

Preface

The Monash Graduate Association (MGA) is the recognized representative body of graduate students at Monash University. In 2024, the MGA collaborated with the office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research Training and the Department of Government Relations to lobby the federal government on age limits to the temporary graduate visa (TGV), which would have excluded a significant number of international HDR students from access to a work visa post-graduation (48.8%). Members of the executive committee created a [report](#) to facilitate a data-driven lobbying approach. The university was instrumental in getting the MGA into contact with key government representatives and circulating the report. The outcome of this initiative was positive, as HDR students were excluded from the changes to TGV.

Proposal

The MGA proposes that a joint lobbying effort be initiated with the goal of increasing the RTP stipend rate in line with the minimum wage under a framework similar to the lobbying efforts of 2024. Data from our surveys outline the relationship between financial satisfaction, student experience, and research completions.

Financial security, mental health and timely PhD completions: Key findings from recent surveys

This report highlights key findings from two recent projects examining financial security, mental health issues and timely completions among graduate research students at Monash University.

MGA Survey on Health, Family and Finance (2023) - In April/May of 2023, the MGA surveyed 894 Monash graduate research students. Financial wellbeing and mental health were a key focus of the survey.

MGA Survey on Graduate Research Student Satisfaction (2024) - In April/May of 2024, the MGA surveyed 699 Monash graduate research students on degree satisfaction.

Moderate correlation between financial satisfaction and ability to complete research

In relation to their financial situation, 52% of Monash graduate researchers were dissatisfied, while only 15% of respondents said financial stress had no impact on their ability to complete their research to the best of their ability.

Using the Pearson correlation coefficient, there was a moderate positive correlation (0.48) between a Monash graduate research student's satisfaction with their financial situation and their ability to complete their research to the best of their ability. Although moderate, this score is approaching a strong correlation (>0.5). As such, there is a somewhat consistent association between the two factors.

Moderate correlation between mental health and finances

Using the Pearson correlation coefficient, there was a moderate positive correlation (0.36) between a Monash graduate research student's self-reported mental health and finances.

Over a third of respondents had considered leaving their degree with mental health and financial issues the primary reasons

Of the 37% of Monash graduate research respondents who had considered leaving their degree, mental health and financial issues were the two most common responses provided as to why.

Cost of living pressure increasing

Graduate researchers in rental accommodation saw an average increase of \$171.75 a month in rent between 2022 and 2023. This equates to 15.3% annual increase. As such, 87% were under rental stress. Meanwhile, 72% of those who owned their own home were under mortgage stress.

Study commitments high in STEM with limited opportunities for paid work

Of full-time respondents, 58% of Engineering students, 50% of Pharmacy respondents, 46% of MNHS respondents, 41% of Science respondents and 31% of IT respondents reported that they spent, on average, more than 40 hours per week working on their PhD or Masters by Research. These students also reported higher levels of poor mental health (31.3%) than their colleagues studying less than 40 hours per week (19.7%).

The majority of students studying more than 40 hours per week were also employed. The mean for hours in paid work was 6-10 hours per week.

As such, between study and work, many students enrolled in STEM at Monash are consistently working over 45 hours per week.