



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Pharmacy

The Research Training Experience
(Research Higher Degree Students)

Student Research Experience Questionnaire Report

Includes:

- *Executive summary: Key results for 2008*
- *Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002 – 2008*
- *Comparative results: Focus of written observations from respondents 2002 – 2008*
- *Focus of written observations from respondents: 2008*

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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 those respondents who answered the open ended questions on the best areas of their experience and those that were considered to be in need of improvement.

43 respondents (34 domestic; 9 international) to the 2008 SREQ answered the open question requesting comments on areas of best practice in their research higher degree experience; 38 respondents (31 domestic; 7 international) suggested improvements.

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

FACULTY SCORES

Over the past three years significant improvements in the supervision received by respondents to the SREQ, are evidenced by the substantial increase in the percentage agreement scores between 2002 – 2005 (65% - 58%) and 2006 – 2008 (70% - 80%). The current faculty score of 78% is the second highest recorded. The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%. In 2008 domestic and international candidates recorded similar outcomes.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 40% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisor
- 9% of respondents considered that they were provided with sufficient guidance in the management of their candidature
- 7% appreciated the freedom to pursue their own research.
- Sample comment: *"Correspondences and advice are very prompt. My supervisors are attentive to any needs or questions that I may have & they point me in the right direction which is very helpful"*

Suggested improvements

- 13% of respondents to the SREQ, and who provided written observations suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- 8% of students who provided comments would like more guidance in the management of their project including: topic selection, literature review, setting of guidelines.
- Sample comment: *"Feedback on progress, feedback on what is expected. If there was a better guidebook or something with all the information needed it would be ideal"*

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

The current Faculty score for the Infrastructure Scale of 60% agreement is the lowest recorded since commencement of the SREQ in 2002, and represents a decrease of 11% on the 2007 and 2003 results (71%). The University average for this scale is 64%. International students have experienced better outcomes than their domestic counterparts over the past two years.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 12% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- The majority of comments related to the availability of research resources
- Sample comment: *"Access to online research- makes things very easy when not based on campus"*

Suggested improvements

- 95% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Comments were divided between:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; and funding for conferences; (34%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space; computer resources; and equipment (45%)
 - Administration, including: communication between staff and students; quality of customer service (16%)
- Sample comment: *"The faculty needs to be improved in terms of infrastructure and more building changes needs to be done for a more qualitative look which is old at the moment. The equipment also needs to be made advanced within some labs. Overall everything is good except for the cleaning of work areas and some labs where cleaners have accessibility as far as the floors are concerned which is not happening regularly"*

Research Climate (Section 3, pp 16 – 18)

FACULTY SCORES

The Faculty score for the Climate Scale has remained in the 60th percentile since 2006. The current score of 62% is lower than the previous score (67%) but slightly higher than the 2006 score (61%). The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%. Since 2006, international students have consistently rated their experiences in this scale higher than domestic students.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 30% of respondents who provided written observations on their experiences expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 16% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students, and appreciated their support
- 21% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- Sample comment: *"Being in the same work environment as other research students, especially those at the same stage as you - the social support is very valuable"*

Suggested improvements

- 29% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- Opportunities for networking and collaborative projects; together with participation in the research culture of the faculty and an increase in seminars would be appreciated by 11% of respondents.
- The lack of a supportive work environment, or respect as a fellow researcher, together with the need for a useful orientation program was the focus of 13% of comments received.
- Sample comment: *"I feel that post graduate students are very important to the research within the faculty but are not acknowledged in any way"*

Generic Skills (Section 4, pp 19 – 21)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have remained in the 80th percentile since 2005, and currently sit at 82% agreement. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%. In 2007 and 2008, international students rated their experience better than their domestic counterparts.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 42% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 16% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- 9% appreciated the opportunities to learn relevant technical skills; whilst 7% of respondents considered that their ability to work independently had been enhanced.
- Sample comment: "*Literature review technique as to sharpen our knowledge. Being innovative, as to think alternative ways of doing things*"

Suggested improvements

- 16% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience, including: oral and written communication skills; organisational skills; research skills; statistical support; and help in English language proficiency for international students.
- Sample comment: "*Work independently, as to plan our works in more efficient ways. Developing oral and written communication skills as to produce high presentations and publications*"

Overall Satisfaction (Section 5, pp 22 – 23)

FACULTY SCORES

After a high of 81% agreement recorded in 2007, the Faculty score for Overall satisfaction returned to its lowest score of 70%, last recorded in 2005. Simultaneously the recorded scores for international students declined considerably from 92% in 2007, to 64% in 2008; whilst the scores for domestic students decreased slightly, from 78% in 2007 to 72% in 2008. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 9% of respondents who answered the open questions expressed satisfaction with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.
- Sample comment: "*Intellectual self indulgence. Pursuit of areas of research interest*"

Suggested improvements

- No respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience

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October 2009

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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 Pharmacy 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.

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 caution².

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	29	33	30	28	26	45	43
International students	0	8	7	5	8	13	11
Overall	29	41	37	33	34	58	54

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

Areas of best practice	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic				17	20	37	34
International	26 ⁴	37	28	2	5	10	9
Total				19	25	47	43

Suggested improvements	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic				16	19	36	31
International	26	30	20	2	6	9	7
Total				18	25	45	38

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

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.

- KPI linked results are shown for domestic students and overall results only (2002)
- Results of the qualitative analysis are expressed as the percentage of comments received from ALL respondents to the CEQ (2005)

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

Qualitative data only: Where the number of respondents who have supplied written observations on their experiences is between 5 and 10, results are excluded from the report as they lie within the lower range of statistics that should be viewed with caution.

- Results of the qualitative analysis are expressed as the percentage of comments received from ALL respondents to the CEQ (2006 – 2008)

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 Pharmacy on 06.10.09
<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/secure/rrr.cfm>

⁴ Separate qualitative data for international students did not become available until 2005

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*⁵, 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 (Research culture: conferences; seminars; networking); Generic Skills (NESB language skills): and Quality of Supervision (Supervisor); the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 5 aspects in one comment.

My research supervision has been splendid and helped me in understanding my research fitting into the big picture. Postgraduate conferences, seminars and journal clubs held in the faculty and outside as well (with collaborators from other departments, pharmacology) were very helpful. Provision of various workshops by education faculty helped in writing, me being an international student.

Quality of Supervision:
 • Supervision/
 Supervisor

Research Climate
 • Research culture:
 conferences;
 seminars; networking

Generic Skills:
 • NESB language skills

⁵ 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

Over the past three years significant improvements in the supervision received by respondents to the SREQ, are evidenced by the substantial increase in the percentage agreement scores between 2002 – 2005 (65% - 58%) and 2006 – 2008 (70% - 80%). The current faculty score of 78% is the second highest recorded. The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%. In 2008 domestic and international candidates recorded similar outcomes.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 40% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisor
- 9% of respondents considered that they were provided with sufficient guidance in the management of their candidature
- 7% appreciated the freedom to pursue their own research.

Suggested improvements

- 13% of respondents to the SREQ, and who provided written observations suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- 8% of students who provided comments would like more guidance in the management of their project including: topic selection, literature review, setting of guidelines.

1.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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

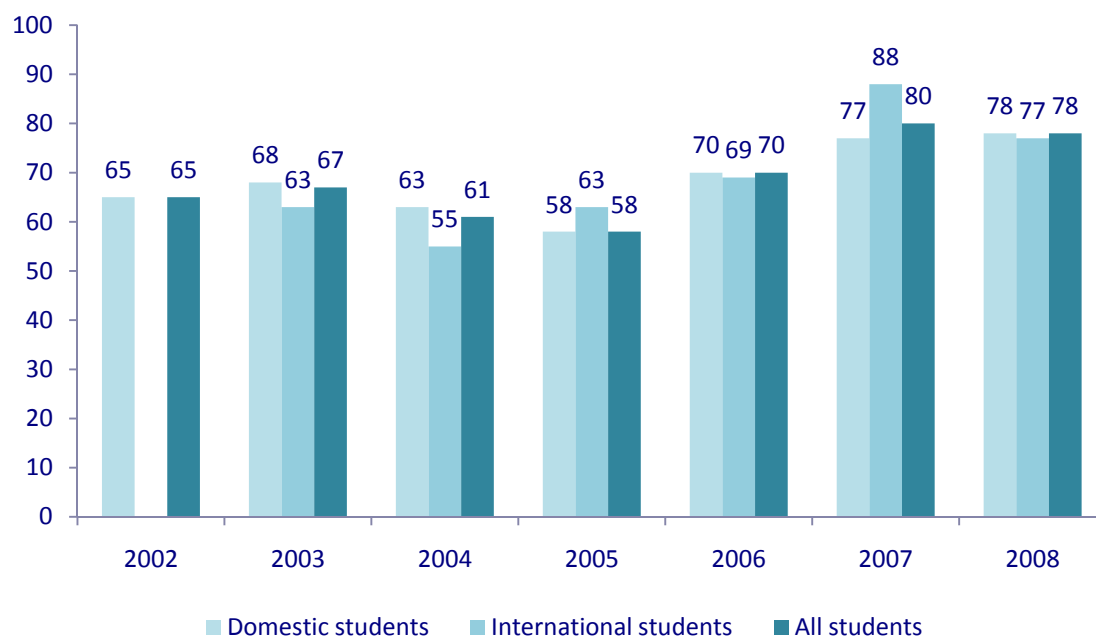


Figure 1: SREQ Supervision Scale: percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	19%	11%	21%	26%	36%	47%	56%
Suggested improvements	38%	20%	40%	33%	20%	20%	13%

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

1.3.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n= 43)
Supervision	
- Satisfied with performance of supervisor(s)	40%
- Supervisor(s) available for regular meetings	
- Supervisor(s) provide feedback on work	
Management of candidature	
- additional information relevant to the thesis topic provided	9%
- guidance in topic selection and refinement satisfactory	
- positive guidance in literature search	
Flexibility of program	
- Freedom to pursue own research interests appreciated	7%
- Flexibility of working hours appreciated	

All
(n= 43)

Sample comments

- *Having great supervisors who are not only committed to helping and guiding me but who also have heaps of experience in supervising PhD students so can give constructive feedback and set realistic goals - not all students are as lucky as I am*
- *My interactions with my supervisor has been the best aspect of my research experience as he has been very supportive and has guided me very well in helping me adjust to the life of a researcher. He is always free to help me when I require assistance and is in constant communication with me even when he's away from the university*
- *The best aspects of my research experience are my supervisors. I find I have constant support and they are always open for discussion and feedback*
- *My supervisors are attentive to any needs or questions that I may have & they point me in the right direction which is very helpful*
- *My research supervision has been splendid and helped me in understanding my research fitting into the big picture*
- *Very, very supportive and encouraging supervisors - this really helps to make the process an enjoyable one and helps to prevent difficulties from disrupting my research*

1.3.2 Suggested improvements

13% respondents (i.e. 5/38 comments received) suggested improvements in this area of their experience, including: a structured program on commencement of candidature to enable students to better plan their time/activities; feedback on progress; feedback on what is expected; templates for thesis format; and better supervisory arrangements for off-campus candidates.

Due to the low number of comments provided, and to preserve student confidentiality, no sample comments are provided.

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

The current Faculty score for the Infrastructure Scale of 60% agreement is the lowest recorded since commencement of the SREQ in 2002, and represents a decrease of 11% on the 2007 and 2003 results (71%). The University average for this scale is 64%. International students have experienced better outcomes than their domestic counterparts over the past two years.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 12% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- The majority of comments related to the availability of research resources

Suggested improvements

- 95% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Comments were divided between:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; and funding for conferences; (34%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space; computer resources; and equipment (45%)
 - Administration, including: communication between staff and students; quality of customer service (16%)

2.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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

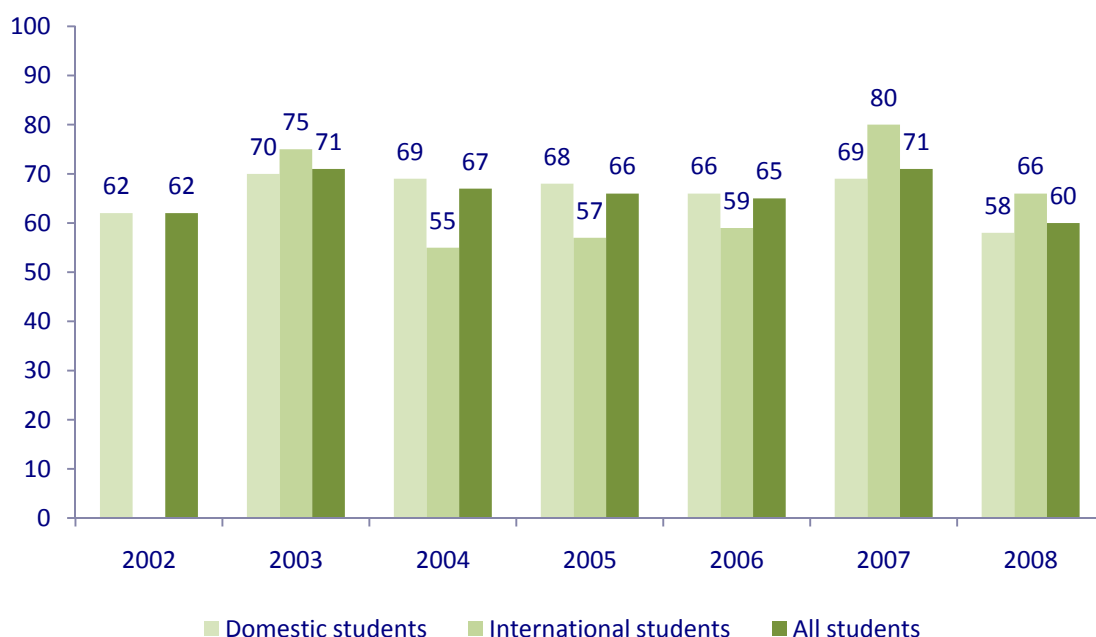


Figure 2: SREQ Infrastructure Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	23%	19%	11%	11%	16%	11%	12%
Suggested improvements	81%	67%	75%	78%	72%	78%	95%

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

2.3.1 Areas of best practice

12% of respondents (i.e. 5/43 comments received) expressed satisfaction with the prevailing infrastructure within the faculty and university, including: access to research resources through the library; facilities at off campus research sites.

Due to the low number of comments and to preserve student confidentiality, no sample comments are provided.

2.3.2 Suggested improvements

All (n=38)	
Finance and funding	
- Funding for research unavailable	34%
- Scholarships unavailable or unsatisfactory	
- PRSS, APA provisions unsatisfactory	

All (n=38)

Facilities

- | | |
|--|-----|
| - Computers are not provided by faculty | 45% |
| - Workspace, office, not provided by faculty | |
| - Equipment provided is not up to date or functional | |
| - Would like a postgraduate common room | |

Administration

- | | |
|---|-----|
| - Faculty administration unsatisfactory | 16% |
| - Lack of communication between administration and students | |

Sample comments

- *Need improved communication between faculty postgraduate/research committee (staff) and the postgraduate student body - it often feels as though we are not consulted on important issues to us and are just told what has been decided on our behalf by the academic staff*
- *Administrative tasks are understandably focused on on-site full time students and when one is off-site and part time they can be difficult. More flexibility for off-site students would be good*
- *The administrative aspects of the faculty has been poor. We have had major interruptions to our research throughout the year, due to constant renovation to our lab that is always delayed and not synchronised. Instead of doing multiple jobs in a set period of time, our lab would be forced into closure repeatedly to get one job done after another. Postgraduate office spaces has still not been provided for members of my research group due to the huge delays in renovations and we have been forced to place our offices within our lab, which is a very noisy environment. Cleaning services have been poor, with rooms not cleaned for several weeks*
- *Funding for overseas conferences. PRSS funds were not provided by the department, only available to third years and not told about this before I applied*
- *Scholarship opportunities for students who have already commenced their PhD candidature are very rare e.g. VCA, APA and most UPA's are for commencing students only. Financially this makes life very hard for students with no scholarship*
- *Computing support within the faculty is swift and efficient, but anything involving university wide computing resources might take 2 weeks before the query is even lodged*

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 6 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; conference participation; networking)
- Work environment (integration into faculty/ department/ school; supportive environment; stimulating; induction/ orientation programme; respect as fellow researcher; support for students)
- Cultural diversity and equity
- Preparation for academia (e.g. availability of tutoring, lecturing)
- Location and physical environment

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

The Faculty score for the Climate Scale has remained in the 60th percentile since 2006. The current score of 62% is lower than the previous score (67%) but slightly higher than the 2006 score (61%). The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%. Since 2006, international students have consistently rated their experiences in this scale higher than domestic students.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 30% of respondents who provided written observations on their experiences expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 21% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- 16% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students, and appreciated their support

Suggested improvements

- 29% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- Opportunities for networking and collaborative projects; together with participation in the research culture of the faculty and an increase in seminars would be appreciated by 11% of respondents.
- The lack of a supportive work environment, or respect as a fellow researcher, together with the need for a useful orientation program was the focus of 13% of comments received.

3.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2004–2008

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

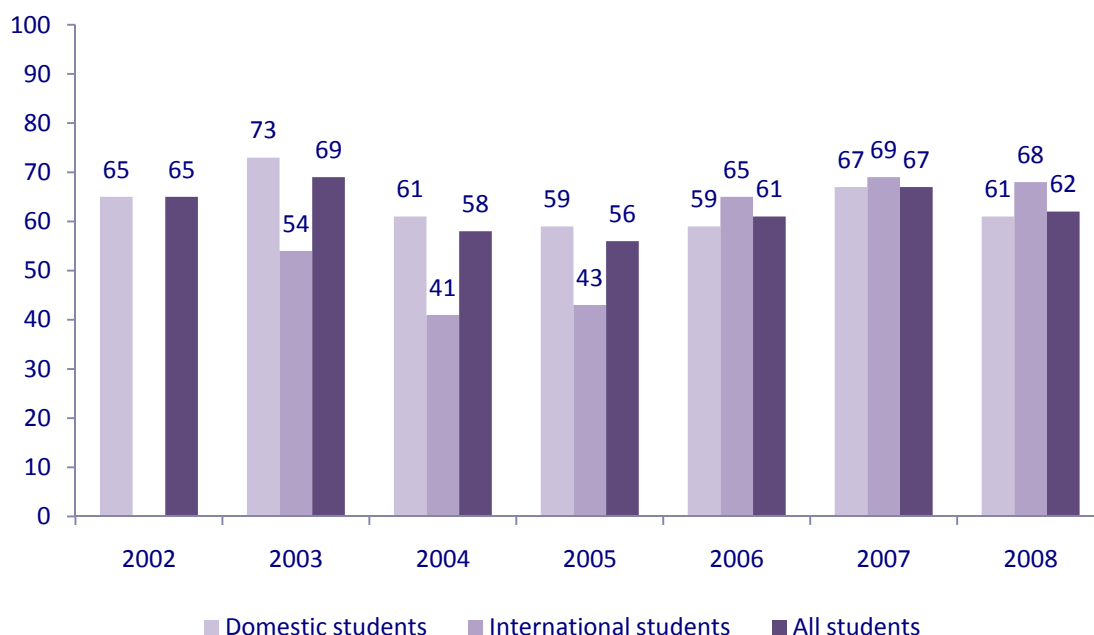


Figure 3: SREQ Climate Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	54%	54%	61%	37%	48%	53%	30%
Suggested improvements	19%	40%	30%	22%	20%	24%	29%

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

3.3.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=43)
Interaction with other research students	
- Opportunities are provided to discuss research with other students	16%
- Opportunities are provided for social contact with other students	
- Other students are supportive	
Research culture	
- Opportunities provided to participate at conferences	21%
- Networking opportunities available	
- Feel part of a research community	
- Seminar program provided by faculty	

All (n=43)

Work environment

- | | |
|---|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research ambience stimulating, challenging - Satisfactory induction or orientation programme is provided - 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 | 7% |
|---|----|

Sample comments

- *During my postgraduate study, I did enjoy participating in conferences; whether that was institutional, national or international. This golden opportunity was a perfect environment to instigate collaboration between other fellow researchers and provided me with constructive feedback and peer review of my work.*
- *Active encouragement and support to attend and present at conferences, including local, national and international conferences - this greatly increases exposure to some very high quality research and also enables me to present my research to other researchers and get valuable feedback*
- *Post-graduate conferences, seminars and journal clubs held in the faculty and outside as well (with collaborators from other departments, pharmacology) were very helpful*
- *Being in the same work environment as other research students, especially those at the same stage as you - the social support is very valuable*
- *I am working with a multidisciplinary research group and internationally recognised researcher. Working with and learning from them will be very beneficial to me in my future career*
- *Opportunities for international conferences (expose to the world's directions in my research area and building my experience)*

3.3.2 Suggested improvements

All (n=38)

Research culture

- | | |
|---|-----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities not provided to participate at conferences - Networking opportunities unavailable - Do not feel part of a research community - Seminar program not provided by faculty | 11% |
|---|-----|

Work environment

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research ambience is not stimulating, challenging - Induction or orientation programme is not provided - 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 | 13% |
|--|-----|

Sample comments

- *need to have supportive rather than competitive research environment*
- *A more structured orientation program at the very beginning of the candidature so students can have the knowledge and skills to better plan their time/activities (the research environment is very different to work and takes adjusting to)*
- *PhD students are not integrated into the faculty well. This could be improved*
- *The research environment and facilities. The ambience in this faculty does not stimulate research and it leaves an impression of isolation*
- *I feel that post graduate students are very important to the research within the faculty but are not acknowledged in any way*
- *The opportunity to network and interact with others of similar interest to share information and ideas*

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 80th percentile since 2005, and currently sit at 82% agreement. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%. In 2007 and 2008, international students rated their experience better than their domestic counterparts.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 42% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 16% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- 9% appreciated the opportunities to learn relevant technical skills; whilst 7% of respondents considered that their ability to work independently had been enhanced.

Suggested improvements

- 16% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience, including: oral and written communication skills; organisational skills; research skills; statistical support; and help in English language proficiency for international students.

4.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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

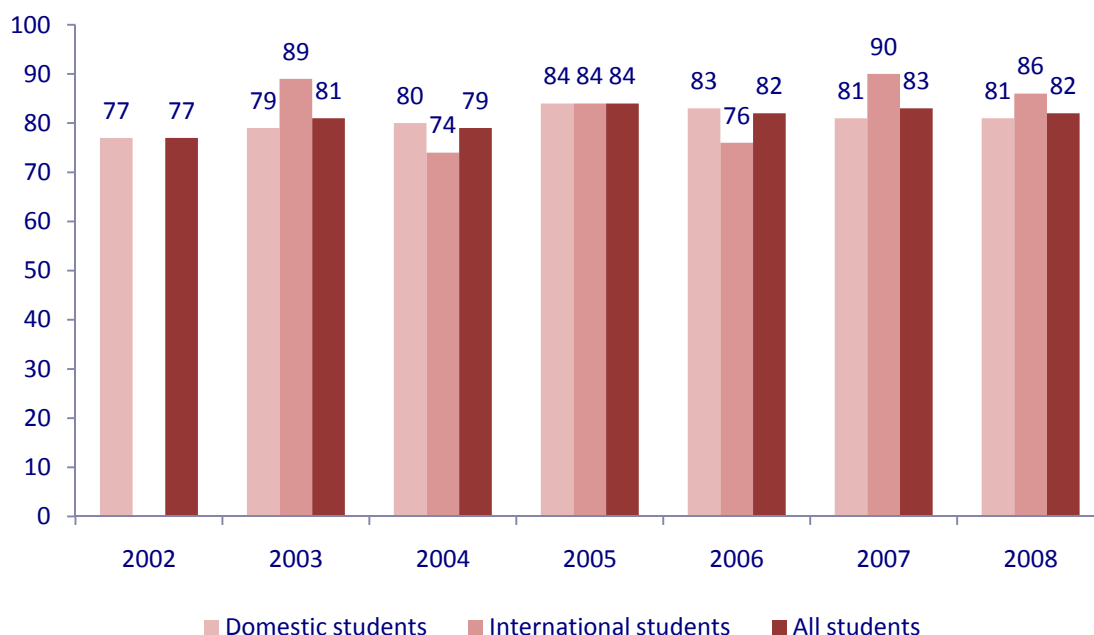


Figure 4: SREQ Generic Skills Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	54%	65%	39%	53%	72%	51%	42%
Suggested improvements	4%	13%	30%	11%	12%	13%	16%

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

4.2.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=43)
Graduate Attributes	
- Problem solving skills are being developed	16%
- Analytical skills are being developed	
- Oral and written communication, and presentation skills are being developed	
Technical skills	
- Training in use of equipment provided	9%
- Statistics training provided	
- Learn how to write academically e.g. thesis	
- Learn how to undertake literature review	
Working independently	7%
- Ability to plan own work developed	
- Ability to learn independently developed	

All
(n=43)

Sample comments

- *Learning research skills and writing skills. These are invaluable skills for any employment situation*
- *Skills with regards to analysis, communication (oral and written), critical thinking*
- *Also, my own research project involved mastering quite a few state of the art techniques in molecular biology as this has strengthened my understanding*
- *Learning how to plan a and organise a project: This will allow me to know the depth of the research field and warns me of the difficulties I might face in future as a independent researcher*
- *Being independent, self-organized, better critical thinking and communication skills. I believe all these will be able to equip me with the necessary capability to face challenges in future research*
- *It helps me a lot to develop my research skills*

4.2.2 Suggested improvements

16% of students (i.e. 6 /38 comments received) who responded to the SREQ suggested improvements in this area of their experience, including: development of graduate attributes; availability of statistics training or access to expertise; how to work independently; and help with language skills for NESB students.

Sample comments

- *Developing oral and written communication skills as to produce high presentations and publications*
- *Learning English, especially reading, writing, speaking to have better relationship with others*
- *Statistical support*
- *Time organisation and project execution: As project goes there several things that will appear on the plate at once, it is confusing I should touch first sometimes, therefore I need to plan my time and project very carefully*
- *Work independently, as to plan our works in more efficient ways. Developing oral and written communication skills as to produce high presentations and publications*
- *Statistical help*

5 Overall Satisfaction

Coverage

This single item asks students 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

After a high of 81% agreement recorded in 2007, the Faculty score for Overall satisfaction returned to its lowest score of 70%, last recorded in 2005. Simultaneously the recorded scores for international students declined considerably from 92% in 2007, to 64% in 2008; whilst the scores for domestic students decreased slightly, from 78% in 2007 to 72% in 2008. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 9% of respondents who answered the open questions expressed satisfaction with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.

Suggested improvements

- No respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience

5.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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

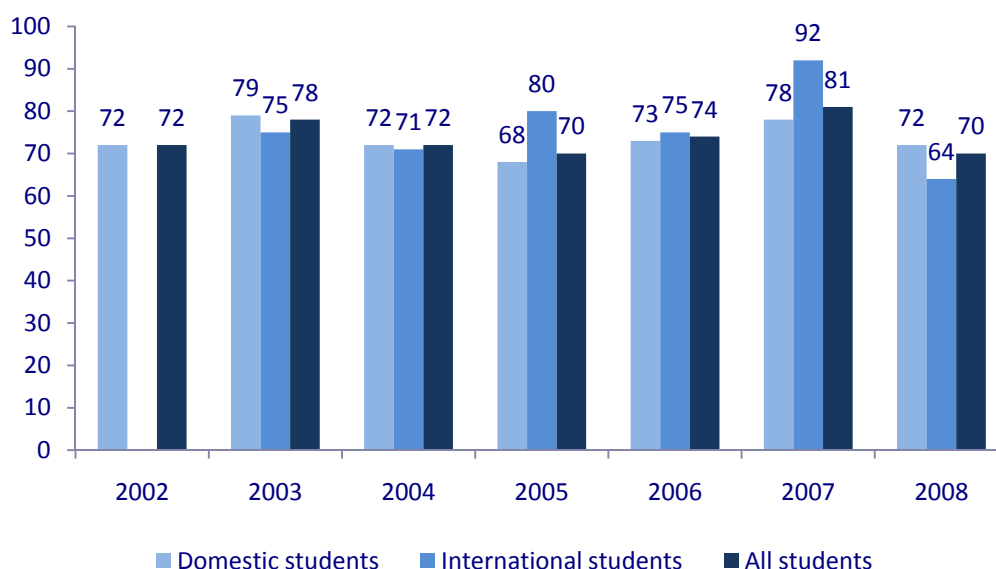


Figure 5: SREQ Overall Satisfaction Item: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	38%	14%	36%	0%	16%	11%	9%
Suggested improvements	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%

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

5.2.1 Areas of best practice

9% of respondents (4/43 comments received) expressed satisfaction with their research topic, and its contribution to the field.

Due to the low number of comments received, and to preserve student confidentiality, no sample comments are provided.

5.2.3 Suggested improvements

No respondents to the 2008 SREQ provided written observations relating to improvements in their overall satisfaction of the course