provide feedback on work			
Management of candidature			
- Guidance is provided on thesis, topic, literature review	11%	0%	9%
- Workload is manageable			

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Having supervisors who encourage and support me and allow me the space to develop myself. Equally important is having supervisors who can provide important guidance on how my ideas might best fit with and challenge the existing research without telling me what to think. Giving enough direction but not over-steering*
- *Relationship with my supervisor to help me to decide the direction of my research and be supported*
- *Having a supervisor who is so clearly in command of his field, and who so thoroughly understands the PhD process and requirements*

Sample comments: international students

- *The fact that I have one of the top researchers in my field as my supervisor*
- *The communication, the interaction between my supervisor and I. I have learned a lot from my supervisor*
- *My supervisor's review is great. He check the details of my paper work, and give me good advice*

1.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=99)	International (n=23)	All (n=122)
--	---------------------	--------------------------	-----------------

Supervision

- | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| - Performance of supervisor(s) unsatisfactory | 15% | 30% | 18% |
| - Supervisor(s) unavailable for regular meetings | | | |
| - Supervisor(s) do not provide feedback on work | | | |

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Communication and clarity between supervisors and their students. The nature of doing research was not made clear, the task of doing research and how to do it in particular disciplines. It may be particular in education because it is a multidisciplinary sector and so you are unsure how to approach this particular discipline*
- *My supervision arrangements are not really working. Infrequent contact means the challenge (and motivation) to improve has to come always from me. I will finish knowing that my dissertation would have reached a higher standard with consistent, frequent and critical supervision*
- *Provision of specific written information about how to put the thesis together as it nears completion. For example, margin sizes, referencing protocols, binding. It would also have been useful to learn how to use Endnote and also formatting and style functions to enable automatic updating of contents page, page numbers etc*

Sample comments: international students

- *My advisor is on sabbatical and is on a trip every 2 months which makes it difficult to meet for supervisory appointments or obtain feedback for my last 6 months here*
- *Supervisor hasn't provided specific supervision as he thinks it is our study and "we should know what to do". Unfortunately, PhD students are not born with PhD brains to start with*
- *The unavailability of the supervisors is the big problem I got. I don't have sufficient support from them, which slows down my progress*

2 Quality of Infrastructure

Coverage

The *Infrastructure Scale* covers aspects of the infrastructure available to research students, including: access to a suitable working space; access to technical support; access to a common room; access to necessary equipment; access to computing facilities and resources; appropriate financial support; and overall satisfaction with the quality of services and facilities.

SREQ Survey items

2	I have access to a suitable working space
6	I have good access to the technical support I need
10	I have access to a common room or a similar type of meeting place
12	I am able to organise good access to necessary equipment
19	I have good access to computing facilities and services
28	There is appropriate financial support for research activities
35	Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the services and facilities

Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 sub-categories within *Quality of Infrastructure*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the research students' perceptions of the quality of infrastructure. The components of these sub-categories are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Finance and funding (funding for resources, equipment etc; scholarships, PRSS, APA etc)
- Facilities (computer hardware and software; equipment; workspace, building, parking etc)
- Research resources (provided by faculty; provided by library)
- Support (IT; technical; laboratory)
- Administration (enrolment and admission; communication between faculty and students; general comments on administration (faculty and university)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Infrastructure Scale have increased considerably since the commencement of the SREQ in 2002. The current score of 54% represents an increase of 27% since 2002 (37%). In 2007 and 2008, international students recorded better outcomes for this scale than their domestic counterparts. The University average for this scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

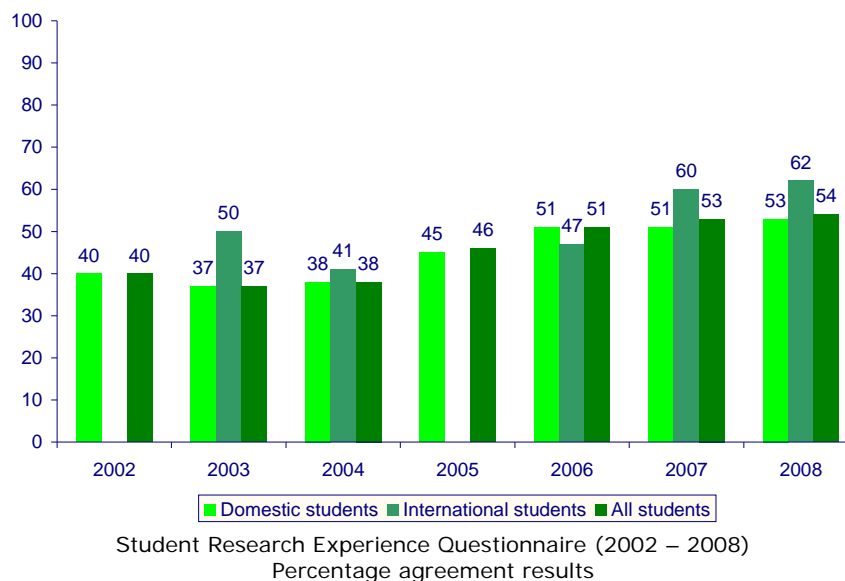
- 21% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- 7% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the facilities provided by the Faculty (office space, desk, computers); whilst 9% were happy with library services and the availability of relevant electronic journals and databases.

Suggested improvements

- 52% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Comments were divided between:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; funding for conferences; and parking fees (11%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space, particularly for part-time students; computer resources, including provision of textual analysis software (23%)
 - Administration, including: enrolment, general administrative issues, communication (12%)

2.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with Infrastructure Scale survey items in the SREQ.



2.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the survey, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in students' perceptions of the quality of infrastructure between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			14%	16%	13%	20%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	14%	40%	29%
	All	19%	14%	14%	13%	16%	18%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			58%	47%	55%	48%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	60%	64%	70%
	All	52%	68%	61%	58%	49%	56%

2.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

2.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
Facilities			
- Computers are provided by faculty	6%	10%	7%
- Workspace, office, provided by faculty			
- Equipment provided is up to date and functional			
Research resources			
- Research resources are provided by faculty	8%	14%	9%
- Library services satisfactory			

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *The access to library facilities and a convenient office space. They help reduce the tiresome aspects of research*
- *I received a bequest scholarship this year which makes it easier for me to study*
- *Access to e-journals on Internet which facilitated wide access to current research at all times. As a part-time student, this provided flexibility in terms of remaining on top of current and emerging issues*

Sample comments: international students

- *Facilities and resources - faculty provided sufficient facilities and resources. Additionally, I'm highly satisfied with online network system, e.g. unikey, MyUni, faculty directory etc*
- *Unlimited access to on line database and Internet, because it really helps my research*
- *I found the access to journals good. Supervisory facilities are good. The library facilities are helpful. Supervisor has been cooperative*

2.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=99)	International (n=23)	All (n=122)
--	---------------------	--------------------------	-----------------

Finance and funding

- | | | | |
|--|----|-----|-----|
| - Funding for research unavailable | 8% | 26% | 11% |
| - Scholarships unavailable or unsatisfactory | | | |
| - PRSS, APA provisions unsatisfactory | | | |

Facilities

- | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| - Computers are not provided by faculty | 23% | 22% | 23% |
| - Workspace, office, not provided by faculty | | | |
| - Equipment provided is not up to date or functional | | | |

Administration

- | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| - Services supplied by faculty administration office is unsatisfactory | 11% | 17% | 12% |
| - Enrolment and admissions processes unsatisfactory | | | |
| - Communication channels between faculty and students unsatisfactory | | | |

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Some University faculty admin staff are not ' student-centred' often rude and unhelpful. I often wonder how non-English speaking students cope. Some are good though*
- *Access to NVivo software on a University laptop for part-time PhD students at the point they are ready to analyse their data. This has been a big obstacle that I have raised on several occasions over the last 12 months, at several levels in the Faculty. Though I have had agreement and a sympathetic ear, there has been no response or improvement in this MAJOR difficulty*
- *The fact that it took many months to get my office on campus wasted lots of time during which I could have been working way more effectively. I worry about the new students who aren't given an office at all- a laptop is a poor substitute. I think providing office space is one of the most effective ways the University can support students, build relationships*

Sample comments: international students

- *To provide more support in finance and hardware environment e.g., more research fund and a quiet office with a window*
- *Workspace, insufficient postgraduate study rooms. Funding for attending conferences*
- *The library needs to review which books are recalled most frequently, and purchase additional copies*

3 Research Climate

Coverage

The *Climate Scale* covers aspects of the prevailing research climate in a students' school/ department, including: opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students; integration into the school/ department community; opportunities to become involved in the broader research culture; perception of other research students as supportive; feelings of isolation within the school/ department; encouragement of interaction with other research students; provision of a good seminar programme; stimulation of personal work by the prevailing research ambience; provision of a supportive work environment; and feeling respected as a fellow researcher.

SREQ Survey items

- | | |
|----|--|
| 3 | The department / school provides opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students |
| 8 | I feel integrated into the department's / school's community |
| 15 | The department / school provides opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture |
| 16 | I feel that other postgraduate students in my department / school are supportive |
| 20 | I tend to feel isolated within this department / school |
| 23 | Interaction with other postgraduate students is actively encouraged in this department / school |
| 24 | A good seminar program for postgraduate students is provided |
| 25 | The research ambience in the department / school or faculty stimulates my work |
| 29 | I feel that this department / school provides a supportive working environment |
| 31 | I feel respected as a fellow researcher within my department / school |

Qualitative data analysis

There are 8 sub-categories within *Research Climate*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the student experience of the prevailing research climate within the faculty. The components of these sub-categories are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Interaction with other research higher degree students (study related; social; support of peers)
- Research culture (part of research community; integration into faculty/ department/ school; conference participation; networking)
- Work environment (supportive environment; stimulating; induction/ orientation programme; respect as fellow researcher; support for students)
- Cultural diversity and equity
- Practical aspects (field work; industry/ professional experience)
- Relevance to career/ work
- Preparation for academia (e.g. availability of tutoring, lecturing)
- Location and physical environment

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

The current score of 54% for the Climate Scale is the highest since 2002, and represents an overall increase of 13% since the lowest scores were recorded in 2005 and 2003 (41%). Between 2004 and 2007 domestic students recorded better outcomes than their international counterparts, but this situation was reversed in 2008. The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

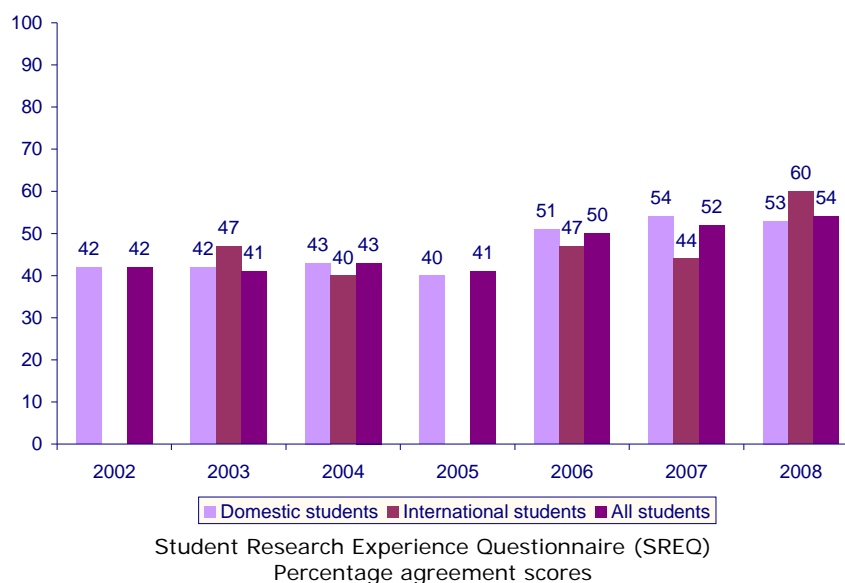
- 42% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 12% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students
- 9% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- A supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 15% of respondents

Suggested improvements

- 36% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- 16% thought that the Faculty could provide more opportunities for interacting with their fellow students; whilst 6% considered that this could be achieved through a wider range of seminars
- The lack of a supportive work environment, and a feeling of isolation from staff and students within the faculty/ department was the focus of 9% of comments received.

3.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2004–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with Climate Scale survey items in the SREQ.



3.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the students experiences of the prevailing research climate in the faculty between 2002 and 2008, as indicated in the responses to open questions in the SREQ.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			33%	53%	54%	48%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	57%	35%	10%
	All	36%	44%	36%	33%	53%	51%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			55%	39%	31%	40%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	53%	36%	17%
	All	57%	67%	62%	54%	41%	32%

3.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

3.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
Interaction with other research students			
- Opportunities are provided to discuss research with other students	13%	5%	12%
- Opportunities are provided for social contact with other students			
- Other students are supportive			
Research culture			
- Opportunities provided to participate at conferences	10%	5%	9%
- Networking opportunities available			
- Feel part of a research community			
- Seminar program provided by faculty			

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
Work environment			
- Research ambience stimulating, challenging			
- Satisfactory induction or orientation programme is provided	18%	0%	15%
- Feel part of / welcomed by the faculty/ department			
- Respected as a fellow researcher			
- Support is provided for students (especially part-time, external)			
- Presence of a supportive work environment			

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Treated as respected professional, opportunities to lead seminars/tutor provide needed money and university level teaching experience, having an office on campus - this is essential to feeling a part of the community, getting to know people and being truly productive while on campus*
- *Really appreciate the friendliness in the department, they make you feel like they want you there. I am getting good feedback from people.*
- *Interacting with other Postgraduate students and broaden knowledge and share ideas. Working with network in Education Faculty - feel a purpose/guided.*
- *Informal social meetings with a key core group of researchers to encourage each other and share our progress successes, obstacles and setbacks together*

Sample comments: international students

- *Being part of a research group with researchers at all stages of their career*
- *As a student of the University of Sydney, I really love the supportive atmosphere of the other postgraduate students and administrative staff. I have a very good contact with my supervisor, even if sometimes I feel he doesn't supervise my research enough. My best experiences here so far are the friends I have met in my room at the faculty (the dungeon as people call it) and their support.*

2.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=99)	International (n=23)	All (n=122)
Interaction with other research students			
- Opportunities are not provided to discuss research with other students	17%	13%	16%
- Opportunities are not provided for social contact with other students			
- Other students are not supportive			
Research culture			
- Opportunities not provided to participate at conferences	11%	0%	9%
- Networking opportunities unavailable			
- Do not feel part of a research community			
- Seminar program not provided by faculty			
Work environment			
- Research ambience is not stimulating, challenging			
- Induction or orientation programme is not provided	9%	4%	8 %
- Do not feel part of / welcomed by the faculty/ department			
- Are not respected as a fellow researcher			
- Support is not provided for students (especially part-time, external)			
- Supportive work environment not present			

Domestic (n=99)	International (n=23)	All (n=122)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Activities to unite students, especially those who don't take coursework- possibly making it a requirement to meet in student groups to write, brainstorm... I think this lack of professional and social contact makes the faculty a lonely place for many and reduces the productivity- faculty members could actively encourage students to get involved in social events, personally invite them to events. The fact that it took many months to get my office on campus wasted lots of time during which I could have been working way more effectively. I worry about the new students who aren't given an office at all- a laptop is a poor substitute. I think providing office space is one of the most effective ways the University can support students, build relationships.*
- *Research community as a whole in E&SW. not a separate community for PhD students and a separate community for other academics*
- *In the Education Department everyone is isolated. There's no sense of community, no one knows who anyone is, people don't know each other, everyone is very isolated and it can be difficult sometimes*

Sample comments: international students

- *More contact with other postgraduate students. Experts were good to discuss general issues, but other than that no structure to meetings and was not too helpful*
- *International research students, especially those from non-European countries (mostly Asia, Africa, and South America), should be given particular attention, as their previous sociocultural, economical, political, and learning experiences are very different from local students as well as those from Europe, the UK, and the US. More research needs to be conducted by the University to understand their needs and pains instead of simply requiring them to follow the route primarily designed for the local students*
- *Working space; academic and social network; financial support*

4 Generic Skills

Coverage

The *Generic Skills* scale reflects the extent to which students perceive their studies to have fostered the development of the generic skills recognised by the university as being a valuable outcome of university education, in addition to discipline specific skills and knowledge. Skills include problem solving; oral and written communication; development of ideas and their written presentation; collaboration with other researchers; analytical skills; planning; confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems; and ability to learn independently

SREQ Survey items

- 4 My research has further developed my problem-solving skills
- 7 Doing my research has helped to develop my written communication skills
- 9 I have learned to develop my ideas and present them in my written work
- 11 As a result of my research, I have developed the ability to work collaboratively with other researchers
- 14 My research has sharpened my analytical skills
- 17 Doing my research has helped to develop my oral communication skills
- 21 Doing my research has developed my ability to plan my own work
- 27 As a result of my research I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems
- 30 As a result of my research I have developed the ability to learn independently

Qualitative data analysis

There are 8 sub-categories within *Generic Skills*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) which are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Graduate Attributes (includes: problem solving, analytical skills, oral and written communication, presentation, and planning)
- Technical skills (statistics, thesis/ academic writing, disciplinary, and training in use of equipment)
- Research skills
- Publishing skills (writing for publication; opportunities for publication provided)
- Collaboration with other researchers
- Expansion of knowledge base (i.e. on research topic and associated subjects)
- Working independently
- English language skills for NESB/ international students (proficiency, support with academic writing, proof reading etc)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have remained in the low 70s since 2006, and currently sit at 73%. The experiences of domestic and international students appear to be identical. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

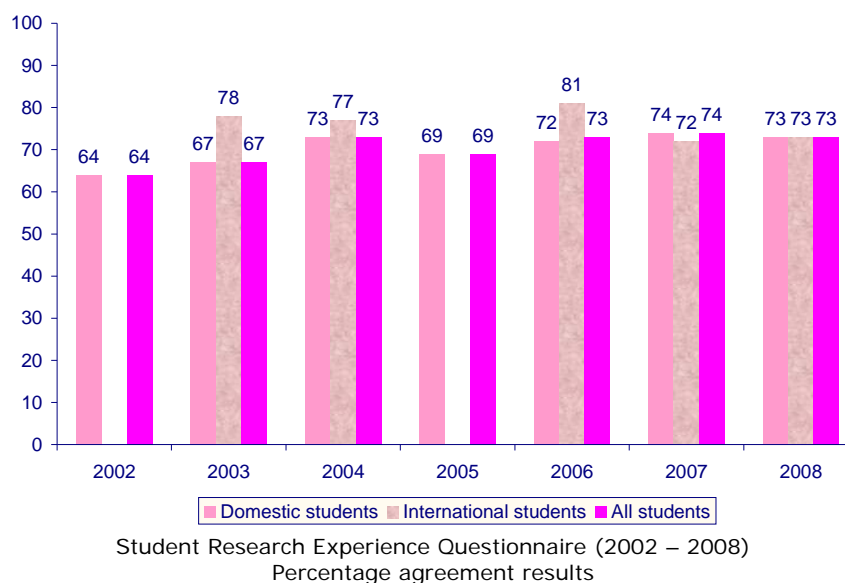
- 28% of respondents considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 7% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- The provision of coursework in research methodology, together with additional training in research was the subject of 8% of comments received
- 7% of respondents considered that knowledge of their subject area had been expanded

Suggested improvements

- 8% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience, including: oral and written communication skills; organisational skills; research skills; and help in English language proficiency for international students.

4.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with Generic Skills Scale survey items in the SREQ.



4.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the development of Generic Skills by respondents between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			28%	34%	32%	26%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	29%	20%	38%
	All	43%	36%	52%	28%	33%	30%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			9%	12%	7%	7%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	13%	5%	13%
	All	7%	13%	10%	9%	12%	7%

4.2 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

4.2.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
Graduate Attributes			
- Problem solving skills are being developed	7%	10%	7%
- Analytical skills are being developed			
- Oral and written communication, and presentation skills are being developed			
Research skills			
- Research skills are being enhanced	6%	19%	8%
- Research methodology courses are available			
Expand knowledge base			
- Knowledge of research topic is being expanded	9%	0%	7%
- Knowledge of associated topics is being expanded			

Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Doing this research has given me a chance to explore areas of knowledge in depth. This self-directed approach is a good life-long learning skill and has set me up for future research possibilities*
- *My conceptual sophistication, dependant of thought and thorough understanding of research reports and literature*
- *Completing course work studies related to my research. I was able to design my research methodology and thesis structure in the two courses I have completed this year. My confidence strengthened.*

Sample comments: international students

- *My critical and analytical skills have improved over the years of research involvement*
- *I have opportunities to develop my academic research skills. It's quite important to my career as lecturer and researcher in my country*
- *Research coursework develops the foundation to our research skills as a vital guideline to PhD students. It shortens our learning curve and guide us to mitigate any unnecessary time consumption. Interaction with other research students encourages me to solve problems*

4.2.2 Suggested improvements

8% of graduates (i.e. 10/122) who responded to the SREQ considered that improvements were needed in this area of their experience.

Sample comments: domestic students

- *My writing style, but am working on it*
- *An annual publication for submissions from postgraduate social science students would give good experience to students*
- *My skills with the technicalities of electronic research need improvement*

Sample comments: international students

- *Academic writing skill, because I need to express my ideas in research*
- *Support for international students: (correction of written work - this is provided for international students in more global universities and financial support).*
- *More opportunities for learning quantitative approach before I fully get involved with my program*

5 Overall Satisfaction

Coverage

This single item asks graduates about their overall level of satisfaction with their research higher degree experience.

SREQ Survey items

43 Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my research higher degree experience.

Qualitative data analysis

There are 3 sub-categories within Overall Satisfaction. They represent the range of aspects of the postgraduate research student experience which are considered to have a major influence on the quality of the research degree experience, and which are not covered elsewhere.

- General comments
- Quality of degree
- Satisfaction with research (topic, contribution to field)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Overall Satisfaction Item have remained over 75% for the past 3 years, and currently sit at 80%. Previously scores ranged between 57% and 68%. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%. Domestic students continue to record better outcomes than their international counterparts.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

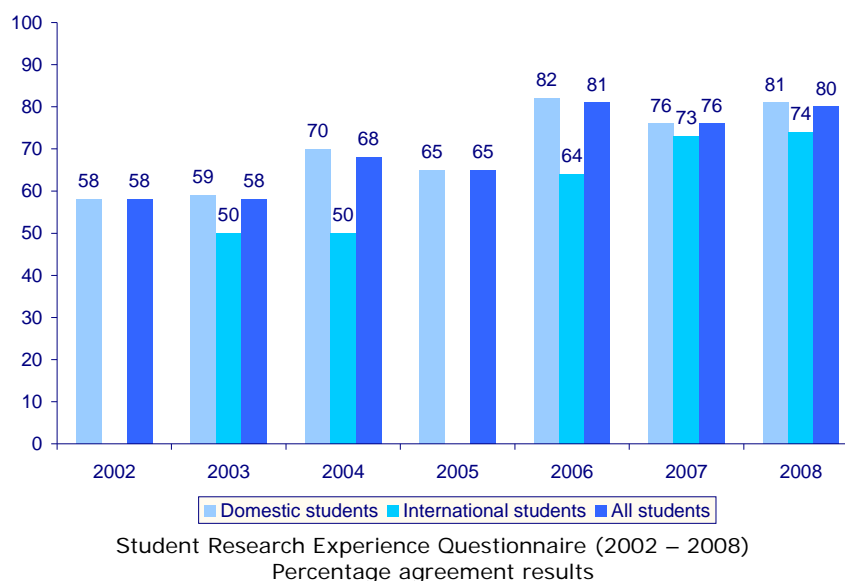
- 18% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience
- The majority of these (11% of comments received) were satisfied with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.

Suggested improvements

- 8% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience

5.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with the Overall Satisfaction item in the SREQ.



5.1 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the survey, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in research higher degree students' overall satisfaction between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			23%	28%	15%	19%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	14%	15%	14%
	All	17%	18%	25%	22%	27%	18%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			5%	7%	7%	10%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	13%	0%	0%
	All	0%	0%	5%	8%	6%	8%

5.2 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

5.2.2 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=116)	International (n=21)	All (n=137)
Satisfaction with research			
- Research topic will contribute to field	19%	14%	18%
- Researching topic that have always been interested in			
- Research is worthwhile			

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Travelling the world, exploring contexts I would not have had opportunity to explore without undertaking the PhD*
- *Having the opportunity to do the research and learn about the field. This is good because the field is particularly contentious and I think it's necessary to understand the issues involved in order to work against negative and perhaps even ignorant perceptions of the field*
- *The feeling of excitement when I develop my ideas that have long been resting in the background*
- *The opportunity to excel within the area of educational research- to be able to make a difference, to continue to broaden the horizons of change*

Sample comments: international students

- *I can see the whole picture of doing research and learn from my experiences*
- *The best aspect of my RHD experience is that I am part of a collegial programme, which means that I am enrolled in a university[overseas] as well as the University of Sydney, and this is a great advantage for me, my career and my research*

5.2.3 Suggested improvements

8% of graduates (i.e. 10/122) who responded to the SREQ considered that improvements were needed in this area of their experience. There were no comments from international students on this topic.

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Too early to say at this stage. Though the course DARP requires some significant review as I have found it frustrating and at times NOT worthwhile in terms of time and effort*
- *The lack of time to fully do justice to all aspects of my research project which is occasioned by my working full time*
- *The topic wouldn't passed the Ethics Committee as it was a negative research topic*
- *Would not recommend part time research and full time job - not University's fault! Lucky I have organised a study leave option*
- *Just me getting down to it*
- *Organizing time for study*

Attachment A Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ 2008)

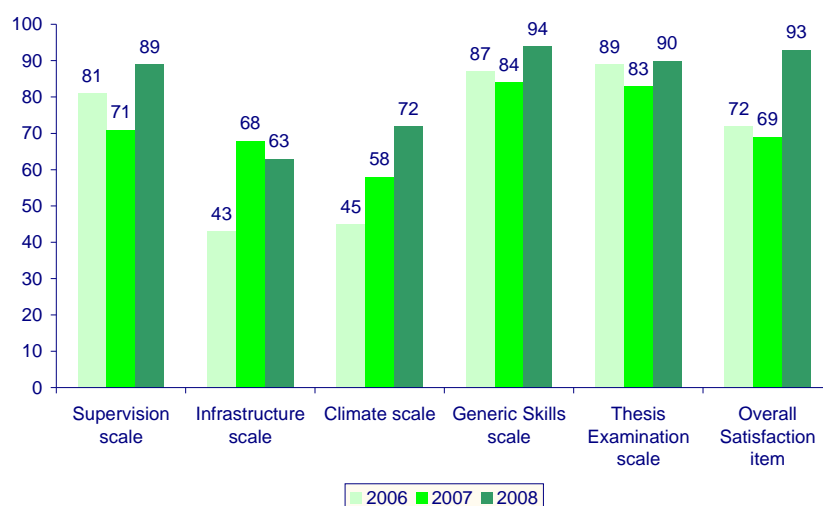
The survey

In 2002 the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) began collecting data for The University community on research higher degree graduates' perceptions of their research training experiences. This data is gathered each year using a national survey specifically developed for this task, the "Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire" (PREQ). The purpose of the PREQ is to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of research higher degrees. The PREQ also provides data for benchmarking between similar programmes in different universities.

The survey gathers data on students' perceptions of the quality and frequency of supervision, intellectual and social climate, infrastructure, approaches to research, quality of thesis examination, and generic skills development in their research higher degree. The ITL analyses this data and provides a range of reports to staff and students of the university through their web site⁵

The ITL use responses obtained from graduates of the University of Sydney who completed their courses in the previous year (i.e. the 2008 reports are for students who completed in 2007). As an example: the 2008 reports are for graduates who completed their degree in 2007.

Quantitative data 2006 – 2008 (2005 – 2007 graduates)



Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire
Percentage agreement results (2006 - 2008)

NB: In 2006 - 2008 less than 20 graduates from the Faculty of Education and Social Work responded to the PREQ. Since this is below the minimum number recommended for statistical analysis of PREQ data (20) the results in the above graph should be viewed with caution.

Qualitative data 2008 (2007 graduates)

The following comments were received from research higher degree graduates in response to the 2008 PREQ.

Areas of best practice

- My supervisor.
- Field visit - which made me understand the rural education.
- My supervisor Dr XXX gave consistent and generous time for detailed analysis, proof-reading and personal encouragement.
- Being encouraged to have control over my work and only seek help when needed, it builds confidence.

⁵ For more information on the PREQ, and results and reports 2002 - 2008 see <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/preq/>

- Relevant and Interesting.
- Support from Faculty of Education, supervisors and other colleagues.
- Supervisor!
- Having a world leader as a supervisor and mentor.
- Dedicated staff, autonomy in the research question and design.
- The Independence, The Supervision and support.
- Development of any skills in writing, thinking and researching.
- My supervisor XXX - her availability, guidance and ongoing support throughout the 5 years.
- I had the intellectual freedom to pursue a variety of different ideas and discuss them with a couple of people on the faculty's academic staff. In particular, there were 3 people, including the Dean of the faculty, without whose support and interest I probably would not have completed my thesis.
- The supervision with knowledgeable & supportive supervisors.

Suggested improvements

- The department was not inclusive enough.
- When your research is part of a bigger project, it is difficult to cross hierarchy. This delays the work. Supervisor needs to be more supportive when work is delayed.
- The thesis proposal committee was very bad, personally derogatory and totally discouraging. I put in complaint and received apology from XXX.
- The technical support was adequate but prompt services with more recent and essential programs would have been appreciated. Broader research culture would go a long way in terms of professional development.
- Promoting the concept and ideas to a broader community.
- Very isolated, not a lot of useful integration.
- Isolation, lack of a research culture, inadequate training in research software (had to pay to do it privately), no work space provided, inadequate teaching in statistical analysis, little coursework.
- I am really satisfied with the experience.
- Guidance in supervision. I felt that I was working without much subject - related direction.
- Outside the 3 people referred to in the previous comment, the faculty's academic staff did not seem interested in supporting students' research, nor in discussing intellectual ideas.