The following is a report to students from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) of the findings of the UQ Student Experience Survey (UQSES) conducted in 2003.

The University of Queensland
Student Experience Survey 2003

The UQSES survey
The University of Queensland Student Experience Survey (UQSES) was developed to collect information about student satisfaction with various aspects of their university experience. It is about overall student experience in their program of study at UQ but is not linked to specific courses.

The UQSES is conducted every two years. It began in 2001 with surveys sent to:

• first-year students
• all final-year and honours students and
• all postgraduate coursework students.

Approximately 4250 students responded overall which was a generally satisfactory response rate of 35% of the cohort surveyed.

How UQSES information is used
Information collected through the UQSES is analysed and reported by staff at the Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI) and then used for a variety of purposes throughout the university. Examples of the ways different groups use UQSES reports include:

• reviewing, reporting on and planning the improvement of the quality of curriculum and teaching in faculties and schools as required by UQ Curriculum Review and Teaching Quality Appraisal policies
• implementing special projects (eg improving the learning experience of first year students)
• making comparisons with similar groups in other universities (benchmarking) to identify strengths, areas of need and effective ideas to incorporate into the UQ teaching and learning context.

To complete the survey, students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction for individual items using a 5-point scale with “1” representing greatest dissatisfaction, “3” representing neither agreement nor disagreement and “5” representing greatest satisfaction.

In addition, students were asked to write comments to open-ended questions on the best aspects of their experience at UQ and also to suggest how their experience could be improved. Many students took the time to make substantial and constructive comments on these aspects of their UQ experience. Comments are included in faculty and school reports and are frequently used by administrative and teaching staff to clarify understanding of the statistical data. In future years, we hope to use some
purpose-developed software to investigate these comments so that it increases the ways in which these comments inform our understanding.

Demographic information is also collected – sex, age, international status, language spoken at home, permanent country of residence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island status, campus enrolled, (faculty) program owner, attendance mode and attendance type. Breaking down the data in this way helps us understand if there are particular needs and issues relevant to these groupings of students.

The 2003 UQSES findings

The findings included in this report are based on the following data from the UQ Scales and the Benchmarking scales (see Appendix A):

i. scale results for 2001 and for 2003 (Figures 1, 2)
ii. scale results for 2001 and for 2003 reported by individual faculty (Figures 3, 4)
iii. first-year results for 2001 and for 2003 (Figures 5, 6)
iv. first-year results for 2001 and the final-year results for 2003 for the Learning Community Scale (of interest because of the assumption that this comparison represents trends over time for the particular student cohort that began a three-year degree in 2001).

Statistical findings in this report are supported by the inclusion of typical student comments from the open-ended sections of the survey. Additional detail is provided in Appendix B.

(i) Scale results for 2001 and for 2003

In 2003, of the UQ scales (Figure 1) student satisfaction was highest for “Facilities, Resources and Services: Physical and Social Aspects” (mean of 4.01), “Facilities, Resources and Services: Learning Support” (3.94) and “Teaching Quality” (3.89). Satisfaction was lowest for “Course Quality” (3.69) and “Graduate Attributes: Ethical and Social Sensitivity” (3.67).

Comparisons of ratings for 2001 and 2003 show that:

- the level of student satisfaction with their UQ experience has risen for all UQ scales since 2001
- satisfaction has remained highest for the “Facilities, Resources and Services: Physical and Social Aspects” scale

Good community atmosphere, the Red Room and Pizza Café were good places to build a group to help with learning difficulties and discuss uni work and survive the workload.

- satisfaction has remained lowest for the “Graduate Attributes: Ethical and Social sensitivity” scale.

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1 UQSES student satisfaction scores for the various scales can be analysed in quite complex ways, particularly when student groups are considered separately and demographic data is also added to the equation. In addition, because the UQSES has been conducted in both 2001 and 2003, it is now possible to compare scores of the different groups and sub-groups for different scales and/or items over this two-year time period.
Levels of satisfaction were generally lower for the Benchmarking scales than for the UQ scales in both 2001 and 2003 (Figure 2). Student ratings were highest for the “Generic Skills” (3.86) and “Overall satisfaction” (3.81) scales.

In 2003, combined group ratings had improved for six of the Benchmarking scales.

Student comments on the best aspects of their experience included:

Courses that offered real world learning such as group project assignments

All course content seems to be up to date and constantly changing to keep up to date with current knowledge in any field.

Suggestions for improvement related to lower scoring scales such as “Program Quality” and “Perception of Workload” (which were asked only of first year students) included:

Appropriate balance of workload for certain subjects according to their importance.

Feedback on examinations in the XXX degree takes too long and the assessment often differs from the important learning objectives.
2001 & 2003 Mean Benchmarking Scale Scores

![Benchmarking Scales](image)

**Figure 2:** Benchmarking Scales
Scale results for all student groups surveyed for 2001 and 2003

It is of interest that satisfaction with aspects of teaching measured by the UQ "Teaching Quality" scale was higher than for those aspects of teaching measured by the Benchmarking "Good Teaching" scale (see Appendix A for how the two scales differ).

Best experiences of teaching were described as:

- **Getting new perspectives, new ideas, learning a hell of a lot from some excellent teachers (who treated me as an equal), coming to grips with some amazing concepts**

- **Great lecturers and tutors who were experts in their area and provided challenging interesting courses**

- **It is a total difference in terms of teaching method, course and communication in compare (sic) with my home country university**

Many suggestions for improvement related to smaller classes, more feedback and improved teaching skills:

- **Tutorial sizes in XXX need to be reduced as this facilitates better in-class discussions and therefore better learning**

- **Many lecturers provide insufficient feedback on assessment tasks**

- **I think that quite a few lecturers are in need of some professional development to allow them to learn how to teach more effectively**
(ii) Scale results for all groups for 2001 and 2003 reported by faculty

An analysis of ratings by faculty shows that students in the Arts faculty reported consistently high levels of satisfaction across many of the UQ scales during both survey periods (Figure 3). Ratings for students in the Social and Behavioural Sciences faculty (SBS) also demonstrated relatively high levels of satisfaction. Some faculties rated highly in one or more specific scales, such as Health Sciences and Natural Resources Agriculture and Veterinary Science (NRAVS) across the Graduate Attribute scales and Biological and Chemical Sciences (BACS), Engineering Physical Sciences and Architecture (EPSA), NRAVS and Business, Economics and Law (BEL) across aspects of the Facilities, Resources and Services scales.

In Figures 3 and 4, the location of the black dot, which represents the ratings for 2001, indicates where improvements have been made since the 2001 survey. While each of the scales has shown overall improvement since 2001, the BEL, EPSA and NRAVS faculties have shown improvements across several of the UQ scales.

For the Benchmarking scales (Figure 4), Arts was again rated generally highly by students, EPSA fared well in the “Learning Community” and “Social Support” scales and first year SBS students expressed satisfaction with their perceptions of “Program Quality”, “Teaching Quality” and “Workload”.

The location of the dot above the 2003 bar alerts faculties to areas where improvements need consideration in both the UQ and Benchmarking scales.

For further detail on student satisfaction rating means reported by faculty see Appendix B.
Figure 3: UQ Scales
Scale results for 2001 and 2003 reported by faculty

Key to faculty acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Arts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BACS</td>
<td>Biological and Chemical Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEL</td>
<td>Business Economics and Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPSA</td>
<td>Engineering Physical Sciences and Architecture</td>
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<td>Health</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
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<td>NRAVS</td>
<td>Natural Resources Agriculture and Veterinary Science</td>
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<td>SBS</td>
<td>Social and Behavioural Sciences</td>
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Figure 4: Benchmarking Scales
Scale results for 2001 and 2003 reported by faculty
(iii) First-year results for 2001 and for 2003

Ratings of first-year students for the UQ scales shown in Figure 5 generally follow a similar pattern to those for combined groups (see Figure 1) in that satisfaction has improved for most scales in the 2001-2003 period. Best experiences were:

The students support services learning and career advisors – they are always willing to help and are a simple service for students to use

Nice physical environment - love the jacaranda trees – informed and motivated lecturers – good library facilities

The exception is the ratings for the “Facilities, Resources and Services: Physical and Social Aspects” scale which fell slightly during this period. Suggestions for improvements in this area included:

Some more eating facilities and seating in shaded and protected areas

Space for self-study

More events for meeting new people

Parking
As Figure 6 illustrates, first year surveys contained only five of the eight Benchmarking scales. Of these, satisfaction in 2003 was highest for “Student Support” and lowest for “Perception of Workload”.

First year satisfaction increased for three of the Benchmarking scales:

- Learning Community
- Student Support
- Perception of Teaching Quality
  
  *I particularly liked the smaller classes that were made available in first semester to students in the bachelor of ..........*

First year satisfaction decreased for the other two Benchmarking scales

- Perception of Program Quality
  
  *I would like the workload of the readings and assignments to be not so heavy so there was more time to dedicate to research*

Concerns raised by the generally lower levels of satisfaction of first year students have resulted in the development of initiatives planned to enhance the first year experience in many UQ faculties, schools and programs.
(iv) Results for first year 2001 student cohort and 2003 final year student cohort

A comparison of the ratings of the first year cohort in 2001 with those of the final year cohort in 2003 can give an example of how a single cohort of students may change their beliefs about their experience in relation to any particular scale over time. Many of the students in the final year cohort in 2003 will be from the same student cohort as were surveyed (as first year students) in 2001 (this is true, at least, for those completing three-year programs).

![Figure 7: A comparison of 2001 first year results and 2003 final year results for the Learning Community scale](image)

The example provided in Figure 7 is for the Learning Community scale and items, selected because it has been found to be strongly related to overall student satisfaction with their UQ experience. This indicates that as students progress through their studies they tend to develop a greater sense of belonging to a learning community.

Recognition of the significance of the "Learning Community” scale has meant that many programs now include teaching experiences specifically designed to promote a sense of community among students, teaching staff and/or professional associations.

**Action taken in response to the 2003 and 2001 UQSES**

Faculties and schools have considered the findings of the 2003 UQSES and, together with the responses from the 2001 survey, they provide a useful basis for future planning within their own contexts.

The University as a whole has also planned improvements in areas suggested by the two survey reports:

- Feedback on assessment: The University takes seriously students' concerns about the quality of assessment. Procedures were instituted in 2003 requiring schools to report annually on students' perceptions of the quality of their assessment - in particular whether feedback is provided on assessment items - and to take action where compliance with University assessment policies and procedures is not occurring.
• Building learning communities: A project officer has been appointed to help faculties and schools improve the experience of first year students, especially through the building of learning communities through formal or informal networks in or outside the classroom.

• Lecture theatre facilities: The University has long had a lecture theatre refurbishment program but will be undertaking an enhanced program of refurbishment of teaching and learning spaces, including audio-visual and information and communications technology upgrades, starting in 2005. New spaces are being planned, with a collaborative learning centre, including several radical spatial forms, to be launched on the St Lucia campus in semester 1, 2005. A similar space is being planned for the Gatton campus to be available in 2006.

• Informal learning spaces: There is a growing awareness of the need to provide students with informal learning spaces in and outside buildings. This concept is now being incorporated in planning decisions for new and refurbished buildings and in campus design generally.

• Development of the graduate attribute ethical and social sensitivity in the curriculum: In May 2003, a University-wide colloquium was held on the graduate attribute, ethical and social sensitivity, with the aim of discussing and adopting good practice for the development of this attribute.

• Client services: The Student Centre on the St Lucia campus is being remodelled during the December 2004/January 2005 period. The new design will enable the Centre to operate more effectively as a one-stop-shop for students. The refurbishment will integrate a wider and more streamlined range of services, including the facilities to receive cash payments, and will promote self-service for students via student computer terminals. Several meeting areas will allow staff from cognate sections to meet with students in a comfortable and welcoming environment. A back-of-house area will allow staff in the longer term to support a wider range of contact functions including handling of email and telephone enquiries.

The 2005 UQSES
The UQSES will be conducted again in 2005 for the same cohorts of undergraduate and postgraduate students. This survey offers you an opportunity to have your say in future decision-making about many important aspects of your experience at UQ. So, while it may take a little time to complete, it is a worthwhile contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning for current and future students. I hope you will find the time to have your say when the survey is conducted in second semester 2005.

Margaret Gardner
Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)

Report prepared by:
Dr Clair Hughes (TEDI)
Ms Jennifer Murray (TEDI)
Ms Margaret Lavery (Office of the DVC: Academic)
Appendix A: UQSES Scales and Items

UQ Scales

Teaching Quality Scale
“Thinking about the majority of the lecturing staff in your major area of study or discipline, how much would you agree that they:”
1. Were experts in their fields
2. Were enthusiastic and committed to their teaching
3. Drew on current research and developments in their teaching
4. Taught in a way that increased your understanding of the discipline
5. Treated you with courtesy and respect
6. Were available for consultation
7. Taught in a way that stimulated your interest in the discipline
8. Intellectually challenged and extended you
9. Encouraged you to think in new ways

Course Quality Scale
“Thinking about the majority of courses you have studied in your major area of study or discipline, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:”
1. The learning objectives of the courses were made clear
2. Where it was used, information technology was well integrated into the courses
3. The workload was appropriate
4. The courses covered the breadth of the discipline
5. There was a clear sequence of well integrated courses available
6. The courses were well-structured and administered
7. Students’ knowledge, understanding, and skills were adequately assessed
8. The spread of assessment tasks was appropriate
9. Assessment requirements and marking criteria were made clear at the beginning of each course
10. Helpful feedback on assessment was given within a reasonable time
11. Course materials could be easily accessed
12. First-year courses were adequately designed to help new students adapt to university study *
* only for first-year students

Graduate Attributes
“Thinking about your major area of study or discipline, how much has your experience at UQ contributed to the development of the following skills and outcomes?”

Communication and Problem-Solving Scale
1. As a result of my courses, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems
2. The courses helped me develop my ability to work as a team member
3. The courses sharpened my analytic skills
4. The courses improved my skills in written communication
5. Your ability to think critically
6. Your ability to collect, analyse and organise information
7. Your ability to generate possible solutions to problems
8. Your ability to use the appropriate style and mode of communication depending on your audience
9. Your ability to use computers to retrieve, process and communicate information
10. Your ability to convey ideas & information clearly in an oral form
11. Your ability to evaluate competing perspectives and bodies of evidence
12. Your appreciation of the importance of scholarship & research
13. Your ability to use research to inform decision making
14. Your ability to work and learn independently
15. Your ability to think in creative and innovative ways

Discipline Knowledge and Skills Scale
1. Your understanding of concepts and principles in your discipline
2. Your knowledge of the methods used in your discipline
3. Your understanding of the different approaches and perspectives in your discipline
4. Your knowledge of the full scope of your discipline
5. Your appreciation of the real world applications of your discipline
6. Your capacity to approach issues from the perspective of your discipline

Ethical and Social Sensitivity Scale
1. Your knowledge of ethical issues and standards in your discipline
2. Your appreciation of the philosophical and social contexts of your discipline
3. Your awareness and understanding of cultures and perspectives other than your own
4. Your openness to new ideas and perspectives
5. Your ability to evaluate the perspectives and opinions of others
6. Your understanding of social and civic responsibility

Facilities, Resources and Services
“How would you rate the quality of the following aspects of the University of Queensland?”

Physical and Social Aspects of UQ Scale
1. The university’s physical environment
2. The university’s academic and intellectual environment
3. The general facilities on your campus (e.g., places to eat, shops, student union facilities, etc.)
4. Sporting and recreational facilities (including UQ Sport)
5. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities (including clubs and societies)
6. Orientation activities for new students (including opportunities for academic advising and course planning) *
* only for first-year students

Learning Support Scale
1. The opportunities for a stimulating and varied life for students on campus
2. The teaching facilities (e.g. lecture theatres, laboratories, etc.)
3. Library facilities and resources
4. Library services (including AskIT) and assistance from library staff
5. On-campus IT facilities
6. Off-campus internet access
7. The Student Centre (St Lucia, Herston, Gatton or Ipswich)
8. Faculty/School offices and student centres
9. The library services were readily accessible
10. I was able to access information technology resources when I needed them
11. Relevant learning resources were accessible when I needed them

Benchmarking Scales

Final-Year Undergraduate and Honours & Postgraduate Coursework Students
“Thinking about the courses in your major area of study or discipline, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:”

Generic Skills Scale (CEQ)
1. As a result of my courses, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems
2. The courses helped me develop my ability to work as a team member
3. The courses sharpened my analytic skills
4. The courses developed my problem-solving skills
5. The courses improved my skills in written communication
6. My courses helped me to develop the ability to plan my own work

Good Teaching Scale (CEQ)
1. The teaching staff of this program motivated me to do my best work
2. The staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work
3. The staff made a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work
4. The teaching staff normally gave me helpful feedback on how I was going
5. My lecturers were extremely good at explaining things
6. The teaching staff worked hard to make their courses interesting

Student Support Scale (Extended CEQ)
1. The library services were readily accessible
2. I was able to access information technology resources when I needed them
3. I was satisfied with the degree program and careers advice provided
4. Health, welfare and counselling services met my requirements
5. Relevant learning resources were accessible when I needed them

Learning Community Scale (Extended CEQ)*
1. I felt part of a group of students and staff committed to learning
2. I was able to explore academic interests with staff and students
3. I learned to explore ideas confidently with other people
4. Students’ ideas and suggestions were used during the degree program
5. I felt I belonged to the university community

Overall Satisfaction Item (CEQ)
Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of these courses
First Year Undergraduate Students

"Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your degree program and the teaching within it:"

**Perception of Program Quality Scale**
1. I am finding my degree program intellectually stimulating
2. I have a clear idea of where my degree program is going
3. The teaching staff are good at explaining things
4. Staff made it clear from the start what they expect from students
5. Teaching staff here usually give helpful feedback on my progress
6. Staff are enthusiastic about the courses they teach
7. Overall, I am really enjoying my degree program
8. Overall, I am very satisfied with my university experience so far

**Perception of Teaching Scale**
1. Most of the academic staff are approachable
2. Staff are usually available to discuss my work
3. Most academic staff in my courses take an interest in my progress
4. Staff try hard to make the courses interesting
5. The staff make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work
6. The quality of teaching in my degree program is generally good

**Perception of Appropriate Workload Scale**
1. My degree program workload is too heavy
2. The volume of work to be got through in this degree program of study means that I can't comprehend it all thoroughly
3. The number of contact hours make it difficult for me to complete the tasks set for classes
4. The workload is not challenging enough for me
5. It seems to me that the syllabus tries to cover too many topics

*Please note that the Learning Community Scale was presented to all cohorts.*
Appendix B

UQ Scales: A comparison between 2001 and 2003 of the combined scores for all groups reported by faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>Teaching Quality</th>
<th>Course Quality</th>
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<th>Graduate Attributes: Discipline Knowledge &amp; Skills</th>
<th>Graduate Attributes: Ethical &amp; Social Sensitivity</th>
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## Appendix B (contd)

### Benchmarking Scales: A comparison between 2001 and 2003 of the combined scores for all groups reported by faculty

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<th><strong>GROUP</strong></th>
<th><strong>Good Teaching</strong></th>
<th><strong>Generic Skills</strong></th>
<th><strong>Learning Community</strong></th>
<th><strong>Student Support</strong></th>
<th><strong>Overall Satisfaction</strong></th>
<th><strong>Perception of Program Quality</strong></th>
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<td>3.96 (166)</td>
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<td>3.79 (215)</td>
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<td>3.60 (696)</td>
<td>3.82 (713)</td>
<td>3.75 (408)</td>
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<td>3.11 (312)</td>
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<td>3.83 (361)</td>
<td>3.59 (489)</td>
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<td>3.68 (364)</td>
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<td>3.93 (356)</td>
<td>3.57 (651)</td>
<td>3.72 (674)</td>
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<td>TOTAL UQ (N)</td>
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<td>2001 results (N=4506)</td>
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<td>3.72 (1882)</td>
<td>3.30 (1882)</td>
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Note. * First Year students only. ** Final Year and Honours, and Postgraduate Coursework students only