Identifying Graduate Research Student Satisfaction

Faculty of Education

Monash University 2024

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Executive summary

In April and May 2024, the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) conducted a survey of graduate students at Monash and nine other Australian universities. Similar surveys were conducted in 2017 and 2021, which have allowed for some comparisons throughout this report.

The main findings as they relate to graduate research students enrolled in the Faculty of Education are summarised below:

Education graduate researchers are overwhelmingly positive in relation to their supervision experience

The sentiment of Education respondents in relation to supervision was overwhelmingly positive.

The University's recommended meeting frequency was mostly met with 70% of full-time graduate researchers meeting with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly.

Supervisors were largely meeting the expectations and needs of their students. The most important aspects of supervision, according to Education graduate researchers, were receiving guidance on a career pathway and timely feedback. Guidance on career pathways, however, ranked second-last for satisfaction and had the widest gap score (-13.67%)

Supervisors acting professionally and access to supervisors were the two aspects Education respondents were most satisfied with.

Student satisfaction with their academic unit high

Across the board, Education graduate researchers were predominantly satisfied with the department or school in which they were enrolled.

Satisfaction was highest in relation to respondents feeling that they are treated in a respectful manner, while dissatisfaction was highest in relation to their academic unit providing a student-specific social area for their use.

Confirmation process is largely satisfactory

Respondents were widely satisfied their confirmation experience. In particular, they were satisfied that the panel provided useful feedback.

The highest level of overall dissatisfaction was in relation to their supervisors guiding them through the process.

Professional Development opportunities

Having Professional Development (PD) opportunities that focus on data analysis skills and research methodologies was of the utmost importance to Education graduate researchers, while experiencing PD with students from other fields was the least important of the themes.

Respondents were most satisfied with PD on mental health and project management. The widest gaps between importance and satisfaction were in relation to industry exposure and career

planning.

Minor increase in number of graduate researchers working for the University

There was a slight rise in Education respondents reporting that they had worked for the University - up from 32% in 2021 to 37% in 2024. However, this was a much lower proportion than recorded across the HASS faculties at Monash (54%) and across education respondents from other universities (69%).

Of those who had worked for Monash, 71% were employed on a casual contract, while 14% had a fixed-term contract.

The majority of Education respondents (57%) believed that they were definitely paid appropriately for the work they did for the University and a further 29% indicated they were probably paid appropriately. This contrasts sharply with respondents studying education at other universities of whom 9% said they were definitely paid appropriately and 36% said they were probably.

Pay satisfaction levels were higher in Education than they were across HASS at Monash.

Doubts, delays and drop outs

The majority of Education graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome, although only 5% indicated that they experienced this feeling "often."

Less than a sixth of Education graduate researchers (16%) had never experienced a delay in their research, while 5% indicated that they often experienced delays.

A lack of motivation was the most common reason for a delay in research among Education respondents, while cost of living and/or financial concerns was a reason for a delay in research for 31% of Education graduate research students – almost doubling since 2021 levels.

Monash graduate researchers were far less likely than their equivalents at other university slightly less likely than their colleagues across HASS to have considered leaving their degree.

MGA engagement and satisfaction better among international students

Domestic students were less engaged with the MGA than were international students, who were also more satisfied with the Association.

Introduction

The Monash Graduate Association (MGA) ran a survey of graduate students in April and May 2024 across nine Australian universities. In relation to graduate research students, the aim of the MGA's *National Postgraduate Student Satisfaction Survey* was to better understand their degree experience.

This report explores many of the pillars of a research degree, including supervision, the academic unit, confirmation and professional development. It also looks into some common associated experiences, including paid employment opportunities, imposter syndrome, research delays and thoughts of dropping out. Finally, the report highlights the engagement and satisfaction of Monash graduate research students with the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) and includes suggestions for how the MGA could better support the University's students.

This report provides data and findings specifically for respondents enrolled at in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. In Education, a total of 25 graduate research students participated in the survey (see *Appendix 1: Demographics*), which we estimate to be approximately 8% of enrolled graduate research students at the Faculty.

The survey was advertised in the MGA newsletter, on the MGA website, through MGA social media channels and through contacts with Monash faculty groups and associate deans, many of whom agreed to forward the advertising of the survey to their students. Participants were self-selecting, so an incentive scheme (comprising the opportunity to win one of 100 gift cards worth $50 in value) was used to assist in attracting a representative sample.

With the support of colleagues at student associations across Australia, this survey was offered to postgraduate students at nine other universities. Respondents from the University of Queensland, Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, Southern Cross University, University of Sydney, University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, Victoria University and Federation University are all represented in this survey. A total of 20 graduate research students in the field of education completed the survey across these universities.

Where appropriate, comparisons between Monash and non-Monash respondents have been made.

This research has been approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 41520).

Limitations

While this report provides valuable insight into graduate research student satisfaction, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the interpretation of results. Two such limitations are outlined below.

Over- and under-representation of demographic groups

When considering results, it is important to acknowledge that the response rate is not consistent across demographic groups.

For example, international enrolments accounted for approximately 39% of total graduate research enrolments at the Faculty of Education in 2024. In this survey, international students accounted for 59% of total responses in the Faculty. As a result, international students are over-represented and domestic students are under-represented.

Positive-negative asymmetry (PNA) effect

Across the entire report, the responses of students have been taken at face-value. As such, it is important to reflect on the positive-negative asymmetry (PNA) effect. The PNA effect is two-part: firstly, it incorporates the positivity bias, which refers to an individual's inclination towards favourable perceptions of phenomena that are novel or do not directly impact them,[1] and, secondly, it incorporates the negativity bias which, in part, relates to how individuals are more curious about negative than positive stimuli and therefore are more mobilised by negative events.[2] In the context of this report, this may mean that answers to the quantitative questions in the survey are disproportionately positive, while the responses to the qualitative (open-ended) questions are disproportionately negative, given that students were not required to provide a response.

In relation to the qualitative questions in this survey, effort was made to overcome the PNA effect by splitting questions and asking for a positive and negative reflection.

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[1] Maria Lewicka, Janusz Czapinski and Guido Peeters, "Positive-negative asymmetry or 'When the heart needs a reason'," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 22 (1992): 426.

[2] Reanna M. Poncheri, Jennifer T. Lindberg, Lori Foster Thompson and Eric A. Surface, "A comment on employee surveys: negativity bias in open-ended responses," *Organizational Research Methods* 11, no. 3 (2008): 615-16.

Supervision

Respondents were asked a series of questions in relation to their supervision experience.

Choice of supervisor

Did you choose your supervisor?	Education 2021	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Yes	96%	81%	65%	79%
No	4%	19%	35%	21%

There has been a sharp drop since 2021 in Education PhD candidates choosing their own supervisors. However, the result in Education was higher than that in HASS at Monash and on part with those studying in the field of education across other participating universities.

Previous studies have identified that doctoral students who choose their own supervisor are more likely to complete their degree than those assigned a supervisor.[3]

Choice of topic

Did you choose your own topic?	Education 2021	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Yes	91%	81%	86%	90%
No	9%	19%	14%	11%

Between 2021 and 2024, there was a drop in the proportion of Education respondents choosing their own research topic.

Students choosing their own topic was less likely in Education than it was across HASS at Monash, as across Education at other participating universities.

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[3] Karen Hunter and Kay Devine, "Doctoral student's emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave academia," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 11 (2016): 40.

Contact with supervisors

Participants were asked, on average, how often they meet with their supervisors?

How often do you meet with your supervisor?	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Weekly	14%	15%	11%
Fortnightly	52%	47%	53%
Once every 3 weeks	5%	6%	11%
Once a month	14%	16%	5%
Less than once a month	14%	16%	21%

The majority of Education graduate research respondents met with their supervisors on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

The Monash University *Graduate Research Student Supervision Procedure* recommends full-time graduate researchers meet with their main supervisor at least every two weeks, while part-time students should meet monthly.

Of full-time Education respondents, 70% met with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly.

Those who met their supervisors once a month or less were asked to respond to the question ***Why don't you meet more frequently with your supervisors?***

Comments included:

> *"I need to focus on writing."*

> *"As this is my last year, I am finalising my thesis. Hence, I meet with my supervisors if I have finished with the editing."*

> *"We meet in a formal meeting approx. once a month but would communicate via email at least once a week. Meetings may also be more frequent during critical study points."*

Supervision: Importance and Satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate how important certain aspects of supervision were and how satisfied they were with their own experience. For the purposes of analysis, this 7-point *LIKERT*-scale has been converted to a numerical value and averaged across graduate research respondents.

The gap was calculated as below:

Gap = (Satisfaction - Importance)
÷
Importance (%)

In regard to satisfaction, respondents were asked to consider their supervision experience overall or as a collective, rather than their experience with individual supervisors.

	Importance (1-7)	Satisfaction (1-7)	Gap (%)
Career pathway	6.29	5.43	-13.67%
Timely feedback	6.24	5.71	-8.49%
Constructive feedback	6.19	5.86	-5.33%
Guide me through the degree	6.14	5.43	-11.56%
Mentor me	6.14	5.67	-7.65%
Support for work/life balance	6.14	5.90	-3.91%
Skilled supervisors	6.05	5.76	-4.79%
I am heard	6.05	5.41	-10.58%
Access to supervisors	6.05	6.00	-0.83%
Help me belong academically	6.00	5.57	-7.17%
Inform me of support services	5.95	5.24	-11.93%
Act professionally	5.81	6.05	4.13%
Help me network	5.76	5.24	-9.03%
Clear role delegation	5.52	5.14	-6.88%
Encourage ownership	5.29	5.76	8.88%
I am a priority	5.10	5.43	6.47%
	5.92	5.60	-5.15%

Receiving guidance on a career pathway was the most important aspect of supervision according to Education respondents. Concerningly, owing to a comparatively low satisfaction with this theme had the widest gap score.

Meanwhile, supervisors acting professionally and access to supervisors were the two aspects Education respondents were most satisfied with.

The supervision experience

Participants were asked to reflect on what aspects of their supervision experience they found most satisfying and what aspects they found most dissatisfying.

Most satisfying aspects of supervision

In order to gain further insight into what graduate research students most value in their supervisors, participants were asked to *Tell us about what aspects are most satisfying about your supervision experience*.

Below is a summary of the responses from Education:

Most satisfying aspects of the supervision experience at Monash
(n. 14)

Aspect	Count
Support	5
Accessible	4
Constructive feedback	4
Empowering	3
Encouraging, motivational	3
Expertise, experience, capability	2
Approachable, kind, friendly, patient	2
Professional	1
Promote wellbeing	1
Resourceful	1
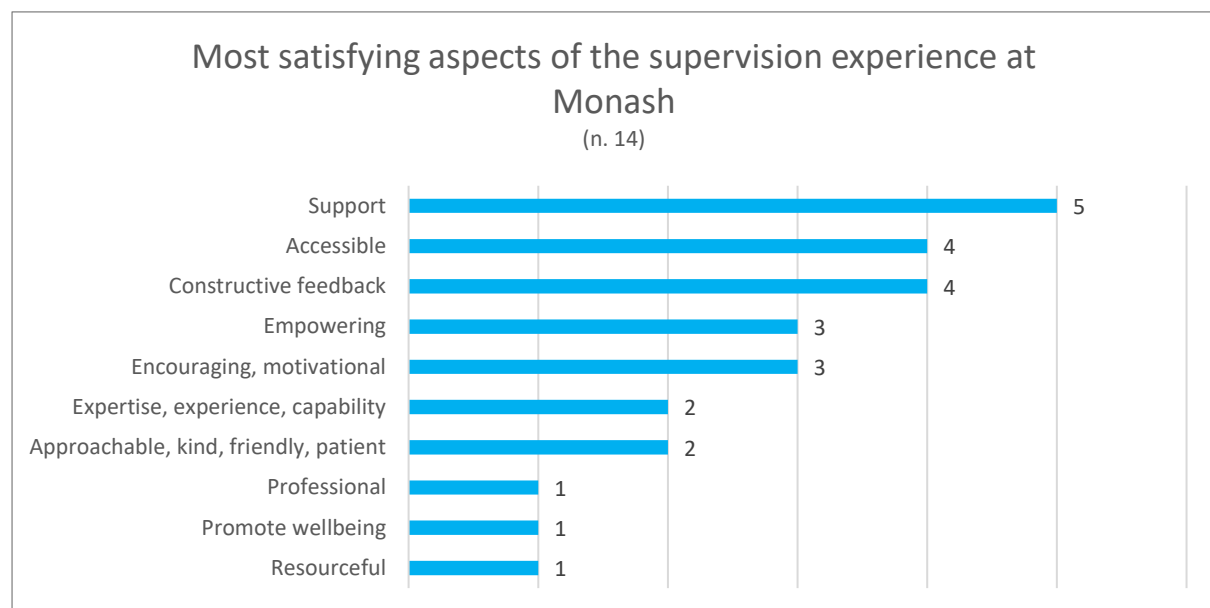
Interesting comments included:

> "Their timely response and constructive feedbacks. I am really appreciative of how they communicate with me in a supporting and encouraging manners, it helps me a lot to boost my self-confidence and my study process."

> "My supervisors are really supportive, which means that I can approach them whenever I need help or have confusion."

> "The fact that my supervisor is extremely supportive and helpful whenever I am in need of it. They provide constructive criticism which helps me to keep growing."

> "I am given a lot of self-direction and I am trusted. My skills are recognised and generally my feedback is timely."

> "I've been truly inspired by those who embody a research-life balance, not just preaching it but living it out in their own lives. Their example has been instrumental in helping me strive

for balance, especially after experiencing the demanding workload during my master's degree a decade ago, where spending over 40 hours a week in the lab still felt insufficient."

Most dissatisfying aspects of supervision

In order to gain insight into what traits graduate research students find most problematic about their supervisors, participants were asked to *tell us about what aspects are most dissatisfying about your supervision experience*.
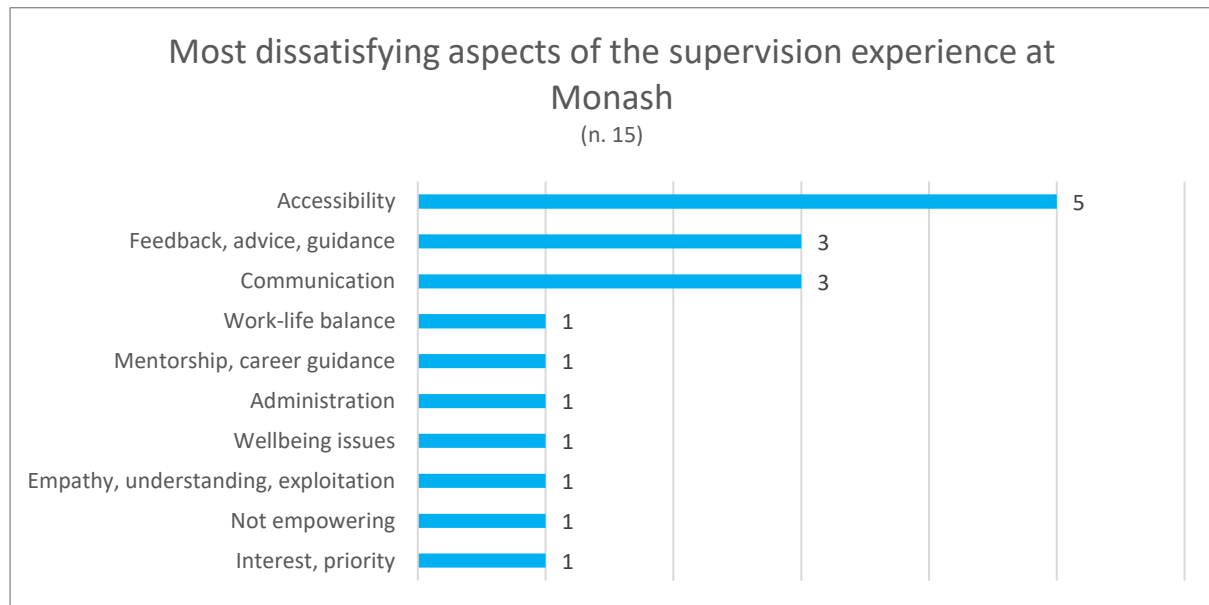
Below is a summary of responses from Education:

Most dissatisfying aspects of the supervision experience at Monash
(n. 15)

Aspect	Count
Accessibility	5
Feedback, advice, guidance	3
Communication	3
Work-life balance	1
Mentorship, career guidance	1
Administration	1
Wellbeing issues	1
Empathy, understanding, exploitation	1
Not empowering	1
Interest, priority	1

Interesting comment included:

"It is difficult at times because I always feel like I'm demanding their input. It's all me me me."

"I feel like I would be more satisfied if the supervisors have provided me with a clear pathway towards my first milestone. With too much freedom, I feel lost and overwhelmed in the process. Our supervision meetings would also be more productive if my supervisors allot undivided attention during meetings. I feel like competing with a lot of their work demands such that I do not feel prioritised at times."

"At times I would like higher level, clearer feedback in regards to my project, and feedback is consistent. Am given work opportunities but I would like this to expand beyond my immediate supervisor so I may grow connections further at Monash to set me up for a role in research and teaching."

"It is more supervisor centred rather than student centred. It is challenging to speak my own voice and express my own expectations due to their 'authority' and 'patronising' communication way."

"Knowing that my supervisors have other commitments including other PhD students to supervise, means that sometimes my feedback is not provided in a timely manner despite my best efforts to work around their schedules. Consequently, I feel rushed to make adjustments prior to deadlines."

"One of them doesn't prioritise my needs, meaning when waiting for them to complete the ethics mandatory training it took 1 month and many follow-ups which delayed my data collection. Similar delays happen when waiting for feedback and they rarely responds to emails making it tricky to know where they are up to. My other supervisor suggests 215454 ideas per meeting but then forgets, so you come back with that you've found/done based on those ideas and they make you feel like you've wasted your time because I should be focusing on other stuff. They also seem to constantly forget my project and decisions we've made about the study. Meaning, in the meetings they say yes go ahead or great idea and then when I come back the next meeting they say "why would you do that". This has led to some time-consuming delays (such as getting the go ahead to do a scoping review title and abstract screening almost 10,000 papers!)."

Conflict with supervisor

Have you ever had a disagreement with a supervisor that was challenging to overcome?	Education 2017*	Education 2021*	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
No, I've never had a serious disagreement with a supervisor	*(no) 71%*	*(no) 83%*	80%	69%	53%
Yes, but it was only minor	*(yes) 29%*	*(yes) 17%*	10%	22%	41%
Yes, I have had a serious disagreement			10%	9%	6%

*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a "yes" or "no" question and "conflict or misunderstanding" was used in place of "disagreement."

Disagreements with supervisors remained on par with 2021 levels in the Faculty of Education.

Meanwhile, respondents from Education were far less likely to have had a serious disagreement with a supervisor than education respondents from other universities.

Type of conflict

Respondents who had experienced a disagreement with a supervisor ("minor" or "serious") were asked to describe this disagreement.

Below are some of responses of Education students:

> "I'm facing a disagreement with my supervisors regarding the research direction. While I'm keen on pursuing option A and diving straight into it, they advocate for a more comprehensive approach, urging me to delve deeper into research literature and explore a broader spectrum of ideas rather than getting fixated on one."

> "I expressed my expectation to balance my life and work. However, it was not supported and I was questioned. The main supervisor even refused to further communicate when I professionally approached to them. I had to change my original plan and work overtime to meet the main supervisor's expectations which definitely negatively influenced my wellbeing... I had and have to speak and behave very carefully in a way the main supervisor likes and expects."

Dealing with conflict

Respondents who had experienced a form of conflict were asked to select if they had dealt with it and, if so, the ways in which they had dealt with it.

How did you deal with this "disagreement"?	Education 2017*	Education 2021*	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Decided to do nothing	30%	25%	0%	12%	13%
Sorted it out directly with supervisor(s)	40%	50%	50%	64%	50%
Sought assistance from a friend/colleague	20%	8%	0%	24%	13%
Sought assistance from student association	20%	0%	0%	5%	0%
Sought assistance from my chair	NA	NA	0%	14%	0%
Sought assistance from grad. coordinator or head of school	20%	8%	25%	14%	25%
Other	NA	8%	25%	17%	13%

* Please note, when we asked this question in 2017 and 2021, "conflict" was used in place of "disagreement" i.e. *How did you deal with the conflict?*

The proportion of respondents at Education who directly respond to conflict by speaking with their supervisor remained on par with 2021 levels.

Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents who decided to do nothing decreased substantially in 2024.

Changing supervisors

Participants were asked a series of questions relating to changing supervisors.

Considered changing supervisors

Have you thought about changing supervisors?	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Never	80%	69%	53%
Rarely	10%	16%	29%
Often	5%	9%	12%
All the time	5%	6%	6%

Education respondents were less likely than those from other universities and the HASS faculties at Monash to have considered changing their supervisors.

Supervisor changes

Have you ever changed supervisors?	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
No	80%	69%	77%
Yes, but it wasn't my choice	10%	17%	18%
Yes, my supervisor and I agreed to make a change	0%	5%	6%
Yes, I decided to change a supervisor(s) even though they did not want to be replaced	5%	3%	0%
Other	5%	8%	0%

Education respondents were less likely than those across HASS at Monash and marginally less likely than education students from other universities to have changed supervisors.

Why students did not change supervisors

Respondents who had not changed supervisors, but who had considered it, were asked what stopped them from changing supervisors.

Education comments included:

> "It is too troublesome to change supervisor(s) and I have great support from my partner. My emotional wellbeing has been greatly supported by my partner otherwise I couldn't have managed the challenges with my supervisor. And myself inner conversations, like 'it is just for this PhD, I don't need to work with them forever, so it is ok, I can do this' and 'think about the good things they have provided me, no one is perfect, it is ok, I can do this' have supported me a lot."

Comments on the process of changing supervisors

Respondents who had changed supervisors were asked to comment on the process of changing supervisors.

Interesting comments included:

> "I am currently in the middle of this and it has been tricky. I didn't want my second supervisor to leave but with her change in role she was not able to provide me with support and the change was mutually agreeable. I have had to wait a LONG TIME for my third supervisor to agree to come on board."

> "Easy steps to do."

Academic Unit

The following questions were asked in relation to the faculty, department or school in which a student was enrolled.

Academic unit satisfaction

Participants were asked how satisfied they were with their academic unit across a range of areas.

The results of Education graduate researchers are presented below:

	Extremely Dissatisfied	Moderately Dissatisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Neutral	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
I feel included in my academic unit		5%	16%	21%	11%	21%	26%
I am treated in a respectful manner				11%	32%	26%	32%
I am encouraged by staff to socialise with other research students in my area	5%	5%	5%	11%	21%	26%	26%
I am informed about opportunities for tutoring/sessional work	5%	16%	5%	21%	5%	16%	32%
My academic unit provides appropriate facilities for my field of research		5%	11%	16%	21%	21%	26%
My academic unit provides a student-specific social area for me to use	5%		26%	5%	21%	26%	16%
My academic unit organises regular seminars and guest speakers for research ..			11%	5%	21%	26%	37%
Other research students in my academic unit are supportive				26%	21%	32%	21%
I feel the policies, rules and regulations around doing research are there to sup..			11%	21%	16%	21%	32%
Provides an academically stimulating environment		5%	11%	11%	32%	21%	21%
I can see myself having a career in a place like this		11%	11%	11%	32%	11%	26%

Across the board, Education graduate researchers were predominantly satisfied with their academic unit.

Satisfaction was highest in relation to respondents feeling that they are treated in a respectful manner (89%), while dissatisfaction was highest in relation to their academic unit providing a student-specific social area for their use (31%).

Academic unit comments

Respondents were asked to reflect on what aspects of their supervision experience they found most satisfying and what aspects they found most <u>dis</u>satisfying.

Best aspects of academic unit

Participants were asked to comment on what they thought was the best thing about their academic unit.

The responses of Education graduate researchers are summarised below:

Most useful aspects of confirmation
(n. 13)

Aspect	Count
Facilities, resources, opportunities	4
Staff	3
Skills & expertise	3
Supportive & friendly	2
Culture, community, belonging	1
Diversity and inclusion	1
Academic seminars, groups, events	1
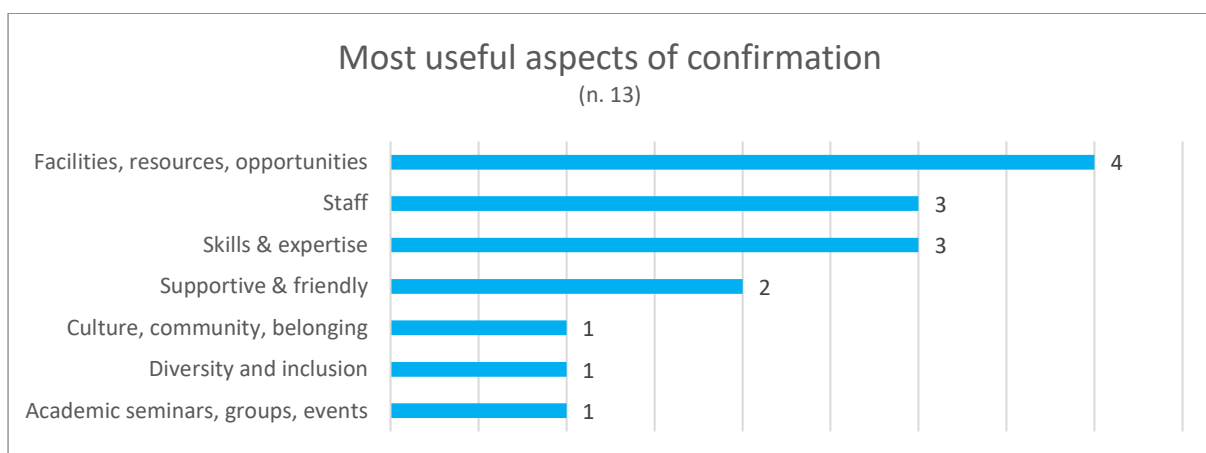
Interesting comments included:

> *"There are lots of opportunities for seminar and workshops covering a wide range of topics."*

> *"Our academic unit is composed of leaders from the field, hence, you would expect that you are going to be mentored by the best."*

> *"The admin support when I have questions have always been helpful."*

> *"It offers specific program on inclusive education along with experts in this field which I can learn from the best."*

Worst aspects of academic unit

Participants were asked to comment on what they thought was most-dissatisfying about their academic unit.

The responses of Education graduate researchers are summarised below:
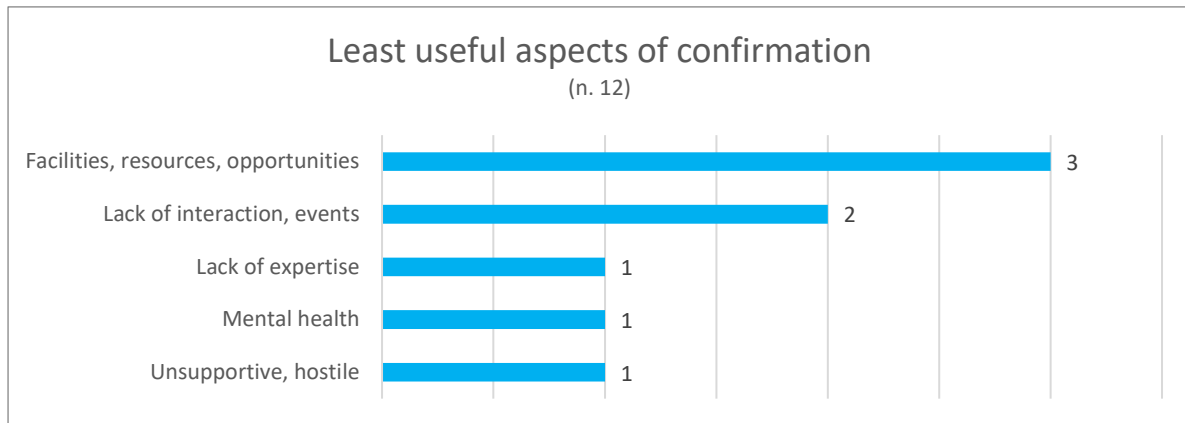
Least useful aspects of confirmation
(n. 12)

Aspect	Count
Facilities, resources, opportunities	3
Lack of interaction, events	2
Lack of expertise	1
Mental health	1
Unsupportive, hostile	1

Interesting comments included:

> *"I personally do not like the faculty's hub environment, as it is more like an environment for socialise but not very supportive for study and research."*

> *"Our academic unit has not provided sufficient opportunities to network with other HDR students from the same field of interest. While I appreciate their effort, they could initiate more activities that are intentional in nature. The PhD Hub in the Faculty of Education lacks space for HDR students to work comfortably - "hot desk" system is clearly not working and would better be replaced by allotting specific desks for each HDR student."*

> *"The study space is messy and chaotic. I don't feel like I receive opportunities for work from the academic unit itself (only through my supervisor)."*

> *"Not enough clear information and instructions."*

> *"The isolation and demanding workload."*

Confirmation

Relevant participants were asked to reflect on their experience of confirmation.

Have you passed your confirmation?	Respondents
We don't have this requirement where I study	10%
No, I'm not at this stage yet	35%
No, I presented my research, but I need to make amendments	10%
Yes, I passed first time	45%
Yes, I passed, but after I needed to make amendments	0%

Satisfaction with confirmation process

Participants were firstly asked how satisfied they were with the confirmation process.

The overwhelming majority of respondents expressed that they were satisfied (36% extremely satisfied, 27% moderately satisfied, 18% slightly satisfied), while a small proportion indicted that they were dissatisfied (9% extremely dissatisfied, 0% moderately dissatisfied, 0% slightly dissatisfied).

Participants were then asked a series of questions about their satisfaction with certain aspects of the confirmation milestone.

The responses of Education graduate researchers are summarised below:

	Extremely Dissatisfied	Moderately Dissatisfied	Neutral	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
The expectations for my confirmation were clear	18%	9%		9%	9%	55%
My supervisor(s) guided me through the confirmation process		9%	18%	18%	9%	45%
The preparation required was a good use of my time	9%		9%	18%	18%	45%
I felt comfortable speaking openly with the panel			18%	18%	27%	36%
The behaviour and tone of the panel was professional	9%		9%		18%	64%
The panel provided useful feedback		9%			18%	73%

Respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with confirmation. In particular, Education graduate researchers were satisfied the panel provided useful feedback (91%).

The highest level of overall dissatisfaction (27%) was in relation to their supervisors guiding them through the process.

Most useful aspects of confirmation

Respondents were asked to reflect on what they found most useful about the confirmation process.

Below are some of the comments of Education respondents:

> *"The first year of my PhD was a combined year with my masters where I was on placement 3-4 days a week. Obviously, I had minimal time to dedicate to the PhD and the first year was a complete right-off. Having confirmation at least helped me conceptualise my studies otherwise I would've entered second year without having anything to show for it. Speaking of which I've been told by so many staff that the structure of this degree is highly disadvantageous and things should change or at least this should be considered but nothing ever happens."*

> *"Panel members offered constructive feedback and insights to make the project more cohesive."*

> *"What I found most useful about confirmation is the supportive and constructive feedback from the panel."*

Least useful aspects of confirmation

Respondents were asked to reflect on what they found least useful about the confirmation process.

Interesting comments included:

> *"Having to create a summary document from all of my fully fleshed out chapters. It felt like I was going backwards for a few months."*

> *"The document preparation was too long and took too much time away from my thesis. While my panel was great, my chair was awful - rude, took over the questions and asked about questions that were not appropriate to my study or discipline."*

> *"Chairperson did not contribute to discussion, and it may have been useful to have an outsider's perspective. No constructive feedback was provided on written work/chapter."*

> *"What I found the least useful about confirmation is the time limit for the presentation."*

Professional Development

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of Professional Development at their university.

Only students for whom Professional Development was relevant (i.e. included in their degree) and who had completed some Professional Development units were asked to respond in regard to their satisfaction and experiences.

Professional Development included in degree

Is Professional Development included in your degree?	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
No	10%	13%	19%
Yes, but it was optional	20%	11%	63%
Yes, it is mandatory	70%	76%	19%

Professional Development was mandatory for the majority of Education respondents. It was mandatory for 76% of respondents from HASS at Monash, but only 19% of those studying education at a different university.

Professional Development: Importance and Satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate how important certain Professional Development themes were and how satisfied they were with what Monash University provides in relation to that theme.

Question	Importance (1-7)	Satisfaction (1-7)	Gap (%)
Data analysis techniques	6.20	5.18	-16.45%
Research methodologies	6.15	5.22	-15.12%
Professional ethics	6.10	5.12	-16.07%
Publishing skills and knowledge	6.00	5.18	-13.67%
Project/research management	5.90	5.28	-10.51%
Career planning	5.90	4.76	-19.32%
Presenting findings e.g. conferences, meetings, seminars	5.80	5.06	-12.76%
Industry exposure	5.80	4.50	-22.41%
Coursework relevant to my research	5.75	4.83	-16.00%
Networking skills	5.75	4.72	-17.91%
Grant writing	5.70	4.73	-17.02%
Mental health and wellbeing	5.55	5.33	-3.96%
Entrepreneurial skills	5.30	5.12	-3.40%
PD with students from other fields	4.85	4.94	1.86%
	5.77	5.00	-13.05%

Having Professional Development opportunities that focus on data analysis skills and research methodologies was of the utmost importance to Education graduate researchers, while experiencing PD with students from other fields was the least important of the themes.
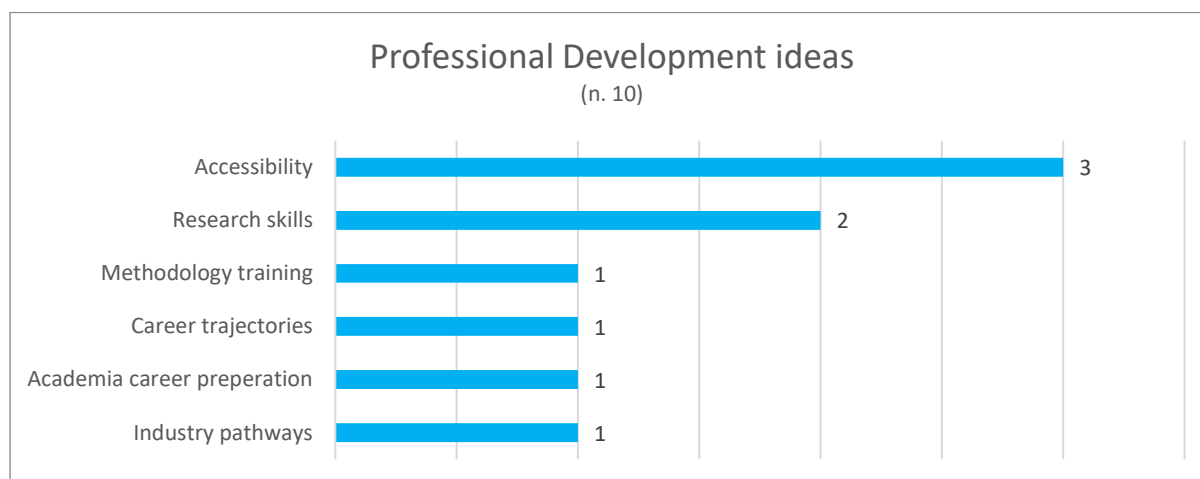
Respondents were most satisfied with PD on mental health and project management. The widest gaps between importance and satisfaction were in relation to industry exposure and career planning.

Professional Development ideas

Participants were asked what they would like to see offered in relation to Professional Development that was not currently available to them.

Below is a summary of the responses of Education graduate researchers.

Professional Development ideas
(n. 10)

Category	Count
Accessibility	3
Research skills	2
Methodology training	1
Career trajectories	1
Academia career preperation	1
Industry pathways	1

Interesting suggestion from Education respondents included:

"More specific methodology, framework and data analysis that is appropriate to education - with a specific focus on qualitative methods."

"I think that various courses have been provided, just need more offline session and more hands-on activities."

"PD related to industry or career development is usually unavailable in our faculty (Education), but I do think it is important."

"A lot of the PDs are seasonal; hence, they might not be as timely or relevant. They are also held virtually which limit the interaction among HDR students."

"Online approach accessible to students."

Paid Employment Opportunities

The following questions were asked in relation to paid employment opportunities.

Paid work at the University

Participants were asked whether they had been given the opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university.

Have you conducted paid work for the faculty or university?	Education 2021	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Yes	32%	37%	54%	69%
No	68%	63%	46%	31%

*Please note that in 2021 the wording of this question was slightly different. It asked if participants had been given the opportunity to "tutor."

The likelihood of an Education graduate researcher at Monash being given an opportunity to conduct paid work for the Faculty or University increased slightly over the past three years; however, levels of employment within the Faculty were far lower than across HASS at Monash and lower still than among education respondents from other universities.

Position at the University

Monash respondents were asked to specify the nature of their position at the University.

What was your position at Monash?	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024
Fixed-term (one of the 450 fixed-term roles offered at Monash)	14%	21%
Casual	71%	71%
Other	14%	8%

The overwhelming majority of Education graduate researchers employed by the University were on (or had been on) casual contracts.

Paid appropriately

Participants were asked if they felt they were paid appropriately for the work they conducted for their university.

Were you paid appropriately for your work at the university?	Education 2021	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Definitely not	*(no)*	0%	32%	9%
Probably not	*39%*	14%	18%	46%
Probably yes	*(yes)*	29%	29%	36%
Definitely yes	*61%*	57%	21%	9%

*Please note that in 2021 this question related to being paid for tutoring only and participants could only answer "yes" or "no".

The majority of Education respondents (57%) believed that they were definitely paid appropriately for the work they did for the University and a further 29% indicated they were probably paid appropriately. This contrasts sharply with respondents studying education at other universities of whom 9% said they were definitely paid appropriately and 36% said they were probably.

Pay satisfaction levels were higher in Education than they were across HASS at Monash.

Doubt, Delays and Drop Outs

The following section explores research delays and if and why graduate researchers consider leaving their degree.

Imposter syndrome

Participants were asked: Do you ever feel like you don't belong in your field of study despite evidence of your accomplishments and abilities?

Do you ever feel like you don't belong in your field of study…?	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Never	16%	21%	13%
Rarely	32%	30%	25%
Sometimes	47%	28%	44%
Often	5%	21%	19%

The majority of Education graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 5% indicating that they experienced this feeling "often."

Research delay

Participants were asked if they had experienced delays in the progress of their research.

Have you experienced delays in the progress of your research?	Education 2017*	Education 2021*	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Never	*(no) 57%*	*(no) 39%*	16%	21%	6%
Rarely	*(yes) 43%*	*(yes) 61%*	32%	30%	44%
Sometimes			47%	28%	44%
Often			5%	21%	6%

*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a "yes" or "no" question.

Less than one-sixth (16%) of Education graduate researchers had never experienced a delay in their research, while 5% indicated that they often experienced delays.

Reasons for delay

Respondents who had experienced a delay in the progress of their research were asked to select the reasons for that delay from a list of prepared reasons.

Please select all relevant reasons regarding the delay in progress to your research	Education 2021	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Change of research project direction	29%	25%	23%	20%
Poor supervision	24%	13%	15%	13%
Lack of resources for my research	3%	13%	11%	20%
Preparing for hurdles/milestones	16%	38%	30%	27%
Unpleasant workplace/research environment	11%	19%	9%	0%
Lack of motivation	16%	44%	31%	27%
Procrastination	NA	38%	29%	60%
Health issues	29%	38%	30%	47%
Family responsibilities	32%	25%	25%	33%
Cost of living/financial concerns	18%	31%	30%	47%
Work commitments	21%	25%	25%	47%
Data collection issues	NA	25%	17%	20%
COVID-19	84%	19%	21%	20%
Other	16%	13%	12%	13%

A lack of motivation was the most common reason for a delay in research among Education respondents.

Cost of living and/or financial concerns was a reason for a delay in research for 31% of Education graduate research students – almost doubling since 2021 levels.

Considered leaving

Participants were asked if they had ever considered leaving their course.

Have you ever considered leaving your course?	Education 2021*	Education 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Education 2024
Never	*(no) 69%*	63%	59%	31%
Rarely		26%	22%	25%
Sometimes	*(yes) 31%*	11%	13%	38%
Often		0%	6%	6%

*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a "yes" or "no" question.

Monash graduate researchers were far less likely than their equivalents at other university slightly less likely than their colleagues across HASS to have considered leaving their degree.

Why leave

Respondents who had considered leaving were asked to elaborate as to why.

Responses from Education included:

> *"I have financial concerns and therefore, I would like to be working more."*

> *"Is it worth it? Too hard."*

> *"Cost of living – the scholarship isn't enough to live on and the limitations on work are too much!! Imposter syndrome (not believing*

Why continue

Respondents who had considered leaving their course were asked why they had decided to continue.

Responses from Education included:

> *"Pride, wanting to achieve something."*

> *"To stick with it."*

> *"I am still living at home and have financial support."*

> *"I am motivated and passionate to continue research and this degree is an important step toward that."*

Engagement and Satisfaction with the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

This section highlights the engagement levels that Education graduate research students have with their representative body - the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) – as well as their satisfaction with the MGA. It also includes respondents' suggestions for how the MGA or equivalent student body could better support the university's students.

3.1   MGA engagement

Participants were asked to respond to the question *how engaged do you feel with your student association or union or guild?*

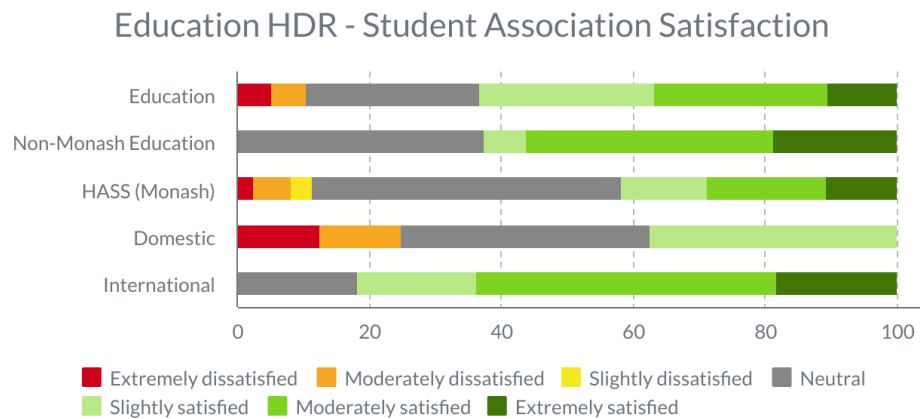Below is a summary of how key groups within Education responded:

Education HDR - Student Association Engagement

Legend: Not at all · A little · A moderate amount · A lot · A great deal
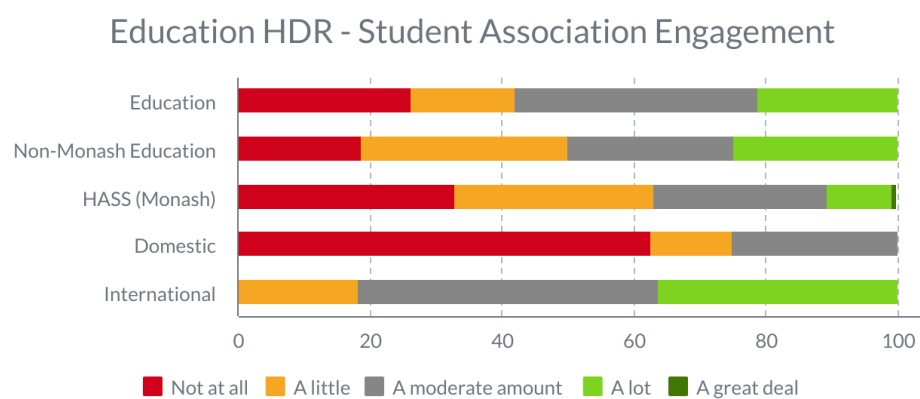
Domestic students were less engaged with the MGA than were international students.

3.2   MGA satisfaction

Participants were asked to respond to the question *how satisfied are you with your student association/union/guild?*

Below is a summary of how key groups within Education responded:

Education HDR - Student Association Satisfaction

Legend: Extremely dissatisfied, Moderately dissatisfied, Slightly dissatisfied, Neutral, Slightly satisfied, Moderately satisfied, Extremely satisfied

Education students were far more likely to have a positive opinion than a negative opinion of the MGA.

International students were far more satisfied than domestic students.

3.3   Suggestions for additional support

Participants were given the opportunity to respond to the question *how could your student association better support you?*

Below are some of the responses from Education:

> *"Not sure. I'm not sure why I'm paying the 'student services' money each year..."*

> *"Make some event to have some talk between PhD students."*

> *"Creating opportunities for communicating with other research students."*

> *"I'd love to be involved but it feels like 'another thing'. Can't commit on top of study and work."*

> *"While they already have activities in place which are much appreciated, MGA could provide more opportunities for social welfare activities. The current level to maintain a decent living situation is very high that social welfare grants and activities are dire especially for international students."*

Conclusion

The results of the MGA's *National Postgraduate Student Satisfaction Survey 2024* have provided valuable insights into what Education graduate research students value in regard to their educational experience, as well as how satisfied they are with the structure and delivery of their degrees.

The key findings, as they relate to respondents from the Faculty of Education, are summarised below:

Key findings

Education graduate researchers are largely satisfied with their supervision experience, but want more help with career guidance

Across all sixteen metrics surveyed, satisfaction in relation to supervision was high. Education graduate researchers are predominantly satisfied with their supervision experience with supervisors largely meeting the expectations and needs of their students, while they were also largely accessible.

The most important aspect of supervision for Education respondents was receiving guidance on career pathways, yet this ranked second-last for satisfaction.

A focus on the academic skillset is desired from Professional Development

Students in Education placed great importance on Professional Development themes that focused on developing their academic skillset with data analysis techniques, research methodologies and publishing skills occupying three of the first four places on their ranking.

Satisfaction with what is being delivered in relation to these themes was comparatively low, which meant they had an above average gap between importance and satisfaction.

Imposter syndrome a common experience among Education graduate researchers

The majority of Education graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with only 16% indicating that they had never experienced this feeling.

MGA engagement and satisfaction better among international students

The MGA better engages with international graduate researchers than their domestic colleagues, who are also less satisfied with the Association.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the MGA's *National Postgraduate Student Satisfaction Survey 2024*, the MGA recommends the following actions be taken to improve the graduate research student experience in the Faculty of Education:

Renewed effort to increase the percentage of students choosing their own supervisors

Where possible, an active effort to encourage and facilitate prospective graduate researchers to choose their own supervisor would be beneficial to overall student satisfaction, retention and completions.

Improving academic skillset offerings

Improving students' access to seminars or Professional Development on research methodologies and data analysis techniques would be beneficial to the Education cohort.

Tackle imposter syndrome in graduate research students

Consider seminars and workshops on imposter syndrome and resilience to raise awareness and provide coping mechanisms.

Encourage and foster peer support opportunities which can be a valuable platform for candidates to share experiences, offer mutual encouragement, and build a sense of community and which can help to alleviate feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome.

The MGA to more actively engage with domestic students

Improve outreach with domestic students by working with the Faculty to interact with traditionally difficult to reach cohorts.

Appendix 1: Demographics

Academic Unit	Respondents
Curriculum Teaching and Inclusive Education	9 (47%)
Education Culture and Society	5 (26%)
Education Psychology and Counselling	5 (26%)

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	6 (29%)
Clayton	18 (86%)
Caulfield	0 (0%)
Peninsula	1 (5%)
Parkville	0 (0%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	9 (41%)
International student	13 (59%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	24 (96%)
Part-time	1 (4%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	7 (32%)
Multi-modal	12 (55%)
Entirely off-campus	3 (14%)
Other	0 (0%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	6 (27%)
1-5 years	8 (36%)
6-10 years	7 (32%)
11+ years	1 (5%)

Course progress	Respondents
First year	12 (55%)
Second year	3 (14%)
Third year and beyond	7 (32%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	0 (0%)
6-10	3 (14%)
11-20	4 (18%)
21-30	10 (46%)
31-40	3 (14%)
Over 40 hours	2 (8%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	14 (64%)
Advanced	6 (27%)
Intermediate	2 (9%)
Elementary	0 (0%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	19 (86%)
Man	2 (9%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	0 (0%)
Prefer to self-describe	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	1 (5%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	4 (18%)
No	17 (77%)
Prefer not to disclose	1 (5%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	9 (100%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	1 (5%)
No	21 (96%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

Registered disability with DSS	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	1 (100%)

Age	Respondents
24 or under	4 (18%)
25-29	8 (36%)
30-39	6 (27%)
40 and over	4 (18%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	2 (9%)
Part-time	5 (23%)
Casual	9 (41%)
Unemployed and looking for work	7 (32%)
Not employed and not looking for work	0 (0%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	2 (14%)
6-10	5 (36%)
11-20	6 (43%)
21-30	1 (7%)
31-40	0 (0%)
More than 40	0 (0%)