



Graduate Coursework in Engineering:

Student Experiences,
Challenges and Opportunities
for Enhancement

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

The Monash Graduate Association respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and learn. We pay our respects to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation, on whose unceded lands our Melbourne campuses are situated.

We also acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of all lands and waters across Australia from which our graduate students participated in this research. We honour the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country, culture and community and recognise their enduring knowledge systems and contributions to Australian society.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Report Production

The Monash Graduate Association would like to thank all those who assisted in the production and distribution of this survey. We would also like to thank the graduate students who completed the survey.

This report was produced by the MGA's Research Manager, Dr Ryan Edwards. Should you have any questions in regard to the paper, please contact ryan.edwards@monash.edu for further information.

Use of Generative AI

The design, methodology and core content of this report are the work of the author. Generative AI (Claude) supported specific technical tasks including the coding of open-ended survey responses and the automation of repetitive data analysis procedures. AI assistance was also employed for language editing and refinement throughout the document. All applications of AI were supervised and validated by the research team. The analytical insights, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report represent the independent professional judgment of the author. All cited sources were identified, reviewed and verified manually.

How to Cite this Report

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Introduction

This report examines the experiences of 41 graduate coursework students in the Faculty of Engineering who participated in the MGA's *2025 National Postgraduate Survey on Health, Family and Finances*. It complements the university-wide report *Graduate Coursework at Monash: Student Experience, Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancement* by identifying faculty-specific patterns and opportunities for targeted enhancement within Engineering.

Where meaningful, findings are compared to Monash-wide averages to highlight areas where Engineering students' experiences converge with or diverge from broader institutional trends. Given the focused sample size, this report emphasises actionable insights for faculty leadership rather than comprehensive statistical analysis.

Survey Participation

- 41 Engineering graduate coursework students participated.
- Response rate represents approximately 5% of enrolled Engineering graduate coursework students.
- Data collected May-June 2025 as part of a broader institutional study.

Report Focus

This report addresses six key areas:

- Mental health and wellbeing in Engineering graduate coursework contexts.
- Financial pressures and their impact on study.
- Parental and carer responsibilities.
- Peer connection and support needs unique to Engineering students.
- Course experience and attrition considerations.
- Employment outcomes and career planning.

Note on methodology: For detailed survey methodology, limitations and comparative analysis with other universities, please see the main university-wide report. This faculty report focuses on patterns specific to Engineering students and what the faculty can do to enhance support.

This research was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 46811).

Key Findings for Engineering

This section provides core findings from the 41 Engineering graduate coursework students who participated in the survey, examining patterns across mental health, financial circumstances, course experience and peer connection. Where meaningful, findings are compared to other faculties and Monash-wide averages to identify where Engineering students' experiences align with or diverge from broader institutional trends. These comparisons reveal both shared challenges affecting graduate coursework students across disciplines and distinctive patterns that may warrant faculty-specific interventions.

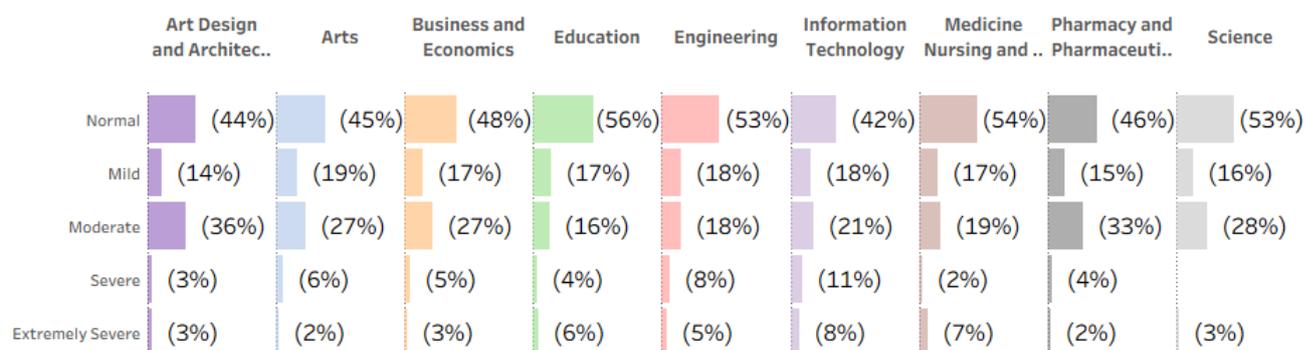
1. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Landscape

Mental health and wellbeing represent fundamental aspects of the graduate coursework student experience, influencing not only personal quality of life but also academic performance, productivity and career trajectories. The unique demands of graduate coursework training – including extended periods of independent work, uncertain timelines, financial constraints and high-stakes academic pressures – create particular psychological challenges that distinguish this population from other student cohorts. Understanding the mental health landscape among graduate coursework students provides essential insights into the support needs of this community and helps contextualise the broader challenges they face in balancing personal wellbeing with academic achievement.

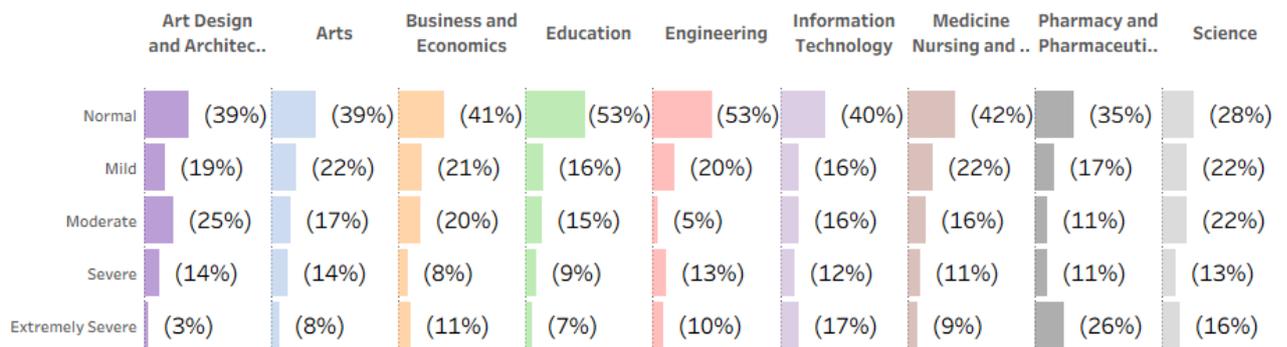
DASS21 and Mental Health Indicators

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS21) is a widely used, validated psychological assessment tool that measures three related emotional states: depression, anxiety and stress. The DASS21 was included in the survey to provide standardised, comparable measures of mental health that can be benchmarked against general population norms and other student cohorts. This tool uses empirically derived severity categories ranging from “normal” through “mild”, “moderate”, “severe”, to “extremely severe” levels, moving beyond simple self-reported perceptions to structured, research-based classifications.

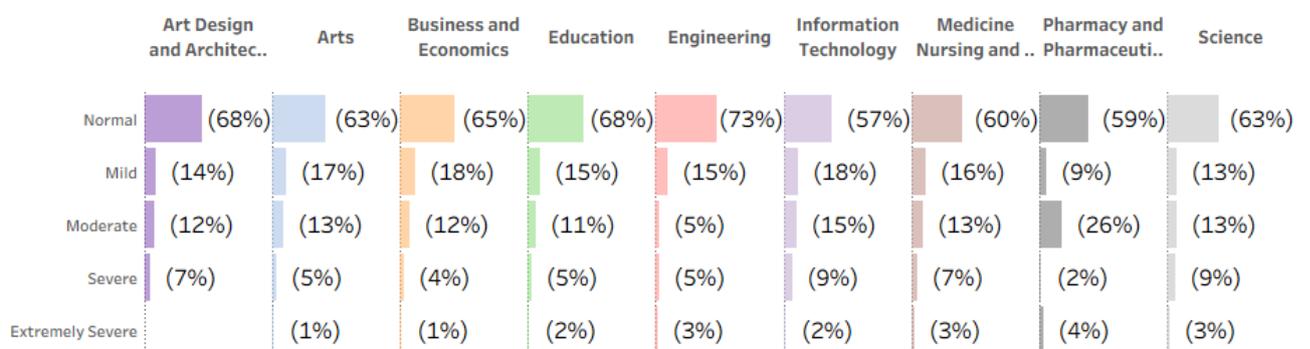
Depression:



Anxiety:



Stress:

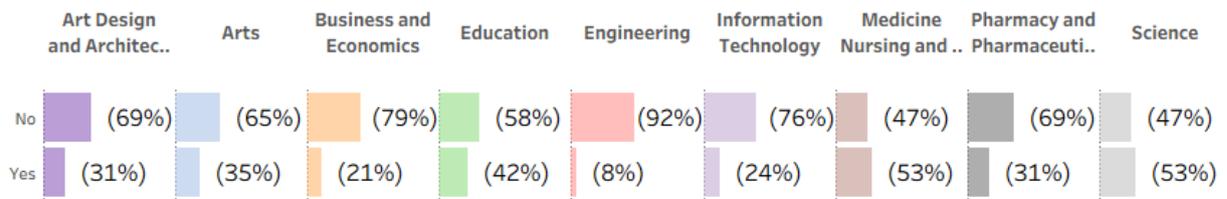


Engineering students demonstrate lower rates of poor mental health symptoms compared to the university average across all three DASS21 measures. For depression, 31% of Engineering students show elevated symptoms (moderate, severe or extremely severe), compared to 34% university-wide. For anxiety, 28% show elevated symptoms versus 38% university-wide. However, Engineering students report more concentration in the 'severe' (13%) and 'extremely severe' (10%) levels than they do in the 'moderate' (5%) level. For stress, only 13% show elevated symptoms compared to 21% university-wide.

Accessing Mental Health Support

Mental health support utilisation among graduate coursework students reveals both encouraging engagement patterns and concerning disparities across different student populations.

Accessing Mental Health Support by Faculty



Engineering students report notably lower rates of mental health support access compared to other faculties. Only 8% of Engineering students have accessed support for a mental health issue, substantially below the university-wide average of 33%. By a distance of 13 points, this is the lowest support access rates across all faculties.

This pattern reflects Engineering's predominantly international student composition (98% of survey respondents), as international students access mental health support at substantially lower rates than domestic students university-wide (25% versus 60%). Cultural differences in help-seeking behaviour, unfamiliarity with Australian mental health systems, language considerations, and stigma around mental health in some cultural contexts create significant barriers to accessing support. Given that 98% of Engineering survey respondents are international students, the 8% access rate aligns with broader international student patterns.

The lower rates of poor mental health symptom reporting, in light of the rates of mental health service access, may be indicative of a cohort that is less willing to acknowledge the presence of issues such as depression, anxiety and stress, leading to potential underreporting in the survey data. Even so, with the known 31% of Engineering students reporting moderate to extremely severe depression and 28% reporting moderate to extremely severe anxiety symptoms, there remains a gap between evident need and support utilisation that warrants targeted outreach addressing the specific barriers international students face in accessing mental health services.

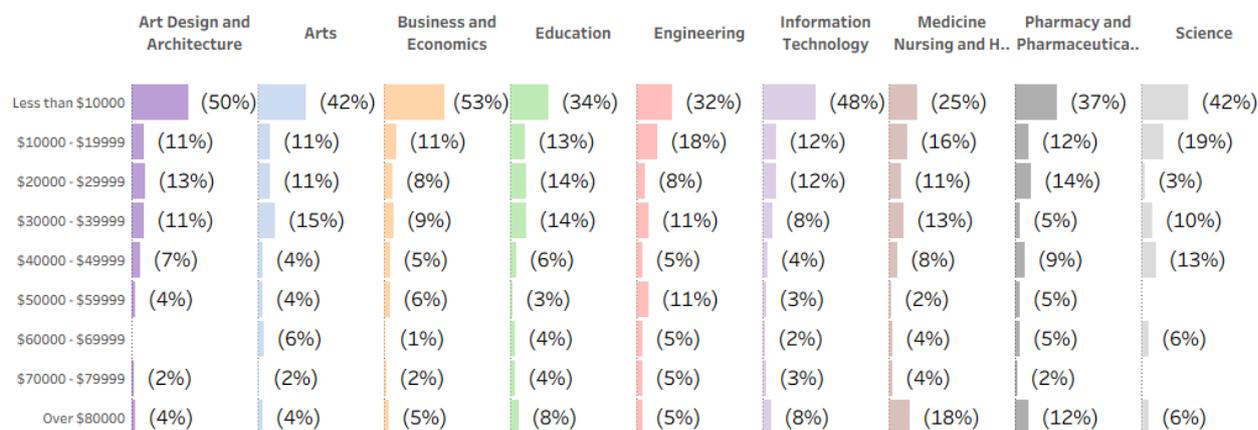
2. Financial Circumstances and Study Impact

Financial circumstances play a pivotal role in shaping the graduate coursework student experience, extending far beyond basic living expenses to directly influence academic engagement, course participation and career development. The intensive demands of graduate coursework programmes, combined with limited financial support mechanisms and the need for many students to maintain substantial employment alongside full-time study, create unique economic pressures for this particular cohort. Understanding how financial circumstances affect students' ability to engage fully with their coursework and professional development is essential for comprehending the broader challenges facing the graduate coursework community and identifying areas where enhanced support could meaningfully improve both student wellbeing and academic outcomes.

Estimated Income

Graduate coursework students report varying income levels that reflect their diverse circumstances and study arrangements.

Estimated Annual Income by Faculty

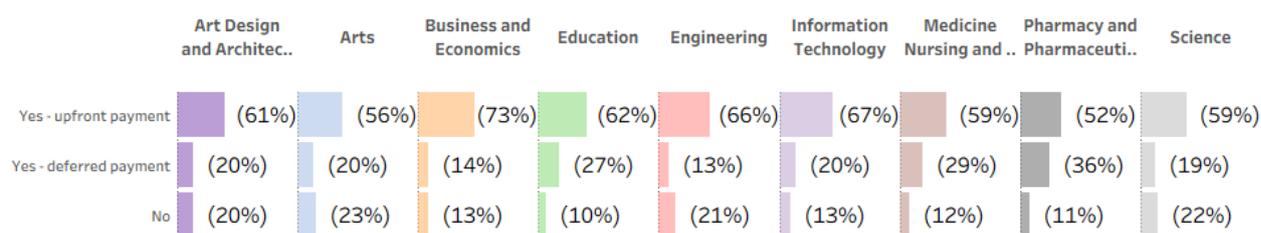


Engineering students report a somewhat more favourable income distribution compared to the university average. For instance, 32% of Engineering students earn less than \$10,000 annually, compared to 40% university-wide. This rate is also the second lowest percentage of students within this income bracket compared to other faculties, behind MNHS reporting (25%). When including those earning \$10,000-\$19,999, 50% of Engineering students fall into the lowest income brackets, reflecting a middle range among the faculties.

Student Fee Payment Status

This section examines the proportion of graduate coursework students who pay tuition or course fees directly. Understanding fee payment status provides important context for interpreting student experiences, particularly regarding value for money perceptions and financial stress indicators. Students who bear direct financial responsibility for their education may have different expectations and concerns compared to those whose fees are covered through external support, including family finances, scholarships and sponsorship or student loans.

Course Fees by Faculty



The majority of Engineering students (79%) pay course fees, with upfront payment being the predominant method (66%). Meanwhile, 13% use deferred payment arrangements (such as HECS-HELP for domestic students) and 21% do not pay fees (typically scholarship recipients or sponsored students).

The high proportion paying upfront reflects the significant international student population in Engineering who responded to the survey. International students are generally ineligible for government loan schemes and must pay fees directly. This creates immediate financial pressure that differs from the experience of domestic students, many of whom can defer payments until after graduation.

Course Fee Funding Sources

While the previous section examined whether students pay tuition fees, this section explores the distribution of fee payment responsibility across different sources for those making upfront payments. These students were asked to indicate how much of their course fees are paid by each of the following: self, family, employer, sponsor and other sources.

Understanding fee payment sources provides crucial insight into the financial ecosystems supporting graduate coursework education. Students who self-fund their education face different financial pressures compared to those with employer support or family assistance. Similarly, the extent of family contribution may reflect broader household financial circumstances and intergenerational support patterns. These funding arrangements have direct implications for student financial stress, employment decisions and study intensity.

The following analysis examines the proportion of fees covered by each source across different student cohorts, revealing the diverse financial arrangements underpinning graduate coursework study.

Course Fee Funding in Engineering

Payment Source	Use this source	All	Most	About Half	A little
Self	56%	16%	0%	0%	40%
Family	84%	48%	24%	4%	8%
Employer	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sponsor	24%	4%	4%	8%	8%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Engineering students with upfront payment costs rely primarily on personal and family resources to fund their course fees. A majority of Engineering students (84%) report reliance on their family for fee support, of which almost half (48%) pay all course fees. In addition, 56% of Engineering students report contributing to course fees out of their own pockets, of which a minority 16% pay all of their course fees and a majority 40% only contribute 'a little' to their overall fees. None of the engineering students who responded to the survey are supported by employers, indicating that students may not be connected appropriately with industry, as well as reflecting the over-representation of international students in survey responses (98%), who are unlikely to be managing professional employment and

study due to visa restrictions. Scholarship support, whilst available to some students (24%), covers a minority of the cohort, with only 4% of those with sponsorship receiving full fee coverage.

Melbourne Institute’s Financial Wellbeing Scale

Whilst reported income provides important baseline information about graduate coursework students’ financial circumstances, the Melbourne Institute’s Financial Wellbeing Scale offers a more nuanced understanding of how financial situations actually affect students’ lives and wellbeing. Income figures alone cannot capture the complexity of financial stress – two students with identical incomes may experience vastly different levels of financial pressure depending on their expenses, debt levels, family responsibilities and psychological relationship with money. The MI Financial Wellbeing Scale addresses this limitation by measuring not just what students earn, but how secure, free, safe and in control they feel regarding their finances.

The MI Financial Wellbeing Scale offers a comprehensive and validated measure of individuals’ financial circumstances and their psychological relationship with money. This scale was incorporated in the survey to move beyond simple income reporting and capture the multifaceted nature of financial wellbeing, including financial security, financial freedom, financial safety and financial control. Respondents are categorised into four groups: “doing great,” “getting by,” “just coping,” and “having trouble,” providing nuanced insights into how financial circumstances affect daily life and decision-making.

MI Financial Wellbeing Scale

	Engineering 2023	Engineering 2025	Monash 2025
Doing great	15%	2%	4%
Getting by	40%	37%	37%
Just coping	40%	42%	41%
Having trouble	5%	20%	19%

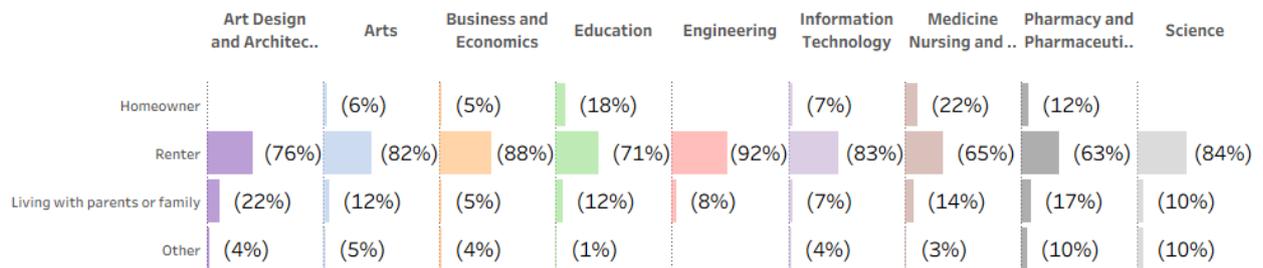
Engineering students report financial wellbeing patterns broadly consistent with the university average; however, since 2023, there has been a substantial reduction in those “doing great” – declining from 15% to 2%. This significant decline in reported financial wellbeing is mirrored by a substantial increase in those “having trouble” from 5% in 2023 to 20% in 2025. Overall, the data reveals that more than half (62%) of Engineering students are experiencing financial distress sitting in the “just coping” or “having trouble” categories.

Housing Costs

Housing represents one of the most significant financial pressures facing graduate coursework students, with rental costs consuming substantial proportions of monthly income and directly constraining students’ capacity to meet other essential expenses. The following analysis examines living arrangements and rental burden patterns across faculties, revealing the extent to which

housing affordability challenges affect Engineering students.

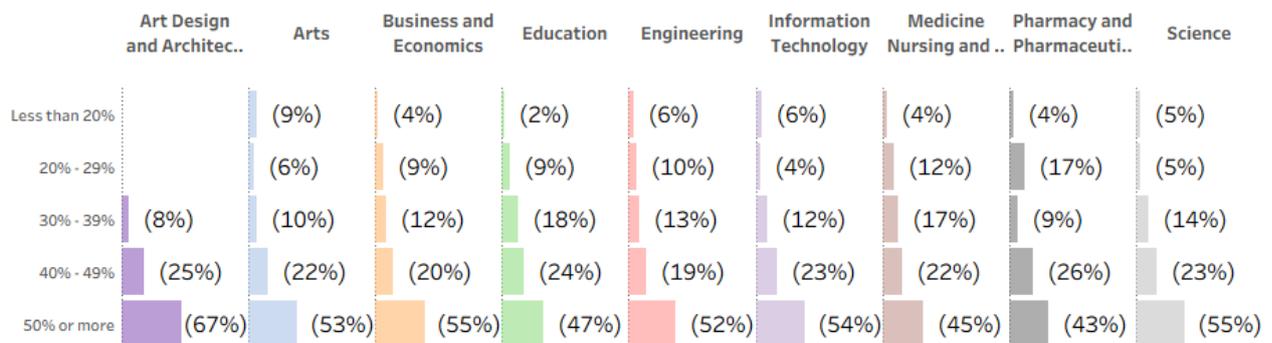
Living Situation by Faculty



Engineering students overwhelmingly live in rental accommodation. Approximately 92% of Engineering students are renters, whilst only 8% live with parents or family. None of the Engineering student survey respondents reporting owning their home or accessing other forms of accommodation. This rental-dominant pattern reflects the high proportion of survey respondents who are international students (98%), who typically cannot live with family whilst studying in Australia nor own homes.

The heavy reliance on rental housing exposes Engineering students to Melbourne’s competitive rental market, where high demand and limited affordable stock create significant cost pressures. This housing profile may contribute directly to the financial stress patterns observed elsewhere in the data.

Rent as Percentage of Monthly Income by Faculty



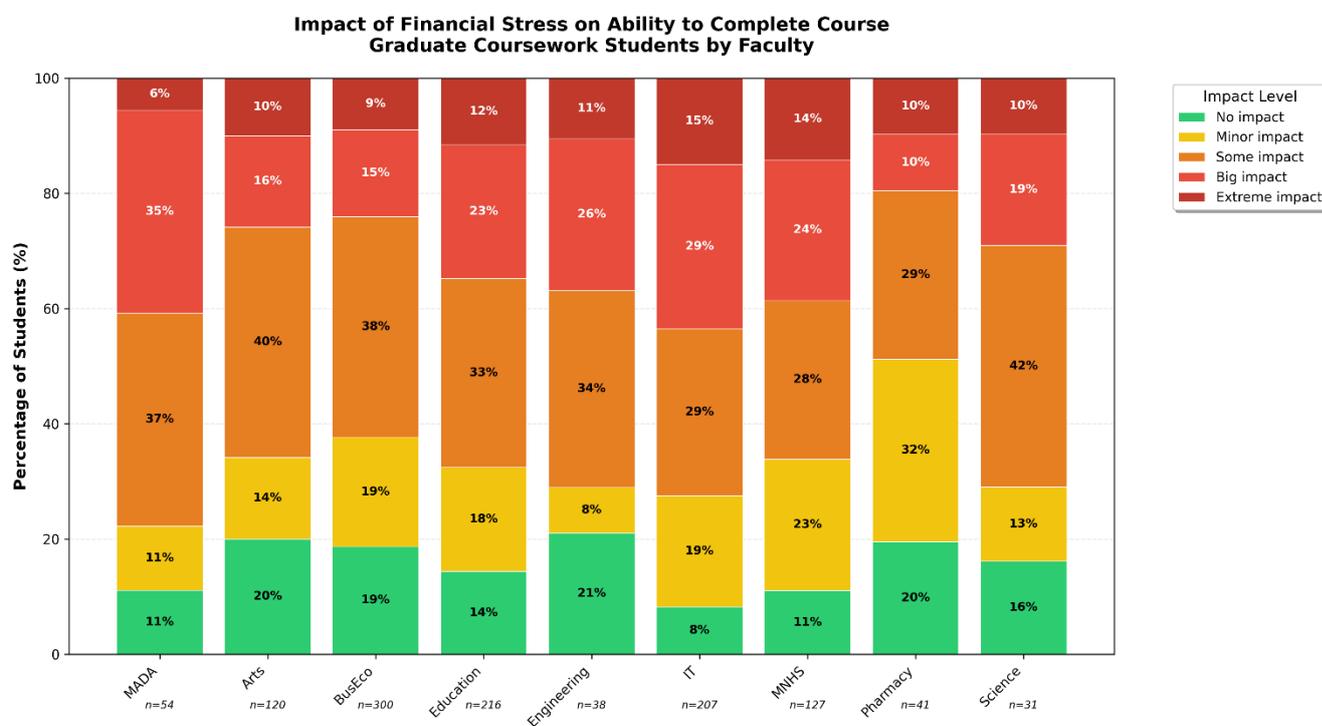
The vast majority of Engineering students who are spending 30% or more of their income on rent (84%). This means almost all Engineering students who responded to the survey are experiencing rental stress, defined as spending more than 30% of income on housing costs.

This near-universal rental stress rate reflects the combination of high Melbourne rental costs and the income constraints facing graduate students, with more than half (58%) earning under \$30,000 a year. Given the median weekly rent in Melbourne is \$647, and even with cost-saving options like share-housing, it is clear that housing costs consume a disproportionate share of available income, leaving Engineering graduate coursework students with limited resources for other expenses and creating ongoing financial pressure.

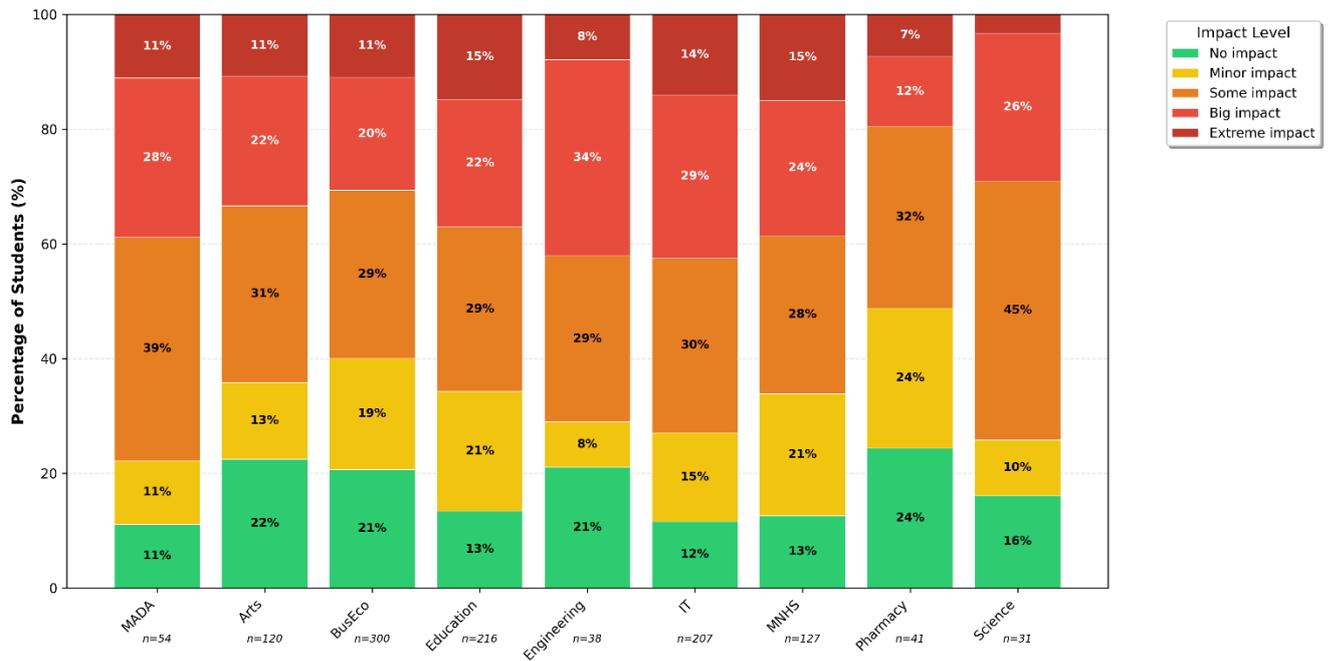
How Financial Stress Impacts Course Engagement

Financial stress extends beyond personal wellbeing to directly impact students' ability to engage with their coursework effectively. The survey investigated three specific areas of concern regarding financial stress impact including the ability to complete studies, the capacity to concentrate on studies and the ability to attend classes and other required study activities. The following section reveals substantial variation across the three groups in how financial pressures affect course engagement, with three graphs detailing these patterns across all impact levels.

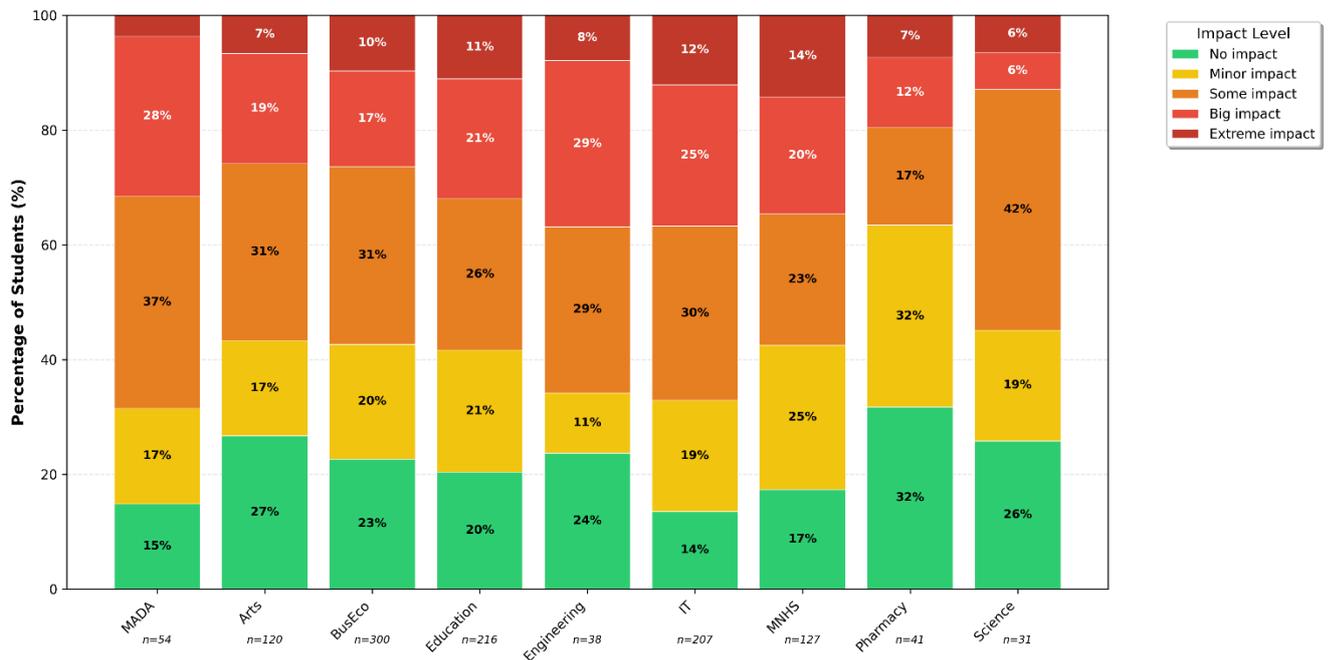
Financial Stress on Completing Course to Best of their Ability



Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to Concentrate on Course/Research Graduate Coursework Students by Faculty



Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to Attend Classes/Study/Research on Campus Graduate Coursework Students by Faculty



Financial stress significantly impacts Engineering students' academic engagement. 37% report that financial stress has a big or extreme impact on their ability to complete their course to the best of their ability. Similarly, 37% report significant impact on attending classes or studying on campus, while 42% report significant impact on their ability to concentrate on their coursework.

Student Testimonies: Financial Realities

To complement the quantitative findings on financial wellbeing and housing costs, this section examines students' own reflections on their financial circumstances through their responses to an open-ended question about their financial situation. These qualitative insights provide depth and context to the statistical patterns observed earlier, revealing the lived experiences behind the data and the specific ways financial pressures manifest in students' daily lives:

"I hope I can find a job with a satisfactory salary."

"I don't think it's too good. I'm barely making ends meet."

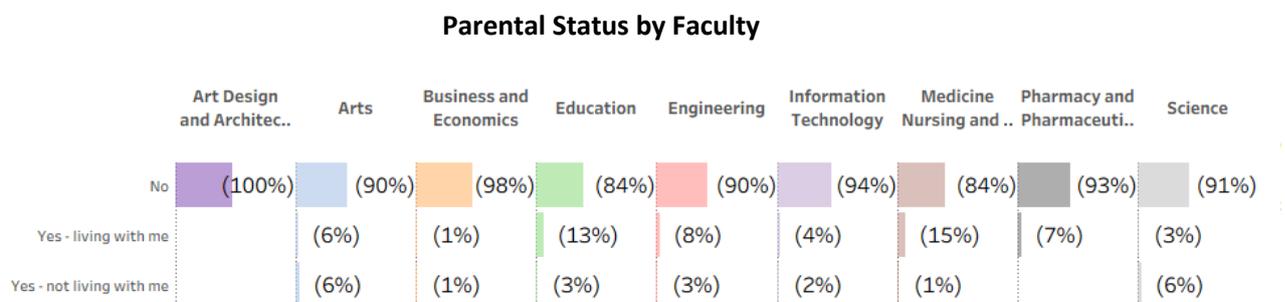
"Rent is too expensive."

"Hope I can get a part time job or internship so that I can live better."

"I have good company that give me good scholarship so I can focus on my study."

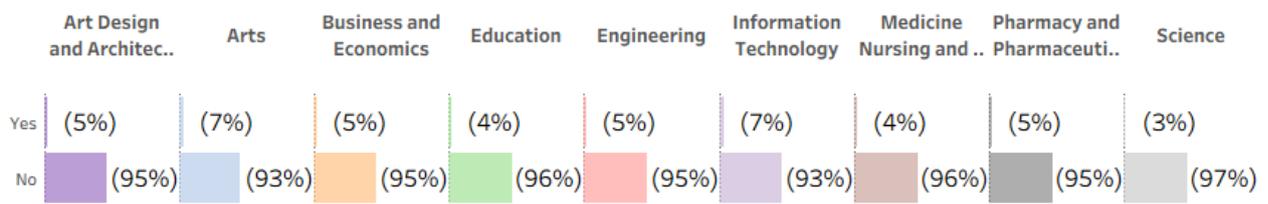
3. Student Parents and Carers

Graduate coursework students who are parents or carers face distinct challenges that compound the typical pressures of academic study, requiring targeted support approaches that acknowledge their dual responsibilities.



Parental responsibilities shape the graduate coursework experience for a small minority of Engineering students. Overall, 10% of Engineering students are parents – with 8% having children living with them and 3% having children not living with them – whilst 90% do not have children.

Carer Status by Faculty



Beyond parenting, 5% of Engineering graduate coursework students have carer responsibilities for someone other than a child, whilst 95% do not have such responsibilities.

Student Testimonies: Parents and Carers on the Distinct Challenges they Face

Despite the quantitative similarities, parent and carer voices reveal the specific practical and emotional challenges they navigate in pursuing graduate coursework whilst managing family responsibilities, providing important context for understanding their experiences beyond what statistical measures can capture.

There were no comments from Engineering students in relation to parental or carer responsibilities. However, further insights from students across Monash on the experiences of being a parent or carer while studying can be found in the university-wide report *Graduate Coursework at Monash: Student Experience, Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancement*.

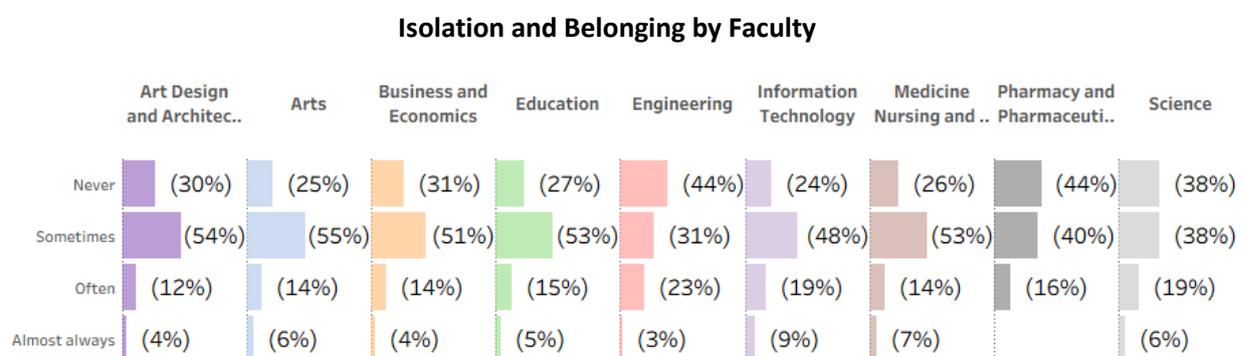
4. Peer Connection and Community Building

Social connections and peer relationships form fundamental components of the graduate coursework experience for many students. Yet, the survey data reveal challenges in fostering meaningful community amongst this population. The graduate coursework environment appears to present unique obstacles to social connection that extend beyond typical university experiences. Varying schedules, diverse backgrounds and the extended duration of graduate programmes, creates particular challenges for building and maintaining peer relationships that are essential for both academic success and personal wellbeing.

Understanding these connection challenges is crucial given the meaningful correlations identified between isolation and mental health outcomes, academic confidence and retention decisions. The following sections examine the specific factors contributing to isolation amongst graduate coursework students, explore their lived experiences of disconnection through their own voices and analyse patterns of meaningful contact across different relationship types. By investigating both the barriers to connection and the types of contact that students find most valuable, this analysis aims to identify opportunities for enhancing peer networks and community-building initiatives that could address the widespread sense of isolation within the graduate coursework community at Monash.

Isolation and Belonging

Feelings of isolation and lack of belonging represent significant challenges for graduate coursework students, with implications extending beyond social wellbeing to encompass mental health, academic engagement and retention outcomes. The intensive nature of graduate coursework programmes, combined with the diverse study patterns across the cohort – some students attending full-time whilst others balance study with substantial professional and personal commitments – creates distinct challenges for building and maintaining peer connections. International students face additional barriers including distance from established support networks, cultural adjustment and language considerations. The survey asked students how frequently they had felt isolated or lacking a sense of belonging in their academic or social environment during the past month, revealing notable differences in isolation experiences across the three groups that correspond with their distinct circumstances and study patterns.



Engineering graduate coursework students show a distinctive pattern of isolation experiences. When asked about isolation frequency in the past month, 44% of Engineering students report ‘never’ feeling isolated, notably higher than the university average of 28%. A further 31% report ‘sometimes’ feeling isolated. However, a combined 26% report greater frequency of isolation, with 23% feeling isolated ‘often’ and 3% ‘almost always’.

Student Testimonies: Isolation

To complement the quantitative findings on isolation frequency, this section examines students’ own reflections on the factors that contribute to their feelings of disconnection through their responses to an open-ended question about isolation experiences. These qualitative insights provide depth and context to the statistical patterns observed earlier, revealing the lived experiences behind the data and the specific circumstances that foster feelings of isolation and lack of belonging in the Engineering graduate coursework environment:

“Not a lot of peers I knew well.”

“Lack of confidence.”

“The pressure of studying, the loneliness of being away from family and my boyfriend.”

“Here the culture is totally different. Every person only cares about themselves. Something that is totally different in Latin America because their people are very sympathetic and empathetic.”

“Being in a new country without close friends or family and struggling to connect with classmates due to language and cultural differences made me feel isolated.”

“Me separating myself from others because I feel I like a failure compared to others.”

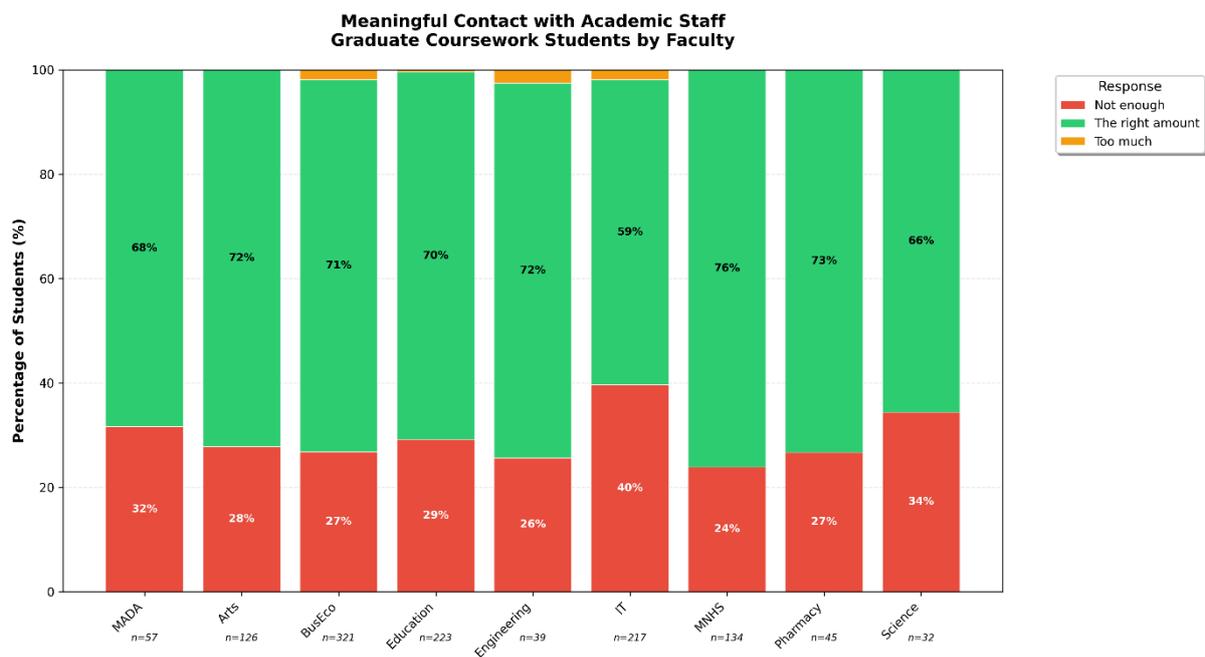
“The sense of everything seems overwhelming, and do not have time to leisure moments.”

“[I] found it challenging to secure opportunities in engineering firms here in Australia. It seems that overseas experience is often undervalued which has left me feeling professionally isolated. At times it feels as though my move to Australia hasn't brought the career progression I hoped for. However, I remain committed to integrating into the Australian engineering industry and contributing meaningfully with my skills in estimation project management and infrastructure development.”

Meaningful Contact

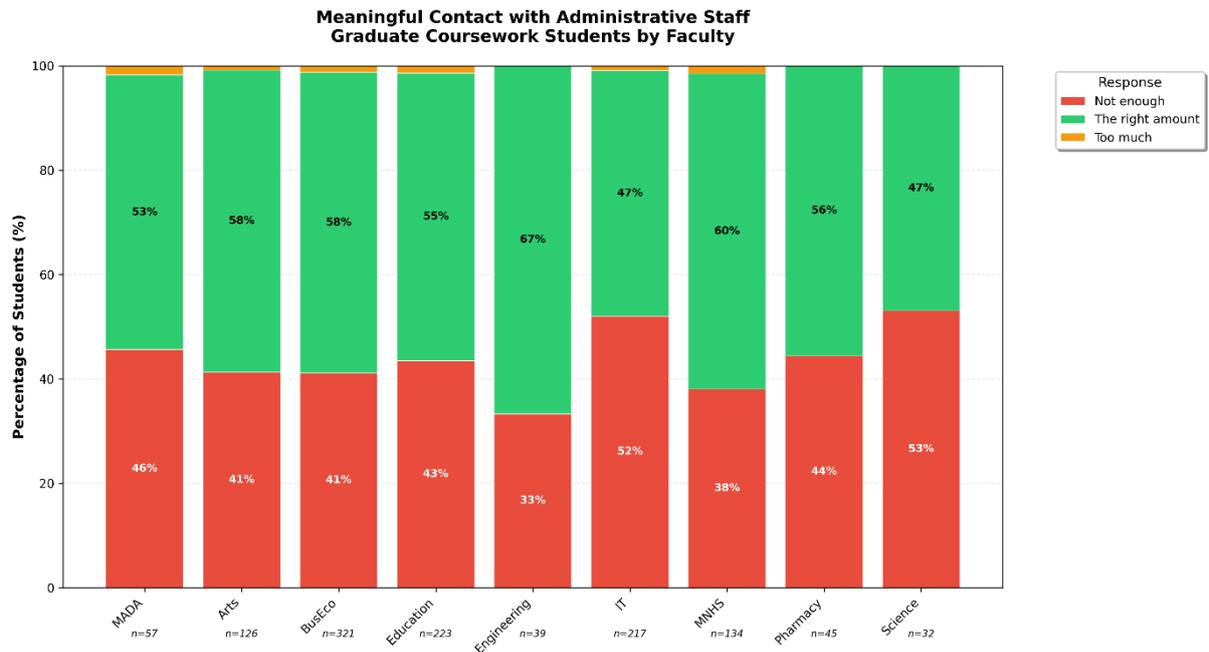
To assess students' access to support networks, respondents were asked to evaluate the frequency of their meaningful connections across five key relationship categories: academic staff, administrative staff, family, friends and peers. This analysis examines how students perceive their level of connection within each sphere and identifies where gaps in meaningful contact may be contributing to feelings of isolation or insufficient support.

Academic Staff



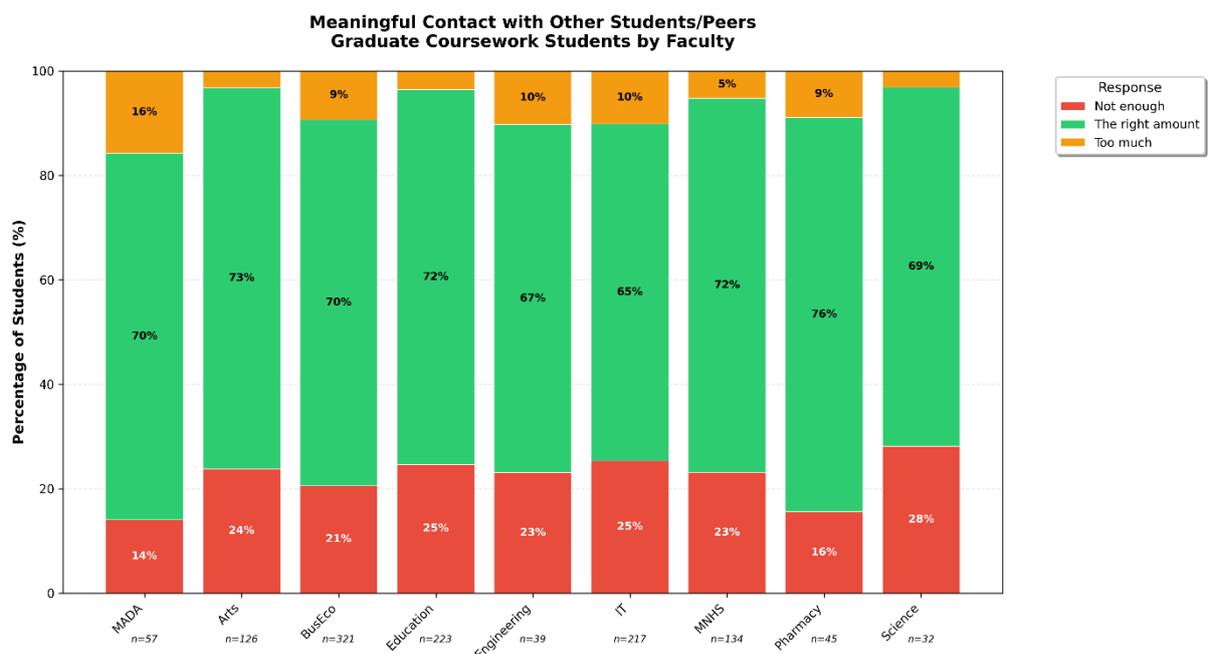
Engineering students report positive experiences with academic staff contact. The majority (72%) indicate they receive the right amount of meaningful contact with academic staff, whilst 26% report not having enough contact and 3% report too much.

Administrative Staff



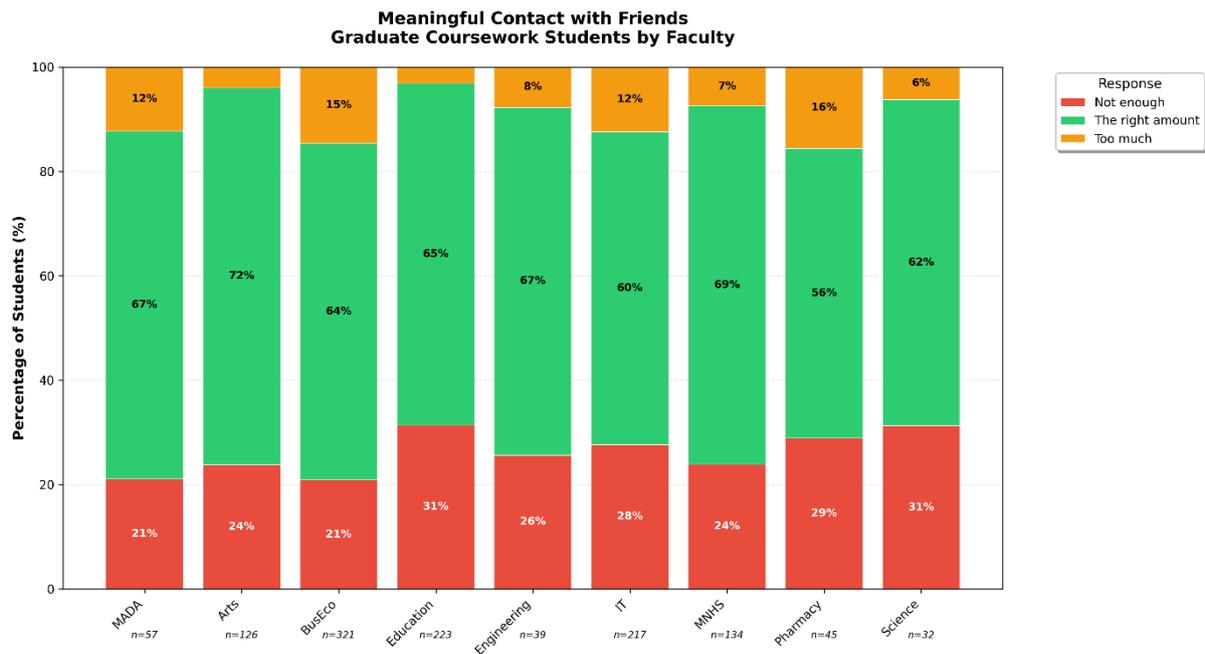
Engineering students show relatively positive experiences with administrative staff contact. Two-thirds (67%) report receiving the right amount of meaningful contact with administrative staff, the highest among faculties, whilst 33% indicate not having enough contact. Engineering's 33% insufficient contact rate is notably lower than the university-wide average of 44%, positioning the faculty among the better performers for administrative support access.

Other Students/Peers



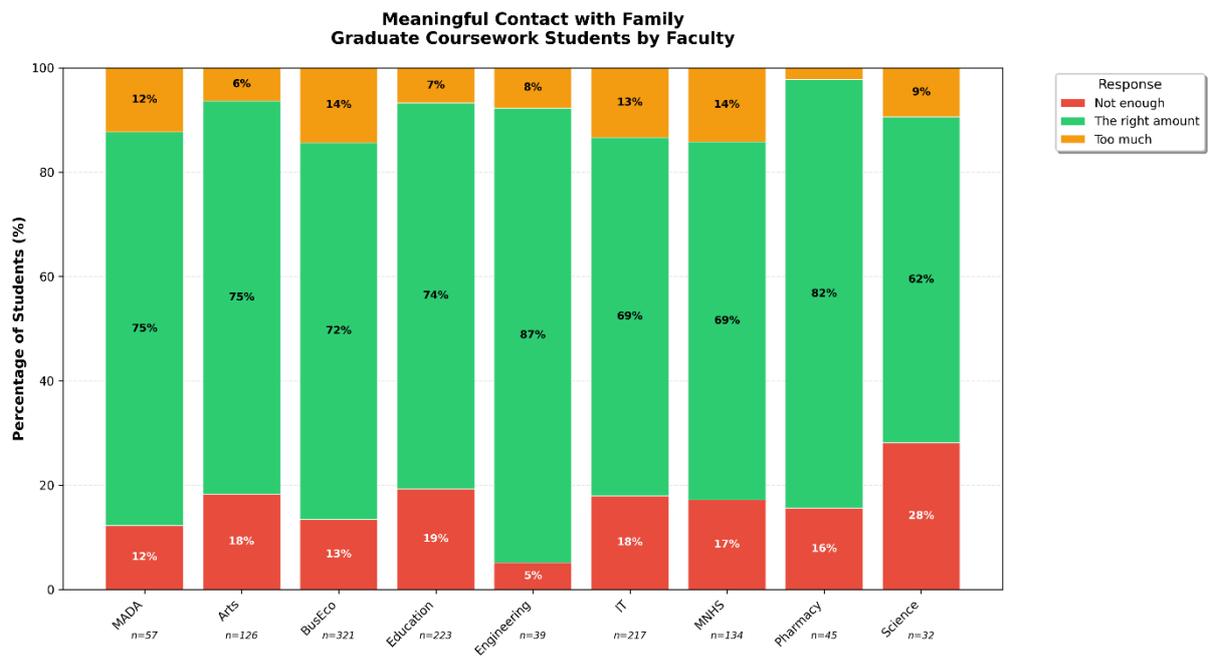
Engineering students report mixed experiences with peer connection. Two-thirds (67%) indicate they receive the right amount of meaningful contact with other students and peers, whilst 23% report not having enough peer contact and 10% indicate too much. Engineering's peer contact satisfaction is slightly below the university-wide average of 69%.

Friends



Engineering students show generally positive levels of friendship contact during their studies. Two-thirds (67%) report the right amount of meaningful contact with friends, whilst 26% indicate not having enough contact and 8% report too much. Engineering's 26% insufficient friend contact rate is comparable to the university-wide average of 27%.

Family



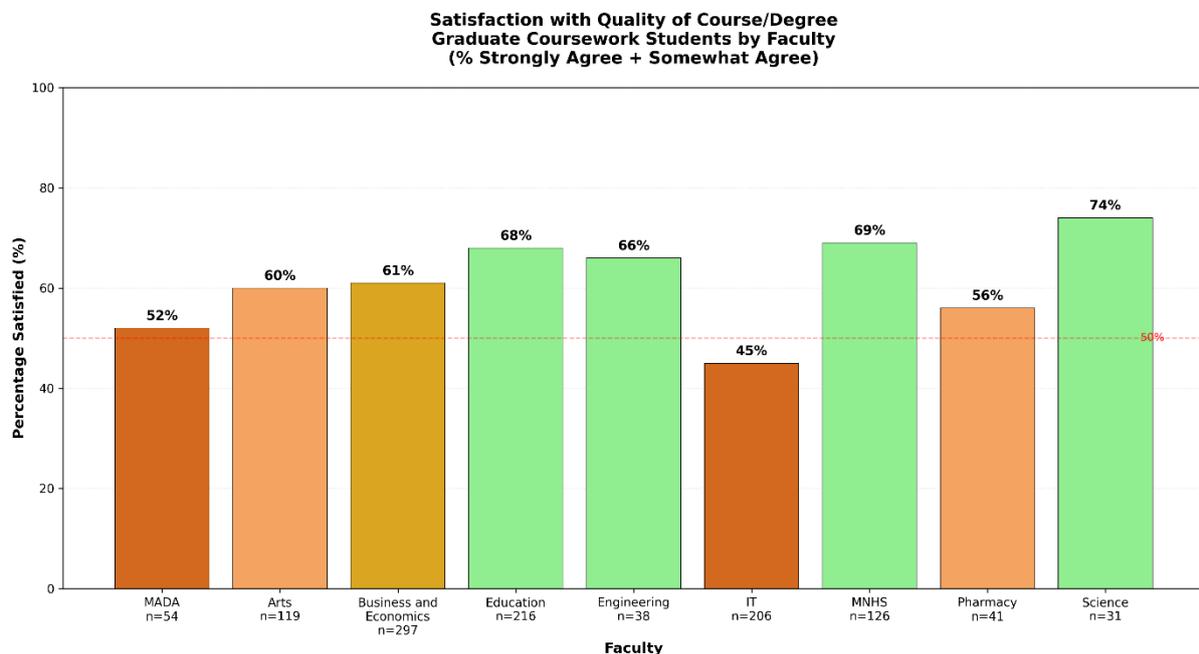
Engineering students report notably positive levels of family contact. A substantial majority (87%) indicate they receive the right amount of meaningful contact with family, whilst only 5% report not having enough contact and 8% report too much. Engineering's family contact satisfaction is considerably higher than the university-wide average of 72%, and is highest among all faculties.

5. Course Experience, Satisfaction and Retention

The academic journey for graduate coursework students involves navigating complex psychological and practical challenges that significantly influence both their immediate wellbeing and long-term success. Graduate coursework programmes represent substantial investments of time, money and professional opportunity, making students' perceptions of course quality and value particularly important indicators of the educational experience. The survey reveals concerns across the graduate coursework community about whether their programmes are meeting expectations and providing adequate return on investment, with many students questioning both the quality of their educational experience and whether the financial costs justify the benefits received. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for supporting student success, as course satisfaction and perceived value for money can be interconnected with the mental health and financial pressures explored earlier in the chapter.

Course Satisfaction

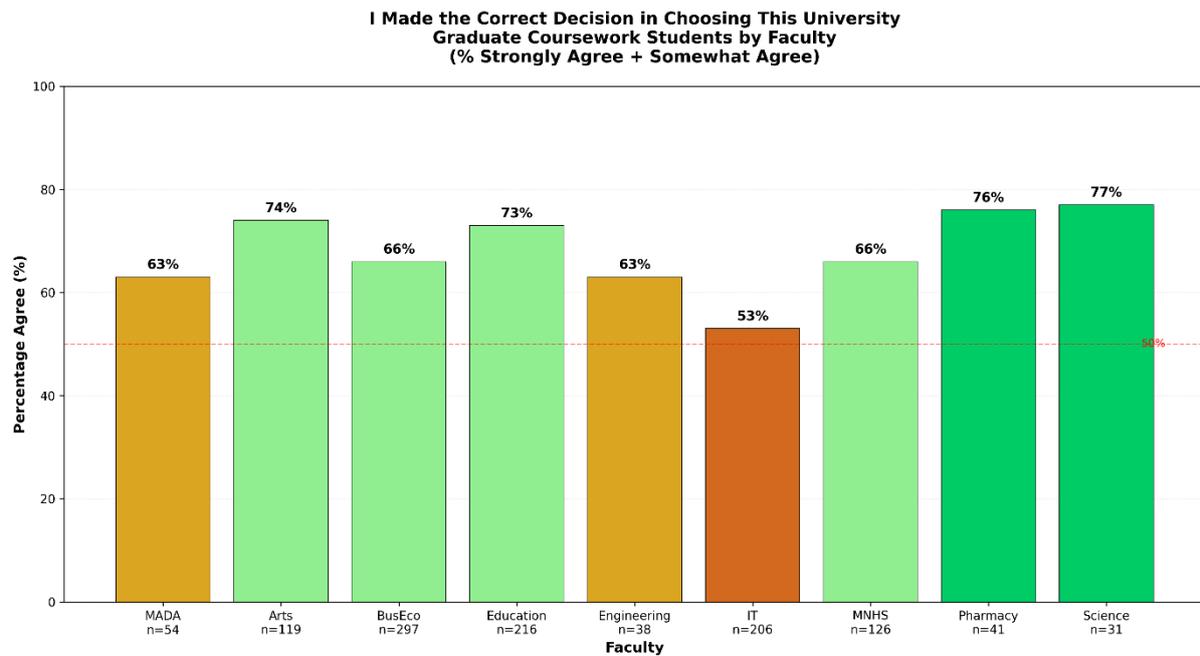
Course satisfaction represents a critical measure of student experience, reflecting whether academic programmes meet expectations and deliver meaningful value. Satisfaction patterns across graduate coursework cohorts reveal important insights about how different student groups perceive the quality of their educational experience.



Engineering students report moderate positive course satisfaction relative to other faculties. Overall, 66% of Engineering students agree or strongly agree they are satisfied with the quality of their course.

University Choice

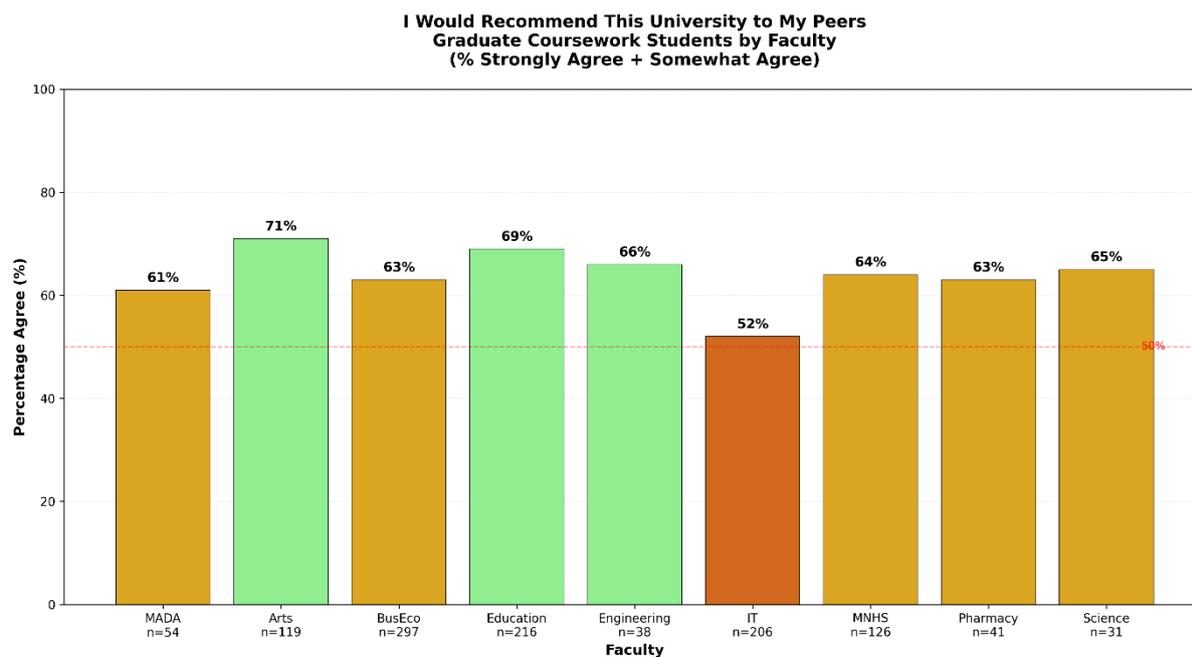
Beyond satisfaction with course quality, students' reflections on whether they made the correct decision in choosing Monash provides insight into their overall evaluation of their educational experience. This measure captures retrospective assessment of university choice, encompassing course quality, support services, campus experience and value proposition.



Engineering students show moderate confidence in their university selection. Just under two-thirds (63%) agree or strongly agree they made the correct decision in choosing Monash, placing Engineering slightly below the university-wide average of 68%.

Peer Recommendation - University

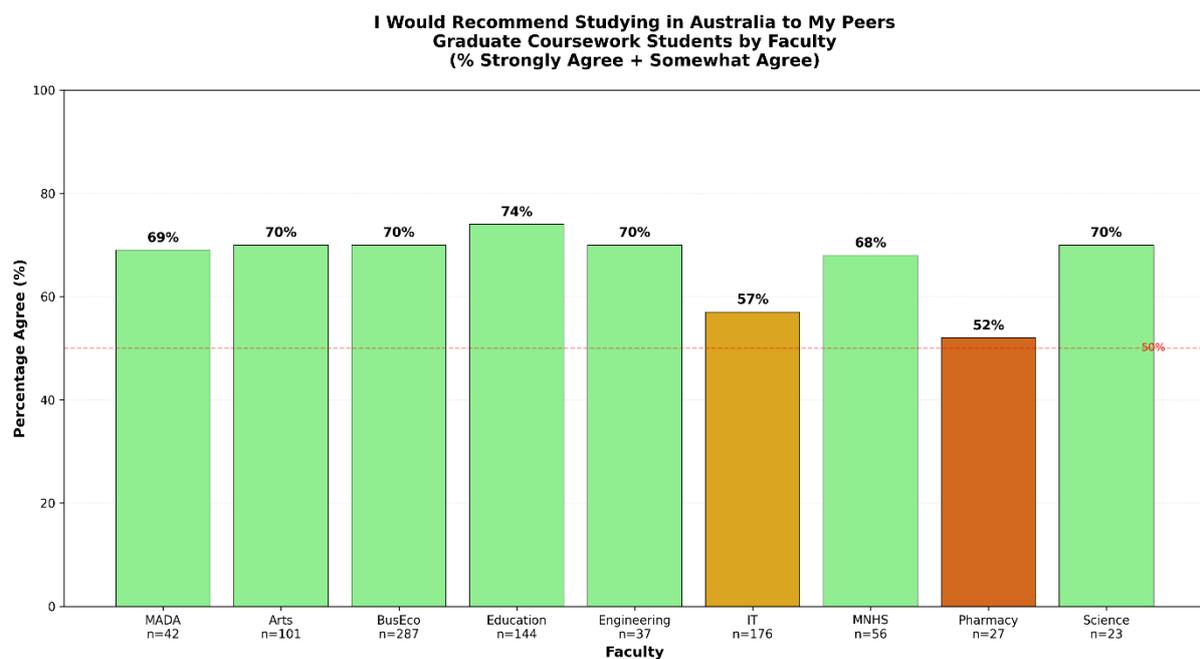
Students' willingness to recommend Monash to their peers serves as a key indicator of overall satisfaction and institutional reputation, reflecting whether students would advocate for the university based on their own experiences. This measure captures the strength of students' endorsement and their confidence in recommending Monash to others in similar circumstances.



Engineering students demonstrate willingness to recommend Monash to peers. Two-thirds (66%) agree or strongly agree they would recommend this university, which is comparable to the university-wide average of 65%. This indicates most Engineering students perceive sufficient value in their experience to endorse the university to others.

Peer Recommendation – Australia

For international students, perceptions of studying in Australia as a destination extend beyond their specific university experience to encompass the broader educational, cultural and professional environment. This measure, asked only of international students, distinguishes between satisfaction with Monash specifically and satisfaction with the Australian higher education experience more generally.

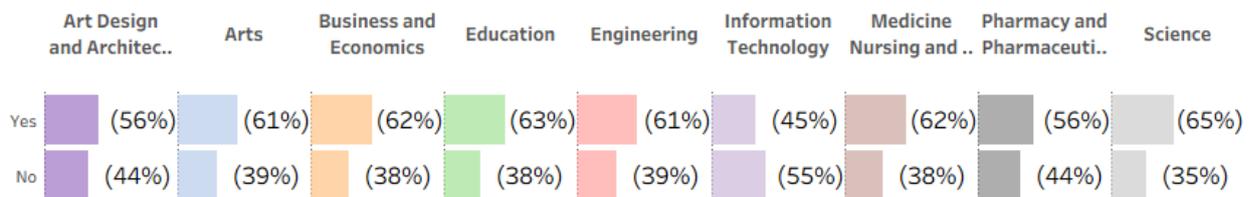


Engineering students, when asked about recommending Australia as a study destination, show positive perceptions. Approximately 70% agree or strongly agree they would recommend studying in Australia to their peers, which is slightly above the university-wide average of 67%.

Value for Money

Value for money perceptions represent a critical measure of whether students believe their substantial financial investment in graduate coursework education delivers commensurate returns. This assessment encompasses not only course quality but also the broader educational experience, career outcomes and support services relative to the fees paid.

Value for Money by Faculty



Value for money perceptions among Engineering students align closely with university-wide patterns. 61% of Engineering students feel their course offers value for money, whilst 39% do not. This is essentially equivalent to the university-wide average of 60% perceiving value for money.

Student Testimonies: Value for Money Concerns

Graduate coursework students who indicated their course does not offer value for money were asked to elaborate on their concerns through an open-ended question: “Why do you feel that your course does not offer value for money? Please elaborate.” Of the 35 responses provided by Engineering students, these highlighted concerns regarding quality of content, access to resources and career transitions. Below are a selection of testimonies capturing the key issues Engineering students perceive regarding course value for money:

“It’s just too expensive for all the resources we get and have.”

“Some teachers don’t spend time classes to explain but only for guiding at assume we already know and just leave readings to learn by ourselves and then leave assignments I feel that our time is not used efficiently and effectively.”

“Education quality is not up to the mark. I feel like lecturers aren’t putting much effort into teaching. No resources are used no classrooms absolutely no practicals. Pretty much everything is self-study some lecturers even ask us to use AI if we need help.”

“Teaching quality is not up to par.”

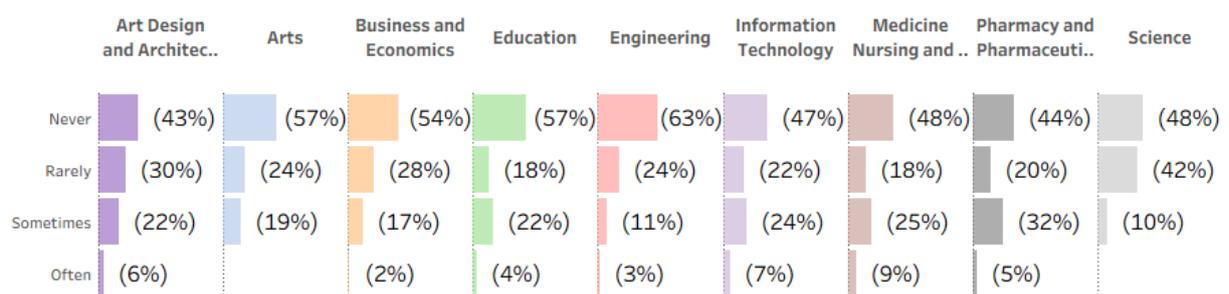
“The content and the lectures are simply not good enough.”

“Somehow I just feel [I’m] not learning any new knowledge, just finishing assignment after assignment after assignment.”

Considering Leaving

Students were asked to indicate how frequently they had considered leaving or withdrawing from their course, with response options ranging from “never” to “often”. This measure provides insight into retention vulnerability across graduate coursework cohorts, with implications for intervention strategies and support system design. Whilst considering departure does not necessarily lead to withdrawal, frequent consideration signals underlying dissatisfaction or challenge that warrants institutional attention.

Considering Leaving by Faculty

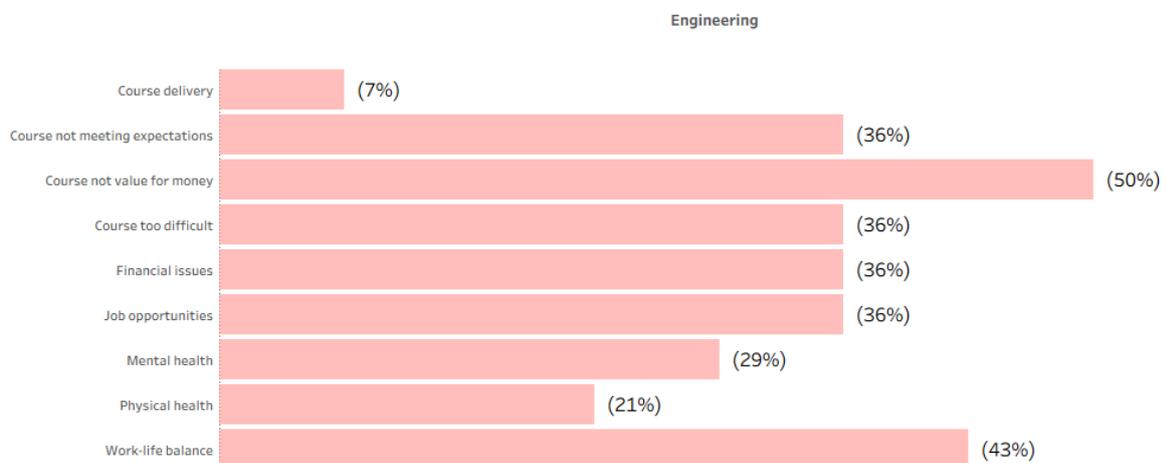


Engineering students demonstrate notably strong retention patterns. A substantial majority (63%) report never having considered leaving or withdrawing from their course – the highest rate in any faculty. Among those who have considered leaving, 24% report doing so rarely, 11% sometimes and only 3% often.

Factors Influencing Withdrawal Considerations

The reasons students cite for considering leaving reveal the interconnected nature of the challenges they face. Here they are for the faculty:

Reasons for considering leaving course in Engineering



Among those Engineering students who have considered leaving their course, the primary factor cited is that the course is not value for money (50%), followed by work-life balance (43%). Financial issues, job opportunities and course not meeting expectations and course difficulty (each 36%) all equally factor as secondary considerations for leaving. These patterns align with the reality of financial stress many Engineering students face, with 84% of students spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs and 58% of students earning less than \$30,000 per year. These financial conditions compound concerns about the value for money trade-offs, given the loss of potential earnings while studying. For those who persevere through their studies, it is likely that most students need to work jobs on the side in order to meet the cost-of-living demands in Melbourne.

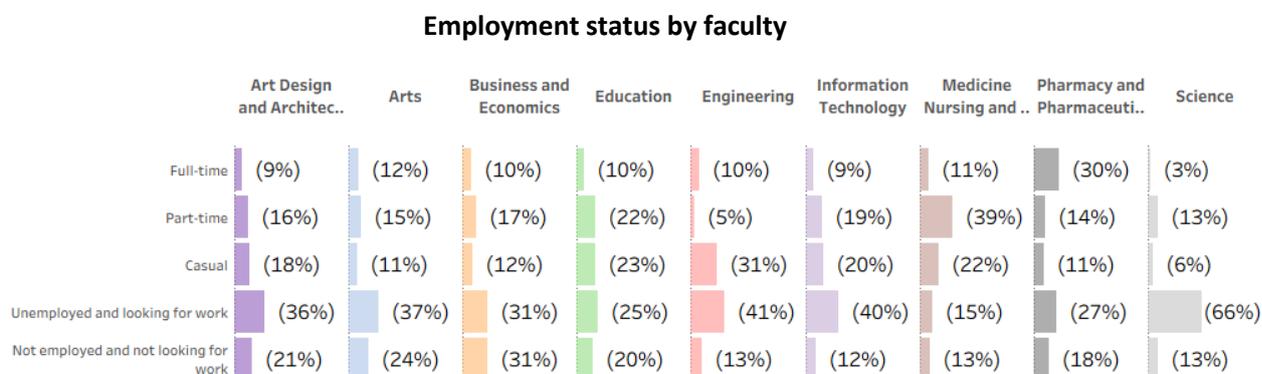
6. Employment and Career Planning

The relationship between employment and academic progress represents a critical balancing act for graduate coursework students, with employment decisions carrying implications for both immediate financial sustainability and long-term career advancement. The survey reveals that graduate coursework students engage with employment in fundamentally different ways: many enter postgraduate study whilst maintaining established careers, using coursework programmes to upskill or transition professionally, whilst others seek employment during study to offset substantial tuition costs and living expenses.

This section examines employment patterns within Engineering, the types of work students undertake, the alignment between employment and academic programmes, satisfaction with career guidance services and post-graduation plans for international students. Understanding how Engineering students navigate employment choices – and the extent to which their work experiences complement or compete with their academic goals and career aspirations in creative industries – reveals critical support needs for optimising both financial wellbeing and professional development.

Employment status

The following table outlines the employment status of Monash graduate coursework students.

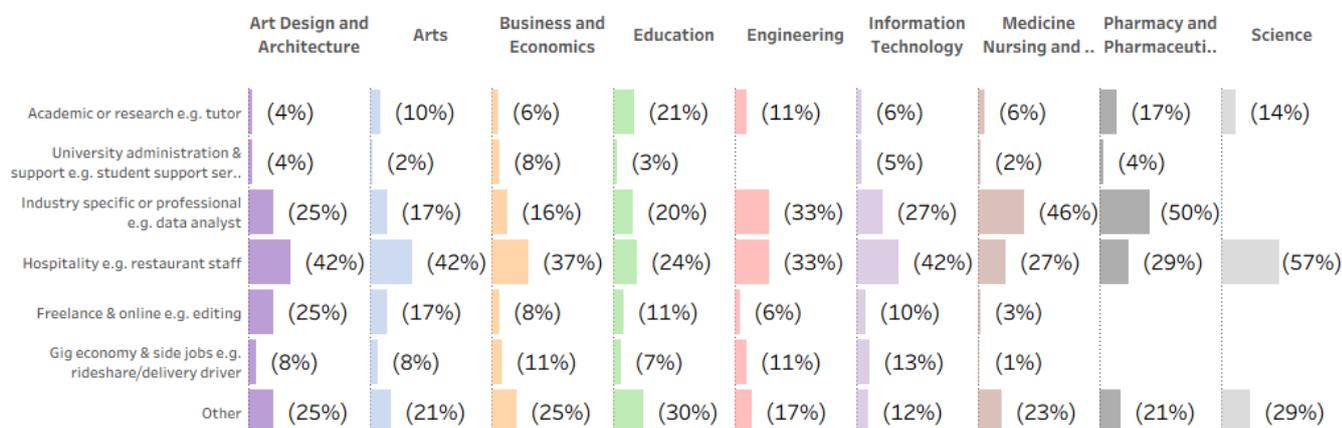


Engineering students show distinctive employment patterns compared to other faculties. The largest proportion (41%) are unemployed and looking for work – notably higher than the university-wide average of 29%. Among employed students, casual work dominates (31%), followed by full-time (10%) and part-time (5%) employment. 13% of Engineering students report not being employed and not looking for work.

The high unemployment rate among students actively seeking work, along with the smaller minority unemployed and not looking for work, may reflect the challenges international students face in securing employment, visa restrictions on work hours, or students prioritising study over employment.

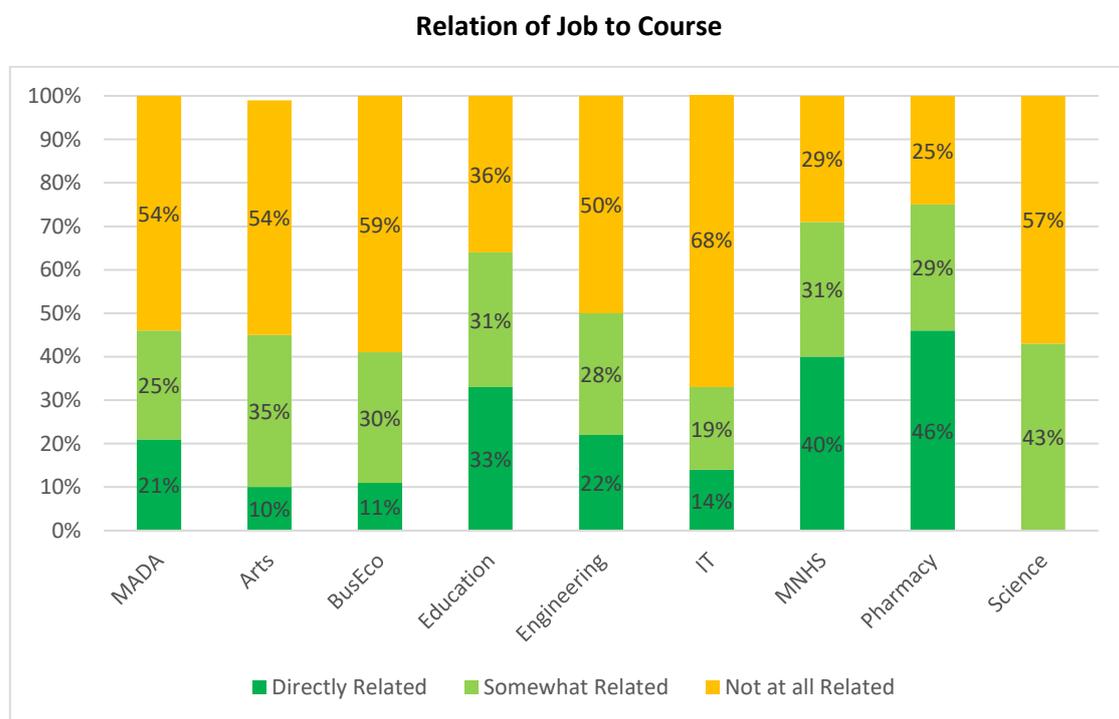
Job Type

The following table outlines the type of jobs Monash graduate coursework students work in.



Among employed Engineering students, job types are split mostly between hospitality work (33%) and industry-specific or professional roles (33%), with each category representing approximately one-third of employed students. Academic or research positions account for 11% of employment. The remaining 34% report a combination of freelance, gig economy and other undisclosed employment. Meanwhile, none of the Engineering survey respondents report employment in university administration or support, signalling a potential gap in opportunities for study adaptive roles within the institution.

Work-Study Relevance

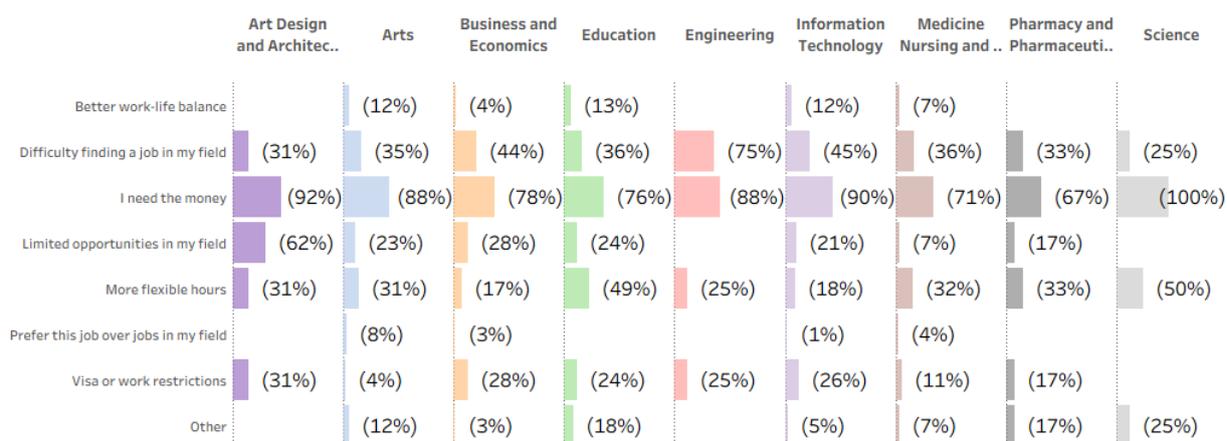


Half of employed Engineering graduate coursework students (50%) work in a job unrelated to their course, while 22% work in a job directly related to their course, and 28% in roles that are ‘somewhat related’.

Why Students Work Outside their Field

The employment misalignment documented above raises critical questions about the drivers behind these patterns. Students working in unrelated fields were asked to identify reasons for this misalignment, with multiple selections permitted to capture the intersecting pressures shaping employment decisions.

Why Students Work in Jobs Unrelated to their Course by Faculty

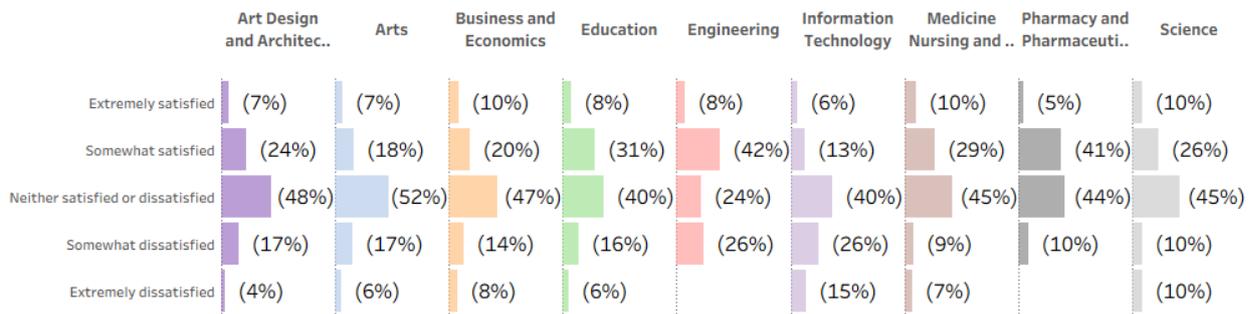


The reasons Engineering students cite for working outside their field of study centre predominantly on financial necessity and job market accessibility. Survival employment is the highest driver of working in unrelated roles at 88%. Beyond the immediate need for income, students report also experiencing difficulty finding positions in their field (75%), which may reflect the competitive entry-level engineering job market and employer preferences for candidates with local experience or specific technical certifications. The secondary reasons which factor into Engineering students engaging in unrelated employment include requiring flexible hours (25%) and visa or work restrictions (25%). These data suggest that Engineering students have unique employment needs and constraints which are potentially being overlooked by the local labour market.

Career Guidance Experiences

Given the employment challenges documented above – including significant rates of unrelated work, financial necessity driving employment decisions and labour market access barriers particularly affecting international students – institutional career support services represent a critical intervention point for improving graduate coursework student experience and outcomes. Career guidance tailored to postgraduate contexts should address the distinct needs of students seeking to leverage existing professional experience, transition between fields or establish initial career footholds whilst navigating study demands. However, the extent to which current career services meet these diverse needs remains uncertain. This section examines student satisfaction with career guidance received during their coursework programmes.

Career Guidance Satisfaction by Faculty



Engineering students report relatively positive career guidance experiences. 50% express satisfaction with career guidance and support received from the university (combining extremely and somewhat satisfied responses), compared to the university-wide average of 33%. However, 26% report dissatisfaction with career guidance services. A further 24% report being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, indicating a potential unreached sub-cohort of Engineering students who may not know what services are available or who have accessed services but lack the level of engagement necessary to form strong opinions about it.

The above-average satisfaction and the comparatively lower neutral rates to other faculties suggest Engineering’s career services are more visible and meeting student needs more effectively than in some other faculties, though the substantial dissatisfied minority indicates room for enhancement in career support provision.

Student Testimonies – Suggestions for Improvements to Career Guidance

To identify specific areas for improvement, respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with career guidance services were asked to suggest enhancements. Of the suggestions made, most centred around the importance of industry connection and personalised support:

“Part time jobs related with engineering or administrative environment for people who express their interest in working and studying. Also acting as intermediary between companies and students to link them and create work relationship. Many postgraduate students already have professional experience however it is overlooked.”

“More industry experience for students.”

“1:1 consultation for career path resume/cover letter tailor.”

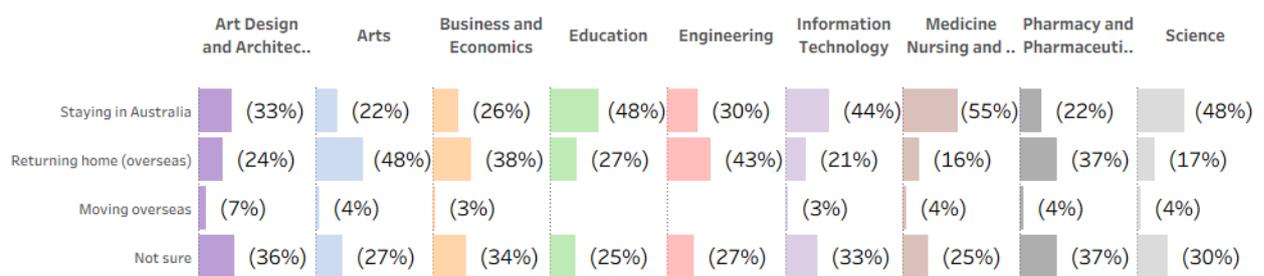
“I hope there are more industry internship opportunities for international students despite maybe hard.”

Post-Degree Plans for International Students

International students’ post-graduation plans carry significant implications for both individual career trajectories and institutional outcomes, influencing the value proposition of Australian postgraduate

education and informing workforce retention strategies. Understanding whether students intend to remain in Australia, return home or relocate elsewhere reveals how international coursework students perceive Australian labour market opportunities, the transferability of their credentials to home contexts and the extent to which their study experience positions them for desired career outcomes. These intentions are shaped by the employment challenges documented throughout this report – including difficulty accessing field-relevant work, visa restrictions limiting labour market integration and varying levels of institutional career support. Students planning to remain in Australia signal confidence in local career prospects and successful integration, whilst those returning home may indicate either strong home-country opportunities or discouragement with Australian labour market accessibility. This question illuminates whether Australia’s substantial international coursework cohort views their education as a pathway to local careers or primarily as credential acquisition for opportunities elsewhere.

Post-Degree Plans for International Students at Monash by Faculty



Post-graduation intentions among Engineering international students show a distinctive pattern. The largest proportion (43%) plan to return home overseas after completing their degree, whilst 30% intend to stay in Australia and 27% remain uncertain. The intention to stay in Australia is lower than the university-wide average of 35%.

What Makes Engineering Distinct: Key Themes

Two distinctive patterns shape the Engineering graduate coursework experience, each presenting clear opportunities for faculty-led enhancement.

International Student Dominance with Employment and Integration Barriers

Engineering demonstrates the most internationally concentrated student body amongst Monash faculties who responded to the survey, with 98% being international students. This composition produces unique challenges around employment access, professional integration and cultural adaptation.

Employment patterns reveal the most concerning manifestation. Engineering reports the second-highest unemployment rate amongst students actively seeking work (41%), substantially exceeding the 29% university-wide average. For those securing employment, half work in jobs completely unrelated to engineering studies, with 33% concentrated in hospitality roles. This mismatch reflects intersecting barriers: visa restrictions, labour market realities, professional recognition challenges and cultural barriers affecting networking.

Student testimonies reveal frustration that overseas engineering experience is “often undervalued”, leaving some individuals feeling “professionally isolated”. The 43% planning to return home overseas after graduation may reflect these employment disappointments and limited career pathway visibility.

Mental health support access patterns further illustrate distinctive needs. Only 8% of Engineering students have accessed mental health support – by substantial distance the lowest amongst all faculties and well below the 33% university-wide average. This extremely low utilisation, despite 26% experiencing isolation often or almost always, likely reflects cultural differences in help-seeking behaviour, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and stigma around mental health in some cultural contexts.

Financial Stress Despite Strong Programme Commitment

Engineering faces a paradox: students demonstrate the strongest retention commitment amongst all faculties yet cite financial pressures as the primary threat to that commitment. A substantial 63% report never having considered leaving – the highest rate amongst all faculties. Yet amongst those who have considered withdrawal, half (50%) cite that the course is “not value for money”, indicating financial sustainability rather than programme quality may drive departure considerations.

Financial circumstances reveal why sustainability threatens otherwise committed students. Between 2023 and 2025, those “doing great” collapsed from 15% to just 2%, whilst those “having trouble” increased from 5% to 20%. Nearly universal rental dependency (92% are renters – highest amongst all faculties) exposes students to Melbourne’s increasingly unaffordable housing market, with 84% of renters experiencing rental stress. Approximately 37% report financial stress has big or extreme

impact on their ability to complete their course, with similar impacts on campus attendance and concentration.

Value for money concerns crystallise this paradox. Only 61% feel their course offers value for money despite strong programme commitment. Student testimonies focus predominantly on teaching quality: “Education quality is not up to the mark”; “lecturers aren't putting much effort into teaching”; “Pretty much everything is self-study”. Students recognise the credential’s professional value whilst questioning whether delivery quality justifies the substantial financial investment, particularly for international students paying higher fees whilst facing visa restrictions and housing insecurity.

Faculty-Specific Recommendations

These recommendations target the two distinctive challenges identified above, organised by investment level to provide Engineering leadership with actionable options across different resource scenarios.

Addressing International Student Employment and Integration Barriers

Cultural and Operational Enhancements (Low Investment)

Redesign career guidance to explicitly address international students' distinctive labour market barriers. Create targeted support for translating international credentials into Australian context, navigating professional recognition requirements and developing networking strategies appropriate to Australian workplace culture. Develop Engineering-specific peer mentoring connecting incoming international students with senior students who have successfully secured field-relevant work, compensated through small stipends or academic recognition.

Establish partnerships between Engineering and mental health services to create culturally responsive support pathways acknowledging international students' help-seeking barriers. Train teaching and administrative staff to recognise distress signs and facilitate referrals, addressing the 8% support access rate – the lowest amongst all faculties – by normalising support-seeking through faculty-embedded wellness resources.

Moderate Investments

Create Engineering “Professional Integration Programme” supporting international students' transition into Australian engineering practice. Include workplace culture workshops, professional networking skill development, industry mentorship opportunities and employer panels. Partner with engineering employers to create shadowing opportunities, short-term projects or paid internships specifically for international students, directly addressing the 41% unemployment rate and 50% employment-field mismatch, as well as equipping students with local market experience to overcome the lack of recognition of international industry experience.

Pilot “Engineering Alumni-Student Connection Initiative” matching current international students with Engineering alumni who successfully transitioned into Australian engineering careers. Structure around practical career navigation challenges where alumni share insights whilst building connections that lead to potential employment opportunities.

Supporting Financial Sustainability Despite Strong Programme Commitment

Cultural and Operational Enhancements (Low Investment)

Implement proactive wellbeing and financial check-ins at high-stress programme points where faculty contacts students rather than expecting help-seeking behaviour. Given the 8% mental health

support access and substantial financial stress impacts (37-42% reporting big or extreme impact on academic engagement), proactive outreach addresses barriers whilst identifying at-risk students before crises escalate.

Create transparent communication about programme demands, true costs (including accommodation, living expenses, visa requirements and realistic income expectations given work restrictions) and employment realities before international student enrolment. Address value for money concerns and deteriorating financial wellbeing by ensuring accurate expectation-setting and budget planning from the outset.

Moderate Investments

Establish emergency financial assistance for Engineering students facing acute crises (rent arrears, unexpected expenses, visa costs) threatening course continuation. Even modest funding could prevent withdrawals amongst the 20% "having trouble" financially. Complement with financial counselling addressing underlying sustainability concerns.

Appendix 1: Demographics

Course name	Respondents
Master of Advanced Engineering	2 (5%)
Master of Civil Engineering	1 (2%)
Master of Engineering	17 (42%)
Master of Professional Engineering	19 (46%)
Master of Transportation Systems	0 (0%)
Other	2 (5%)

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	1 (2%)
Clayton	40 (91%)
Caulfield	3 (7%)
Peninsula	0 (0%)
Parkville	0 (0%)
Law Chambers	0 (0%)
Malaysia	0 (0%)
Hospital or Medical Centre	0 (0%)
Indonesia	0 (0%)
Suzhou	0 (0%)
other	0 (0%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	1 (2%)
International student	40 (98%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	40 (98%)
Part-time	1 (2%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	17 (41%)
Multi-modal	23 (56%)
Entirely off-campus	1 (2%)
Other	0 (0%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	17 (41%)
1-5 years	17 (41%)
6-10 years	5 (12%)
11+ years	2 (5%)

Degree progress	Respondents
First year	33 (80%)
Second year	8 (20%)
Third year and beyond	0 (0%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	0 (0%)
6-10	7 (17%)
11-20	11 (27%)
21-30	12 (29%)
31-40	6 (15%)
Over 40 hours	5 (12%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	14 (34%)
Advanced	13 (32%)
Intermediate	14 (34%)
Elementary	0 (0%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	10 (24%)
Man	31 (76%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	0 (0%)
Prefer to self-describe	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	0 (0%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	2 (5%)
No	36 (88%)
Prefer not to disclose	3 (7%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	1 (100%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	1 (2%)
No	39 (95%)
Prefer not to disclose	1 (2%)

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

Age	Respondents
24 or under	18 (44%)
25-29	14 (34%)
30-39	7 (17%)
40 and over	2 (5%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	4 (10%)
Part-time	2 (5%)
Casual	12 (30%)
Unemployed and looking for work	17 (43%)
Not employed and not looking for work	5 (13%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	4 (22%)
6-10	4 (22%)
11-20	7 (39%)
21-30	3 (17%)
31-40	0 (0%)
More than 40	0 (0%)