



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Veterinary Science

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*

September 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 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.

44 respondents (38 domestic; 6 international) to the 2008 SREQ answered the open question requesting comments on areas of best practice in their research higher degree experience; 43 respondents (39 domestic; 4 international) suggested improvements.

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

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Supervision Scale have remained consistently in the high 70s percentage agreement since 2005. The current score of 77% is marginally lower than the 2007 score (78%). The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%. Over the past two years domestic and international respondents have recorded similar outcomes.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 20% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey appreciated the freedom to pursue their own research and the flexibility of their working hours.
- 9% expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisors
- Sample comment: *"That my supervisors trust me and give me space to conduct my research"*

Suggested improvements

- 26% of respondents to the SREQ, and who provided written observations suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- Of these, 9% were unhappy with various aspects of their supervision, including: the supervisor(s); feedback on their work; availability and frequency of meetings; and the need for evaluation of the supervision process.
- 9% of students who provided comments would like more guidance in the management of their project including: topic selection, literature review, setting of guidelines, and monitoring of progress.
- Sample comment: *"Supervisors to ensure progression for timely finish of degree so students aren't left for months/years with no money"*

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 remained in the 70th percentile since 2004. The current score of 74% agreement is marginally higher than the 2007 score (70%). International students have consistently experienced similar or better outcomes than their domestic counterparts. The University average for this scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 18% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- Comments were evenly divided between funding; facilities; and research resources
- Sample comment: *"The facilities, services and support system is complete and working pretty well"*

Suggested improvements

- 98% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Comments were divided between:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; and funding for conferences and equipment; (35%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space; computer resources; and equipment (26%)
 - Lack of IT, laboratory, and technical support (14%)
 - Administration (12%)
- Sample comment: *"There is an urgent need of improvement of facilities in the lab. Also improvement of money available for research for international students. It should have a new system to apply for grant without a specific date to attend courses and conferences overseas. This will enable students that wish to attend a course or go to a conference overseas be able to afford them"*

Research Climate (Section 3, pp 16 – 19)

FACULTY SCORES

The Faculty scores for Research Climate have remained in the 60th percentile since 2005. The current score of 66% represents an increase of 5% on the previous year, and is similar to the previous highest scores of 67% in 2006, and 68% in 2005. International students rated their experiences higher than domestic students in both 2007 and 2008. The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 55% of respondents who provided written observations on their experiences expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 11% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students
- 18% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- A supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 9% of respondents
- 9% of respondents appreciated the practical aspects of their work e.g. meeting field work participants
- Sample comment: *"Attending overseas conferences where we have the chance to meet the scientists whose papers we read. Discussing future collaborations and learning about current research in our field is very helpful"*

Suggested improvements

- 37% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- 12% thought that the more opportunities could be provided for interacting with their fellow students, both at Camperdown and Camden
- The lack of a supportive work environment, and a feeling of isolation from staff and students within the faculty/ department was the focus of 14% of comments received.
- Sample comment: *"Also, the faculty needs to work more at actively encouraging more interaction between staff and students. One or two people try, but mostly nothing happens. There isn't a very good sense of community. Even if they just organised one or two dinners a year, that would be good. There doesn't need to be huge efforts, but just small things would really make a difference"*

Generic Skills (*Section 4, pp 20 – 22*)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have increased steadily since 2002 and currently sit at 87% agreement. Since 2006, international and domestic students have recorded similar outcomes. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 34% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 9% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- 9% of respondents considered that their ability to work independently had been enhanced.
- The ability to be a confident researcher was appreciated by 7% of respondents
- Sample comment: *"Learning to work independently to develop good research and communication skills"*

Suggested improvements

- 7% of respondents considered that more help was required in the development of technical and research skills.
- Sample comment: *"More formalised training in project management would greatly have assisted the progress of my research and actually given me some skills, as well as avoiding a lot of issues that arose from my work which have affected my whole department"*

Overall Satisfaction (*Section 5, pp 23 – 24*)

FACULTY SCORES

The Faculty Score for the Overall Satisfaction Item in the SREQ has increased significantly over the past 6 years. The current score of 91% agreement is the highest recorded. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%. With the exception of 2006 when scores were almost identical, international students have consistently rated their experience higher than their domestic counterparts.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 16% of respondents who answered the open questions 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: *"Ability to produce a body of work that I can be proud of and claim later if I need to"*

Suggested improvements

- No respondents provided comments that could be categorised as belonging to this area of the research training experience

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September 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 Veterinary Science 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. The broad area(s) by which each comment has been analysed are indicated alongside each comment.

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	34	48	47	43	46	48	56
International students	0	9	8	6	14	8	12
Overall	34	57	55	49	60	56	68

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				38	41	41	38
International	29	48	44	2	12	7	6
Total				40	53	48	44

<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				31	37	38	39
International	29	46	37	1	11	6	4
Total				32	48	44	43

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. Results of the qualitative analysis are expressed as a total of all comments received.

Quantitative and qualitative data: Where the number of respondents is between 5 and 19 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 are expressed as a total percentage of all comments received.

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 Veterinary Science on 19.09.09 <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 (Interaction with other students; Cultural diversity and Equity); and Quality of Supervision (Flexibility of program); the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 3 aspects in one comment.

The sense of freedom given when conducting postgraduate research regarding formation of ideas and the writing process. Working with other students to solve problems no matter how trivial e.g., end-note. Meeting international students is also a plus associated with research at university

Quality of supervision
 • Flexibility of program

Research Climate:
 • Interaction with other students
 • Cultural diversity and equity

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 have remained consistently in the high 70s percentage agreement since 2005. The current score of 77% is marginally lower than the 2007 score (78%). The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%. Over the past two years domestic and international respondents have recorded similar outcomes.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 20% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey appreciated the freedom to pursue their own research and the flexibility of their working hours.
- 9% expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisors

Suggested improvements

- 26% of respondents to the SREQ, and who provided written observations suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- Of these, 9% were unhappy with various aspects of their supervision, including: the supervisor(s); feedback on their work; availability and frequency of meetings; and the need for evaluation of the supervision process.
- 9% of students who provided comments would like more guidance in the management of their project including: topic selection, literature review, setting of guidelines, and monitoring of progress.

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.

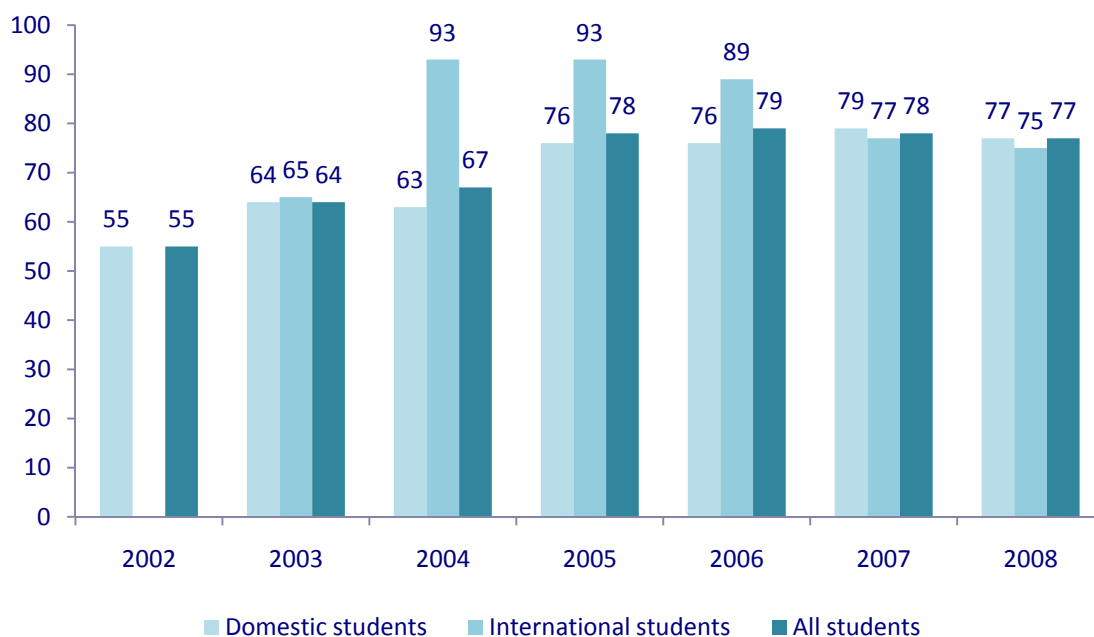


Figure 1: SREQ Supervision Scale: percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	Domestic					49%		
	International					33%		
	All	34%	29%	32%	35%	45%	35%	30%
Suggested improvements	Domestic					16%		
	International					27%		
	All	28%	28%	32%	22%	19%	25%	26%

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

1.3.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n= 44)
Supervision	
- Satisfied with performance of supervisor(s)	9%
- Supervisor(s) available for regular meetings	
- Supervisor(s) provide feedback on work	
Flexibility of program	20%
- Freedom to pursue own research interests appreciated	
- Flexibility of working hours appreciated	

Sample comments: domestic students

- *That my supervisors trust me and give me space to conduct my research*
- *My supervisor treats me as very mature student - which I like very much. I have my own time and space. My supervisor never put me into any sort of academic or research related pressure. I like this environment*
- *The supervisor team is very good. They always try their best to help me*
- *That I have entire control and ownership over my project and that I am supported within reason to pursuit my own research aims*
- *The sense of freedom given when conducting postgraduate research regarding formation of ideas and the writing process*
- *Academic freedom to pursue what interests me. Flexibility with personal life and family (study life balance).*

1.3.2 Suggested improvements

	All (n=43)
Supervision	
- Performance of supervisor(s) unsatisfactory	9%
- Supervisor(s) unavailable for regular meetings	
- Supervisor(s) do not provide feedback on work	
- Process for evaluating supervisor performance suggested	
Management of candidature	9%
- Additional information relevant to the thesis topic not provided	
- Insufficient guidance in topic selection and refinement	
- Lack of good guidance in literature search	
- Workload and progress monitoring required	

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Supervision - my associate supervisor has been supportive, my supervisor is disinterested or highly critical - rarely receive positive feedback or assistance*
- *Supervisors to ensure progression for timely finish of degree so students aren't left for months/years with no money*
- *More monitoring and assistance of students*
- *Closer scrutiny by supervisors would put some pressure on me to complete tasks on time*
- *More directed supervision*
- *Overall supervision*

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, Camden facilities)
- 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 remained in the 70th percentile since 2004. The current score of 74% agreement is marginally higher than the 2007 score (70%). International students have consistently experienced similar or better outcomes than their domestic counterparts. The University average for this scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 18% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- Comments were evenly divided between funding; facilities; and research resources

Suggested improvements

- 98% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Comments were divided between:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; and funding for conferences and equipment; (35%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space; computer resources; and equipment (26%)
 - Lack of IT, laboratory, and technical support (14%)
 - Administration (12%)

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.

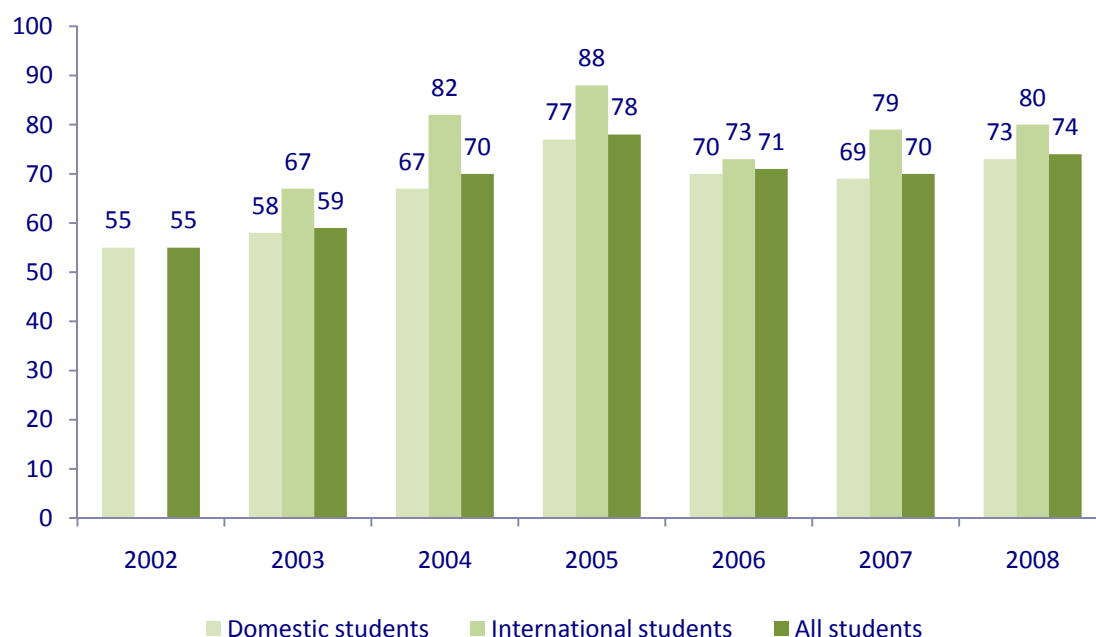


Figure 2: SREQ Infrastructure Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	Domestic					22%		
	International					0%		
	All	21%	13%	25%	3%	17%	15%	18%
Suggested improvements	Domestic					65%		
	International					73%		
	All	48%	65%	65%	75%	67%	50%	98%

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

2.3.1 Areas of best practice

18% of respondents to the SREQ (8/44 comments received) appreciated access to funding and scholarships; provision of physical facilities (computers, equipment and workspace); technical support; library resources; and faculty administration.

Sample comments:

- *The university administration is efficient and well organised*
- *Being financed by an external body, no need to worry about fundraising*
- *Being funded by invasive animals CRC because they organise many events to bring researchers from all over Australia together who are studying similar things and provide many training camps*
- *full use of library resources, time in the field*
- *Getting technical assistance from people with experience*
- *It's good to work in a great research atmosphere with good facilities*

2.3.2 Suggested improvements

	All (n=43)
Finance and funding	
- Funding for research unavailable	35%
- Scholarships unavailable or unsatisfactory	
- PRSS, APA provisions unsatisfactory	
Facilities	
- Computers are not provided by faculty	26%
- Workspace, office, not provided by faculty	
- Equipment provided is not up to date or functional	
- Camden not adequately supplied with facilities	
Support services	
- Technical support not available	14%
- Laboratory support not available	
- IT support not available	
Administration	
- Dissatisfied with administration: faculty and university	12%
- Unhappy with enrolment process	

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Need more financial support for the conference, travel and research*
- *The university needs to allow more funds for student equipment and software*
- *Lack of coordination within the faculty as a whole for ordering supplies - seems to be an awful lot of waste. I think this probably is not limited to the research groups but includes the hospitals as well*
- *Need access to technical equipment. Struggled to find an appropriate centrifuge in the University for some of my research work. Maybe could get a database of all the working high cost equipment available for loan/hire in the University*
- *The postgraduate room in the RMC Gunn building (level 5) has old fashioned desks and poor kitchen facilities that make it an unwelcome place to work*
- *The Veterinary Science Department needs to work at encouraging students to seek external support when they're working in areas that the faculty has little experience in. We're encouraged to use all these new and different technologies, but there aren't the accompanying resources that teach us how to do that. Sometimes the faculty don't have the expertise in a particular area, and there is no support, and we're left to reinvent the wheel ourselves and bang our heads against the wall trying to figure out how to do something. We could, instead, just seek external help, from other universities etc. Things would get done much easier and more quickly if we had external help sometimes*

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 7 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 (Camden and Camperdown)
- Practical aspects of research (field work; clinical aspect etc)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

The Faculty scores for Research Climate have remained in the 60th percentile since 2005. The current score of 66% represents an increase of 5% on the previous year, and is similar to the previous highest scores of 67% in 2006, and 68% in 2005. International students rated their experiences higher than domestic students in both 2007 and 2008. The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 11% of respondents who provided written observations on their experiences valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students; whilst 18% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- A supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 9% of respondents
- 9% of respondents appreciated the practical aspects of their work e.g. meeting field work participants

Suggested improvements

- 12% of respondents considered that the more opportunities could be provided for interacting with their fellow students, both at Camperdown and Camden
- The lack of a supportive work environment, and a feeling of isolation from staff and students within the faculty/ department was the focus of 14% 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.

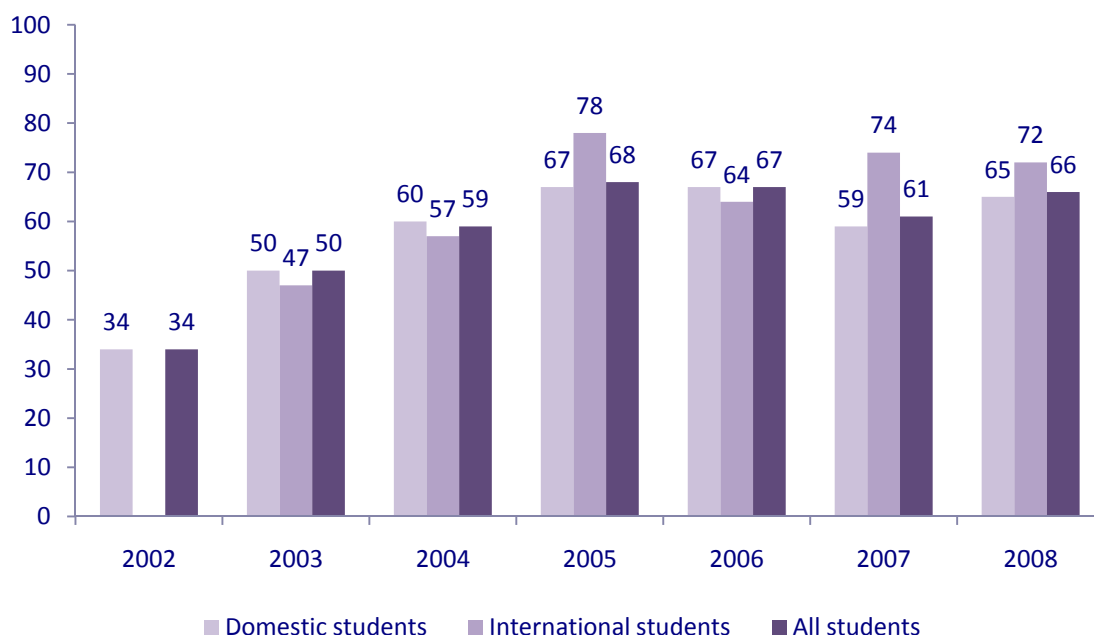


Figure 3: SREQ Climate Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	Domestic					54%		
	International					33%		
	All	31%	33%	64%	45%	49%	52%	55%
Suggested improvements	Domestic					43%		
	International					36%		
	All	62%	33%	24%	34%	42%	50%	37%

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

3.3.1 Areas of best practice

All (n=44)	
Interaction with other research students	
- Opportunities are provided to discuss research with other students	11%
- Opportunities are provided for social contact with other students	
- Other students are supportive	
Research culture	
- Opportunities provided to participate at conferences	18%
- Networking opportunities available	
- Feel part of a research community	
- Seminar program provided by faculty	
Work environment	
- Research ambience stimulating, challenging	
- Satisfactory induction or orientation programme is provided	9%
- 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	
Practical aspects of research	
- Appreciate field work	9%
- Enjoy meeting project participants: farm workers	
Sample comments: domestic students	
- <i>Meeting international students is also a plus associated with research at university</i>	
- <i>Attending overseas conferences where we have the chance to meet the scientists whose papers we read. Discussing future collaborations and learning about current research in our field is very helpful</i>	
- <i>The support has been great with everyone in my department being respectful and encouraging of my work</i>	
- <i>Opportunity to conduct research overseas (living), fantastic for personal and professional development</i>	
- <i>Working with other students to solve problems no matter how trivial e.g., end-note</i>	
- <i>visits from people from the industry as it gave me a perspective of how my research is or not helping the industry and colleagues, and also I gained motivation</i>	

3.3.2 Suggested improvements

All (n=43)	
Interaction with other research students	
- Opportunities are not provided to discuss research with other students	12%
- Opportunities are not provided for social contact with other students	
- Other students are not supportive	
Work environment	
- Research ambience is not stimulating, challenging	
- Do not feel part of / welcomed by the faculty/ department	12%
- Are not respected as a fellow researcher	
- Support is not provided for students	
- Supportive work environment not present	
- Isolation of off-campus students e.g. at Camden	

All
(n=43)

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Making a feel involved in a research community. Interactions between post graduates*
- *Also, the faculty needs to work more at actively encouraging more interaction between staff and students. One or two people try, but mostly nothing happens. There isn't a very good sense of community. Even if they just organised one or two dinners a year, that would be good. There doesn't need to be huge efforts, but just small things would really make a difference*
- *As I was based off-campus, I felt separated from the Sydney University postgraduate network. It may be beneficial to organise more days for students to come in and get together and discuss ideas*
- *More social events out at Camden so that all students remain connected with each other as well as with new students. Not sure what happened with sausage sizzles and volley ball but soccer still occurs once a week so this is good*
- *Interaction with other students/researchers on the same/similar field to discuss my project. It has been a "one to one" discussion with my supervisor only, all this time (1st year and half)*
- *Geographical, social isolation at Camden. Inadequate exposure to anything outside Camden*

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 increased steadily since 2002 and currently sit at 87% agreement. Since 2006, international and domestic students have recorded similar outcomes. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 34% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 9% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- 9% of respondents considered that their ability to work independently had been enhanced.
- The ability to be a confident researcher was appreciated by 7% of respondents

Suggested improvements

- 7% of respondents considered that more help was required in the development of technical and research skills.

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.

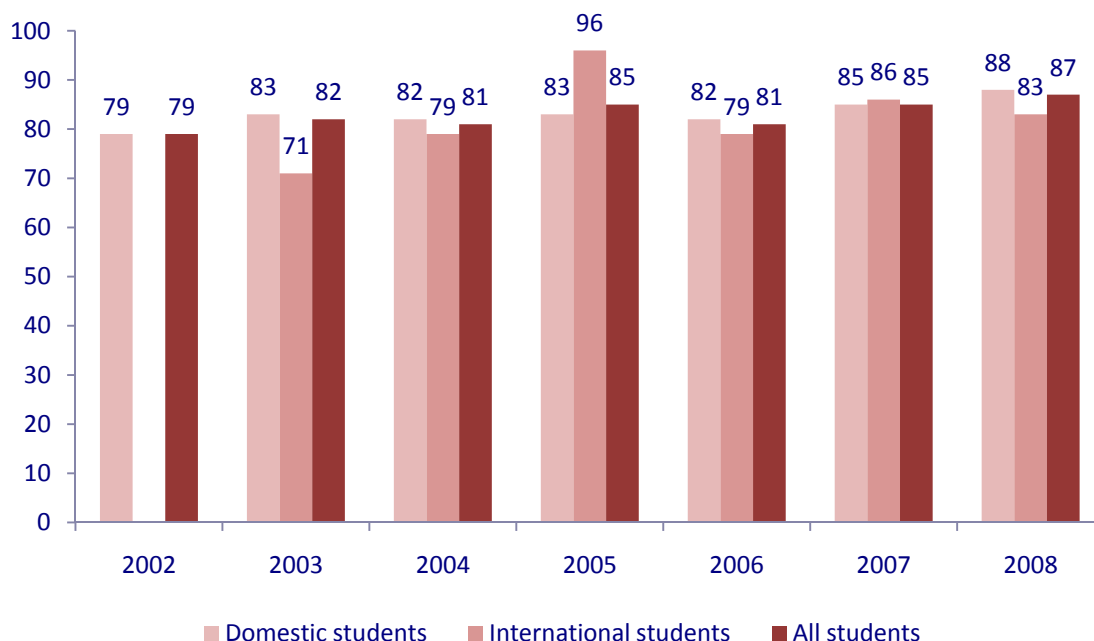


Figure 4: SREQ Generic Skills Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	Domestic					27%		
	International					75%		
	All	69%	35%	59%	68%	38%	33%	34%
Suggested improvements	Domestic					8%		
	International					0%		
	All	21%	11%	8%	19%	6%	16%	7%

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

4.2.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=44)
Graduate Attributes	
- Problem solving skills are being developed	
- Analytical skills are being developed	11%
- Oral and written communication, and presentation skills are being developed	
- English language skills (NESB students) improved	
Working independently	
- Ability to plan own work developed	9%
- Ability to learn independently developed	

	All (n=44)
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Research skills

7%

- Ability to retrieve and use information
 - Developed confidence as a researcher
-

Sample comments: domestic students

- *New discoveries and ideas that arise either when you are listening to someone talk on a supposed "unrelated" topic. My writing has improved markedly*
- *Learning to work independently to develop good research and communication skills*
- *Gaining practical skills which will facilitate future studies/research projects*
- *Learning how to tackle problems on my own. Working on my project has made me more independent and I feel confident in working on my own to get a job done*
- *Also to study in a English speaking country improved all aspects of my English skills*
- *Overall this research higher degree providing me a great environment to acquire and develop comprehensive skills to progress further and to become a successful complete researcher*

4.2.2 Suggested improvements

7% of students (i.e. 3/43 comments received) who responded to the SREQ would appreciated more help in the development of technical and research skills.

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

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

The Faculty Score for the Overall Satisfaction Item in the SREQ has increased significantly over the past 6 years. The current score of 91% agreement is the highest recorded. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%. With the exception of 2006 when scores were almost identical, international students have consistently rated their experience higher than their domestic counterparts.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 16% of respondents who answered the open questions 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

- No respondents provided comments that could be categorised as belonging to this area of the research training 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.

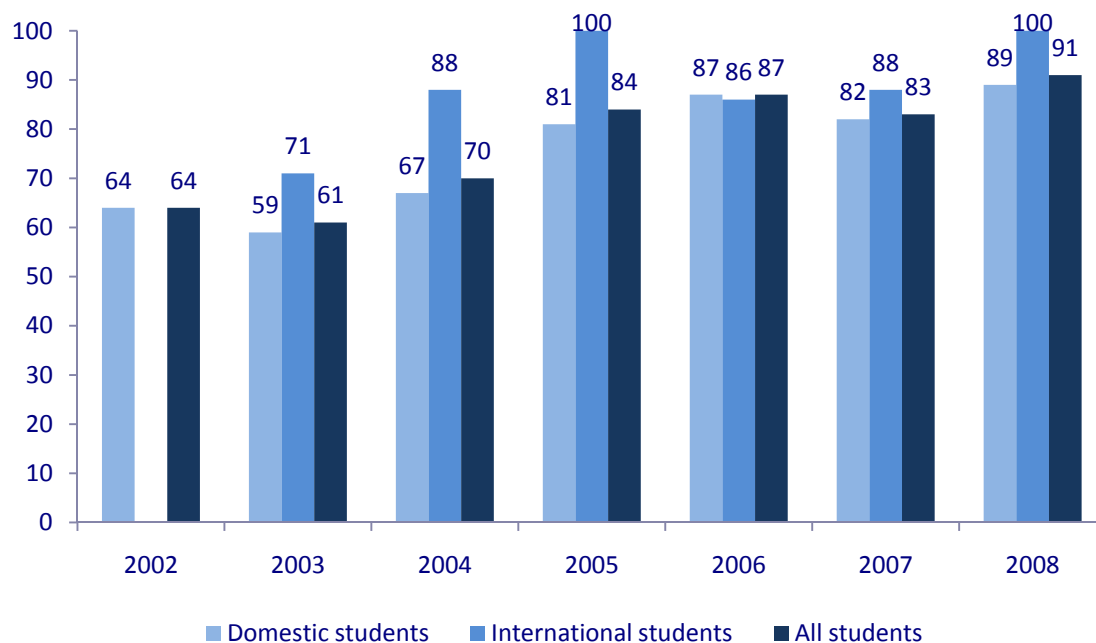


Figure 5: SREQ Overall Satisfaction Item: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

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	Domestic					20%		
	International					25%		
	All	38%	31%	14%	28%	21%	29%	16%
Suggested improvements	Domestic					3%		
	International					18%		
	All	0%	0%	0%	3%	6%	7%	0%

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

5.2.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n= 44)
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Satisfaction with research

- | | |
|---|-----|
| - Research topic will contribute to field | 11% |
| - Researching topic that have always been interested in | |
| - Research is worthwhile | |

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Ability to produce a body of work that I can be proud of and claim later if I need to*
- *Having this level of education will open many more employment doors than just having a degree*
- *The opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge in my research area*
- *Exploring interesting topics*
- *The opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge in my research area*
- *Development of alternate career path*

5.2.3 Suggested improvements

No respondents provided written observations that could be categorised as belonging to this area of the research training experience.