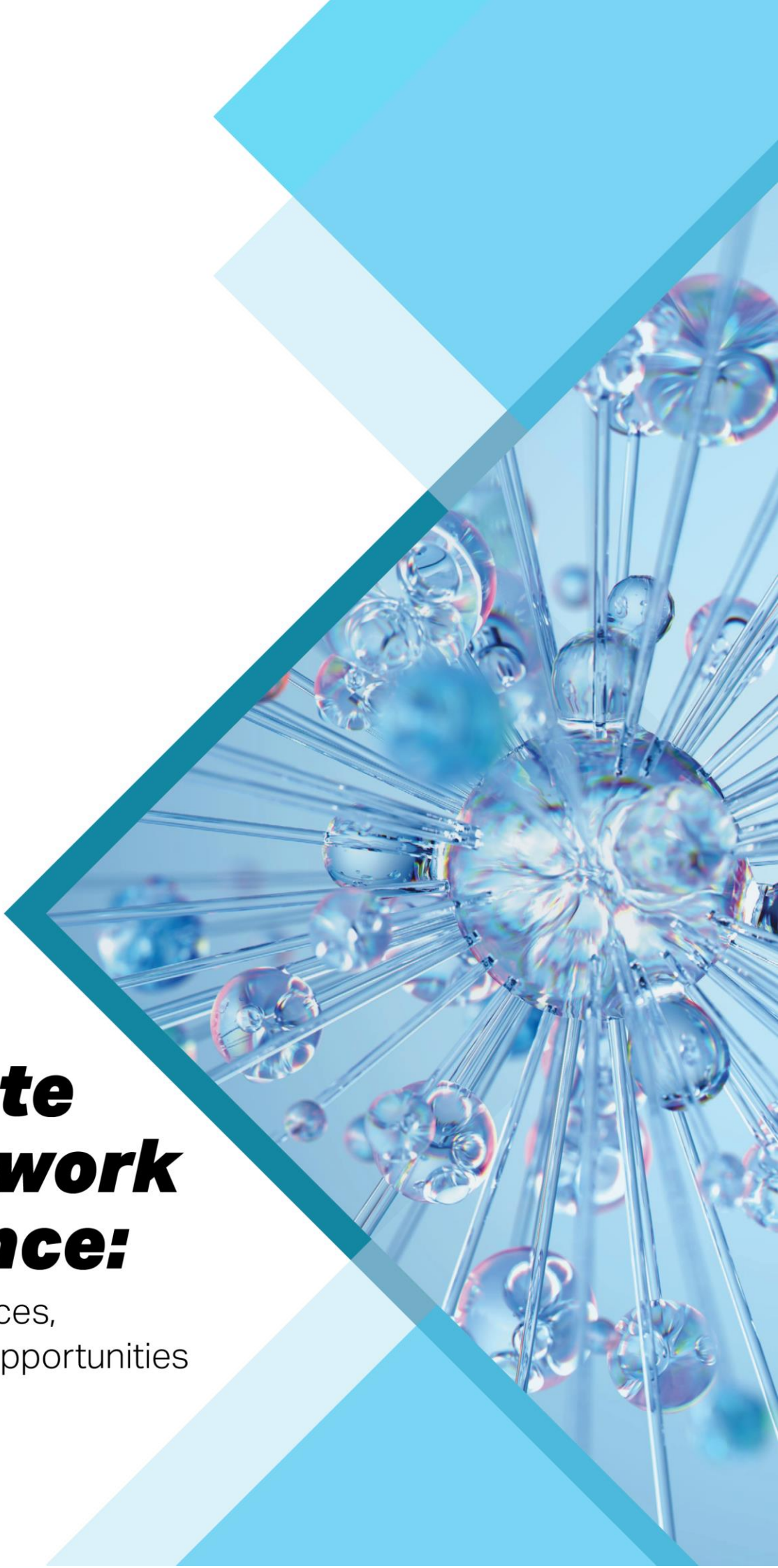
monash graduate association



Graduate Coursework in Science:

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 Science: Student Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancement.* Melbourne: Monash Graduate Association, 2025.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This report examines the experiences of 34 graduate coursework students in the Faculty of Science 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 Science.

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

- 34 Science graduate coursework students participated.
- Response rate represents approximately 6% of enrolled Science 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 Science graduate coursework contexts.
- Financial pressures and their impact on study.
- Parental and carer responsibilities.
- Peer connection and support needs unique to Science 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 Science 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 Science

This section provides core findings from the 34 Science 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 Science 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.

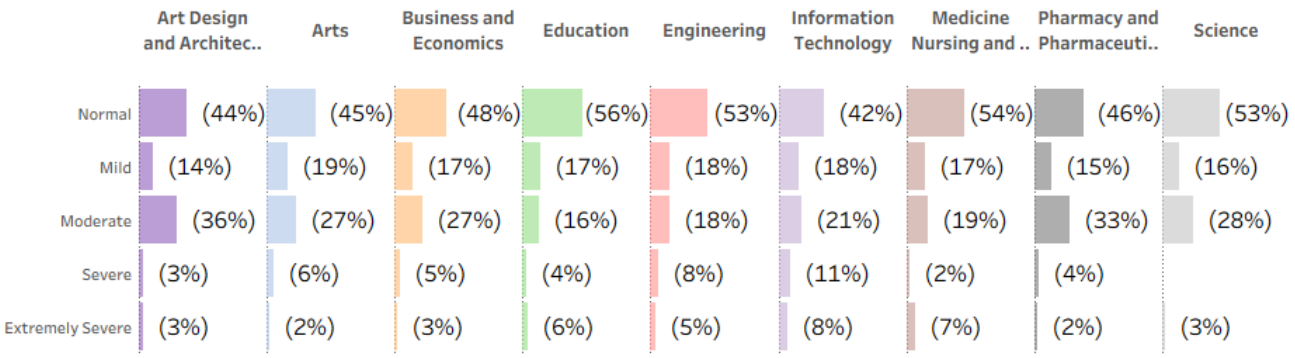
1. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Landscape

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.

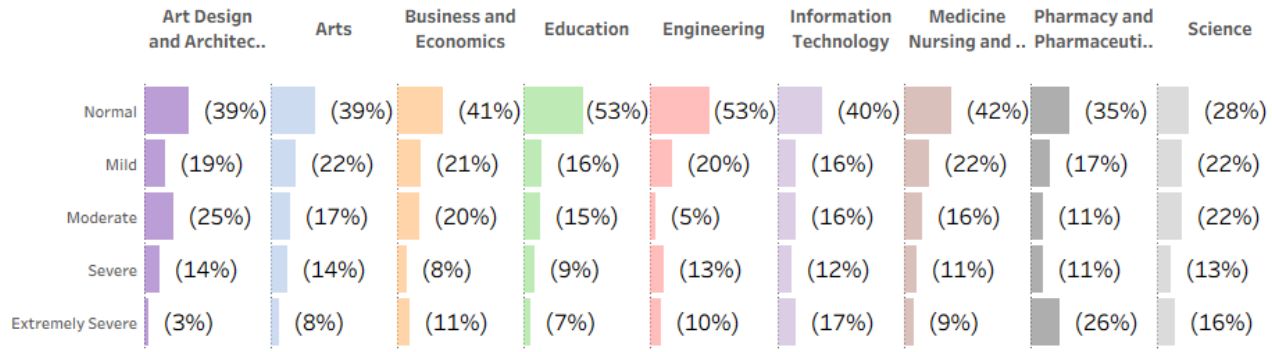
DASS21 and Mental Health Indicators

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.

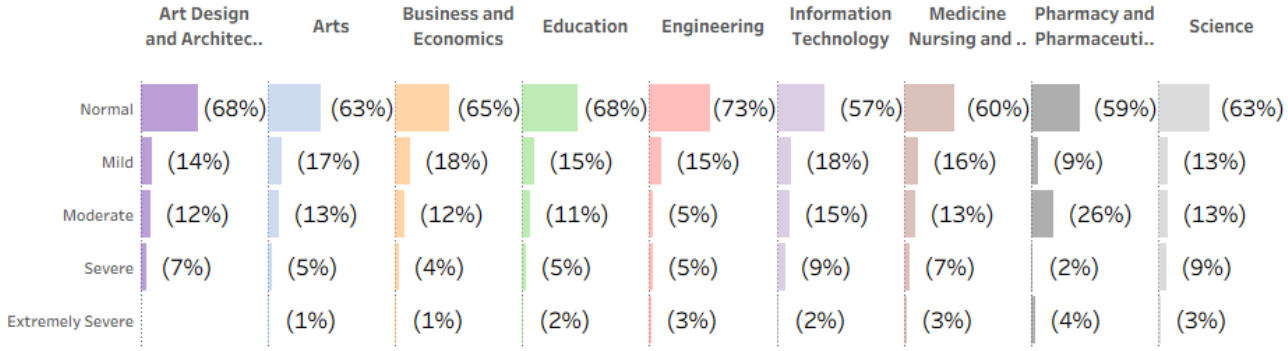
Depression:



Anxiety:



Stress:

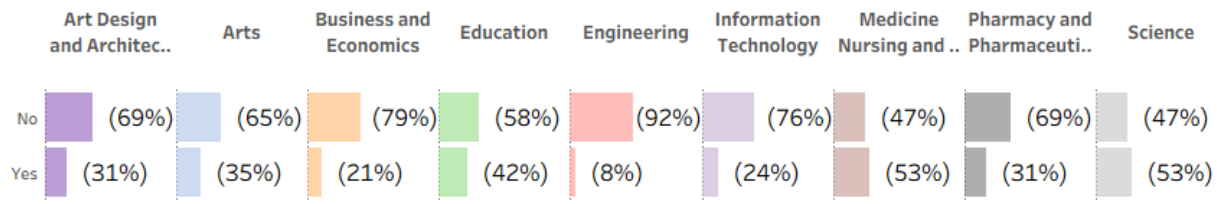


The DASS21 results reveal anxiety as the most significant mental health challenge facing Science graduate coursework students. Whilst 53% report depression levels within the normal range and 63% report normal stress levels, only 28% fall within the normal range for anxiety –the lowest normal-range rate across all faculties surveyed. Nearly one-third of Science students (29%) experience severe or extremely severe anxiety, indicating clinically significant symptoms that may interfere with daily functioning and academic performance. This disproportionate anxiety burden, compared to depression and stress measures within the faculty, suggests that anxiety-specific interventions warrant particular attention from Science leadership. The stress profile appears more favourable, with Science students reporting normal-range rates comparable to higher-performing faculties, though 25% still report moderate to extremely severe stress requiring ongoing support.

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



Science graduate coursework students demonstrate the equal-highest rates of mental health support engagement across all faculties, with 53% reporting they have accessed support from a counsellor, doctor or advocate. This high utilisation rate is particularly notable given that 76% of Science respondents to the survey are international students, a cohort that typically accesses mental health support at substantially lower rates than domestic students. The elevated engagement may reflect the acute anxiety challenges documented previously. However, the 47% who have not accessed support remains concerning, particularly given that 72% of Science students report experiencing at least mild levels across one or more DASS21 measures, indicating substantial unmet support needs despite relatively strong help-seeking behaviours within this predominantly international cohort.

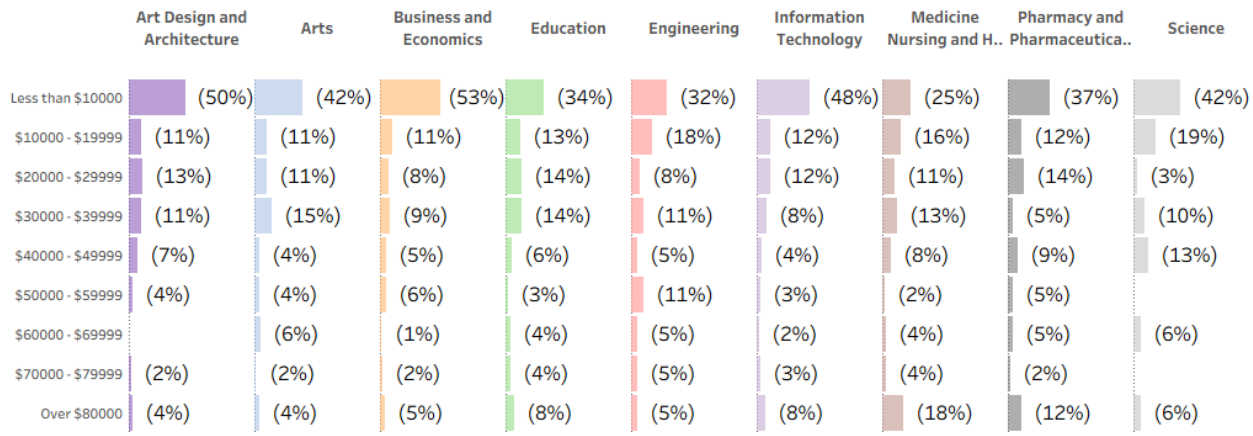
2. Financial Circumstances and Study Impact

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

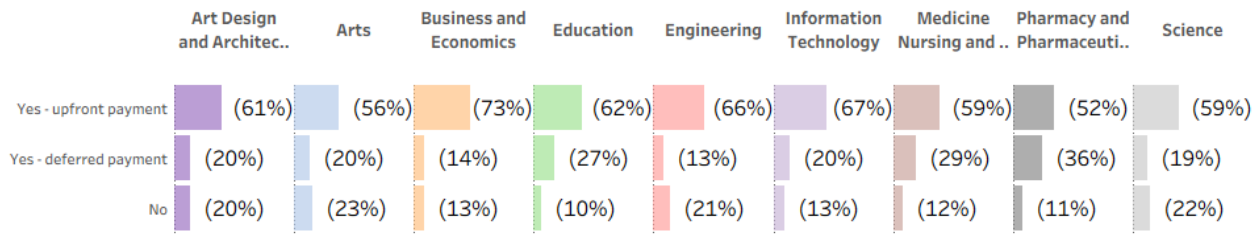


Science graduate coursework students report a notably low-income profile, with 42% earning less than $10,000 annually and a further 19% earning between $10,000 and $19,999 — meaning over three in five Science students subsist on less than $20,000 per year.

Student Fee Payment Status

Science graduate coursework students report a notably low-income profile, with 42% earning less than $10,000 annually and a further 19% earning between $10,000 and $19,999 — meaning over three in five Science students subsist on less than $20,000 per year. A minor 12% of Science students report incomes above $60,000 per year, with 6% earning over $80,000. These patterns show that majority of Science students (64%) are subsisting off an annual income of less than $30,000 – below the Henderson poverty line. This financial reality may also feed into the observed levels of anxiety reported earlier.

Course Fees by Faculty



The majority of Science graduate coursework students bear direct financial responsibility for their tuition, with 59% making upfront fee payments and a further 19% on deferred payment arrangements. Only 22% of Science students report not paying fees directly, suggesting limited access to full scholarships or employer-funded study within this cohort. The high proportion making upfront payments — likely reflecting the overrepresentation of international students who responded to the survey (76%) who are ineligible for domestic fee deferral mechanisms such as

HECS-HELP — underscores the immediate financial burden carried by most Science students and provides important context for interpreting the value-for-money perceptions and financial stress indicators explored later in this report.

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 Science

Payment Source	Use this source	*All*	*Most*	*About Half*	*A little*
Self	33%	0%	0%	11%	22%
Family	89%	44%	11%	22%	11%
Employer	6%	0%	6%	0%	0%
Sponsor	28%	6%	0%	6%	17%
Other	28%	6%	11%	11%	0%

Family financial support is the dominant funding mechanism for Science graduate coursework students with course fee obligations, with 89% drawing on family contributions and 44% reporting that family covers all of their fees. This heavy reliance on family funding — significantly higher than self-funding (33%) or sponsorship and other sources (28% each) — reflects the faculty's predominantly international student representation in survey respondents, where family investment in overseas education represents a substantial household commitment. Employer-funded study is minimal at just 6%, suggesting that the Science cohort largely consists of early-career students rather than professionals upskilling through workplace support – this also reflects the income trends noted earlier, with only 12% of Science students reporting an income of over $60,000 per year that would be expected for an established professional with employer support. The combination of high family dependence and limited self-funding capacity suggests that financial pressures and academic performance anxiety experienced by Science students extend beyond the individual, with implications for broader family investment into educational outcomes.

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

	Science 2023	Science 2025	Monash 2025
Doing great	6%	9%	4%
Getting by	57%	27%	37%
Just coping	31%	47%	41%
Having trouble	6%	18%	19%

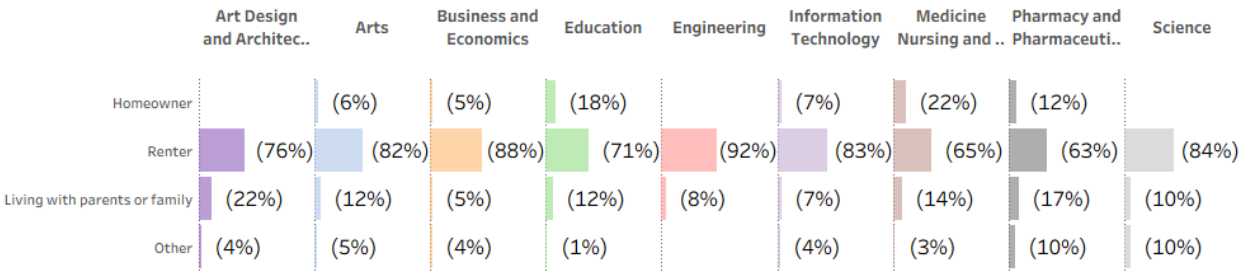
Financial wellbeing among Science graduate coursework students has deteriorated markedly since 2023, with a pronounced shift away from stability and towards financial distress. The proportion of students "getting by" has more than halved from 57% to 27%, while those "just coping" has risen from 31% to 47% and those "having trouble" has tripled from 6% to 18%. This downward migration across wellbeing categories suggests that cost-of-living pressures, housing affordability challenges and constrained earning capacity are increasingly eroding the financial resilience of the Science cohort. While a slightly higher proportion now report "doing great" (9%, up from 6%), this marginal improvement is vastly outweighed by the increase levels of reported financial distress. Science students' 2025 results broadly align with the Monash-wide pattern, indicating that these pressures are systemic rather than faculty-specific, though the scale of deterioration from the faculty's own 2023 baseline is particularly striking and worthy of consideration for any faculty-specific initiatives to improve student experiences and outcomes.

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

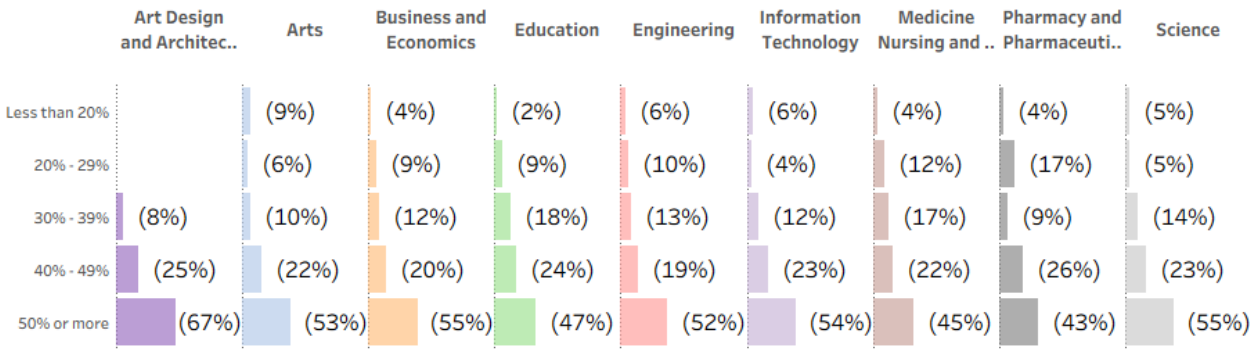
living arrangements and rental burden patterns across faculties, revealing the extent to which housing affordability challenges affect Science students.

Living Situation by Faculty



The overwhelming majority of Science graduate coursework students (84%) are renters, with no students reporting homeownership and small proportions living with parents or family (10%) or in other arrangements (10%). This rental-dominant profile reflects the cohort's predominantly international student survey respondent composition, where lack of access to family housing in Melbourne exposes virtually all Science students to one of Australia's most expensive rental markets — compounding the pressures already observed from low-income status and family-funded course fees documented in previous sections.

Rent as Percentage of Monthly Income by Faculty

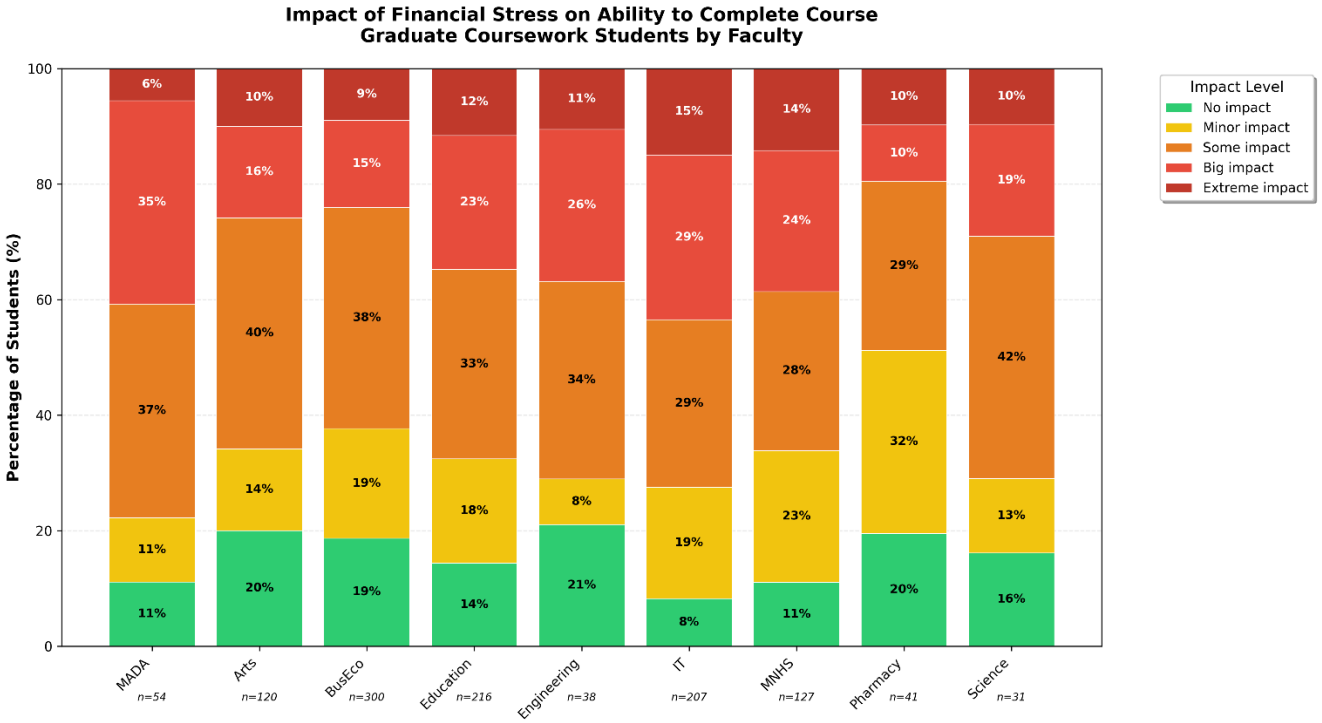


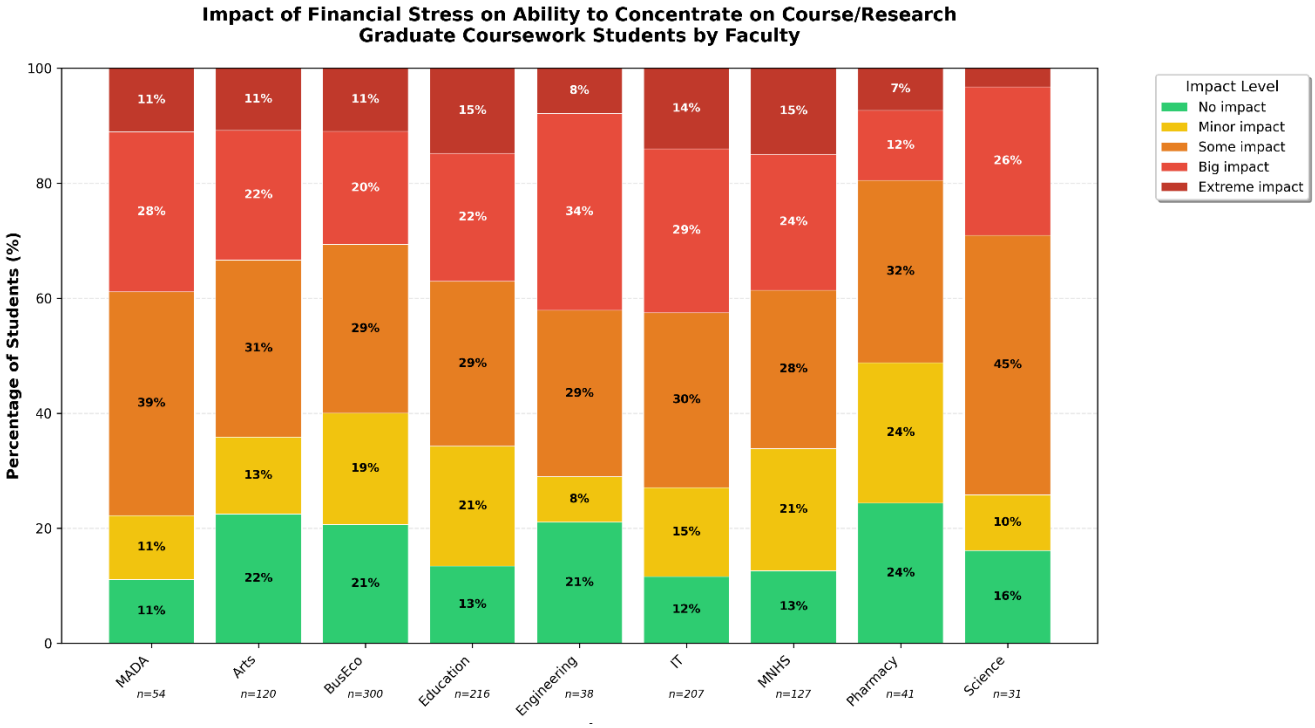
Over half of Science graduate coursework students (55%) spend 50% or more of their monthly income on rent, with a further 23% spending between 40% and 49%. Only 10% of the cohort dedicates less than 30% of income to housing — the threshold widely considered the benchmark for housing affordability. This acute rental burden, when combined with the cohort's predominantly low-income profile, leaves minimal financial capacity for other essentials and reinforces the financial wellbeing deterioration documented earlier.

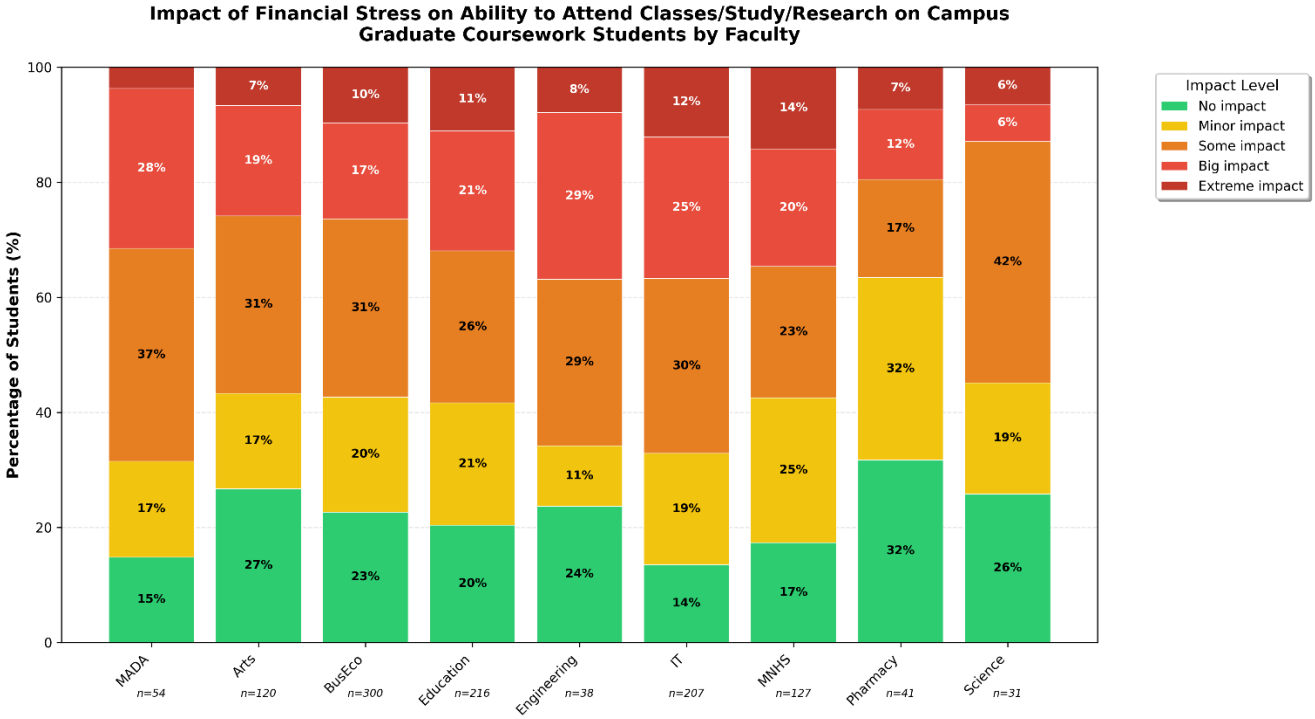
How Financial Stress Impacts Course Engagement

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







Financial stress permeates virtually every dimension of academic engagement for Science graduate coursework students. Only 16% report no impact on their ability to complete their course to the best of their ability, with 42% experiencing “some” impact and a further 29% reporting “big” or “extreme” effects. The pattern is similarly concerning for concentration, where 45% report “some” impact alongside 26% experiencing more severe disruption.

Meanwhile, the ability to attend classes and campus activities emerges as an area of concern — just 26% of Science students report no financial impact on attendance, while 42% experience "some" impact and 12% report "big" or "extreme" effects. In each case, more than half of students are affected in their ability to complete, concentrate or attend their course because of their financial position. This is an important finding, as the ability to commit full attention and cognitive capacity to coursework is critical for students to perform well and set up their foundations for their future careers.

Student Testimonies: Financial Realities

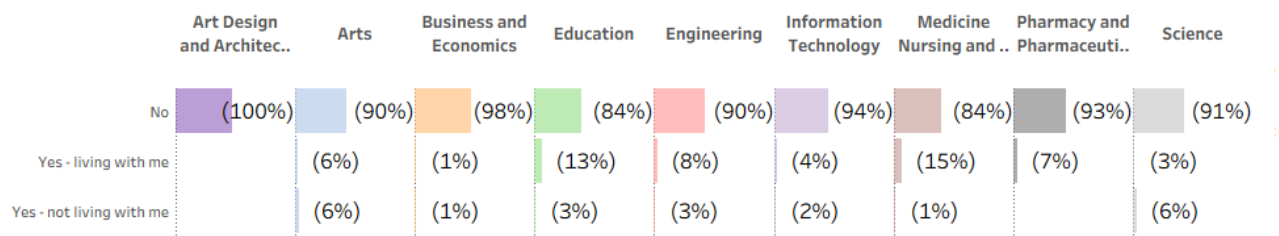
To complement the quantitative findings on financial wellbeing and housing costs, this section examines students' own reflections on their financial circumstances through their responses to an open-ended question about their financial situation. These qualitative insights provide depth and context to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

> *"Due to the need to save money for my tuition fees I'm unable to spend on essentials such as food clothing or leisure activities."*
>
> *"I can't find a job."*
>
> *"Self-employed … [I] am confident in my financial management as long as there is income."*
>
> *"With the current housing situation and the inflation my scholarship is not enough and I need a part time job but still have not found one."*
>
> *"To save money I am rarely eating out with friends. If I have jobs, probably I will be able to be a bit more relax in spending money for entertainment."*
>
> *"My husband works full-time … even though he is working, money is very tight."*

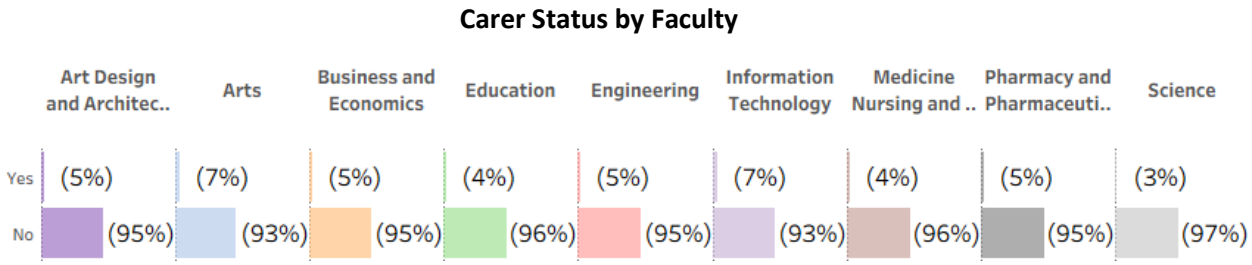
3. Student Parents and Carers

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 Status by Faculty



The vast majority of Science graduate coursework students (91%) do not have children. Of those students with children, just 3% report that their children live with them and 6% report their children do not live with them. This low parental representation is consistent with the cohort's younger age profile, where 70% of survey respondents are aged under 30, and its predominantly international student survey respondent composition, where relocation for study often occurs independently of family.



Carer responsibilities are similarly uncommon among Science students, with only 3% identifying as carers — the lowest proportion across all faculties. While this suggests that caring duties are not a widespread pressure within the Science cohort, the very small number of student carers that are balancing studies with caring may face particularly acute isolation given the absence of a visible peer community sharing similar 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 Science 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,

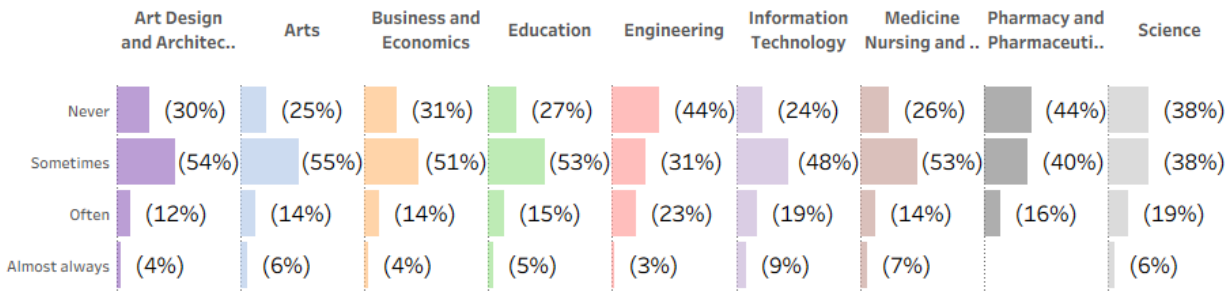
creates particular challenges for building and maintaining peer relationships that are essential for both academic success and personal wellbeing.

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.

Isolation and Belonging by Faculty



Nearly two-thirds of Science graduate coursework students (62%) report experiencing feelings of isolation or lack of belonging at least sometimes, with a quarter (25%) feeling isolated “often” or “almost always.” While 38% report never feeling isolated — a moderate result relative to other faculties — the student testimonies that follow reveal that workload intensity, language barriers and limited opportunities for social connection outside of academic contexts are key drivers of disconnection within the Science cohort. These patterns carry particular significance given the

established correlations between isolation and poorer mental health outcomes, reduced academic confidence and increased likelihood of considering withdrawal.

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 Science graduate coursework environment:

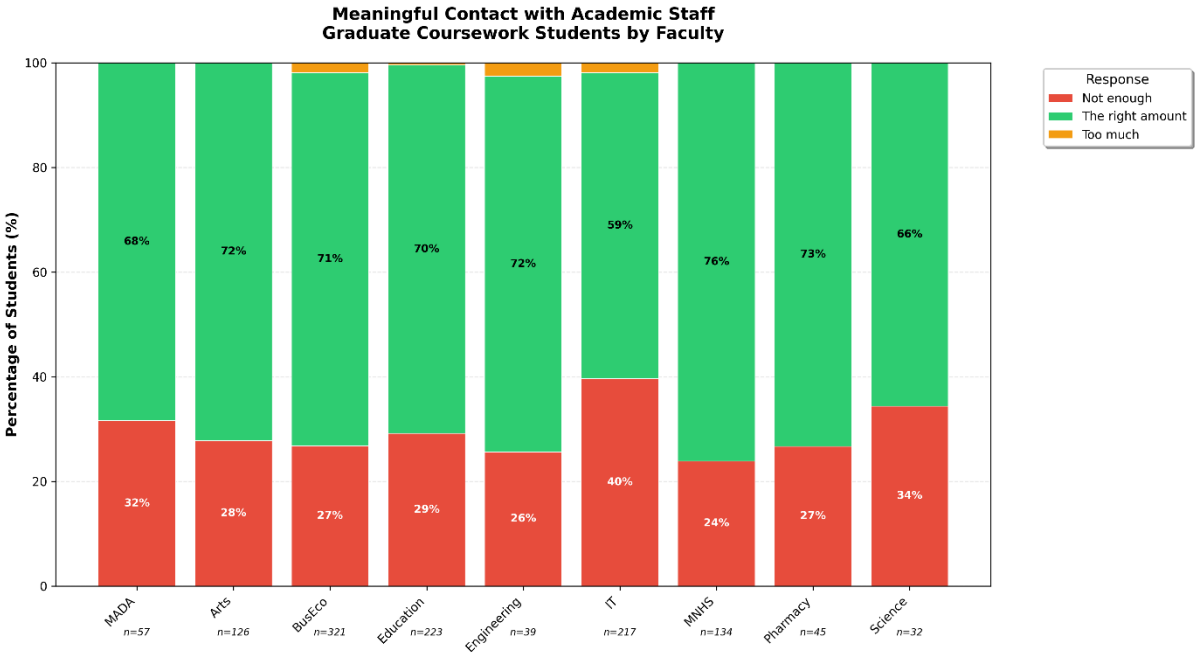
> *"Mental health struggles, personal life and recent end of a relationship."*
>
> *"Being too busy to socialise being too overwhelmed to feel comfortable socialising."*
>
> *"Stress [is] overwhelming."*
>
> *"Too busy to make connections. Lack of friends."*
>
> *"Language knowledge difference interest difference lifestyle difference religion."*
>
> *"There are no other students from my nationality. Sometimes students gather and speak in languages other than English which makes it difficult for me to join the conversation. I don't have any friends I can talk to about things outside of assignments or study-related topics."*
>
> *"Having a hard time finding my place in this world."*
>
> *"Usually this happens after encountering a setback in the academic journey such as receiving poor grades despite putting in a lot of effort. Or when experiencing relationship problems while being far away from them."*
>
> *"The workload along with tight deadlines of getting internships and almost little to no success in finding part-time jobs while most other students had one. Had classes almost during all events arranged by the university so had to miss out on relaxing a bit while seeing others wind down."*
>
> *"Watching too much cell phone content and stay all day in the room."*
>
> *"When I get a grade back that I am not proud of, I feel like it must just be me, not good enough or not understanding how to successfully complete assignments."*
>
> *"Find it difficult to speak English."*

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

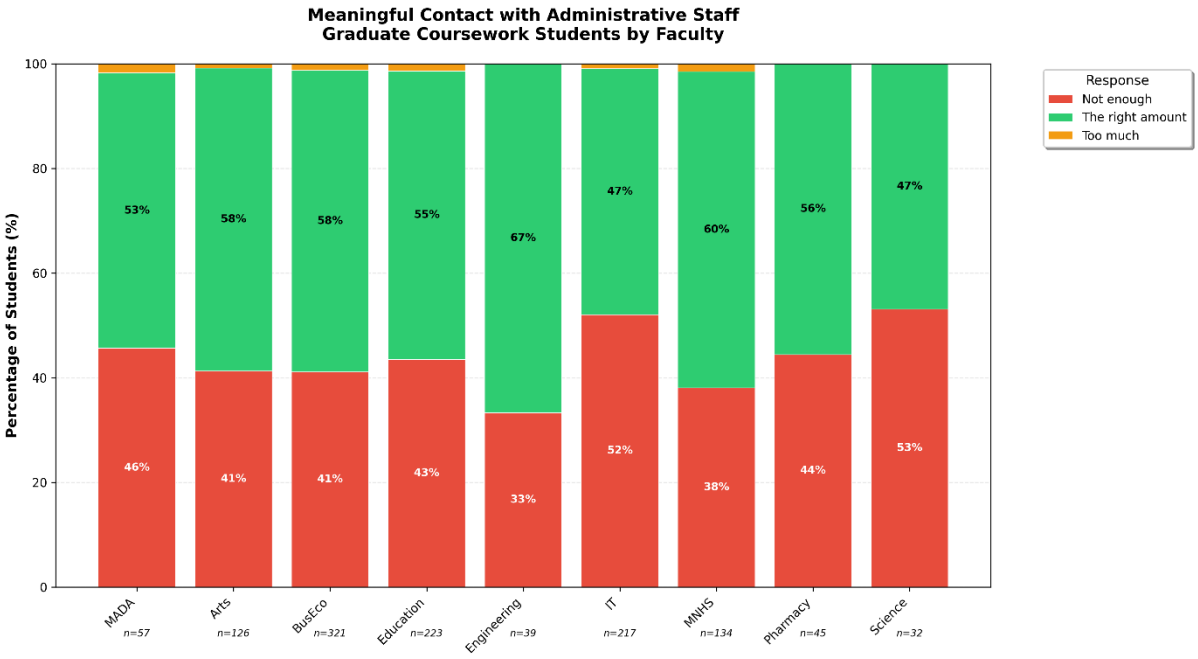
level of connection within each sphere and identifies where gaps in meaningful contact may be contributing to feelings of isolation or insufficient support.

Academic Staff



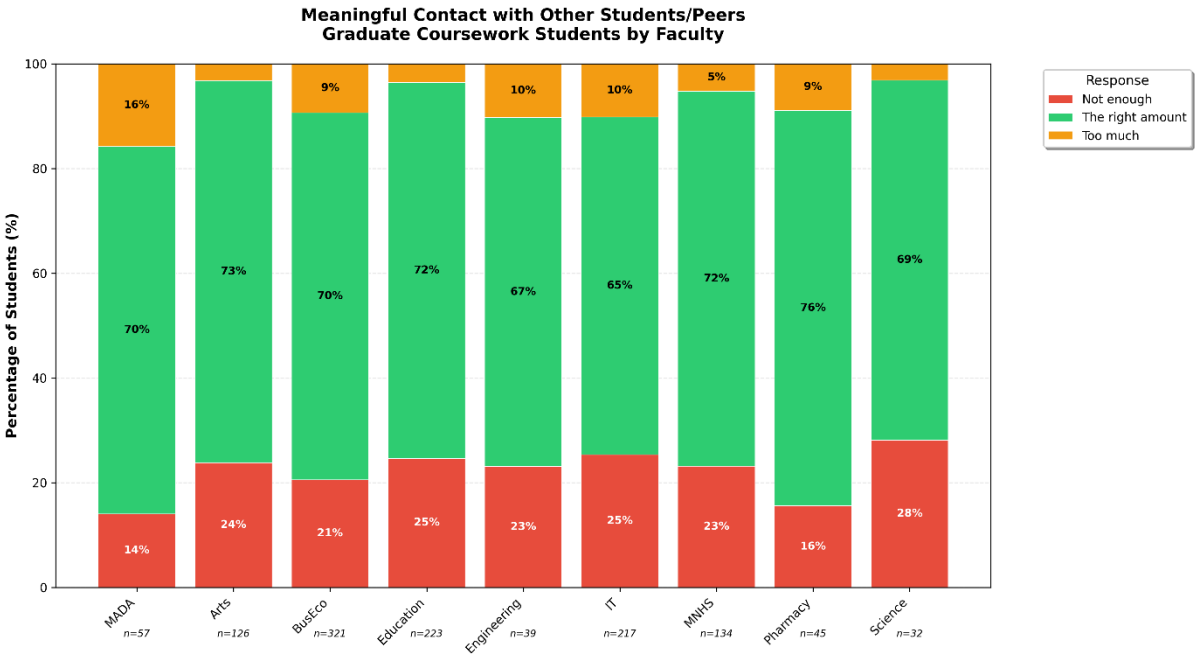
Two-thirds of Science graduate coursework students (66%) consider their level of meaningful contact with academic staff to be “the right amount,” while a third (34%) feel they do not receive enough. This gap suggests that while most students find academic engagement adequate, a significant minority experience insufficient connection with teaching and supervisory staff — a concern that may be compounded by the large class sizes and resource limitations noted in the value-for-money testimonies presented later in this report.

Administrative Staff



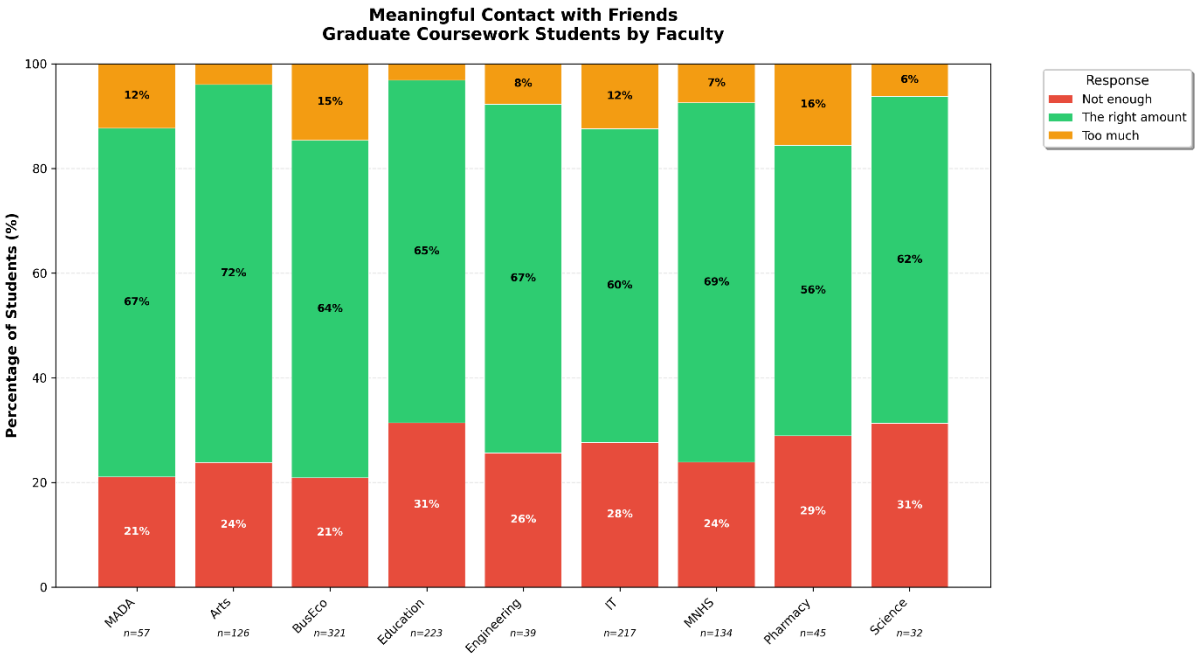
Over half of Science graduate coursework students (53%) feel they do not receive enough meaningful contact with administrative staff, making this the relationship category with the largest unmet need among institutional contacts. This dissatisfaction — notably higher than the 34% gap reported for academic staff — suggests that Science students may struggle to access adequate guidance on enrolment, progression and support services, an area of concern that aligns with the testimonies later in this report highlighting poor communication and organisational challenges within the faculty. Of note, Science has the highest level of unmet need on meaningful contact with administrative support (followed closely by IT at 52%), indicating that there may be opportunities for knowledge sharing across faculties on effective approaches to structuring institutional support to help Science address this high rate.

Other Students/Peers



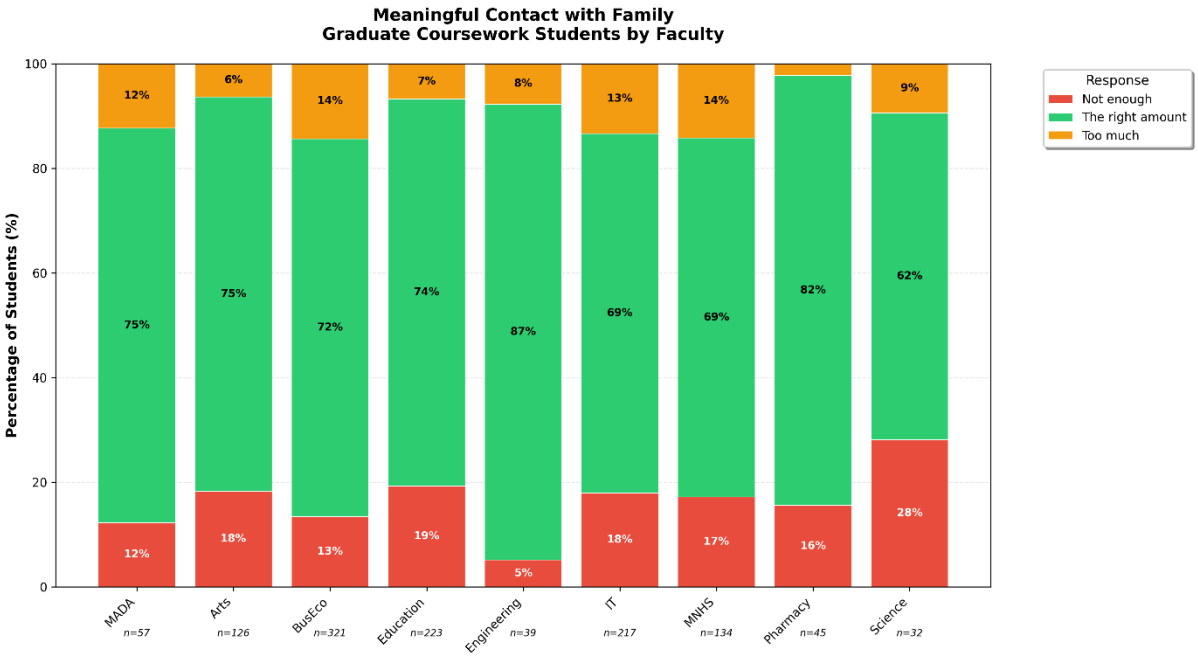
The majority of Science graduate coursework students (69%) report receiving the right amount of meaningful contact with their peers, though over a quarter (28%) feel peer connection is insufficient – the highest among faculties. This gap is notable given the isolation findings documented earlier, where 63% reported feeling isolated at least sometimes — suggesting that while most students have adequate peer interactions in frequency, the quality or depth of those connections may not fully address underlying feelings of disconnection, particularly for international students navigating language and cultural barriers.

Friends



Nearly a third of Science graduate coursework students (31%) feel they do not have enough meaningful contact with friends – equal-highest among faculties – while 62% consider their current level sufficient. Where 76% of Science survey respondents are international students — many of whom have relocated away from established friendship networks — this gap highlights the challenge of rebuilding social connections in a new country while managing intensive study demands. The student testimonies on isolation, which cite busyness, language barriers and difficulty forming connections beyond academic contexts, provide further context for this unmet need.

Family



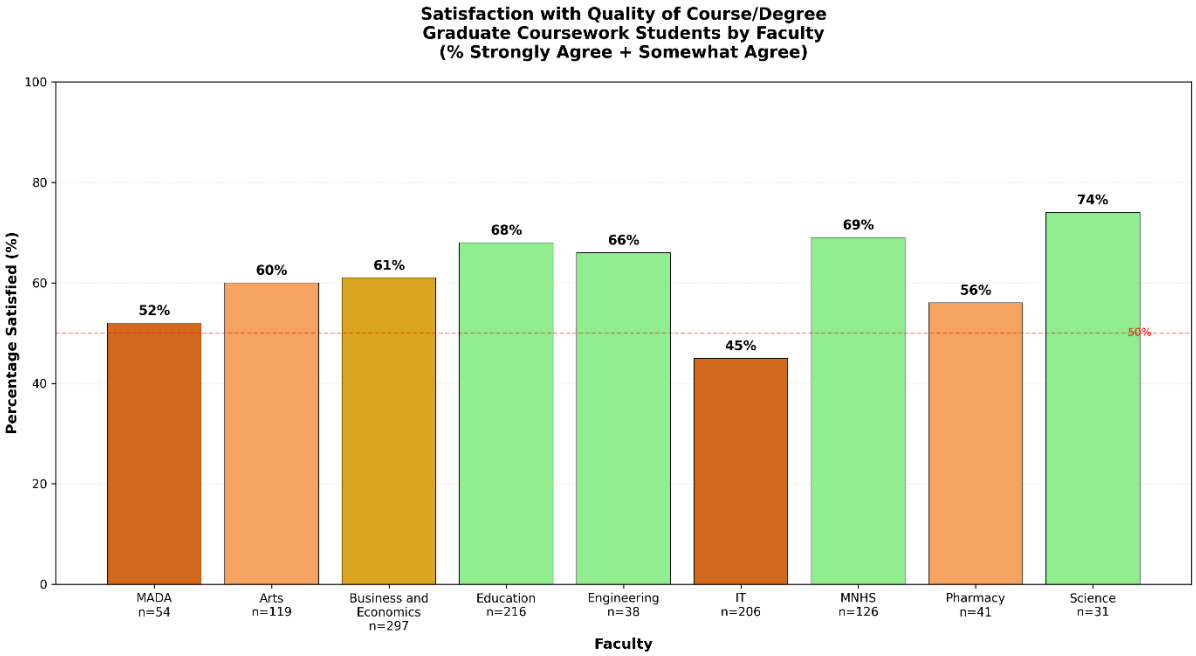
Family contact emerges as another relationship category where Science graduate coursework students report the highest unmet need compared with other faculties, with 28% feeling they do not receive enough meaningful family connection. Again, given that 76% of the Science respondents to the survey are international students, many separated from family by significant geographic distance, this gap reflects the inherent challenge of maintaining close family relationships while studying abroad and balancing demanding coursework schedules.

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

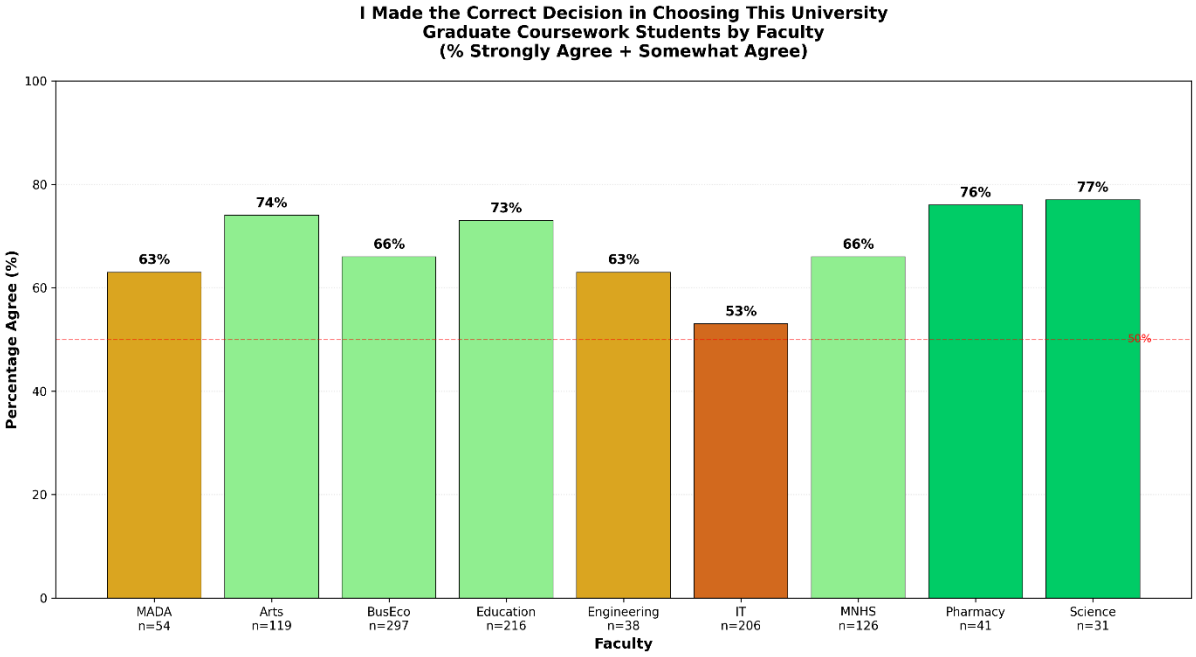
Course satisfaction represents a critical measure of student experience, reflecting whether academic programmes meet expectations and deliver meaningful value. Satisfaction patterns across graduate coursework cohorts reveal important insights about how different student groups perceive the quality of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



Science graduate coursework students report the highest course satisfaction rate across all faculties, with 74% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are satisfied with the quality of their course. This is an encouraging result that suggests the faculty's academic offerings are broadly meeting student expectations. However, the remaining quarter of students who are not satisfied — when considered alongside the value-for-money testimonies later in this report, which highlight concerns about theoretical content, inadequate resources and overcrowded classrooms — indicate that there remain meaningful areas for enhancement, particularly given the cohort's substantial financial investment through predominantly upfront, family-funded fee arrangements.

University Choice

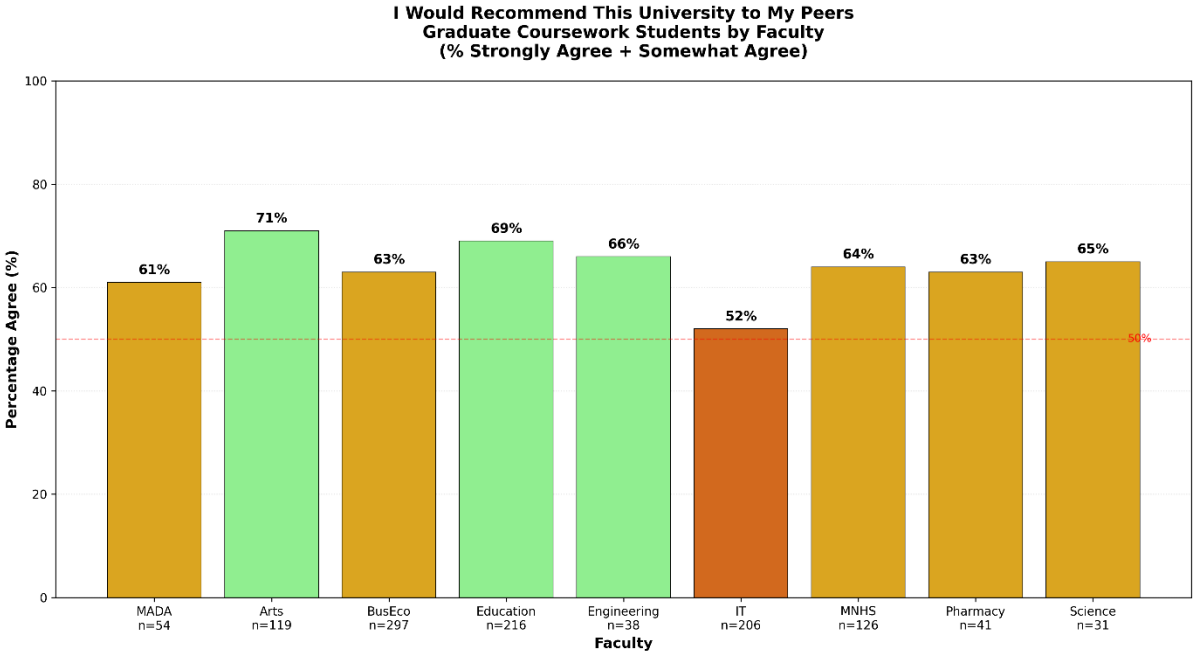
Beyond satisfaction with course quality, students' reflections on whether they made the correct decision in choosing Monash provides insight into their overall evaluation of their educational experience. This measure captures retrospective assessment of university choice, encompassing course quality,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



Over three-quarters of Science graduate coursework students (77%) believe they made the correct decision in choosing Monash — the highest rate across all faculties. This strong endorsement, consistent with the faculty's leading course satisfaction result, suggests that despite the financial pressures and specific pedagogical concerns raised elsewhere in this report, the majority of Science students view their overall educational experience positively. The gap between this broad institutional confidence and the more pointed criticisms around practical skills development and resource adequacy presented later in the report indicates that dissatisfaction tends to be targeted at specific programme elements rather than reflecting wholesale disillusionment with the university.

Peer Recommendation - University

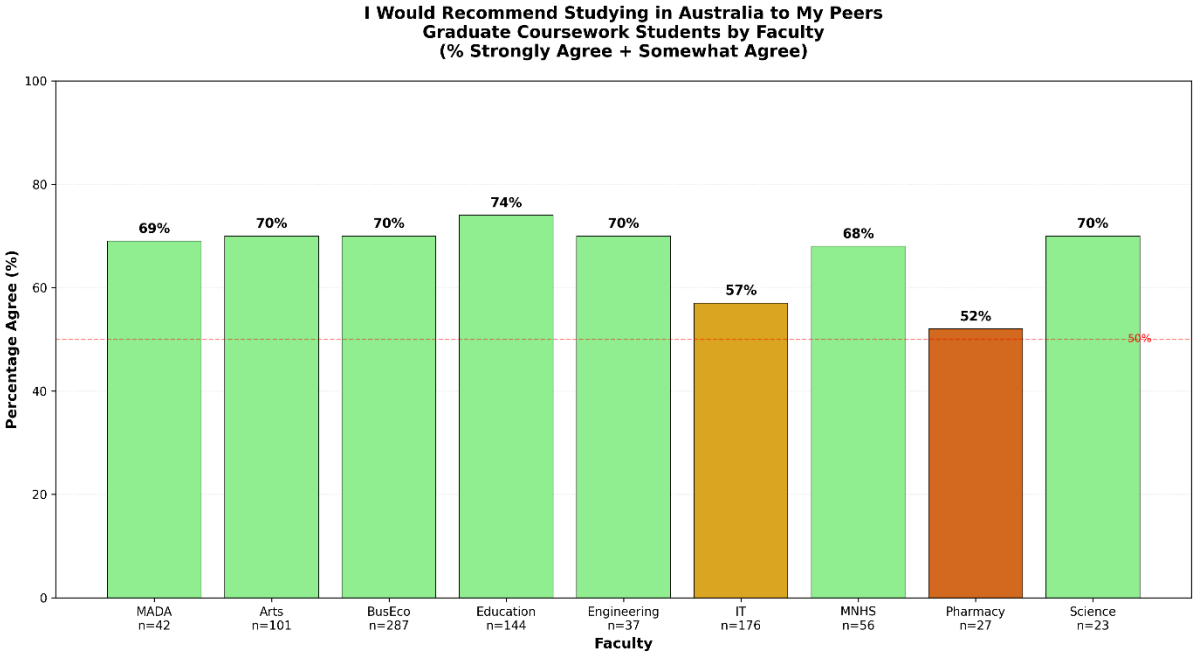
Students' willingness to recommend Monash to their peers serves as a key indicator of overall satisfaction and institutional reputation, reflecting whether students would advocate for the university based on their own experiences. This measure captures the strength of students' endorsement and their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



Two-thirds of Science graduate coursework students (65%) would recommend Monash to their peers, a solid result that sits comfortably above the 50% midpoint. However, a notable gap emerges between the 77% who affirm their own university choice and the 65% willing to recommend the experience to others — suggesting that while most students feel their personal decision was sound, a proportion harbour reservations about endorsing the experience more broadly. This distinction may reflect an awareness that the challenges they have navigated, particularly around financial pressure, resource limitations and practical skills development, could deter prospective students.

Peer Recommendation – Australia

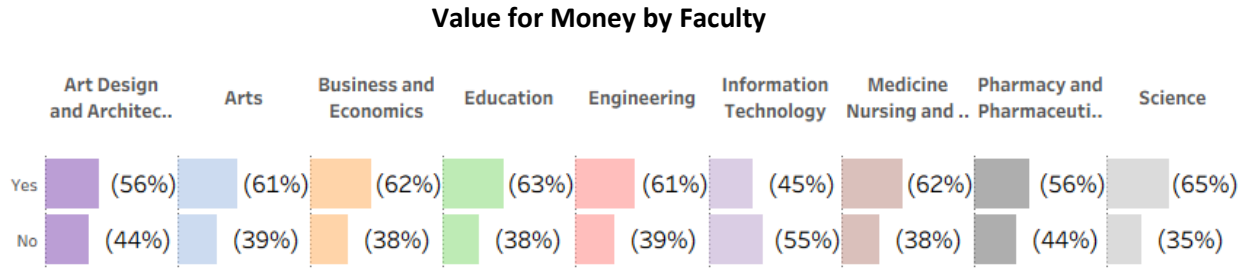
For international students, perceptions of studying in Australia as a destination extend beyond their specific university experience to encompass the broader educational, cultural and professional environment. This measure, asked only of international students, distinguishes between satisfaction with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



Seven in ten international Science students (70%) would recommend studying in Australia to their peers, a result that aligns closely with most other faculties. This indicates that despite noted issues including high rates of isolation (63% experiencing isolation at least sometimes) and substantial financial stress (65% "just coping" or "having trouble") – pressures which reflect systemic challenges like cost-of-living and high rents limiting the ability to go out, make friends and have fun – international students feel Australia is an appealing destination for accessing education.

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.



Nearly two-thirds of Science graduate coursework students (65%) consider their course to offer value for money — the highest rate across all faculties. This is consistent with the faculty's strong

course satisfaction and university choice results, and suggests that for the majority, the educational returns justify the financial investment. Nevertheless, over a third (35%) do not perceive adequate value, and the student testimonies that follow reveal specific and actionable concerns — particularly around insufficient practical and technical skills development, limited staff support relative to unit costs, and inadequate equipment and resources.

Student Testimonies: Value for Money Concerns

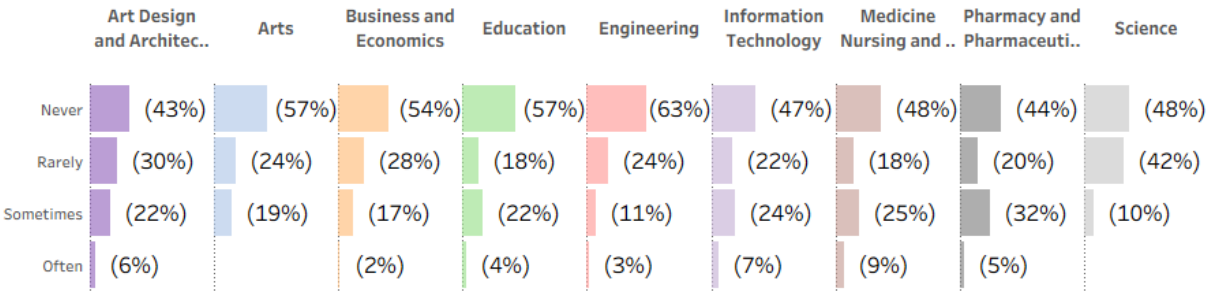
Graduate coursework students who indicated their course does not offer value for money were asked to elaborate on their concerns through an open-ended question: "Why do you feel that your course does not offer value for money? Please elaborate." Of the responses provided by Science students, these highlighted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

> *"Because the required skills especially technical are not even mentioned. It's all theoretical and it doesn't help us be prepared for a job."*
>
> *"Units are $5-6000 each with minimal support from staff (outside a select few) and overall poor communication and organisation from staff."*
>
> *"Some units are mismanaged and disorganised but overall is a good course and covers all important information to go into workforce."*
>
> *"Workshops are cool but I feel internship or sourcing for getting some real world experience would make it better trips are great but trips with practical learning sponsored by university will be even better. There should also be a sperate scholarship such as 'travel learner scholarship' that will help student to gain real world knowledge and experience."*
>
> *"I feel like I didn't get what I paid for. I expected much more from a world level university and this is not what I expected. It is not that everything is unsatisfactory some aspects are still beneficial to me and my career but a lot of things are so much worse than I had expected when I first chose this university."*
>
> *"While I appreciate the academic content of the course, I feel that it does not offer full value for money. The lack of adequate equipment and resources combined with overcrowded classrooms makes it difficult to engage fully in learning. Additionally, as an international student with limited financial resources I expected more personalised support and access to practical or career-related services. The high tuition fees are hard to justify given these limitations."*
>
> *"Some of the topics are a bit random and the class have a hard time connecting it to real life skills."*
>
> *"Needs more exposure with regards to industry partnerships most classes focus on activities and assignments than actual knowledge exchange. Almost zero to no scholarships exclusive to this course and the need to pay the exact fees as other semesters during the Work Integrated Learning/ Internship semester."*
>
> *"Content taught could be improved – especially style of teaching."*

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.

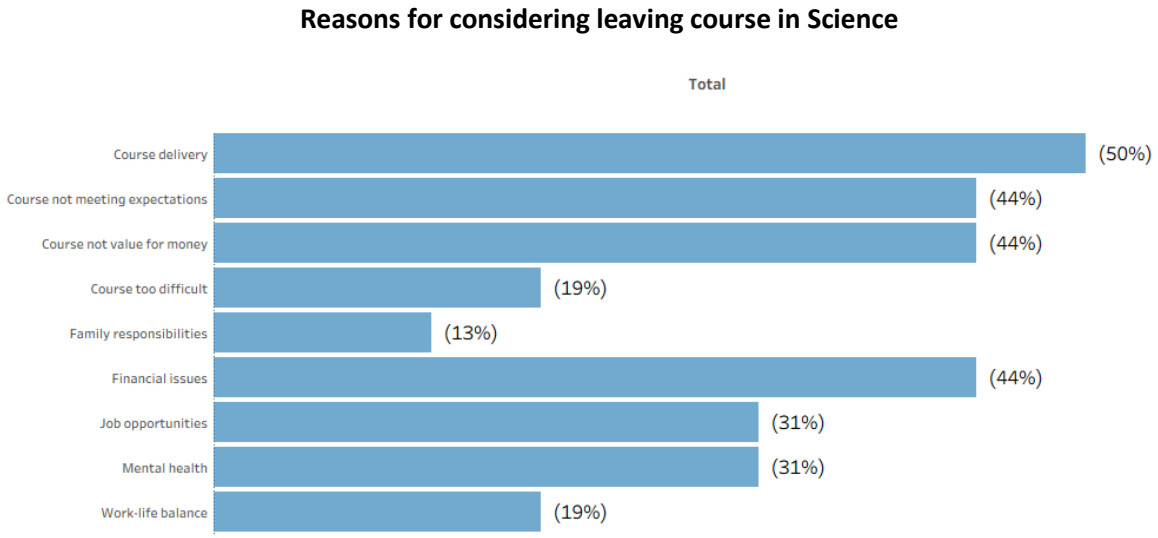
Considering Leaving by Faculty



Just under half of Science graduate coursework students (48%) have never considered leaving their course, while 42% have rarely considered it and 10% sometimes have. No students report considering departure “often.” This is a relatively positive retention picture — the absence of any students in the “often” category and the low “sometimes” rate suggest that while passing thoughts of withdrawal are common, they do not escalate into persistent disengagement for most Science students. These patterns align with course and university choice satisfaction observed earlier in the report. Nonetheless, with over half the cohort having contemplated leaving at some point, the factors driving these considerations, explored in the following section, merit closer attention.

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:



Course delivery is the most commonly cited factor driving withdrawal considerations among Science students (50%), followed by a cluster of equally weighted concerns — course not meeting expectations, course not offering value for money and financial issues (all 44%). This pattern is distinctive in that pedagogical quality and perceived value dominate the withdrawal calculus, reinforcing the concerns raised in the value-for-money testimonies about theoretical content, limited practical skills development and inconsistent staff support. Job opportunities and mental health (both 31%) represent a secondary tier of concern aligning with the financial pressures and high anxiety documented earlier in the report, while course difficulty (19%), work-life balance (19%) and family responsibilities (13%) are less prominent but still present influences on withdrawal considerations. The concentration of withdrawal drivers around course quality and financial return — rather than personal or external factors — suggests that faculty-led improvements to programme delivery and career-relevant content could meaningfully reduce retention risk.

6. Employment and Career Planning

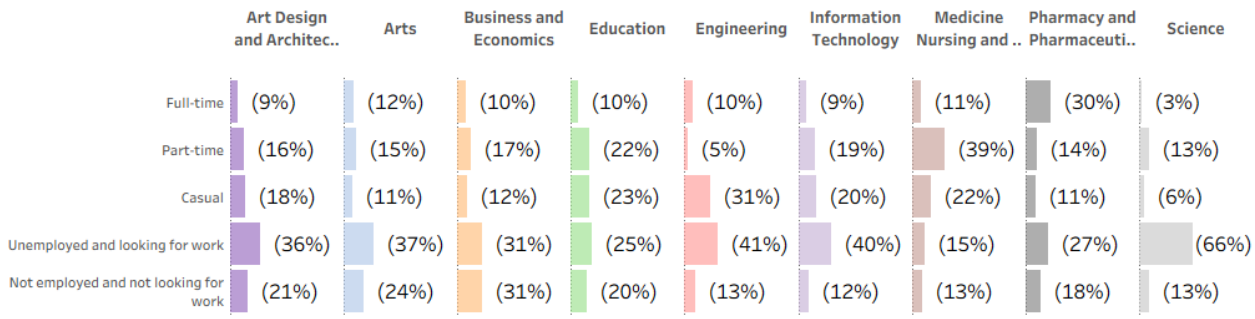
The relationship between employment and academic progress represents a critical balancing act for graduate coursework students, with employment decisions carrying implications for both immediate financial sustainability and long-term career advancement. The survey reveals that graduate coursework students 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 Science, 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 Science 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.

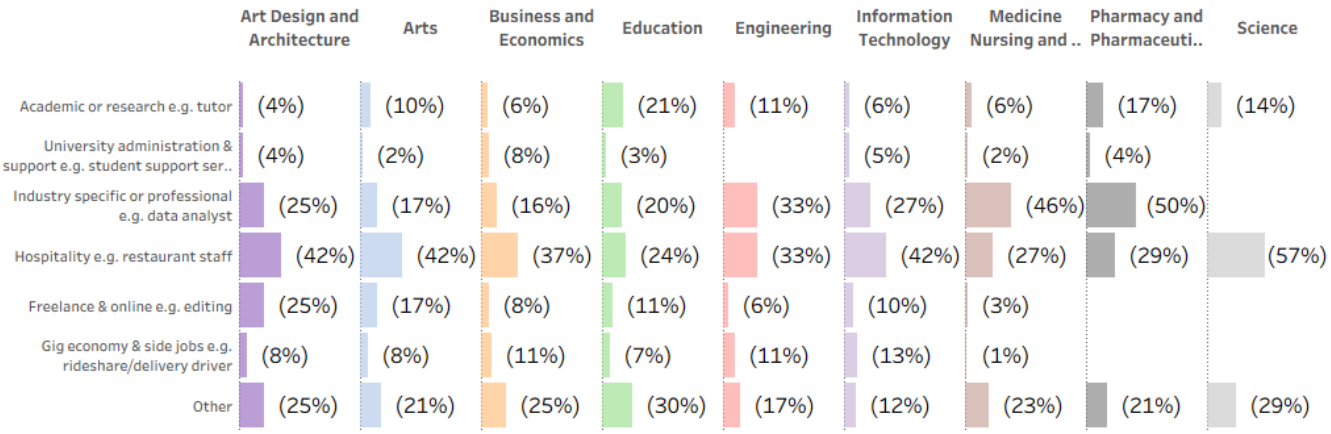
Employment status by faculty



Two-thirds of Science graduate coursework students (66%) are unemployed and actively seeking work — by far the highest rate of any faculty. Only 22% are employed in any capacity (3% full-time, 13% part-time, 6% casual), while 13% are not employed and not looking. This striking employment gap, when considered alongside the cohort's 76% international student survey respondent composition, points to significant labour market access barriers — likely compounded by visa-related work restrictions, limited local professional networks and difficulty securing roles relevant to their field of study. These barriers may explain the 13% not employed and not looking for work, who may have experienced unsuccessful attempts to gain employment and have found other ways of coping (e.g. through family support or grants). The findings here underscore the urgency of the financial pressures documented earlier, as the majority of Science students lack any employment income to offset their substantial living and tuition costs.

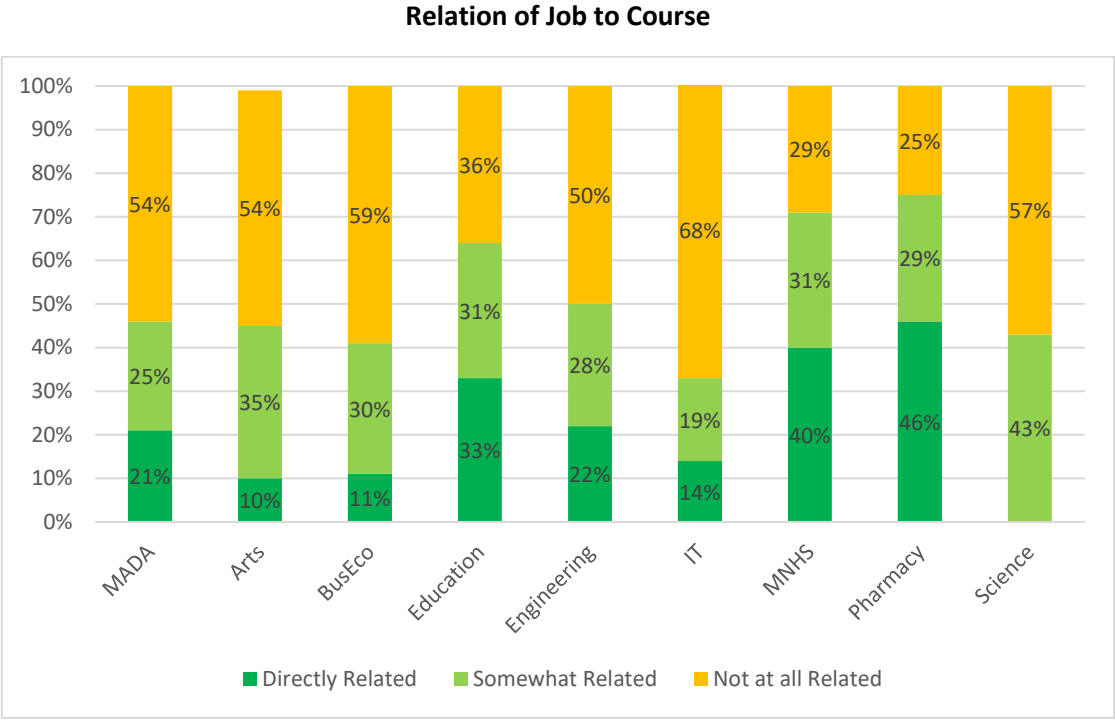
Job Type

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



Among the small number of Science students who are employed (23%), hospitality work is the most common job type (57%). The dominance of hospitality suggests that many employed students are working primarily for financial survival rather than career development. A further 29% are employed in non-descript roles, which could include more service industry employment (e.g. cleaners, call centres and so on). A marginal 14% are employed in academic or research roles, suggesting there is a limited number of opportunities for Science students to gain relevant practical experience through the institution. Critically, the small employed sample size warrants caution in interpreting these figures.

Work-Study Relevance

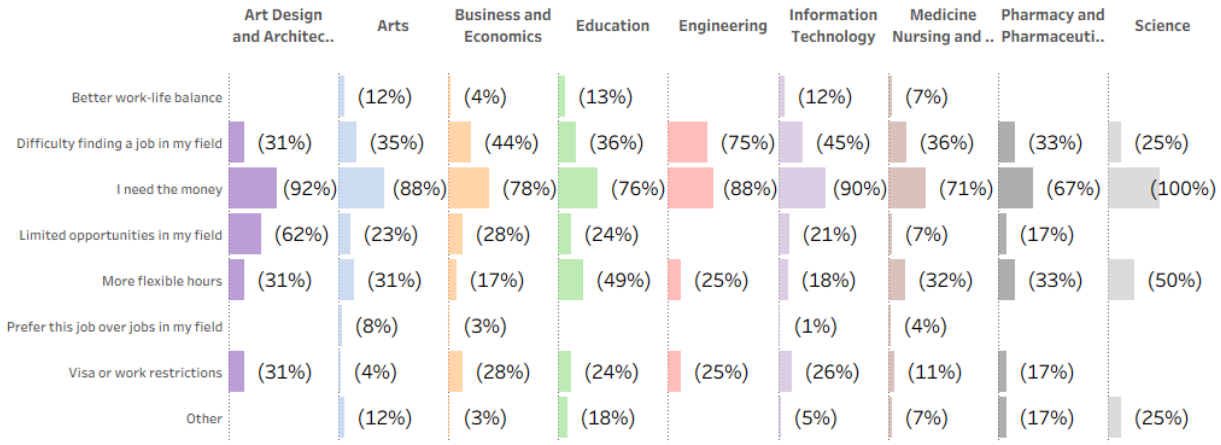


Among employed Science students, the majority (57%) work in jobs not at all related to their course of study, with the remaining 43% in somewhat related roles — and no students reporting directly related employment. This complete absence of directly field-aligned work is a striking finding that distinguishes Science from all other faculties, and is consistent with the high hospitality and other employment rates documented above.

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

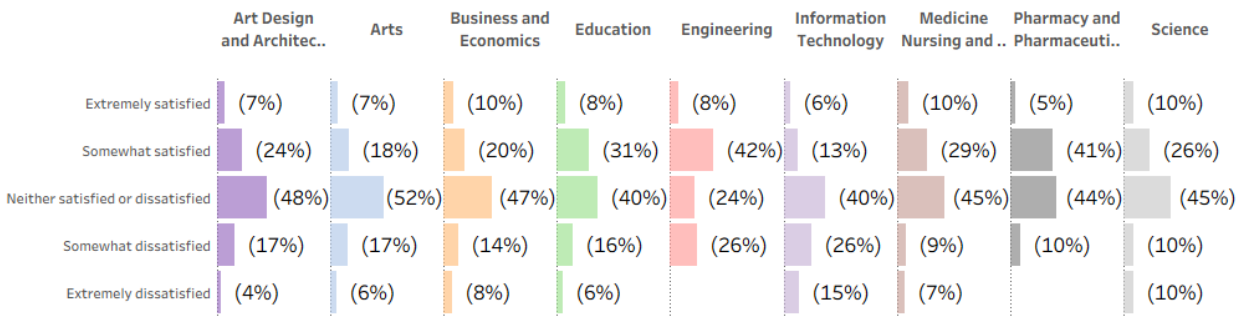


Every Science student working in a role unrelated to their course (100%) identifies financial necessity as the driving reason citing that they do it because they "need the money". This is the only faculty where this factor is universal. Half (50%) also cite the need for more flexible hours, reflecting the challenge of fitting employment around intensive study schedules. A quarter (25%) cite that it is difficult to fine a job in their field and that there are other non-described barriers.

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



Career guidance satisfaction among Science graduate coursework students presents a mixed picture, with the largest group (45%) reporting neutral feelings — neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Just over a third (36%) express some level of satisfaction, while a fifth (20%) are actively dissatisfied. The high proportion of neutral responses may indicate limited engagement with or lack of awareness about career services rather than a considered assessment of their quality, suggesting that many Science students are either unaware of available support or have not found it relevant to their needs. The 20% dissatisfaction rate, combined with the student testimonies that follow highlighting a desire for dedicated job platforms and more personalised guidance, points to an opportunity for the faculty to strengthen career support — particularly given the cohort's significant employment challenges and the universal financial necessity driving those who do find work.

Student Testimonies – Suggestions for Improvements to Career Guidance

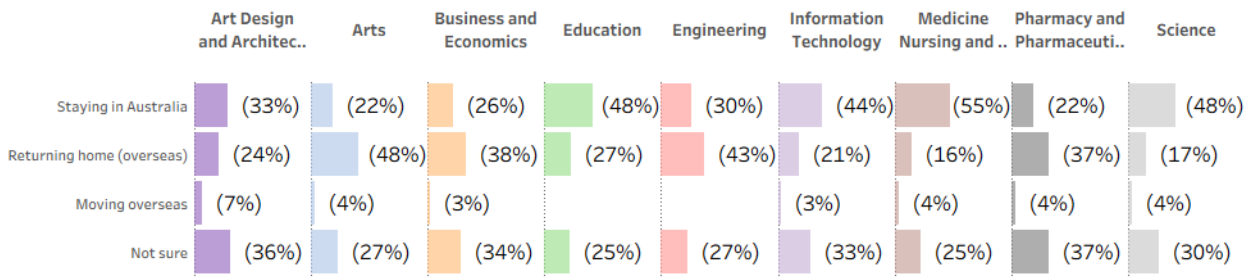
To identify specific areas for improvement, respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with career guidance services were asked to suggest enhancements. Of the suggestions made, most centred around the importance of industry connection and personalised support:

> *"I suggest that the university create a dedicated platform where jobs and internships specifically targeting current students or recent graduates are regularly posted. It would be especially helpful if part-time job opportunities suitable for international students were clearly listed along with guidance on how to apply. This would make it easier for us to find roles that align with our visa conditions and academic schedules."*
>
> *"I have reached out a couple of times regarding choosing the right path in my studies and post-graduation opportunities but I've mostly been met with a 'that sounds like a you problem' attitude."*

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



Nearly half of international Science students (48%) intend to remain in Australia after completing their degree, while only 17% plan to return home and 4% intend to move to another country. A significant proportion (30%) remain undecided. The strong preference for staying in Australia is an encouraging signal of confidence in local career prospects and the value of building a life in Australia, though it sits in tension with the employment challenges documented throughout this section — particularly the 66% unemployment rate and universal reliance on financially-driven, field-unrelated work among those who are employed. While it is positive to see that this current lack of relevant job opportunities does not deter students from planning their future in the Australian job market, this does highlight the need for significant investment in career planning and support in order to facilitate a smooth transition for students post-graduation.

What Makes Science Distinct: Key Themes

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

Compounding Financial Vulnerability and Employment Crisis Among a Predominantly International Cohort

Science graduate coursework students face the most acute employment crisis of any faculty, with 66% unemployed and actively seeking work. Among the small number who are employed, no students report working in roles directly related to their field of study, and every student working outside their discipline (100%) identifies financial necessity as the driving reason.

The financial consequences are severe and worsening. Financial wellbeing has deteriorated markedly since 2023, with the proportion of Science students "just coping" or "having trouble" surging from 37% to 65% in just two years. Over half the cohort (55%) spends more than 50% of their monthly income on rent, and 89% rely on family contributions to fund their tuition fees. The overwhelmingly international composition of the cohort survey respondents (76%) drives much of this vulnerability, as international students face the compounding effects of visa work restrictions, limited local professional networks, ineligibility for domestic financial support mechanisms such as HECS-HELP and geographic separation from family support systems.

Financial stress also emerges as one of the top four reasons students consider leaving (44%), sitting alongside course delivery (50%), unmet expectations (44%) and value-for-money concerns (44%). The intersection of financial vulnerability, employment inaccessibility and academic disruption represents the most pressing systemic challenge facing the Science graduate coursework cohort, with implications extending beyond individual wellbeing to the faculty's retention outcomes and the broader value proposition of its programmes for international students.

Unsustainable Anxiety Levels Compounded by Isolation and Displacement

Science students report one of the most concerning anxiety profiles across all faculties, with only 28% falling within the normal range and nearly one-third of Science students (29%) experience severe (13%) or extremely severe (16%) anxiety. This anxiety burden is notably more pronounced than the cohort's depression or stress indicators, suggesting a specific anxiety-driven mental health challenge that distinguishes Science from faculties where distress is more evenly distributed across DASS21 domains. Student testimonies point to workload intensity, tight deadlines, academic setbacks and the pressure of securing internships as key contributors, painting a picture of a cohort operating under significant psychological strain with limited relief.

This anxiety crisis is deepened by widespread isolation and disconnection within the cohort. Nearly two-thirds of Science students (63%) report feeling isolated at least sometimes, with a quarter experiencing isolation "often" or "almost always." The predominantly international composition of the cohort survey respondents (76%) compounds this challenge — students describe language barriers, cultural differences and the difficulty of forming meaningful connections beyond

assignment-related interactions. Over half (53%) feel they do not receive enough contact with administrative staff, and 28% report insufficient family connection, reflecting the particular vulnerability of a displaced cohort navigating an unfamiliar system far from established support networks.

The intersecting relationship between anxiety, isolation and the financial pressures documented in the report reveals a cycle that is difficult for individual students to break. Financial stress drives students into survival-mode employment, which leaves less time for socialising and peer connection, which deepens isolation, which exacerbates anxiety — all while intensive programme demands continue. That 53% of Science students have accessed mental health support (the highest uptake rate across most faculties) is both encouraging in demonstrating willingness to seek help and alarming in confirming the scale of need. Without targeted intervention addressing the interconnected nature of these pressures, the anxiety and isolation burden is likely to persist and continue undermining both student wellbeing and academic outcomes.

Faculty-Specific Recommendations

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

Addressing Financial Vulnerability and Employment Crisis

Cultural Shifts

- Establish faculty-wide recognition that the Science graduate coursework cohort faces distinctive employment barriers, compounded for its international students, embedding this understanding into programme design, career support and student communication.
- Normalise discussion of financial pressures within the academic environment, ensuring teaching staff are aware of the extent to which financial stress and mental health impacts attendance and engagement and can signpost students to available support services.

Low-Cost Enhancements

- Develop a Science-specific employment resource hub consolidating information on visa-compliant work opportunities, field-relevant part-time roles and industry contact pathways tailored to the faculty's key disciplines.
- Partner with university career services to deliver targeted workshops for international Science students on Australian job market navigation, professional networking and translating coursework skills into employment-ready language.
- Establish peer mentoring connections between currently employed Science students or recent graduates and those seeking work, providing practical guidance on securing field-relevant roles alongside study.

Addressing Anxiety Crisis and Isolation in a Displaced Cohort

Low-Cost Enhancements

- Establish regular, informal faculty-hosted social events (such as morning teas, study groups or discipline-specific networking sessions) designed specifically for graduate coursework students, creating connection opportunities that do not require students to seek out social activity independently.
- Develop a Science-specific peer support programme pairing new international students with more established peers who can provide practical guidance on navigating Melbourne, university systems and the social landscape — addressing the language and cultural barriers highlighted in student testimonies.

- Create a dedicated online community space for Science graduate coursework students, enabling connection and mutual support between students whose varying schedules and study modes make in-person interaction difficult.

Moderate Investments

- Fund a dedicated student experience or community-building coordinator within the faculty, responsible for facilitating peer connection, monitoring isolation indicators and ensuring graduate coursework students are not overlooked in faculty engagement efforts that may be oriented primarily toward undergraduate or research students.
- Enhance accessibility of mental health support by establishing drop-in consultation availability during peak assessment periods, reducing barriers for the 47% of Science students who have not yet accessed support despite the cohort's elevated anxiety profile.

Appendix 1: Demographics

Course name	Respondents
Master of Environment and Sustainability	13 (39%)
Master of Food Science and Agribusiness	7 (21%)
Master of Genome Analytics	8 (24%)
Master of Financial Mathematics	2 (6%)
Other	3 (9%)

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	1 (3%)
Clayton	32 (84%)
Caulfield	5 (13%)
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)	8 (24%)
International student	26 (76%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	32 (94%)
Part-time	2 (6%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	19 (56%)
Multi-modal	14 (41%)
Entirely off-campus	1 (3%)
Other	0 (0%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	9 (27%)
1-5 years	16 (48%)
6-10 years	4 (12%)
11+ years	4 (12%)

Degree progress	Respondents
First year	19 (56%)
Second year	15 (44%)
Third year and beyond	0 (0%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	1 (3%)
6-10	3 (9%)
11-20	8 (24%)
21-30	11 (32%)
31-40	6 (18%)
Over 40 hours	5 (15%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	17 (52%)
Advanced	9 (27%)
Intermediate	6 (18%)
Elementary	1 (3%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	24 (73%)
Man	8 (24%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	1 (3%)
Prefer to self-describe	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	0 (0%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	6 (18%)
No	26 (79%)
Prefer not to disclose	1 (3%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	8 (100%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	7 (21%)
No	23 (70%)
Prefer not to disclose	3 (9%)

Registered disability with DSS	Respondents
Yes	3 (43%)
No	4 (57%)

Age	Respondents
24 or under	15 (44%)
25-29	9 (26%)
30-39	9 (26%)
40 and over	1 (3%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	1 (3%)
Part-time	4 (13%)
Casual	2 (6%)
Unemployed and looking for work	21 (66%)
Not employed and not looking for work	4 (13%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	0 (0%)
6-10	1 (14%)
11-20	4 (57%)
21-30	1 (14%)
31-40	1 (14%)
More than 40	0 (0%)