



Graduate Coursework in Pharmacy:

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

Edwards, Ryan. *Graduate Coursework in Pharmacy: Student Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancement*. Melbourne: Monash Graduate Association, 2025.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Acknowledgement of Country	2
Report Production.....	2
Use of Generative AI	2
How to Cite this Report.....	2
Introduction	5
Survey Participation	5
Report Focus	5
Key Findings for Pharmacy.....	6
1. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Landscape	6
DASS21 and Mental Health Indicators.....	6
Accessing Mental Health Support.....	8
2. Financial Circumstances and Study Impact.....	8
Estimated Income	8
Student Fee Payment Status.....	9
Course Fee Funding Sources	10
Melbourne Institute’s Financial Wellbeing Scale.....	11
Housing Costs.....	12
How Financial Stress Impacts Course Engagement	13
Student Testimonies: Financial Realities	15
3. Student Parents and Carers	15
Student Testimonies: Parents and Carers on the Distinct Challenges they Face	16
4. Peer Connection and Community Building.....	16
Isolation and Belonging.....	17
Student Testimonies: Isolation	18
Meaningful Contact	19
5. Course Experience, Satisfaction and Retention.....	22
Course Satisfaction.....	23
University Choice	24
Peer Recommendation - University.....	24
Peer Recommendation – Australia	25
Value for Money	27
Student Testimonies: Value for Money Concerns	27
Considering Leaving	28
6. Employment and Career Planning	30

Career Guidance Experiences	33
Post-Degree Plans for International Students	34
What Makes Pharmacy Distinct: Key Themes	36
Value-for-Money Concerns Driven by Pedagogical Delivery Issues	36
Unsustainable Anxiety Crisis	36
Faculty-Specific Recommendations	37
Enhancing Pedagogical Quality and Value Proposition	37
Addressing Anxiety Crisis and Unsustainable Programme Intensity	37
Appendix 1: Demographics.....	39

Introduction

This report examines the experiences of 48 graduate coursework students in the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences 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 Pharmacy.

Where meaningful, findings are compared to Monash-wide averages to highlight areas where Pharmacy 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

- 48 Pharmacy graduate coursework students participated.
- Response rate represents approximately 8% of enrolled Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy graduate coursework contexts.
- Financial pressures and their impact on study.
- Parental and carer responsibilities.
- Peer connection and support needs unique to Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy

This section provides core findings from the 48 Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy 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.

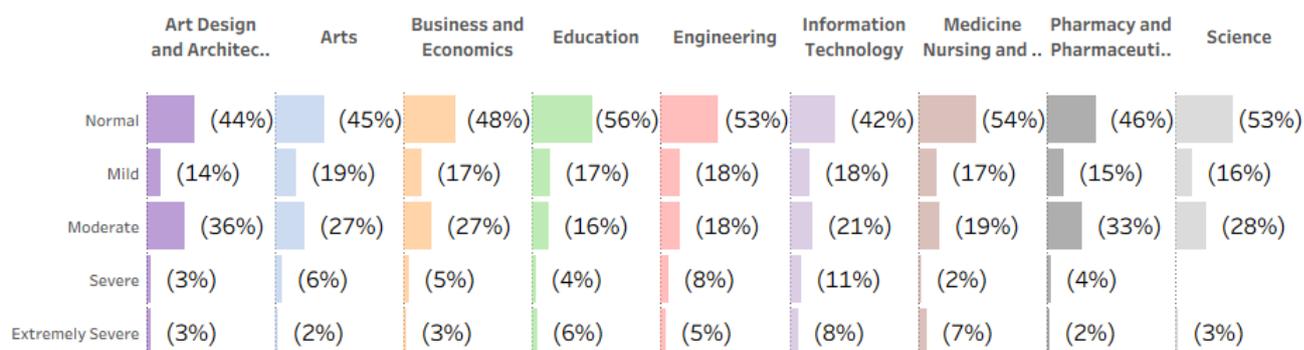
1. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Landscape

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.

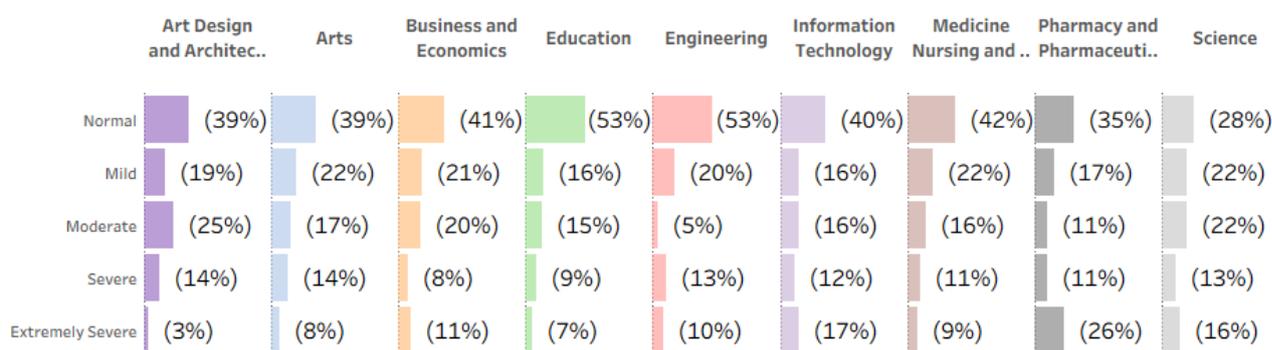
DASS21 and Mental Health Indicators

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.

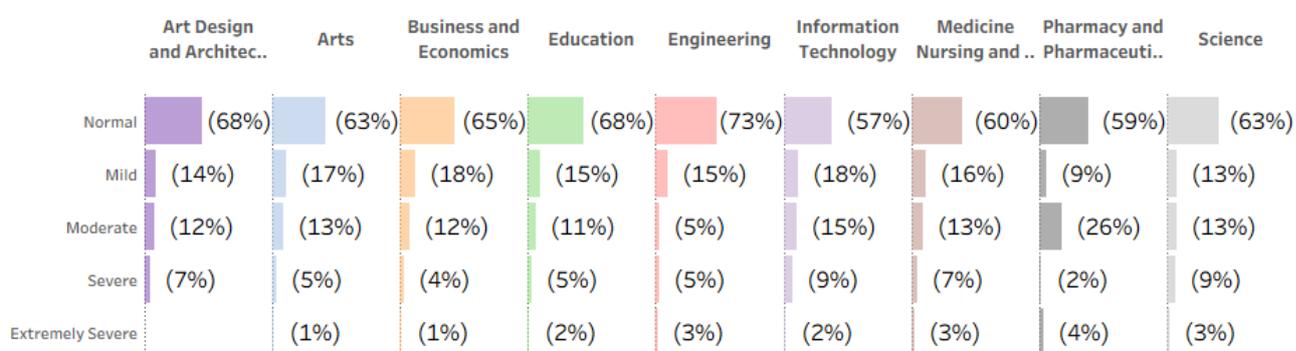
Depression:



Anxiety:



Stress:



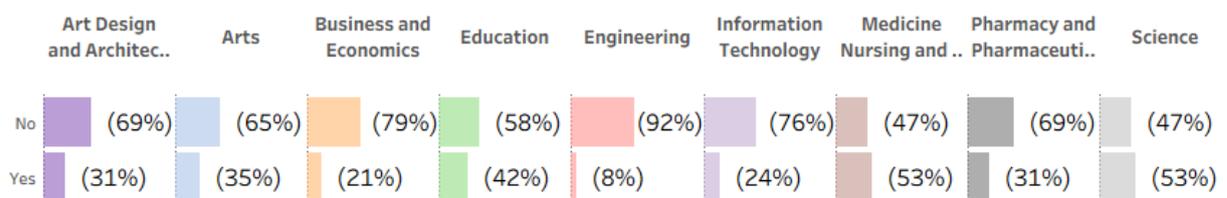
The DASS21 results reveal concerning mental health patterns among Pharmacy graduate coursework students, with substantial proportions reporting symptoms across all three measured dimensions. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of Pharmacy students reported moderate to extremely severe depression (with only 46% in the normal range), whilst a striking 48% experienced moderate to extremely severe anxiety, and 32% reported moderate to extremely severe stress. Notably, Pharmacy students exhibited the highest rate of extremely severe anxiety across all faculties (26%), more than double the rate observed in every other discipline with the exception of Science (16%) and substantially exceeding the institution-wide pattern.

The prevalence of elevated anxiety levels warrants particular attention given the demanding nature of Pharmacy coursework programmes, which combine intensive academic requirements with professional placement obligations and, for the many international student respondents (69% of Pharmacy respondents), the additional pressures of navigating unfamiliar healthcare systems and professional registration pathways. The intersection of these mental health indicators – particularly the exceptionally high anxiety rates – with the financial pressures and isolation patterns explored later in this report suggests that Pharmacy students face compounding pressures that may benefit from coordinated, multi-faceted support interventions rather than isolated mental health services alone.

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



Mental health support utilisation among Pharmacy students reveals a concerning mismatch between need and access. Only 31% of Pharmacy students reported having accessed mental health support, despite the cohort exhibiting the highest rate of extremely severe anxiety across all faculties. The gap between Pharmacy's elevated anxiety levels and relatively modest support access rates indicates potential barriers to help-seeking that warrant investigation, including stigma concerns, awareness of available services or practical constraints such as placement schedules conflicting with counselling availability.

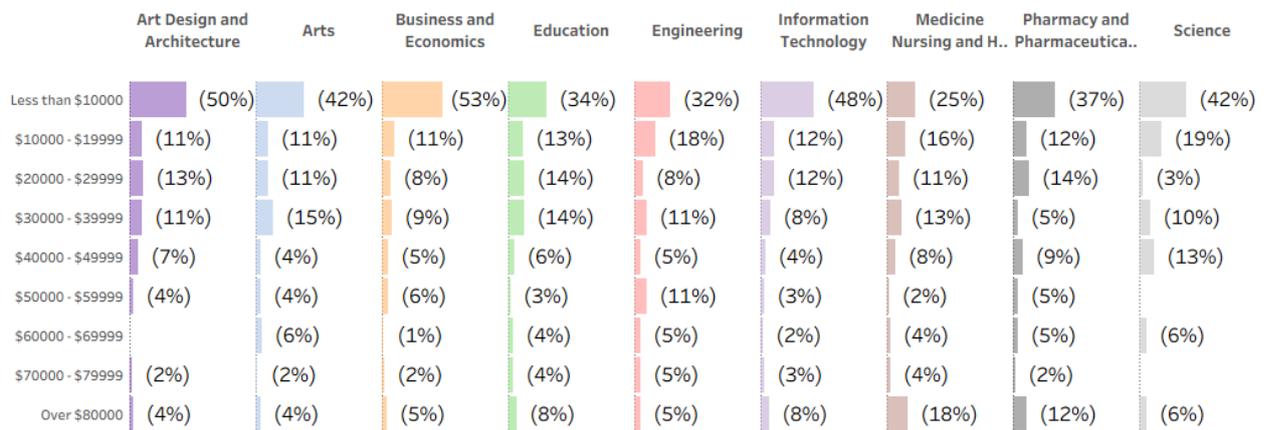
2. Financial Circumstances and Study Impact

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

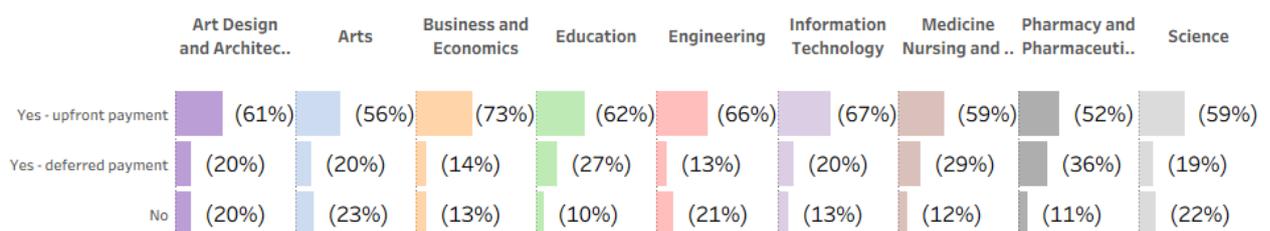


More than one-third (37%) of Pharmacy respondents report earning less than \$10,000 per year, positioning Pharmacy in the middle tier among other faculties for this lowest income bracket but indicating substantial financial constraint for a significant minority. A combined 63% earn less than \$30,000 per year, demonstrating that majority of Pharmacy students experience income stress. However, the patterns in the data show a bimodal distribution, revealing a polarised cohort: whilst most students survive on minimal incomes, 19% earn over \$60,000 per year, with 12% in the over \$80,000 bracket, likely representing continuing professional pharmacists undertaking coursework for specialisation or career advancement. This income distribution suggests most Pharmacy students face considerable financial pressure, particularly given Melbourne's high cost of living and may need to balance substantial employment alongside intensive coursework and placement requirements to maintain financial viability.

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 overwhelming majority of Pharmacy students (89%) bear direct financial responsibility for their course fees, with only 11% receiving full fee coverage through scholarships or other support. Pharmacy exhibits the highest rate of deferred fee payment across all faculties (36%), suggesting many students are accumulating substantial HELP debt to manage the immediate financial burden. Just over half (52%) make upfront payments, lowest among the faculties. The high reliance on deferred payment mechanisms, combined with the low-income levels documented earlier, indicates that most Pharmacy students are managing significant debt obligations whilst surviving on minimal current income, creating compounding financial pressures that extend beyond their study period into future career earnings.

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 Pharmacy

Payment Source	Use this source	All	Most	About Half	A little
Self	39%	17%	0%	9%	13%
Family	87%	65%	17%	4%	0%
Employer	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sponsor	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	4%	0%	0%	0%	4%

Pharmacy students demonstrate a distinctive funding pattern characterised by heavy reliance on family financial support and complete absence of employer or sponsor funding. An overwhelming 87% of fee-paying Pharmacy students receive at least some family contribution, with 65% having their families cover all course fees. Self-funding represents the second major source at 39%, with 17% paying all fees themselves and another 22% contributing at least partially. Most strikingly, no Pharmacy students reported any employer or sponsor support. This absence of workplace funding suggests Pharmacy coursework respondents are predominantly pre-professional rather than upskilling employees, representing a cohort heavily dependent on family resources or personal

finances rather than institutional support, which amplifies financial vulnerability particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or those whose families face economic constraints.

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

	Pharmacy 2023	Pharmacy 2025	Monash 2025
Doing great	14%	12%	4%
Getting by	62%	33%	37%
Just coping	19%	33%	41%
Having trouble	5%	22%	19%

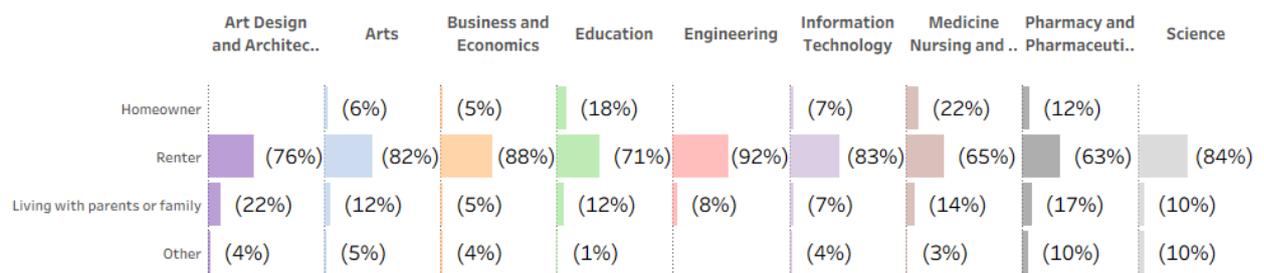
Pharmacy students’ financial wellbeing reveals concerning patterns, with 55% either “just coping” (33%) or “having trouble” (22%) financially. Only 12% report doing great financially, positioning Pharmacy above the Monash-wide average of 4% for this top category, likely reflecting the small cohort of continuing professional pharmacists with established incomes of \$60,000 per year and above (at 19%).

Additionally, the comparison with 2023 Pharmacy data reveals substantial deterioration in financial circumstances: the proportion “getting by” halved from 62% to 33%, whilst those “just coping” increased from 19% to 33% and those “having trouble” surged from 5% to 22%. This downward trajectory may suggest changing cohort composition or worsening economic conditions affecting Pharmacy students particularly acutely in terms of housing and daily expenses affordability.

Housing Costs

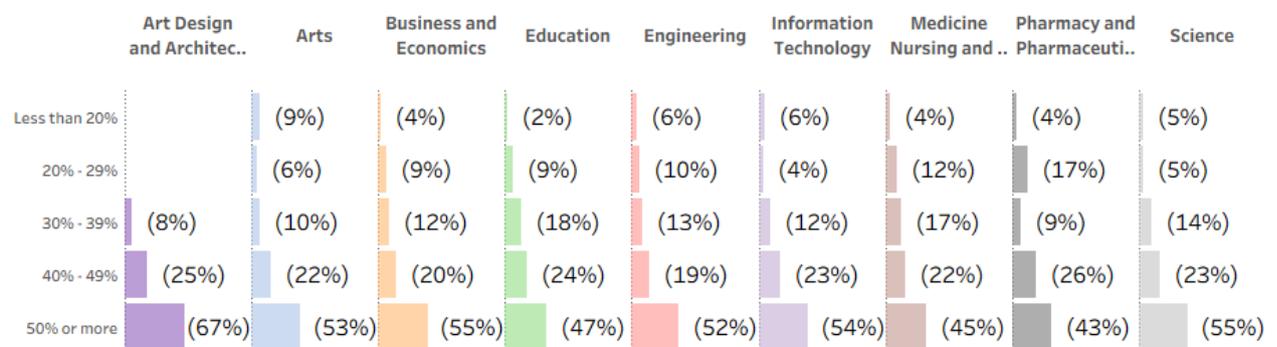
Housing represents one of the most significant financial pressures facing graduate coursework students, with rental costs consuming substantial proportions of monthly income and directly constraining students' capacity to meet other essential expenses. The following analysis examines living arrangements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

Living Situation by Faculty



Pharmacy students demonstrate a housing pattern heavily skewed towards rental accommodation, with 63% renting privately, however this represents the lowest rate of renting across faculties. Notably, 17% continue living with parents or family, suggesting younger cohort demographics or students pursuing strategies to minimise housing costs whilst studying. Only 12% are homeowners, consistent with the observed income levels previously in the report, including lower income levels for majority of students (63% earning less than \$30,000 per year) and predominantly pre-professional status of the cohort. The high rental dependence, combined with Melbourne's elevated housing costs, creates substantial fixed expenses that consume significant portions of the limited incomes documented earlier, leaving minimal financial buffer for unexpected costs or course-related expenses beyond basic survival needs.

Rent as Percentage of Monthly Income by Faculty



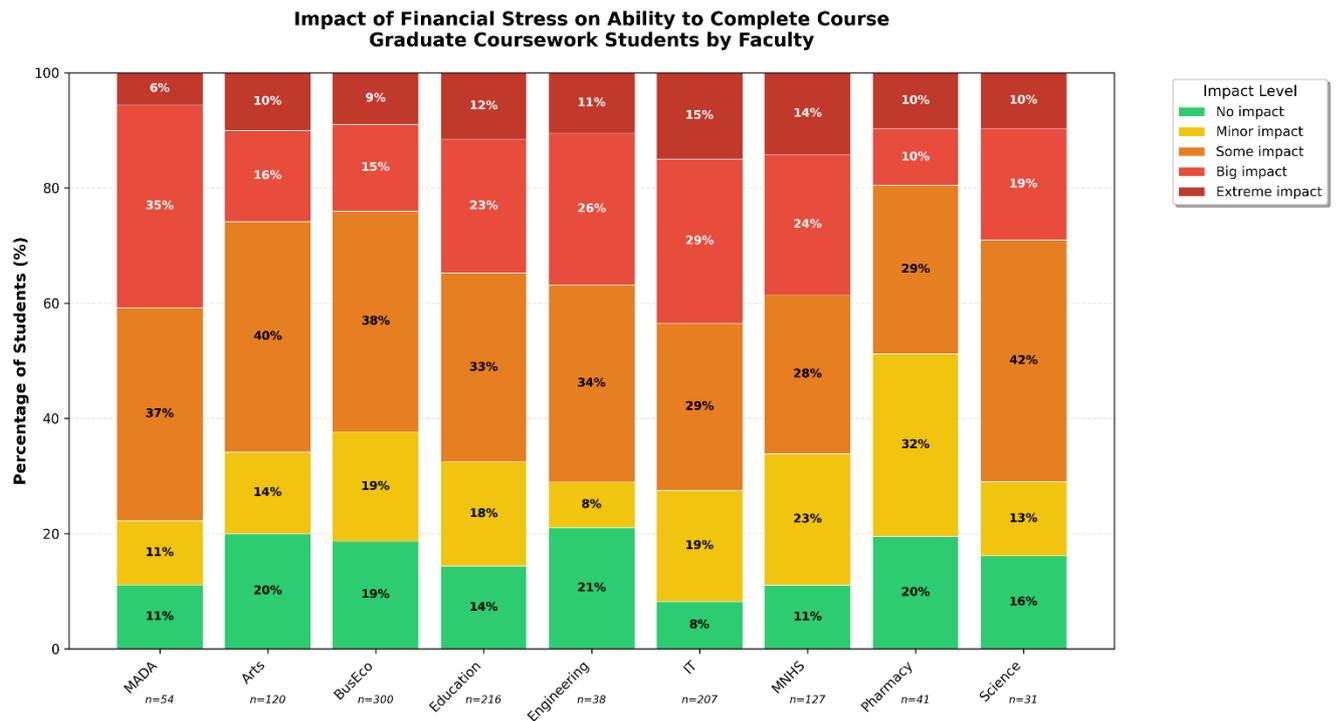
Pharmacy students face severe rental burden, with 43% of renters spending half or more of their monthly income on rent alone. Meanwhile, almost four-fifths (79%) of Pharmacy renters exceed the

conventional 30% affordability threshold significantly. Only 21% maintain rent below 30% of income, leaving the majority with limited financial capacity for essential goods including food, transport, course materials and unexpected expenses after meeting housing obligations. This rental stress, combined with the low incomes and deteriorating financial wellbeing documented earlier, creates a precarious financial wellbeing situation.

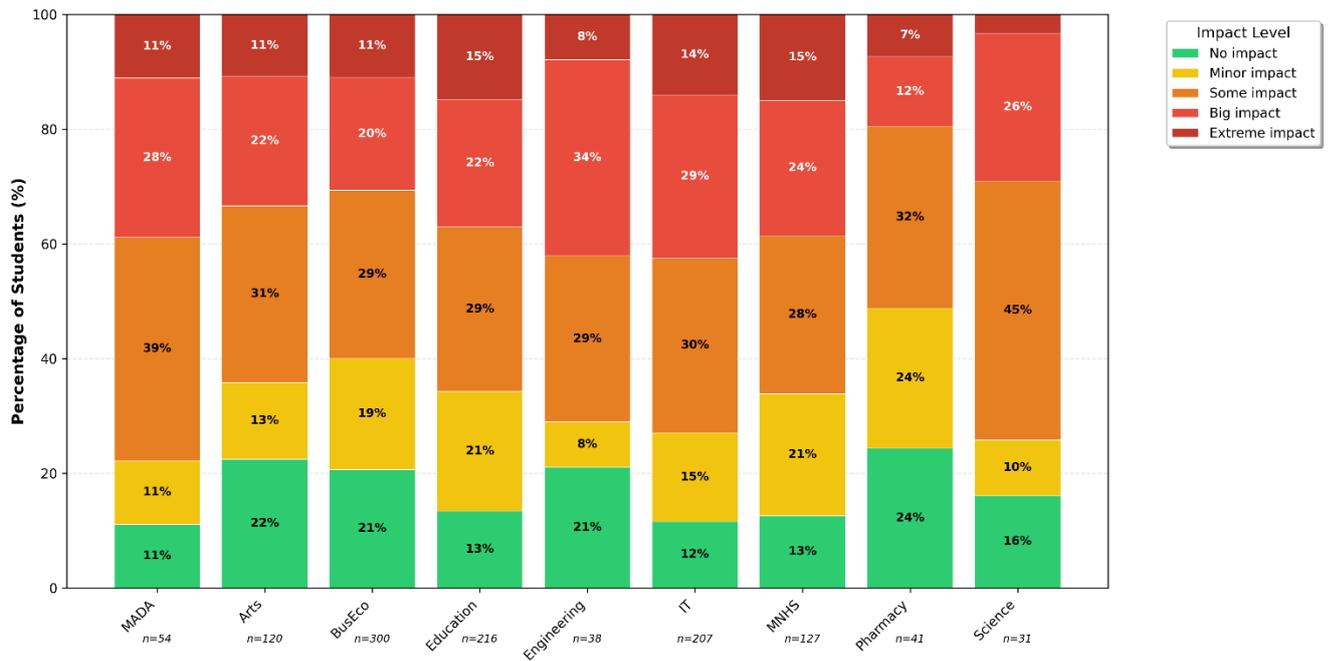
How Financial Stress Impacts Course Engagement

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.

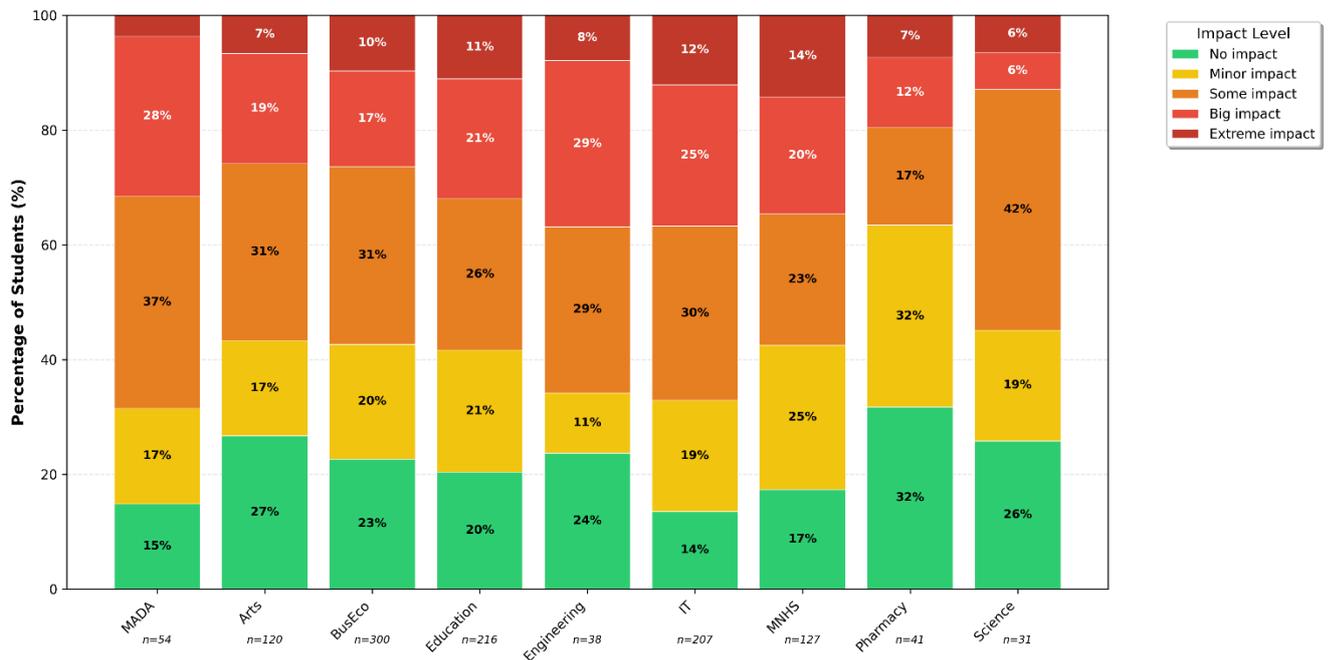
Financial Stress on Completing Course to Best of their Ability



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 substantially impairs Pharmacy students' academic performance, with only 20% reporting no impact on their ability to complete their course to the best of their ability. Almost half (49%) report a noticeable impact. Half (52%) experience minor to some impact, whilst a concerning 20% face big or extreme impact from financial pressures on their academic workcourse progression. A slightly more positive outcome is reported regarding the impact of financial stress on concentration, with 24% of students reporting no impact. However, 51% of students experience

some (32%), big (12%, or extreme (7%) impact, highlighting the influence of external financial wellbeing on cognitive capacity and performance excellence. Pharmacy students report less impact on their ability to attend campus, with 32% comfortably accessing their classes, while 36% report at least some impact.

The patterns described here highlight that concentration of financial stress effects at moderate levels (29% some impact, 32% minor impact) indicates that whilst catastrophic impacts remain limited to a fifth of students, financial concerns can create persistent drag on course engagement and performance for a significant portion of the Pharmacy most of the cohort, potentially undermining their capacity to develop clinical competencies essential for professional practice.

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:

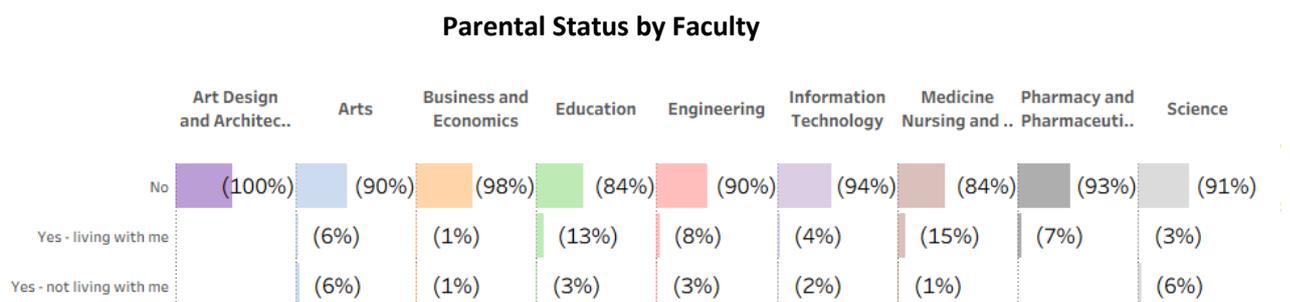
“My parents are funding my tuition and expenses but I want to help them by doing a part-time job. However, the course work is packed with assignments that I am mentally and emotionally drained and physically exhausted to do a part-time job. I only sleep for 3 hrs a day due to my assignments that I can barely [have] any time for social engagement or part-time job.”

“No further comments apart from needing to take up more shifts in order to achieve a more comfortable financial position.”

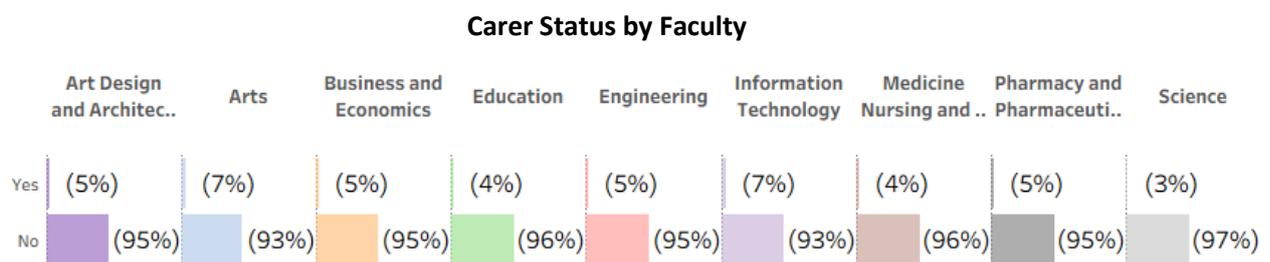
“Not easy to cover the living in Melbourne.”

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.



Pharmacy students demonstrate the lowest rate of parental responsibilities across all faculties, with 93% reporting they do not have children. Only 7% of Pharmacy students are parents, all living with their children, while 93% report having no children. This small minority likely reflects that the cohort comprises of students who may be less established in their lives in terms of professional background, leading to the possibility that these students are also less likely to have transitioned into other key markers of adulthood such as home ownership and starting a family. The minimal parental representation might be mistaken as suggesting that family-friendly policies may be less critical for Pharmacy, compared to faculties with older, more career-established cohorts; however, the small number of student parents who do exist may face particularly acute isolation given their distinctiveness within the peer community.



Pharmacy students report minimal carer responsibilities, with only 5% serving as primary carers for family members with disability, chronic illness or frailty. Meanwhile, 95% report having no carer 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.

No Pharmacy students provided comments regarding 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

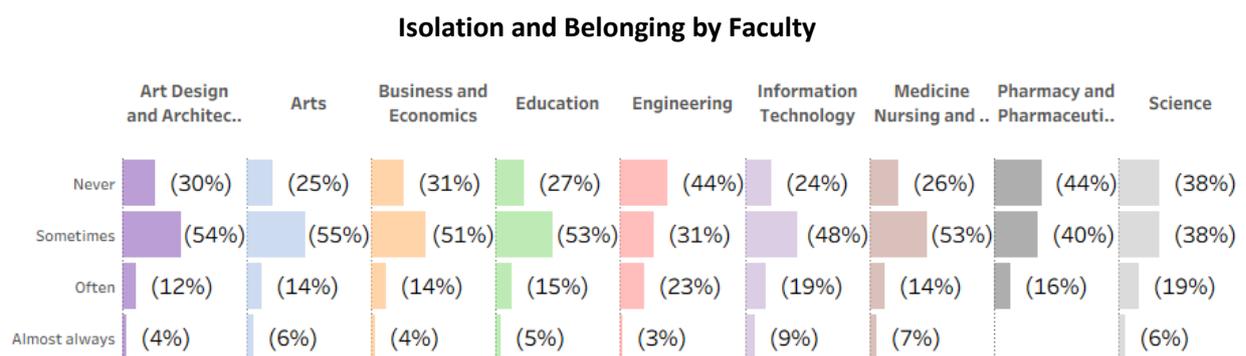
Social connections and peer relationships form fundamental components of the graduate coursework experience for many students. Yet, the survey data reveal challenges in fostering meaningful community amongst this population. The graduate coursework environment appears to present unique obstacles to social 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.



Pharmacy students report the equal-lowest rate of isolation across all faculties, with 44% never feeling isolated or lacking belonging in the past month. Forty percent (40%) experience isolation sometimes, whilst 16% feel isolated often. Strikingly, Pharmacy is the only faculty whose students do not report experiencing isolation ‘almost always’. This relatively positive pattern may reflect the cohort structure of Pharmacy programmes, where students progress through coursework and placements together in defined cohorts, creating natural opportunities for peer connection.

However, the student testimonies reveal that even within this structured environment, isolation remains a significant concern for many, driven by factors including limited opportunities for non-academic socialisation, international student status and time poverty from balancing study with employment or placement demands.

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 Pharmacy graduate coursework environment:

"Having no close friends around me."

"Not much opportunity to get to know people in my cohort. People I now know I met in predetermined groups for group projects."

"I feel homesick."

"Being time poor and unable to spend time with those who matter."

"Feeling worthless; thinking people I love are only tolerating me."

"The difficulties in communicating with others because of a shame of my poor English."

"Leaving home and coming to a different country alone. Lack of friends."

"Balancing work and studies unable to arrange for fun activities on weekends."

"The overall exertion from internship alongside studying resulted in very little opportunities to socialise and meet up with friends."

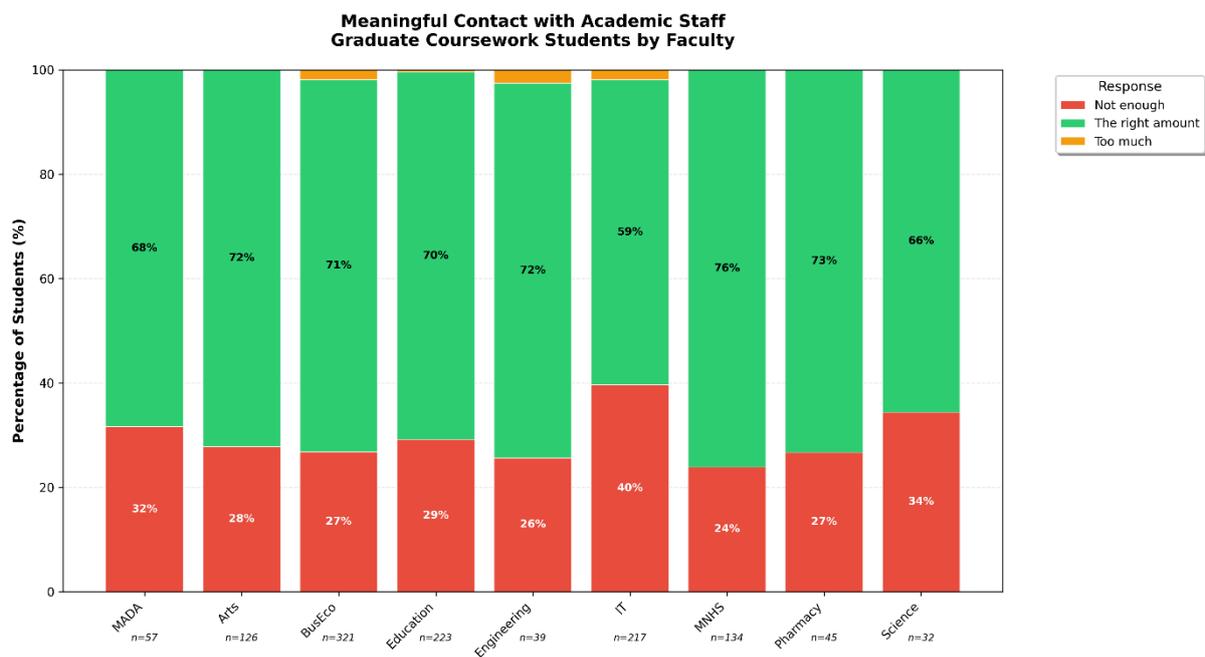
"I had some interesting ideas that I couldn't naturally share with the group-mates. We usually only talk about assessments."

"The absence of my current friends living closer to me and being an international student living away from your family and childhood friends is extremely difficult given the time difference and just in general missing them so so so much when the situation at home has not been going great also."

Meaningful Contact

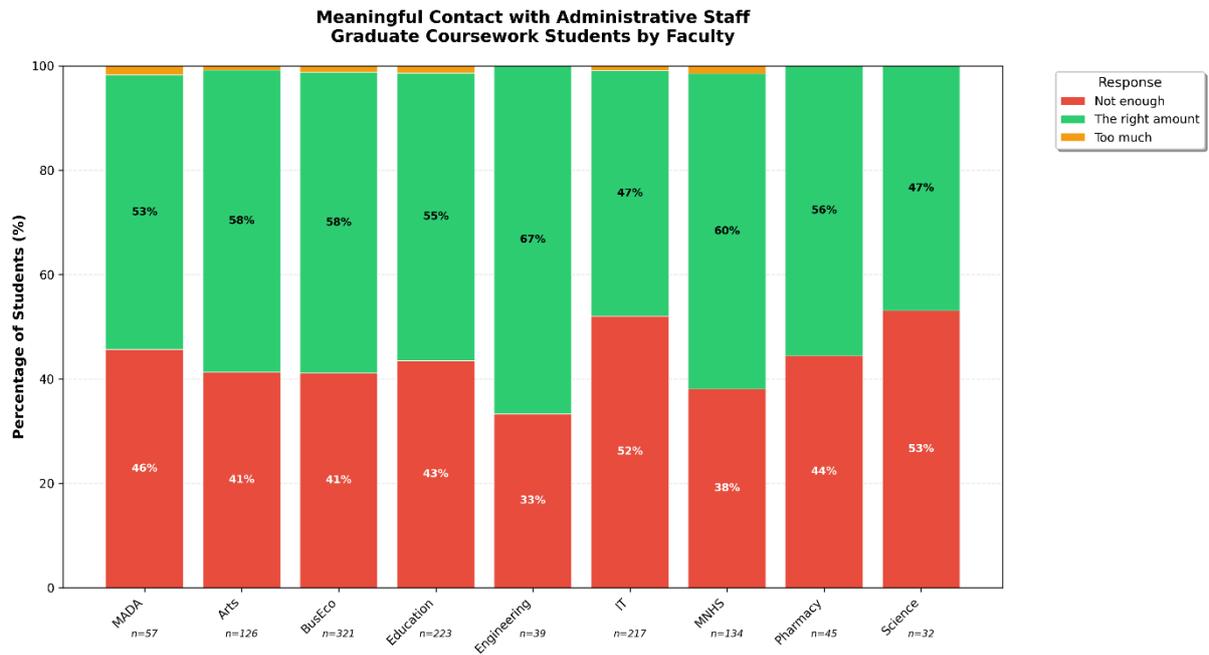
To assess students' access to support networks, respondents were asked to evaluate the frequency of their meaningful connections across five key relationship categories: academic staff, administrative staff, family, friends and peers. This analysis examines how students perceive their level of connection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

Academic Staff



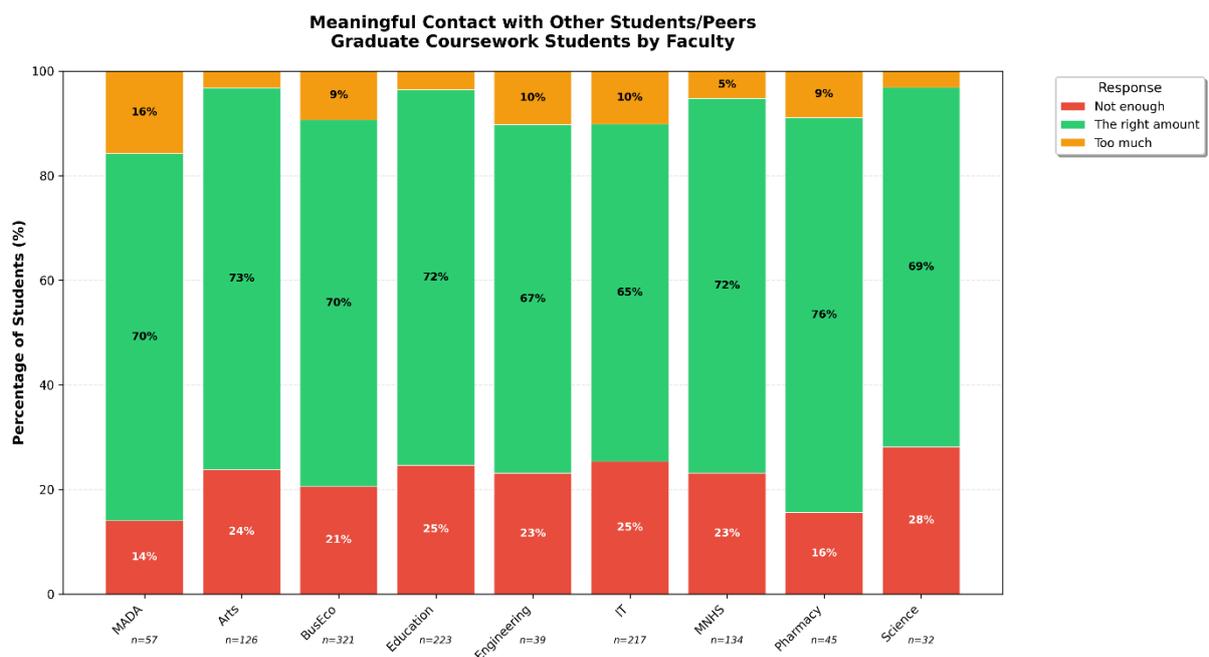
Seventy-three percent (73%) of Pharmacy students experience appropriate meaningful contact with academic staff. However, 27% desire more connection, suggesting opportunities for enhanced staff engagement beyond scheduled coursework activities.

Administrative Staff



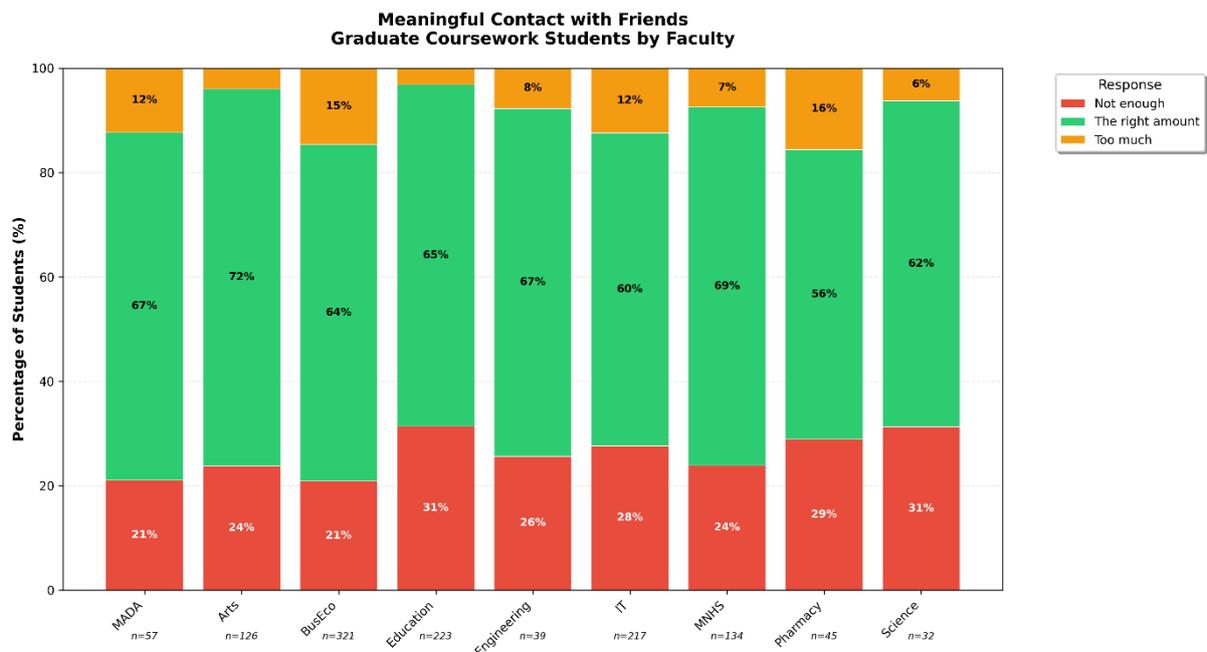
Forty-four percent (44%) of Pharmacy students report insufficient administrative staff contact, with only 56% experiencing appropriate levels. This highlights substantial unmet support needs, potentially reflecting challenges navigating enrolment, placement coordination or progression requirements.

Other Students/Peers



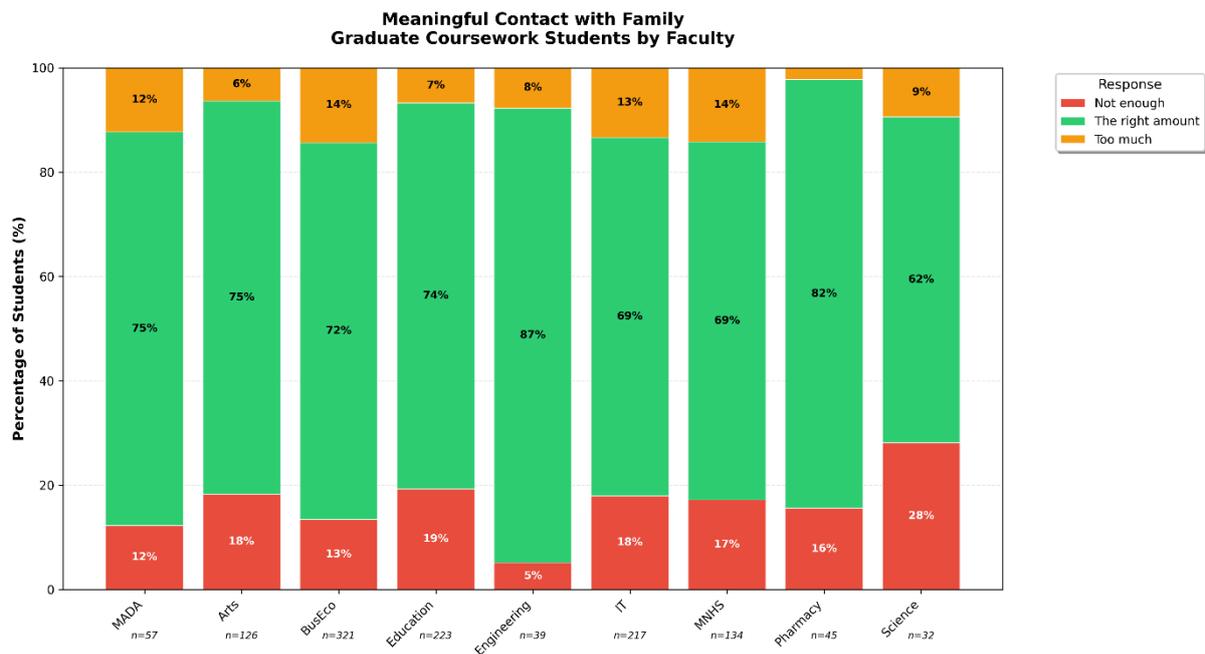
Pharmacy demonstrates strong peer connection, with 76% reporting appropriate contact levels and only 16% desiring more. This is the highest level of positive reporting for peer contact among all faculties. This favourable positioning likely reflects cohort-based programme structures creating natural peer relationship opportunities.

Friends



Conversely, Pharmacy reports the lowest friend contact satisfaction across all faculties, with only 56% experiencing appropriate levels, indicating that programme intensity may limit the capacity of students to invest in their personal life outside of university. However, a small minority of Pharmacy students also report the highest proportion of having too much contact (16%). A further 29% desire more contact with friends. This pattern likely reflects time poverty from intensive coursework demands and international student distance from established networks, while those reporting too much contact may feel some guilt or frustration that socialising can redirect energy away from the demands of their course.

Family



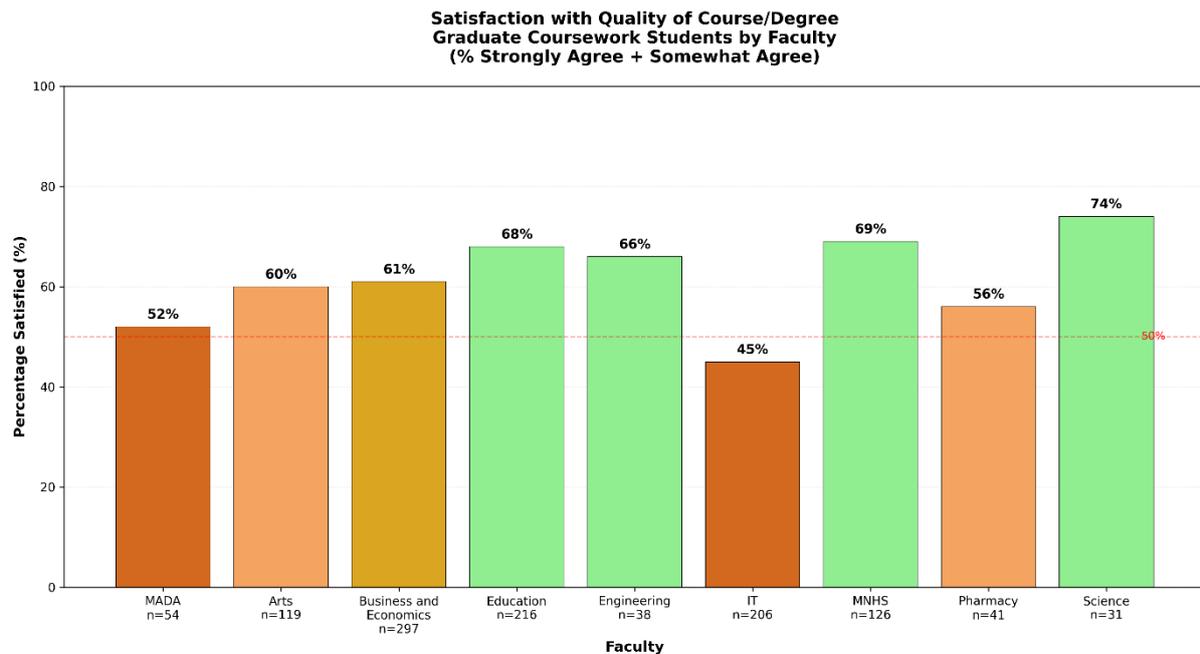
Family contact shows the strongest satisfaction, with 82% reporting appropriate levels – the second-highest rate across all faculties. This positive pattern likely reflects international students maintaining regular digital communication and domestic students’ geographic proximity to family, particularly with the 17% who report living with family.

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 report.

Course Satisfaction

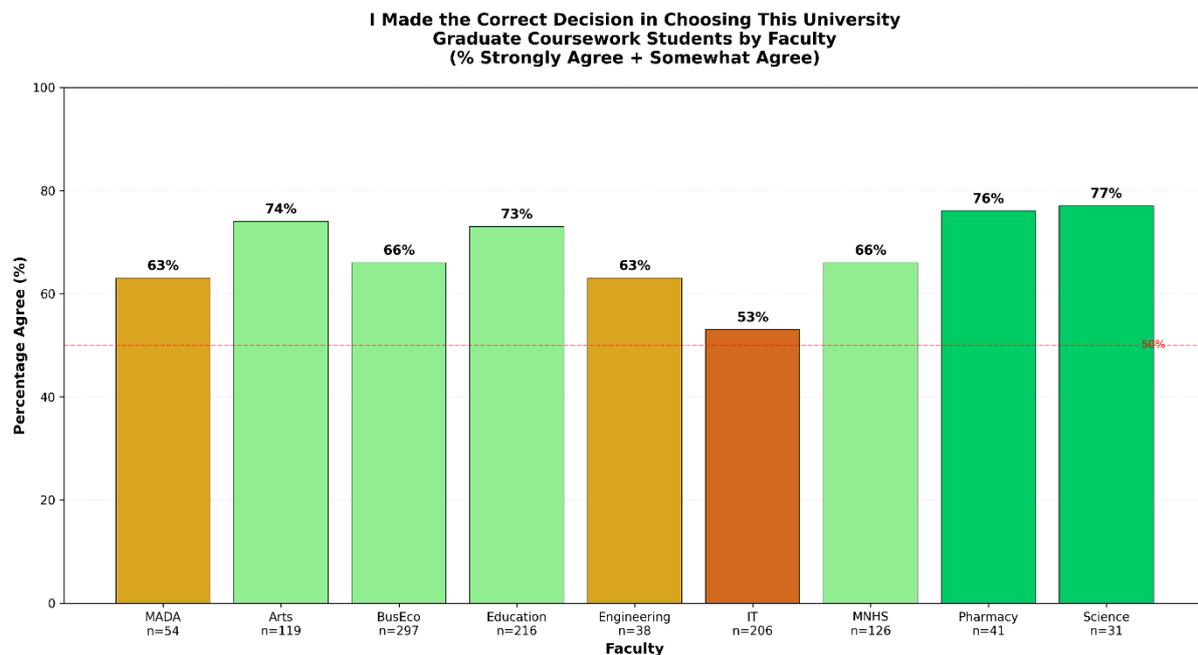
Course satisfaction represents a critical measure of student experience, reflecting whether academic programmes meet expectations and deliver meaningful value. Satisfaction patterns across graduate coursework cohorts reveal important insights about how different student groups perceive the quality of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



Pharmacy students report concerning levels of course satisfaction, with only 56% agreeing they are satisfied with the quality of their degree, positioning Pharmacy as the third-lowest faculty for student course satisfaction. This falls substantially below the institution-wide patterns and signals significant dissatisfaction amongst nearly half the cohort. This dissatisfaction pattern, combined with the high anxiety levels (48% of students report moderate to extremely severe anxiety) and value-for-money concerns documented elsewhere, suggests substantial opportunities for programme enhancement.

University Choice

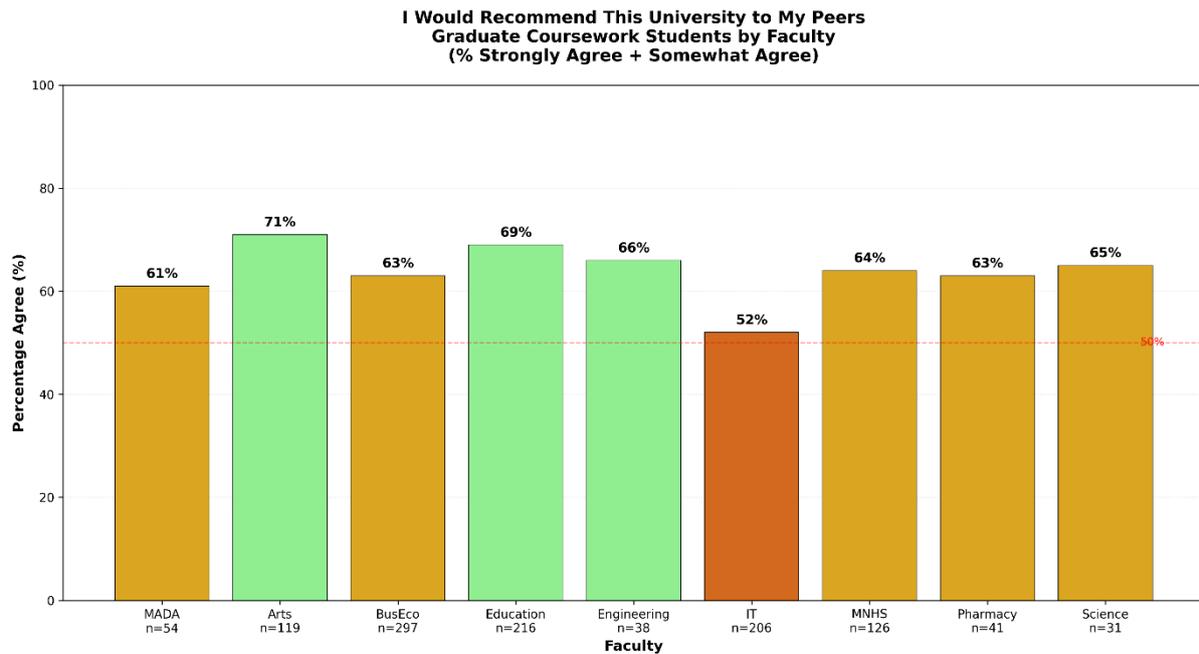
Beyond satisfaction with course quality, students' reflections on whether they made the correct decision in choosing Monash provides insight into their overall evaluation of their educational experience. This measure captures retrospective assessment of university choice, encompassing course quality,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



Despite relatively low course satisfaction, 76% of Pharmacy students agree they made the correct decision in choosing Monash, positioning the faculty as second-highest across the institution. This apparent contradiction suggests students value Monash's institutional reputation, research standing or career prospects even whilst expressing dissatisfaction with specific programme elements. The strong endorsement of university choice despite programme concerns may reflect limited alternative options for specialised Pharmacy education in Australia, international students' investment in the Monash brand for home-country recognition or separation between overall institutional satisfaction and specific coursework experience.

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.

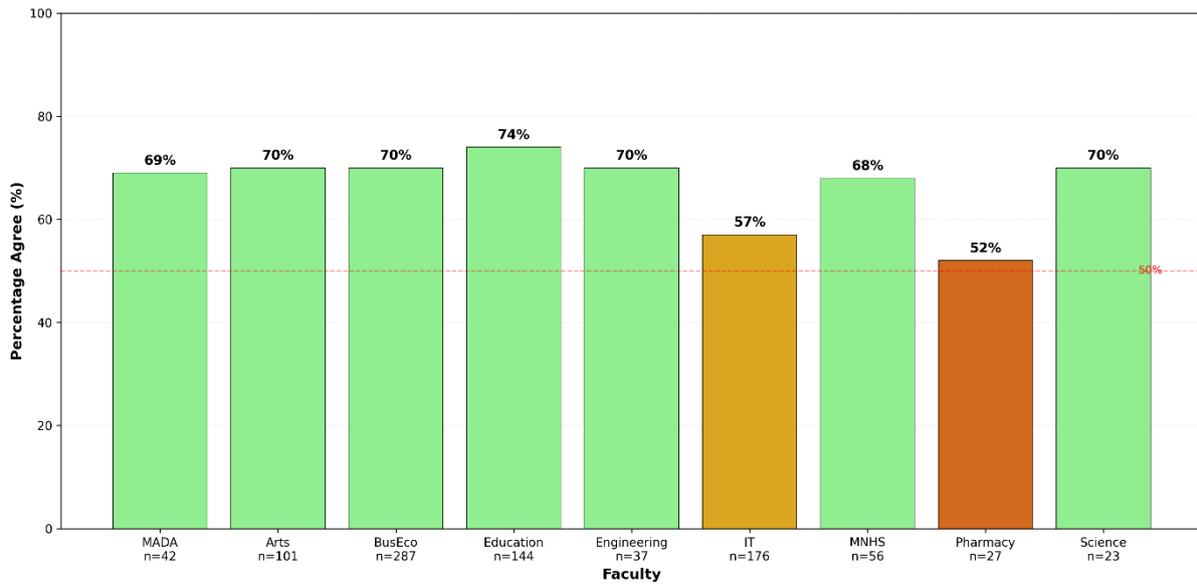


Sixty-three per cent of Pharmacy students would recommend Monash to their peers. This relatively modest endorsement rate, combined with the low course satisfaction documented earlier, suggests that whilst most students affirm their own university choice, they demonstrate less confidence advocating for Monash to others. The gap between personal satisfaction with choosing Monash (76%) and willingness to recommend it to peers (63%) indicates reservations about the broader applicability of the Pharmacy experience to others' circumstances.

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.

**I Would Recommend Studying in Australia to My Peers
Graduate Coursework Students by Faculty
(% Strongly Agree + Somewhat Agree)**

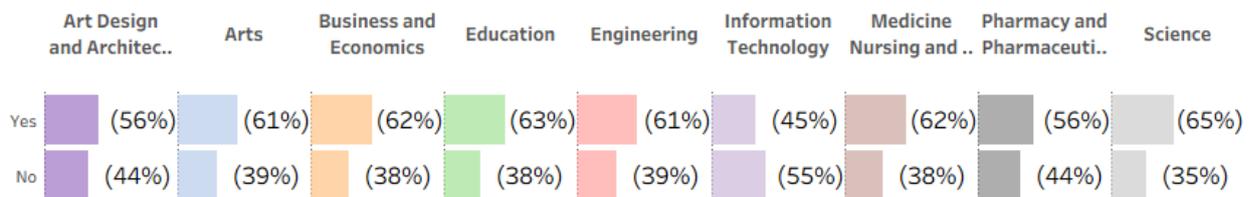


International Pharmacy students demonstrate the lowest endorsement of studying in Australia across all faculties, with only 52% willing to recommend the Australian study experience to peers. This represents substantial dissatisfaction beyond institutional concerns, may reflect challenges including high living costs documented earlier, labour market access barriers for international graduates in regulated health professions, visa restrictions limiting work opportunities and potentially disappointing returns on substantial financial investment. The notably low Australia recommendation rate suggests international students perceive systemic challenges beyond Monash-specific issues, although this does not preclude Monash and the Pharmacy faculty from focussing efforts to address international student satisfaction through tailored support for mental health, labour market navigation and financial planning guidance.

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



Pharmacy demonstrates divided perceptions of value for money, with 56% agreeing their course offers value and 44% disagreeing, positioning the faculty in the middle tier. The substantial minority expressing value concerns aligns with the course satisfaction and programme quality issues documented earlier. Student testimonies reveal specific grievances including excessive reliance on peer-led learning rather than expert instruction, unclear assessment requirements, perceived overuse of AI-generated feedback, insufficient industry connections, and concerns that high fees do not reflect the quality of educational delivery received.

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 responses provided by Pharmacy students, these highlighted concerns regarding quality of content, the increasing prevalence of Artificial Intelligence, access to resources and career transitions. Below are a selection of testimonies capturing the key issues Pharmacy students perceive regarding course value for money:

“There are problems with the course design and no knowledge can be acquired.”

“Too much students and very little teacher.”

“There is no teacher teaching all is self-study and discussion with classmates in class. My tuition fee is paid to the school to hire teachers to teach not to let classmates and chatgpt teach me.”

“While I feel like the structure of the course [it] is [a] mess – especially in this semester and the feedback is come from AI also they are told me how to provide feedback but they are not doing the same thing [when] they are talking. Also, I don't know why the assessments are separately with the thing we are doing during the workshop even we are master student we

should learn something from the professionals not learn from AI. In addition every unit assessments for the unit is not clear [and] we need to ask then there are answers so what the point of the instructor of the assessment and the rubric are really hard to find."

"It is very expensive and I'm not guaranteed to see a return on investment."

"The cost of living in Australia is too high in comparison of the one in my home country. And I think the course I enrol in is mostly based on teamwork instead of learning from tutors. Therefore, what I can get depends on how I collaborate with peers. If there is an unsatisfying experience of teamwork I feel it not valuable."

"University should be free. Education should not be reserved for the economically privileged."

"I pay full fees and we are essentially teaching ourselves so much because majority of the work I have is group work for assignments. I have learnt minimal content though I was hoping to learn a lot considering it's a coursework degree."

"Online courses should be less expensive."

"The knowledge taught is too superficial and provides little help for finding a job after graduation."

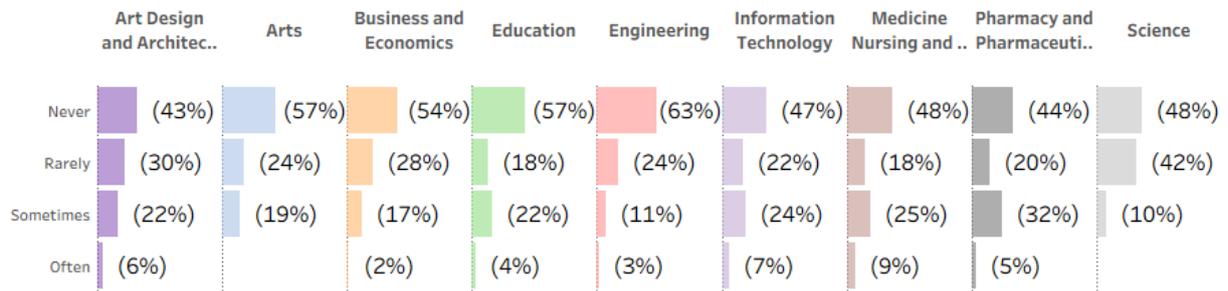
"As the course is relatively new there are always ways to improve delivery of units. Also I haven't experienced enough of the course to really give an opinion on value for money. The cohort is relatively disappointing considering a lot of students use genAI for a lot of the assignments, including translating written work from native language to English generating content and 'research' for the assessments and using genAI to write their entire assessment/part. This really puts extra stress on domestic students who do not want to be flagged for AI usage or want a good grade on their group assessments."

"A lack of connections with industry and jobs."

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

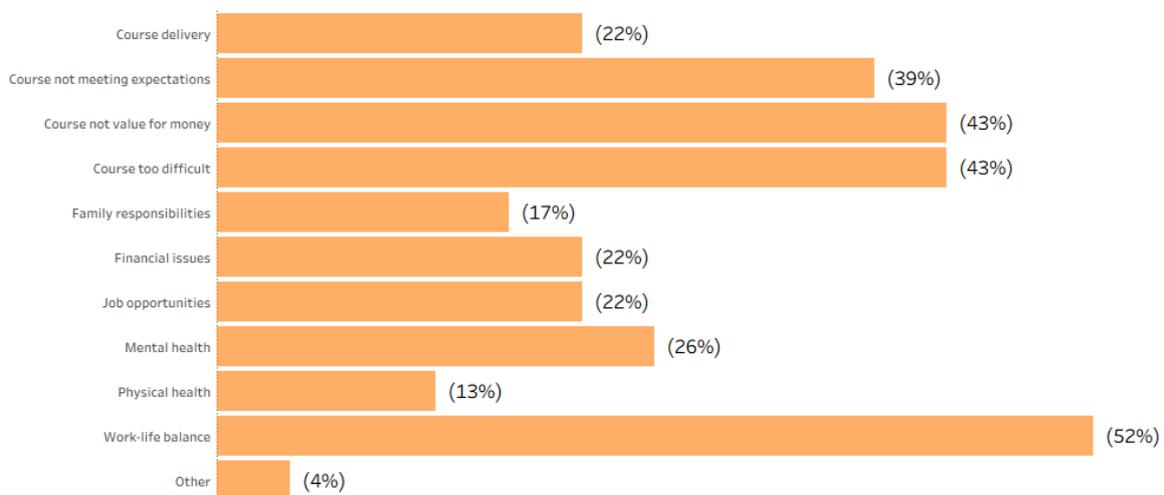


Pharmacy students demonstrate concerning retention vulnerability, with 57% having considered leaving their course at some point (rarely 20%, sometimes 32%, often 5%). Whilst only 44% never considered departure, this is the second lowest among faculties indicating that the substantial proportion contemplating withdrawal may be experiencing signals underlying dissatisfaction requiring attention. The 37% considering leaving sometimes or often represents a particularly at-risk cohort, and is the highest proportion of students reporting at these levels of withdrawal consideration across the faculties. This retention concern aligns with the value-for-money doubts, course satisfaction issues and financial pressures documented throughout the report, suggesting that addressing programme quality and student support could meaningfully improve retention outcomes.

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 Pharmacy



Work-life balance emerges as the dominant driver of departure consideration, cited by 52% of Pharmacy students contemplating withdrawal. This is followed closely by value-for-money concerns (43%), course difficulty (43%), and unmet expectations (39%) and course delivery (22%), forming a cluster of interconnected programme quality and viability concerns. Mental health (26%) and financial issues (22%) represent substantial secondary factors, whilst family responsibilities (17%) and physical health (13%) affect smaller but significant minorities. Finally, job opportunities (22%) also sway some students in considering departure from Pharmacy programs.

These patterns reveals that retention vulnerability stems primarily from programme intensity overwhelming students' capacity to maintain sustainable study patterns, compounded by doubts about whether the educational value justifies the financial and personal costs. The convergence of work-life balance pressures, difficulty levels and unmet expectations suggests that course design modifications addressing workload distribution and learning support could meaningfully improve retention outcomes.

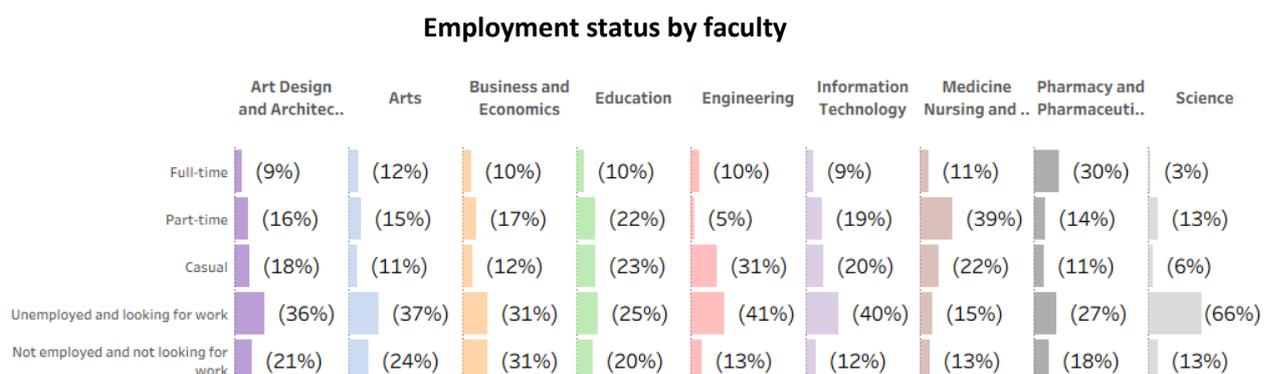
6. Employment and Career Planning

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 Pharmacy, 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 Pharmacy 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

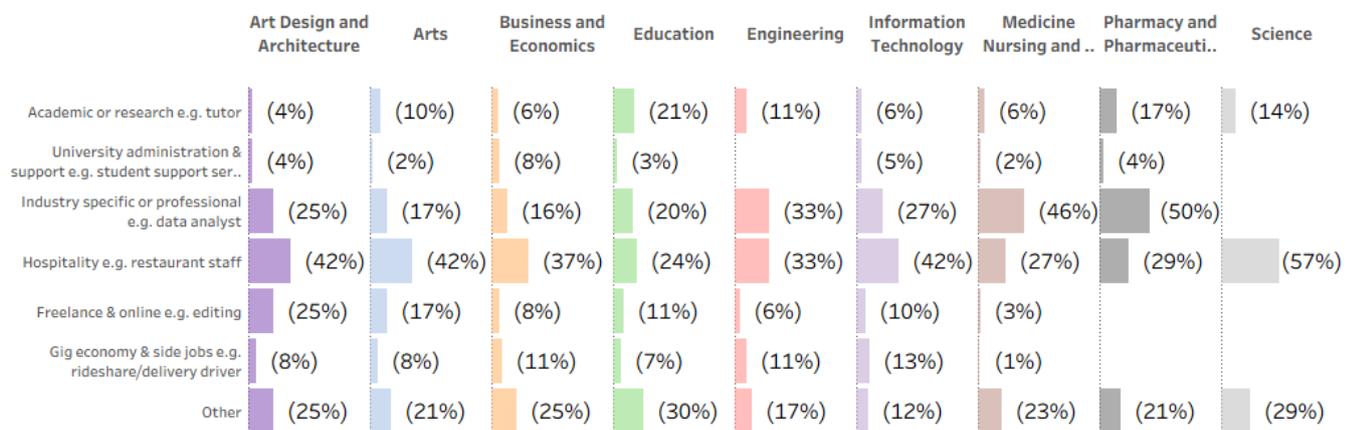
The following table outlines the employment status of Monash graduate coursework students.



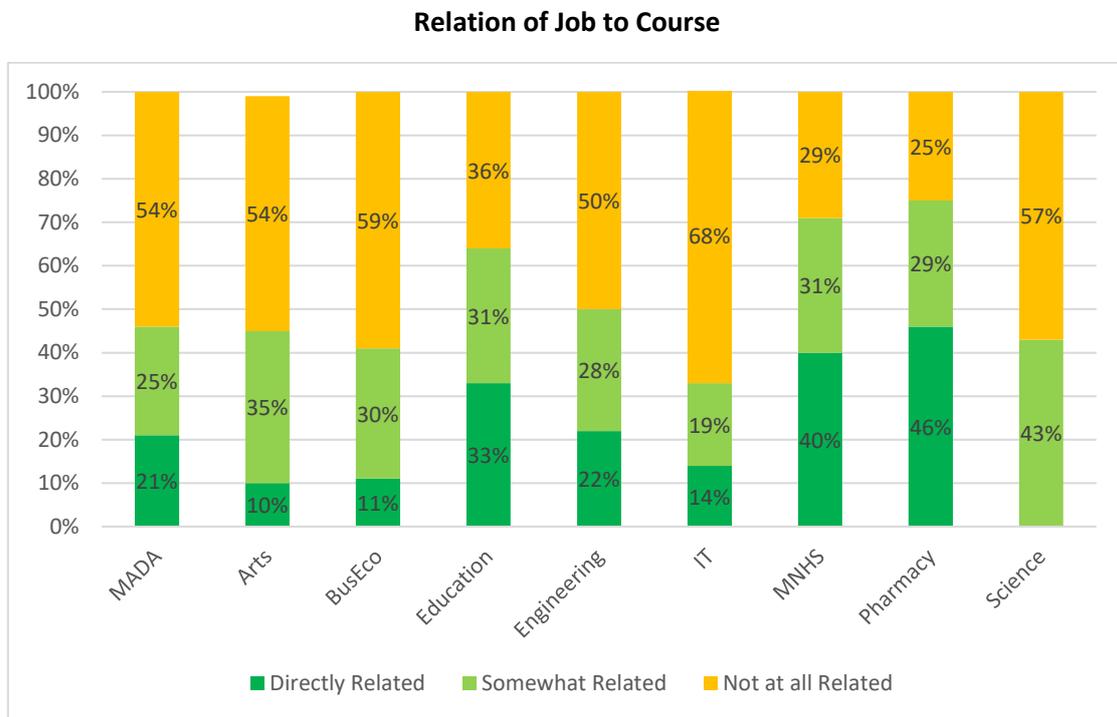
Pharmacy demonstrates a polarised employment pattern, with 30% working full-time – the highest rate across all faculties – whilst 27% remain unemployed and actively seeking work. An additional 25% work part-time or casually, whilst 18% are not seeking employment. The high full-time employment rate likely reflects continuing professional pharmacists undertaking coursework for specialisation, whilst the substantial unemployment cohort suggests challenges for international students and recent graduates accessing pharmacy positions during study. This bimodal distribution indicates two distinct student populations: established professionals balancing careers with study, and pre-professional students struggling to enter the labour market.

Job Type

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



Pharmacy demonstrates the highest rate of industry-specific or professional employment across all faculties at 50%, reflecting the substantial proportion of continuing professional pharmacists undertaking coursework for specialisation. However, 29% work in hospitality roles, indicating significant reliance on work outside the pharmacy field. Academic or research roles (17%) and other work (21%) constitute the remaining employment, revealing a divided cohort between those successfully integrating study with professional pharmacy practice and those relegated to hospitality work to maintain financial viability.

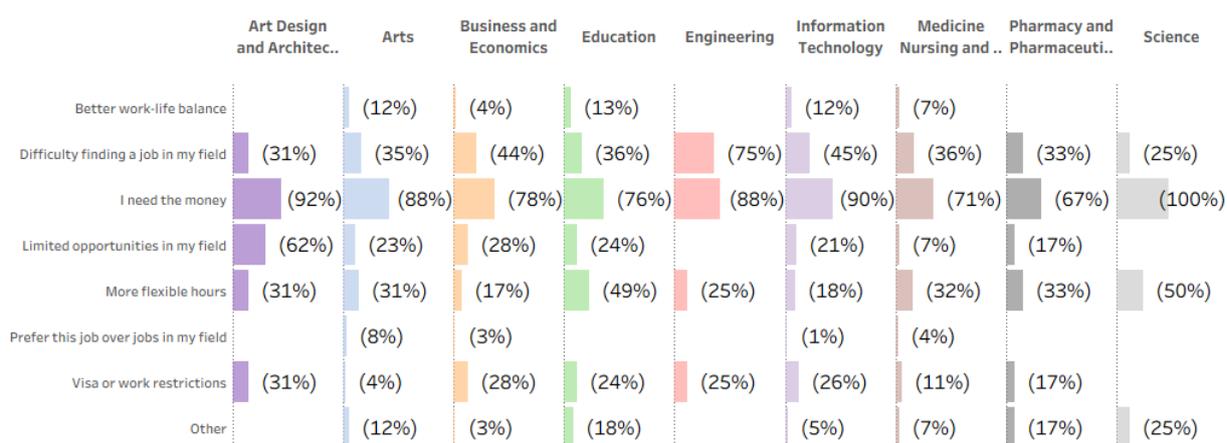


Three-quarters of Pharmacy respondents (75%) report working a job related to their course (46% directly related, 29% somewhat related). Indeed, Pharmacy respondents were the most-likely across the faculties to work in a job associated with their course.

Why Students Work Outside their Field

The employment misalignment for the 25% of students 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

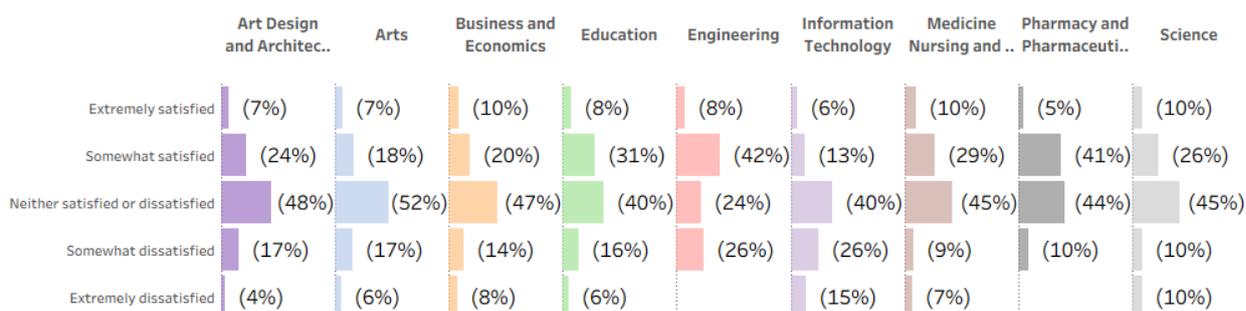


For the one-quarter of employed Pharmacy respondents working in a job unrelated to their course, financial necessity dominates the reasons, with 67% citing “I need the money”. Difficulty finding pharmacy-field work (33%) and seeking more flexible hours (33%) represent substantial secondary factors, indicating labour market access barriers and scheduling incompatibility between pharmacy positions and coursework demands. Visa or work restrictions (17%) affect international students, whilst limited opportunities in the field (17%) suggests oversupply or registration barriers restricting access to pharmacy positions during study.

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



Pharmacy students demonstrate stronger satisfaction with career guidance compared to other faculties, with 46% expressing some level of satisfaction (41% somewhat, 5% extremely) and 10% dissatisfied. Most strikingly, 44% report neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction, suggesting many students have limited engagement with career services or find them insufficiently impactful to form strong opinions. This pattern indicates career guidance may be underdeveloped for Pharmacy's distinctive needs, particularly around international student employment pathways, professional registration requirements and navigating Australia's regulated health workforce as a graduate.

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. Only one student offered a suggestion, centred around the importance of industry connection and personalised support:

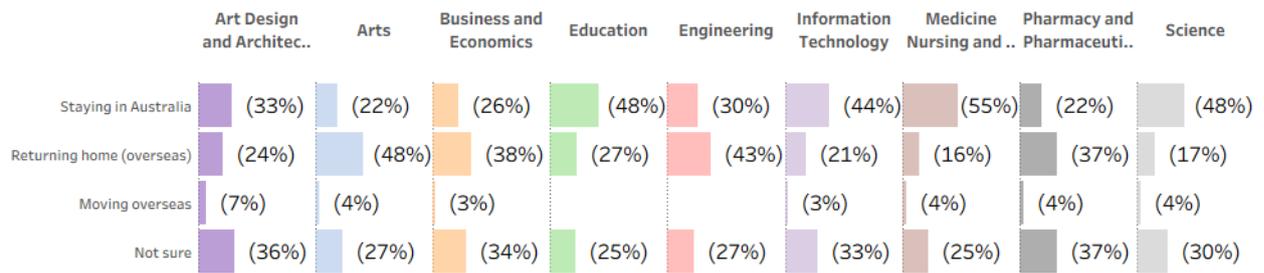
“More events/expos to help us better understand our options with tailored guidance as well.”

This low response rate highlights the disengagement of Pharmacy students with career services to the point where they have not formed strong opinions about this issue. This may be a result of a desire to focus on getting through studies first, or because of a lack of knowledge about services available, for example. It is important for Monash and the Pharmacy faculty not to overlook this finding, and investigate further student needs in career support services.

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



International Pharmacy students demonstrate the equal-lowest intention to remain in Australia across all faculties, with only 22% planning to stay (as with Arts). Thirty-seven per cent plan to return home, whilst an equal 37% remain uncertain about their post-graduation destination.

The current patterns suggest limited confidence in Australian career integration pathways for international pharmacy graduates, likely reflecting professional registration barriers, restricted labour market access for temporary visa holders in regulated health professions and/or disappointing returns on educational investment. The high uncertainty rate indicates many students remain undecided whether their Australian qualifications will facilitate local employment or whether home-country opportunities offer better prospects. This may highlight an opportunity for Monash and the Pharmacy faculty to target specific career planning initiatives to help this substantial minority form concrete future plans.

What Makes Pharmacy Distinct: Key Themes

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

Value-for-Money Concerns Driven by Pedagogical Delivery Issues

Pharmacy students express concerning dissatisfaction with educational quality, reporting the third-lowest course satisfaction across all faculties (56%) despite relatively strong endorsement of choosing Monash (76%). This paradox reveals that whilst students value institutional reputation, they question whether programme delivery justifies substantial financial investment, with 44% explicitly stating their course does not offer value for money.

Student testimonies reveal specific grievances centring on excessive reliance on peer-led learning rather than expert instruction, unclear assessment expectations, perceived overuse of AI-generated feedback, and insufficient connections to professional practice.

These quality concerns intersect with retention vulnerability (56% have considered leaving) and work-life balance pressures (52% cite this as a departure consideration), indicating that programme intensity combined with perceived inadequate instructional support creates unsustainable study conditions that drive both attrition risk and value doubts.

These value-for-money concerns are compounded by dramatic financial deterioration within the Pharmacy cohort, with the proportion “just coping” or “having trouble” financially surging from 24% in 2023 to 55% in 2025. This rapid worsening suggests either changing cohort composition or accelerating economic pressures affecting Pharmacy students particularly acutely, amplifying perceptions that substantial fees are not generating commensurate educational or career returns. When students face both severe financial stress and doubts about programme quality, their willingness to persist through challenging coursework diminishes substantially.

Unsustainable Anxiety Crisis

Pharmacy students demonstrate the highest extremely severe anxiety rate across all faculties (26%), more than double most other disciplines, revealing acute psychological distress within the cohort. This mental health crisis intersects directly with programme design issues, as work-life balance emerges as the dominant driver of departure consideration (52%), followed closely by course difficulty (43%). Student testimonies reveal exhaustion from relentless assessment demands. The 56% of students who have considered leaving, combined with complaints about unsustainable workload distribution, indicates that programme intensity exceeds sustainable thresholds for more than half the cohort. This anxiety epidemic, whilst perhaps partly reflecting the demanding nature of health professional training, signals that current course design may create psychological harm rather than appropriately challenging academic rigor, requiring urgent intervention to prevent both student wellbeing deterioration and retention losses.

Faculty-Specific Recommendations

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

Enhancing Pedagogical Quality and Value Proposition

Cultural Shifts

- Rebalance assessment design to reduce overreliance on group work, ensuring individual learning is appropriately scaffolded through expert instruction rather than predominantly peer-led discovery.
- Establish clear expectations around AI tool usage in group assessment as well as assignment feedback, ensuring students understand when and how AI supports rather than replaces personalised instructor guidance.

Low-Cost Enhancements

- Conduct mid-semester pulse-check surveys on assessment clarity and instructional quality, enabling rapid course corrections within teaching periods.

Moderate Investments

- Enhance staff-student ratios in workshop and tutorial settings to increase opportunities for personalised expert instruction rather than peer-led learning.
- Develop stronger industry connection programmes ensuring students engage with practising pharmacists and understand professional practice applications of coursework content.

Addressing Anxiety Crisis and Unsustainable Programme Intensity

Cultural Shifts

- Establish faculty-wide commitment to sustainable workload distribution, ensuring assessment deadlines are strategically spaced across semester rather than clustered in high-pressure periods.
- Foster culture where seeking mental health support is normalised within health professional training contexts, with academic staff proactively signposting counselling services during high-stress periods.

Low-Cost Enhancements

- Conduct assessment mapping across all units to identify and eliminate unnecessary assignment deadline clustering, redistributing major assignments to create more sustainable pacing throughout semester.
- Implement “wellness weeks” mid-semester with reduced assessment activity, providing students recovery periods within intensive teaching blocks.
- Establish peer support study groups facilitated by senior students who have successfully navigated programme demands whilst maintaining wellbeing.

Moderate Investments

- Fund embedded mental health counsellor with specific expertise in health pharmacy professional student pressures, offering drop-in consultations during peak stress periods without requiring formal appointments.

Strategic Initiatives

- Commission comprehensive programme review examining total student workload hours across all units, benchmarking against sustainable study patterns and identifying opportunities for assessment consolidation without compromising learning outcomes.
- Develop faculty-wide wellbeing strategy specifically addressing the intersection of clinical placement demands, academic assessment pressures and student mental health, with clear metrics for monitoring anxiety indicators and intervention effectiveness.

Appendix 1: Demographics

Course name	Respondents
Master of Pharmacy	6 (13%)
Master of Clinical Pharmacy	4 (9%)
Graduate Certificate in Pharmacy Practice	2 (4%)
Master of Pharmaceutical Science	32 (68%)
Other	3 (6%)

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	4 (8%)
Clayton	2 (4%)
Caulfield	0 (0%)
Peninsula	0 (0%)
Parkville	41 (79%)
Law Chambers	0 (0%)
Malaysia	1 (2%)
Hospital or Medical Centre	1 (2%)
Indonesia	0 (0%)
Suzhou	0 (0%)
other	3 (6%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	15 (31%)
International student	33 (69%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	36 (75%)
Part-time	12 (25%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	35 (73%)
Multi-modal	8 (17%)
Entirely off-campus	5 (10%)
Other	0 (0%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	25 (53%)
1-5 years	19 (40%)
6-10 years	3 (6%)
11+ years	0 (0%)

Degree progress	Respondents
First year	20 (42%)
Second year	19 (40%)
Third year and beyond	9 (19%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	1 (2%)
6-10	8 (17%)
11-20	20 (42%)
21-30	11 (23%)
31-40	4 (8%)
Over 40 hours	4 (8%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	24 (51%)
Advanced	7 (15%)
Intermediate	13 (28%)
Elementary	3 (6%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	30 (64%)
Man	17 (36%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	0 (0%)
Prefer to self-describe	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	0 (0%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	43 (91%)
Prefer not to disclose	4 (9%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	15 (100%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	45 (96%)
Prefer not to disclose	2 (4%)

Registered disability with DSS	Respondents
Yes	NA
No	NA

Age	Respondents
24 or under	28 (58%)
25-29	15 (31%)
30-39	4 (8%)
40 and over	1 (2%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	13 (30%)
Part-time	6 (14%)
Casual	5 (12%)
Unemployed and looking for work	11 (26%)
Not employed and not looking for work	8 (19%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	0 (0%)
6-10	2 (8%)
11-20	4 (17%)
21-30	5 (21%)
31-40	11 (46%)
More than 40	2 (8%)