

# **Graduate Research in Arts:**

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](mailto: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 Research in Arts: Student Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancement*. Melbourne: Monash Graduate Association, 2025.

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## Introduction

This report examines the experiences of 115 graduate research students in the Faculty of Arts who participated in the MGA's *2025 National Postgraduate Student Survey on Health, Family and Finances*. It complements the university-wide report *Graduate Research at Monash: Student Experience, Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancement* by identifying faculty-specific patterns and opportunities for targeted enhancement within Arts.

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

- 115 Arts graduate research students participated.
- Response rate represents approximately 29% of enrolled Arts graduate researchers.
- Data collected May – June 2025 as part of broader institutional study.

## Report Focus

This report addresses four key areas:

- Mental health and wellbeing in Arts graduate research contexts.
- Financial pressures and their discipline-specific manifestations.
- Academic progression, career uncertainty and attrition considerations.
- Peer connection and support needs unique to Arts students.

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

## Key Findings for Arts

This section presents core findings from the 115 Arts graduate research students who participated in the survey, examining patterns across mental health, financial circumstances, academic progression and peer connection. Where meaningful, findings are compared to Monash-wide averages to identify areas where Arts students' experiences align with or diverge from broader institutional trends. These comparisons reveal both shared challenges affecting graduate researchers across disciplines and distinctive patterns that may warrant faculty-specific interventions.

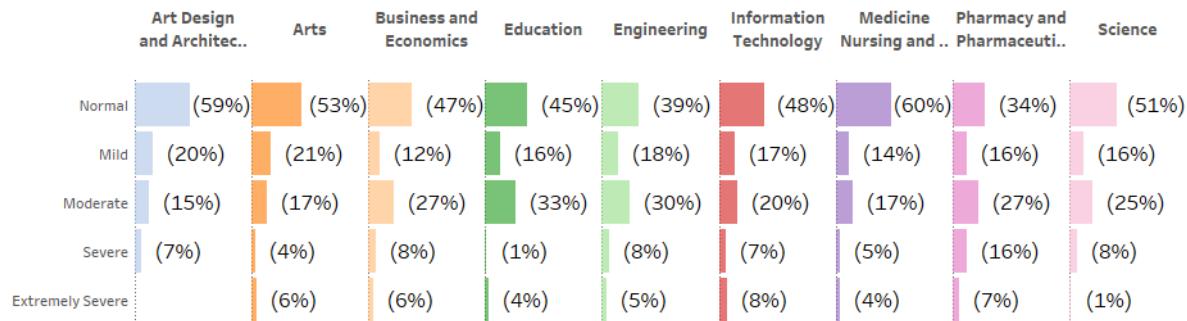
### 1. Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health challenges affect graduate research students across all disciplines, but the intensity and nature of these challenges – and students' willingness to seek support – vary by faculty context. This section examines mental health indicators, support access patterns and imposter syndrome rates among Arts students, comparing them to university-wide averages. These findings reveal where Arts students face similar challenges to their peers and where discipline-specific factors may create unique barriers or pressures.

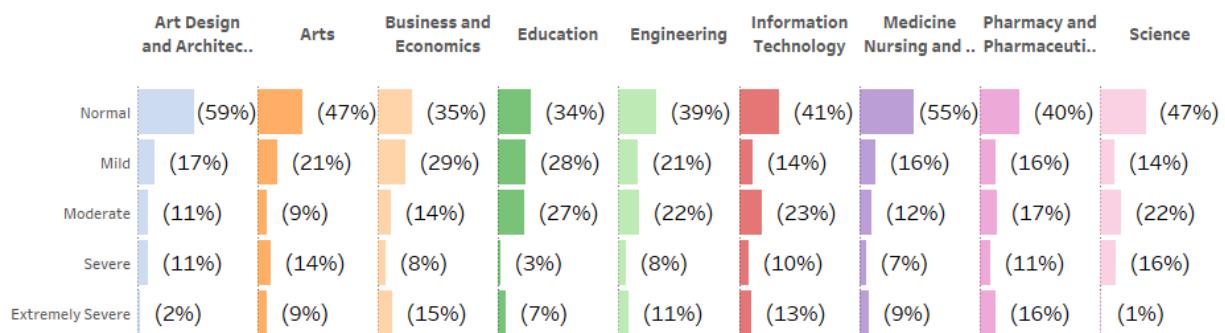
#### DASS21 Indicators:

Arts students show mental health patterns similar to the Monash average.

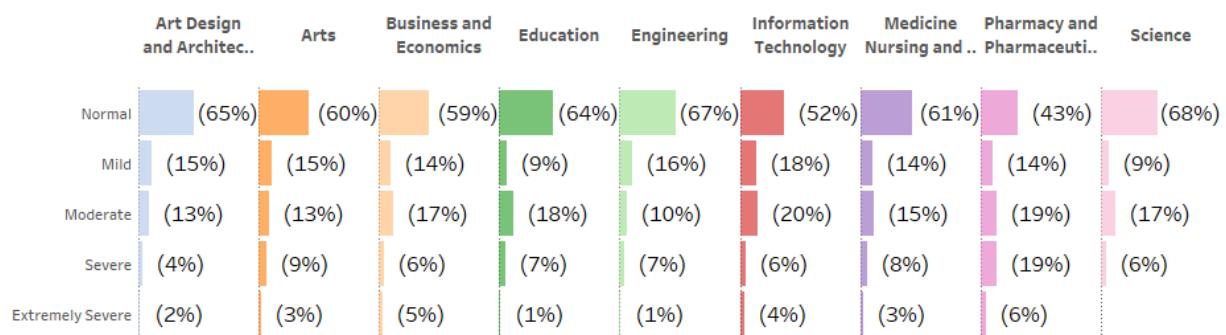
##### *Depression:*



##### *Anxiety:*



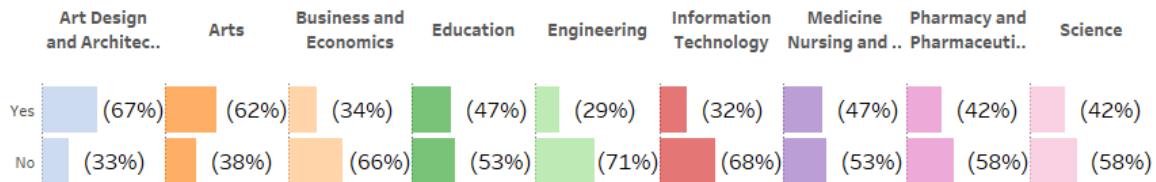
### Stress:



These patterns suggest that Arts students experience mental health challenges at rates comparable to the broader Monash graduate research population, with some metrics showing marginally better outcomes. While specific DASS21 breakdowns show variation across depression, anxiety and stress indicators, the overall pattern indicates that approximately one-quarter to one-third of Arts students experience moderate to extremely severe symptoms across these domains.

### Mental Health Support Access:

Arts respondents are more likely to have accessed support for a mental health issue than respondents from almost every other faculty.

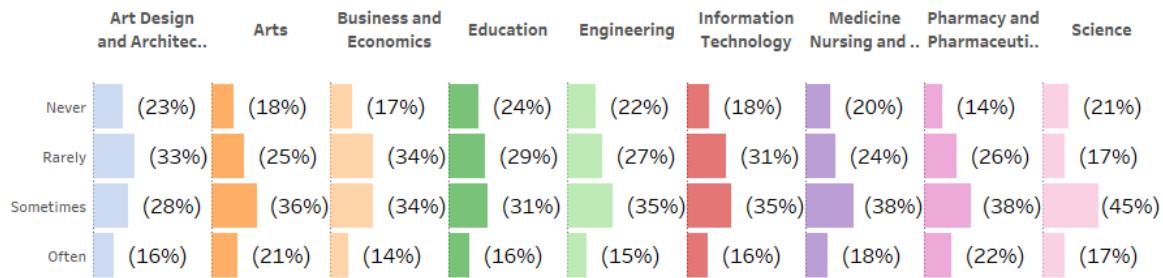


### Key demographic insights:

- 62% of Arts students have accessed mental health support (vs. 42% university-wide).
- 79% of domestic students (n.56) and 43% of international students (n.51) had accessed support.
- Both of these access rates are comfortably above the University-wide average for these demographics (Domestic = 62%, International = 32%).

## Imposter Syndrome:

Beyond clinical mental health indicators, imposter syndrome – the persistent feeling of being a fraud despite evidence of competence – represents a distinct psychological challenge facing graduate researchers. Examining imposter syndrome rates provides insight into how students experience their academic identity and belonging within the research community.



- 82% of Arts students reported experiencing imposter syndrome at some point (vs. 83% university-wide).

## Student Voices from Arts:

While the quantitative data reveals patterns in mental health outcomes, research pressures and imposter syndrome among Arts students, hearing directly from students themselves provides essential depth and context to these statistics. The following testimonies illustrate the lived experiences behind the data, revealing how mental health challenges manifest in the daily realities of graduate research students in Arts:

*“Knowing that Monash University and especially the Faculty of Arts could not give two sh\*ts about students or their wellbeing. Additionally economic stress from being on a scholarship which only equals to 75% of the minimum wage and when I raised in with my main supervisor that I was struggling financially and mentally on the scholarship I was told to stop complaining as being on a scholarship was a privilege.”*

*“[Poor mental health] is probably in weeks when I have had deadlines (work and PhD) and have been unable to spend as much time with friends/ socialising.”*

*“Being unable to balance studying with work and caring commitments not having enough support from supervisors. Difficult to meet peers when I cannot attend on campus events.”*

*“Language barriers, financial problem (really need a part-time/casual job to support my rent and daily spend) lack connection with the collective and the faculty as an international PhD student. (Doing research alone live single without family members in Mel rely on digital communication with others).”*

*“Not being on campus means I don’t feel like part of the cohort and I don’t have anyone to talk about my studies / difficulties with. This means that I don’t know if what I’m experiencing is normal or not.”*

*“Uncertainty about the future.”*

### **What This Means for Arts:**

Arts students access mental health support at notably higher rates than the university average (56% vs. 42%), representing the second-highest access rate across Monash faculties. This elevated access extends across both demographic groups: 79% of domestic Arts students have accessed support (above the 62% university-wide domestic average) and 43% of international Arts students (above the 32% university-wide international average). This pattern suggests that Arts has successfully created an environment where help-seeking is normalised and accessible, potentially reflecting several positive factors: a faculty culture that explicitly validates emotional labour and psychological processing as legitimate aspects of humanities and social sciences research; strong connections between Arts faculty and campus mental health services; peer networks that normalise discussion of mental health challenges; or supervisory practices that proactively address wellbeing alongside academic progress.

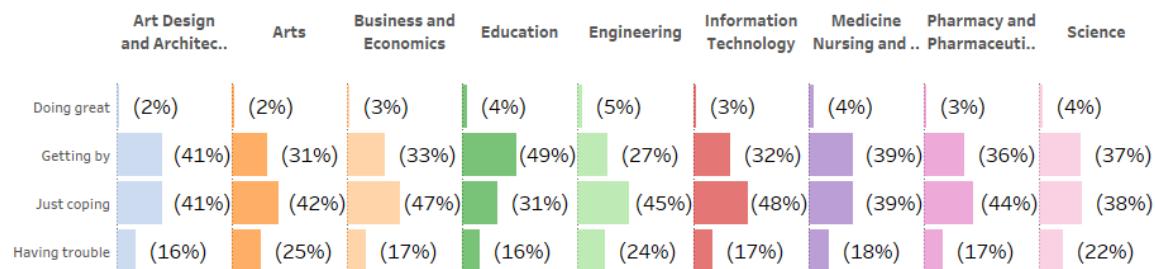
However, the substantial gap between domestic and international students within Arts (79% vs. 43% – a 28 percentage point difference) indicates that despite overall success, international students still face significant barriers to accessing support. While Arts international students access support at higher rates than their international student peers university-wide, the within-faculty disparity suggests opportunities for targeted intervention. The faculty's demonstrated success in supporting domestic students provides a foundation for extending similar accessibility to international students through culturally responsive outreach, multilingual support options and explicit messaging that accessing support does not affect visa status.

## 2. Financial Circumstances and Career Pressure

This section examines two interrelated dimensions of the Arts graduate research experience: financial circumstances and career navigation. Beyond standard financial wellbeing measures, Arts students face discipline-specific pressures including international conference/fieldwork expectations and the tension between academic career paths and industry opportunities. These factors combine to create unique financial and professional challenges that may require targeted faculty-level interventions.

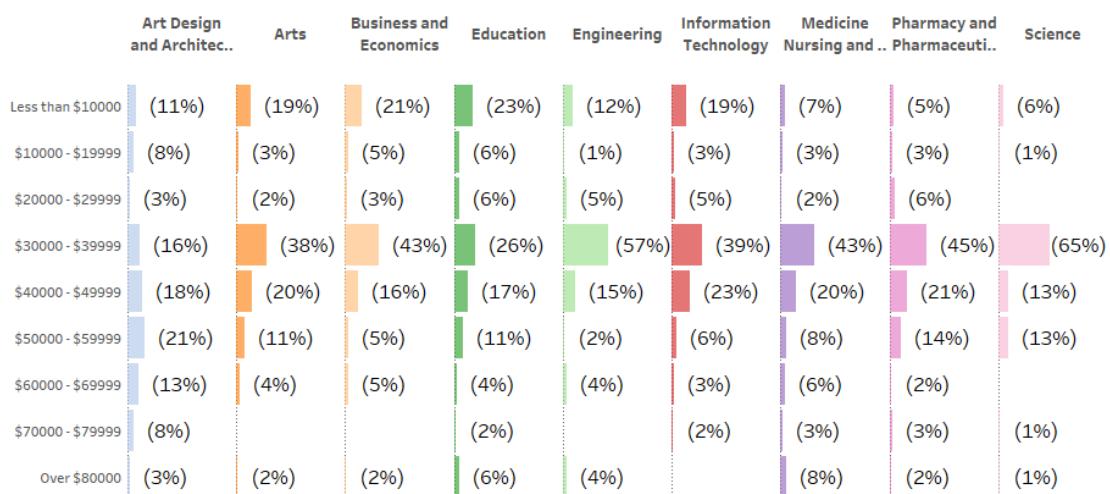
### Melbourne Institute's Financial Wellbeing:

Arts graduate research students show financial wellbeing patterns marginally worse than the Monash average, with 67% of the faculty's students either “just coping” or “having trouble” (compared to 64% university-wide).



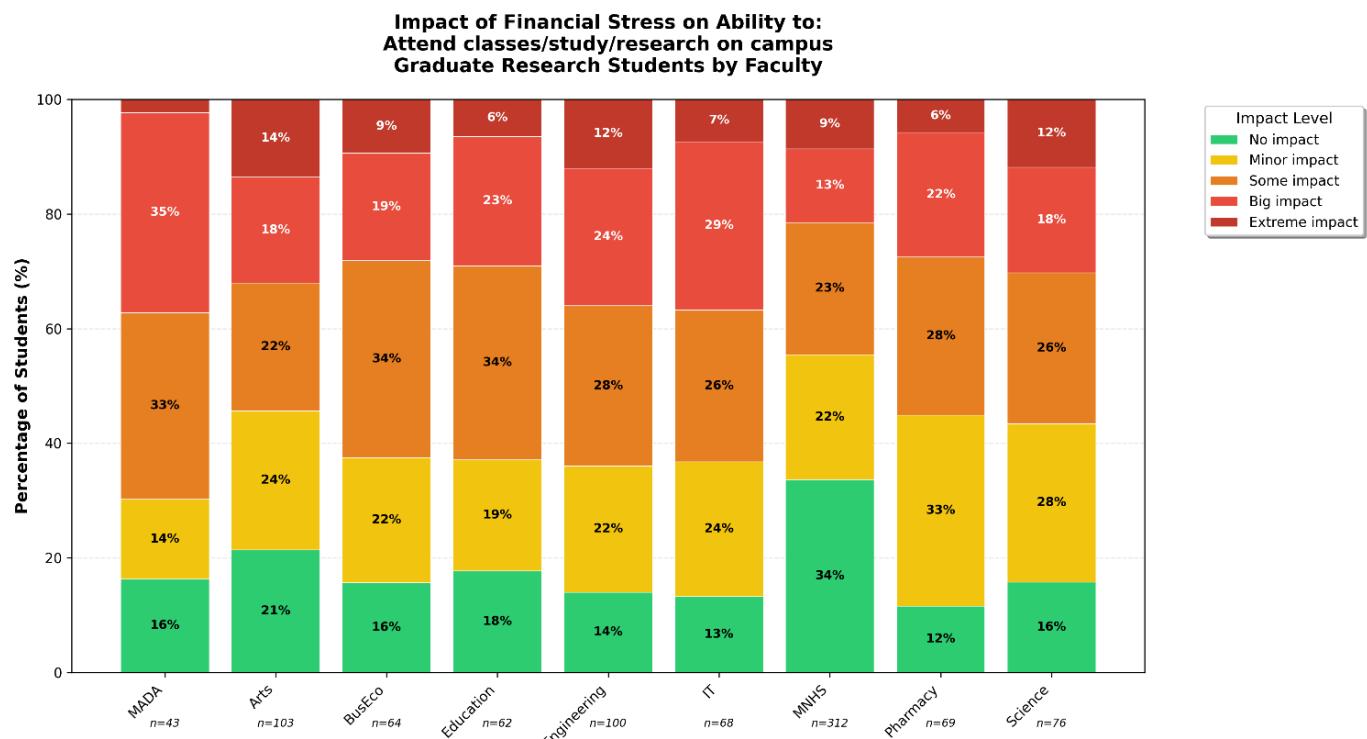
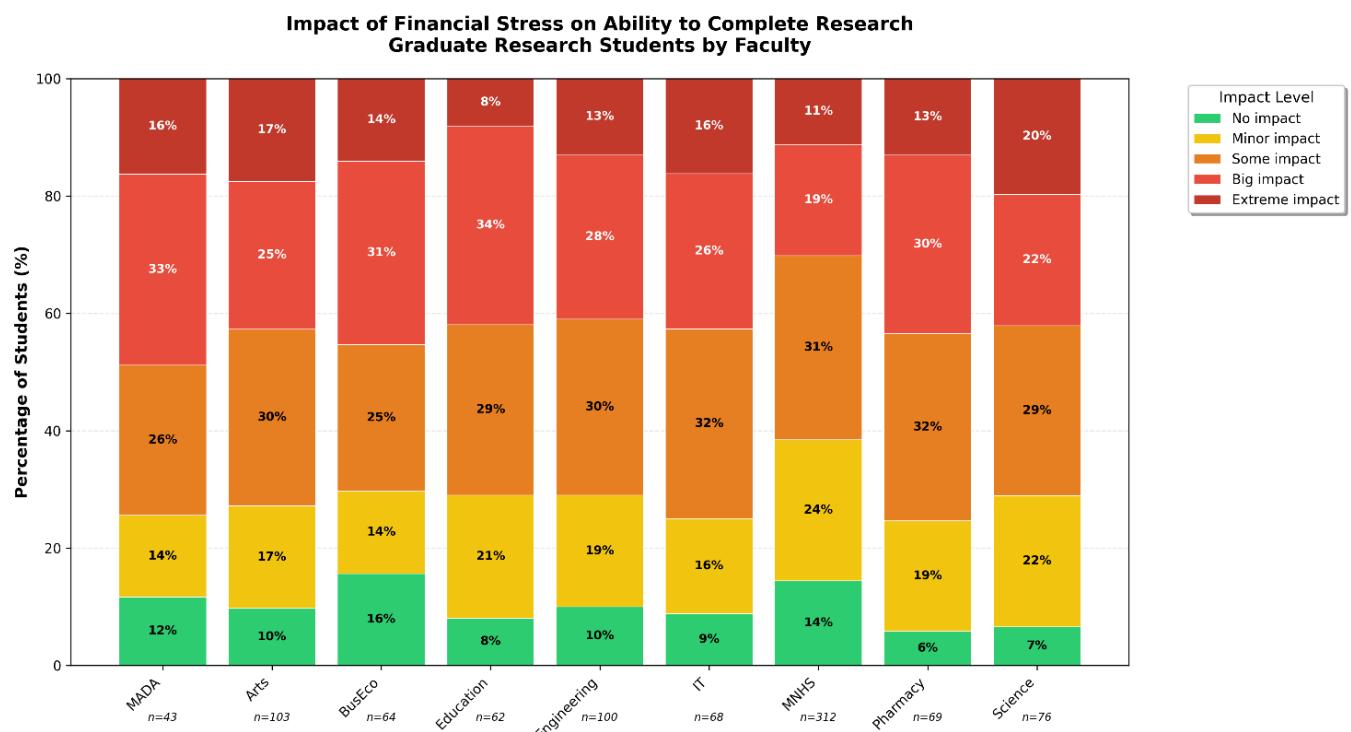
### Estimated Annual Income (AUD)

Arts students show income patterns broadly consistent with university trends, with students reporting median incomes in the \$30,000-\$39,999 range (reflecting scholarship levels).

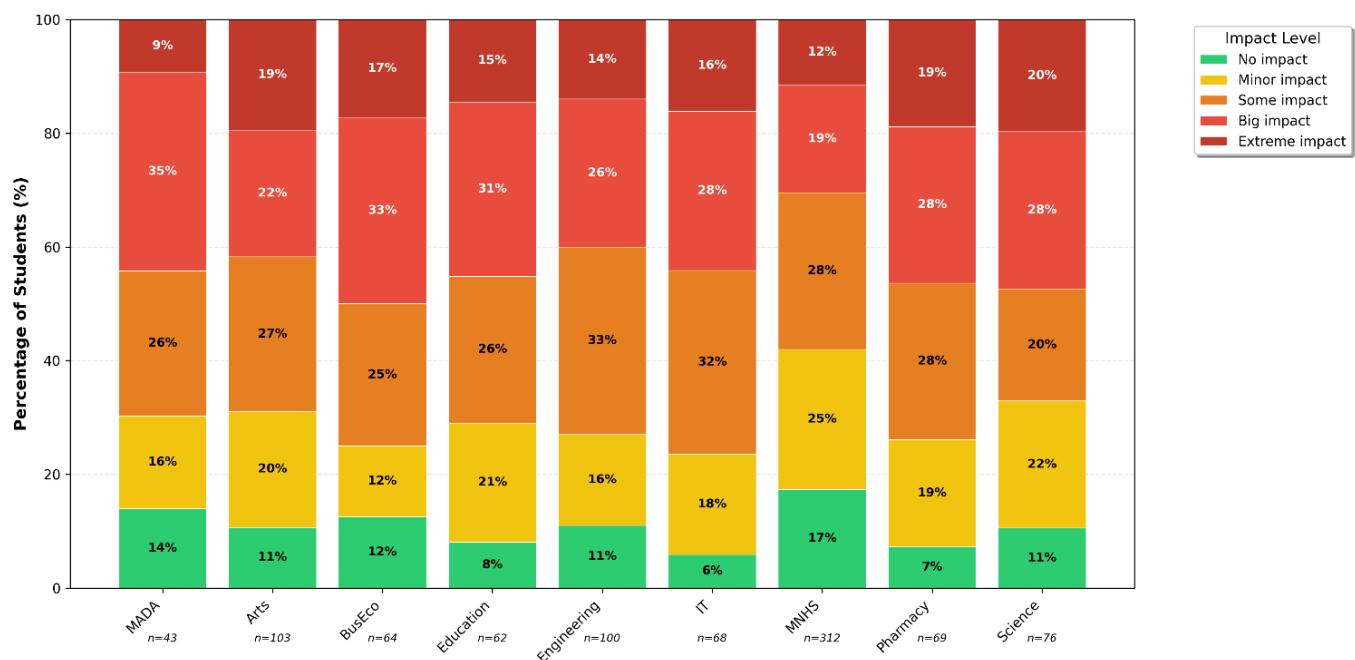


## How Financial Pressures Affect Academic Activities

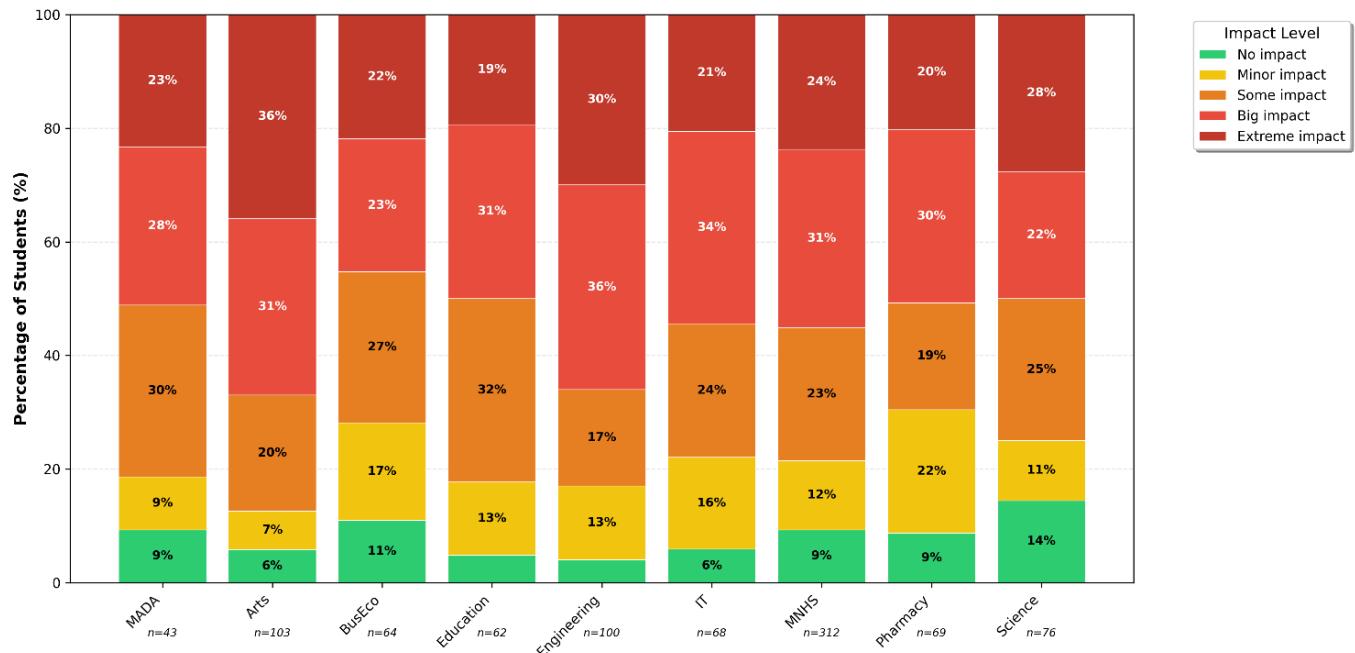
Financial pressures directly impact Arts students' ability to engage fully with their research and professional development opportunities. The following data reveal how financial stress affects key aspects of academic engagement:



**Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to:  
Concentrate on your course/research  
Graduate Research Students by Faculty**



**Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to:  
Travel for study purposes e.g. fieldwork or conferences  
Graduate Research Students by Faculty**



**Key Findings on Financial Impact:**

- **Research completion capacity:** 42% of Arts students indicate that financial stress has an extreme or big impact on their ability to complete their research to the best of their ability

(vs. 39% university-wide reporting extreme/big impact). This metric captures the cumulative effect of financial pressures on overall research quality and completion prospects.

- **Campus attendance and engagement:** 32% of Arts students report that financial stress has an extreme or big impact on their ability to attend classes, study or conduct research on campus (vs. 28% university-wide). For students unable to afford transport costs or who work extensive hours to meet living expenses, physical presence on campus – essential for accessing resources, connecting with peers and engaging with the research community – becomes a luxury rather than a given.
- **Concentration and research quality:** 41% of Arts students report that financial stress has an extreme or big impact on their ability to concentrate on their research (vs. 40% university-wide). This suggests that financial pressures directly undermine the cognitive focus required for high-quality scholarly work, with Arts students experiencing rates similar to peers across the university.
- **Professional development through travel:** 67% of Arts students report that financial stress has an extreme or big impact on their ability to travel for study purposes such as fieldwork, conferences, or research collaborations (vs. 56% university-wide). This was the highest rate of any faculty. Students facing financial constraints may miss crucial networking opportunities, visibility in their field and professional development experiences that are increasingly expected for successful academic careers in humanities and social sciences.

#### **Student Voices on Financial Reality:**

The following testimonies illustrate the lived experiences behind the data, revealing how financial pressures manifest in the daily realities of graduate research student in Arts.

*“I cannot afford public transport into uni every day as we don't have access to concession. Therefore, I predominantly work from home meaning my bills are more expensive. Or I go to my local library, but this means I miss out on any social interactions with my peers.”*

*“I would truly love not to work whilst undertaking my PhD but the stipend just isn't enough to survive on. There is also an extra layer of isolation that comes with seeing my PhD peers who don't have to work and get to focus entirely on their research whilst I am unable to do so. The class divide is quite severe and will undeniably mean that I either have to sacrifice work-life balance financial stability or the quality of my thesis in ways that other students do not.”*

*“My partner works full time in a good career and we have combined finances. I am a very bad example for the typical financial situation of a PhD student.”*

*“If I cannot be awarded a scholarship to cover both my tuition fees and my life expense. I will face the risking of dropping out my PhD study. Therefore, it is impossible for me to have a good career.”*

*“Stipend is not enough to be able to support a family but studying part-time will mean my scholarship is taxed which makes it even more difficult to be able to support myself and family.”*

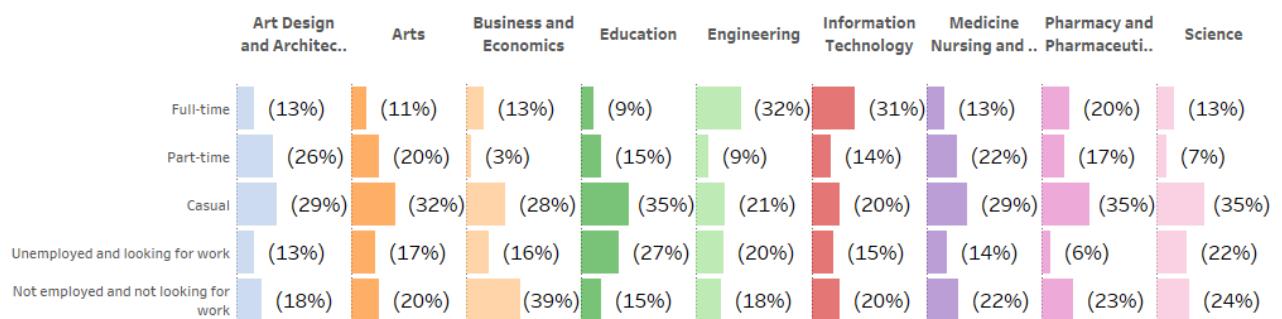
*“I am paid significantly less than when I first got a job out of uni in 2008 and it's impossible to live in Melbourne on it.”*

*“The stipend doesn't reflect the actual cost of living in Melbourne. You're expected to complete full-time hours on your PhD but the stipend is so low that you have to choose between forgoing basic expenses (being able to live by yourself or with limited housemates/a partner being able to afford sufficient groceries being able to participant in social activities) or you additional hours work on top of your full-time PhD. It's a Catch-22 and nearing the end of my PhD the overwhelming outcome is one of burnout and trauma. The value of the PhD is less than the sacrifices I have had to make to do it and many of those are directly impacted by the low stipend and expected PhD hours.”*

### **Employment Patterns:**

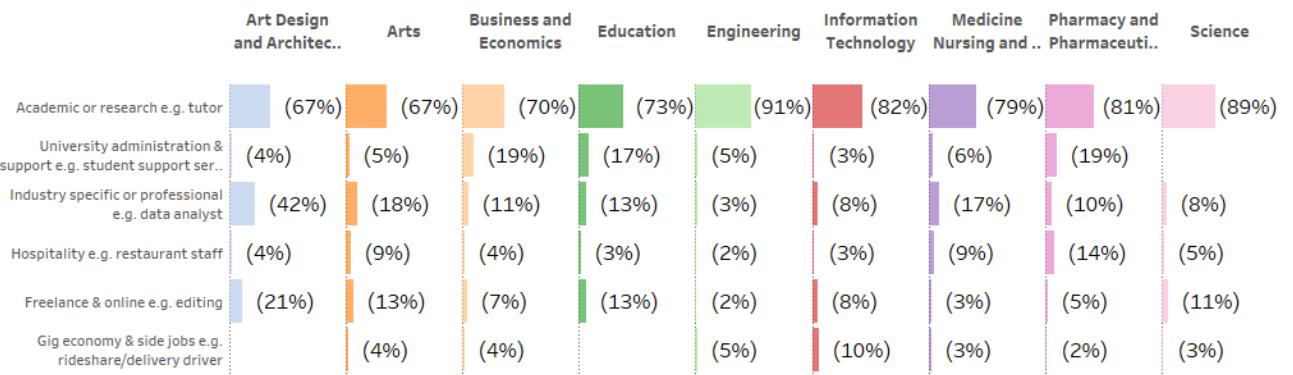
The employment patterns among Arts students reveal the complex relationship between financial necessity, professional development and research progress. Understanding who works, in what capacity and how employment relates to research provides insight into the discipline-specific challenges Arts students navigate.

*Employment Status of Full-Time Students Across the Faculties:*



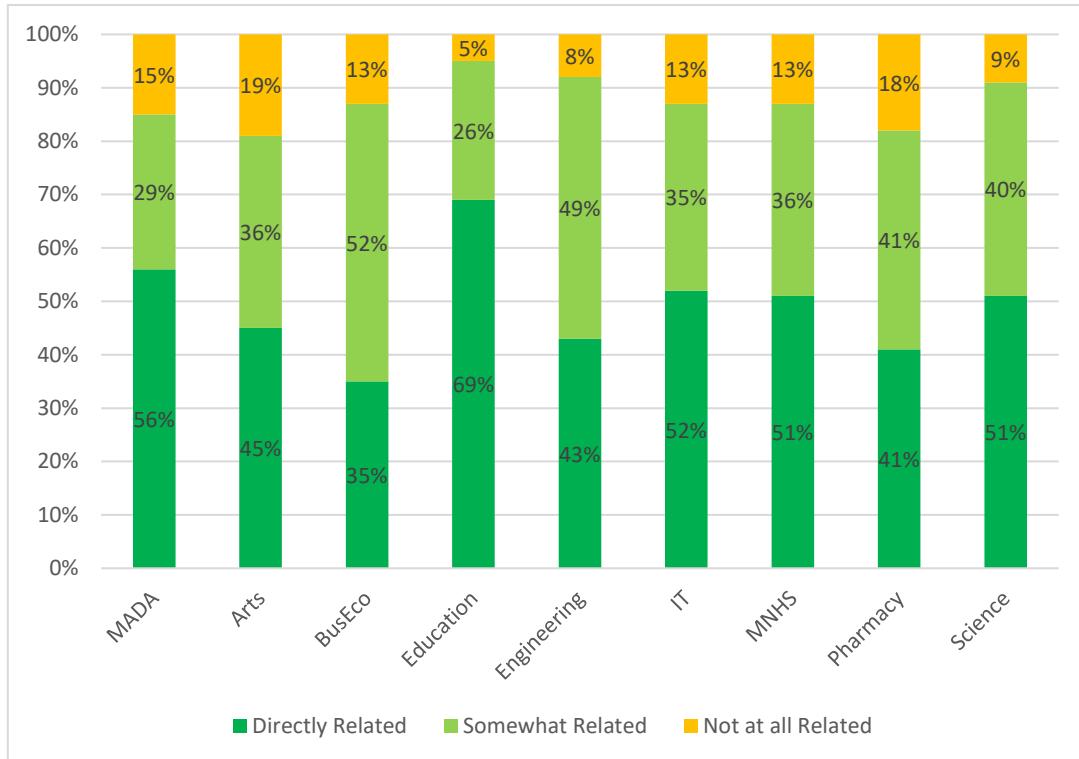
Arts students show employment patterns broadly consistent with university trends. One-fifth of students are not employed and not looking for work, while 17% are unemployed, but unable to find work.

### The Type of Jobs Students are Employed In:



While two-thirds of employed Arts graduate research students have a job in academia, this is the equal-lowest proportion among all the university faculties.

### Relation of Job to Research



These patterns reveal a mixed employment landscape among Arts students. A substantial proportion work in jobs directly or somewhat related to their studies, potentially through teaching assistant positions, research collaborations, cultural sector roles or humanities-oriented organisations. These students may experience employment as less burdensome and more complementary to their academic work.

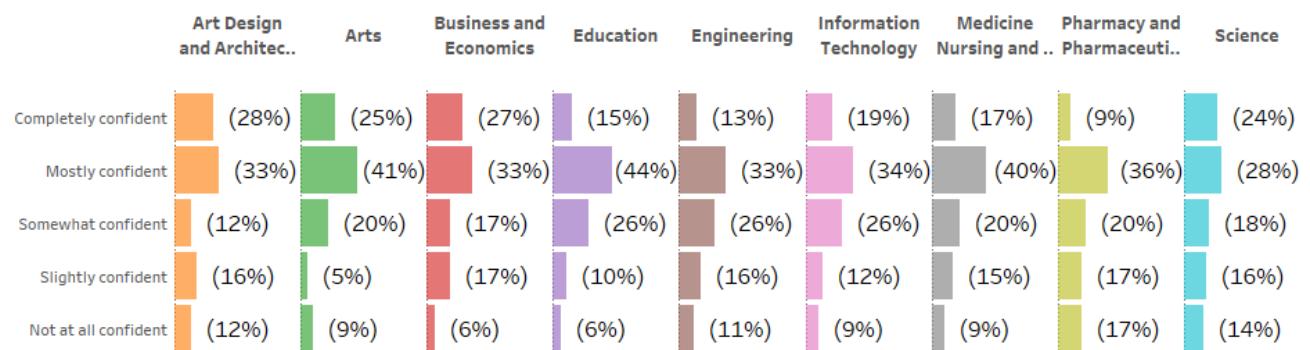
However, students working in jobs unrelated to their studies highlight those for whom employment represents pure financial necessity rather than career building. These individuals face the particular challenge of devoting significant time and energy to work that offers no advancement toward their research or professional goals – a double burden of competing demands and missed opportunity costs. For a discipline where career trajectories often require extensive publication records, conference presentations and professional networking, ensuring students have access to professionally relevant employment opportunities (whether through expanded teaching roles, research assistant positions or humanities sector partnerships) could transform employment from a competing pressure into a professional development asset. This is particularly important for making graduate research in Arts attractive, since the faculty is equal last for proportion of employed students in an academic job.

### 3. Academic Progression and Career Uncertainty

Beyond the immediate pressures of mental health and financial stress, Arts graduate research students must navigate questions about their academic trajectory and post-PhD careers. This section examines completion confidence, consideration of leaving and satisfaction with career guidance among Arts students. Understanding these patterns reveals how the distinctive pressures facing Arts students – including the tension between academic and industry pathways – affect their sense of progress and professional direction.

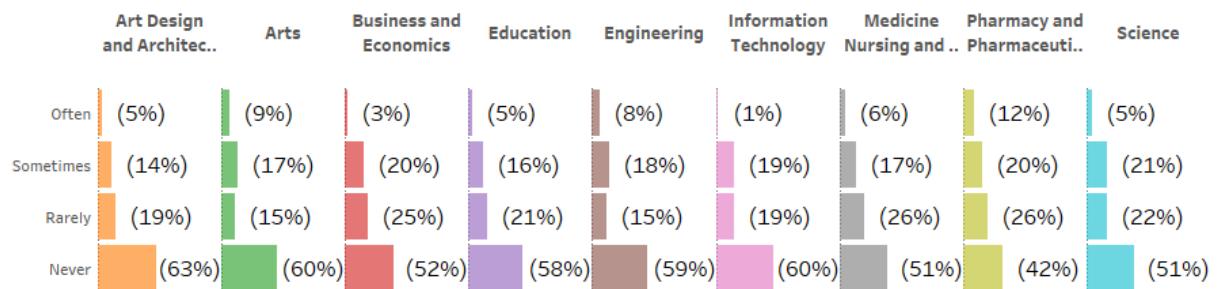
#### Completion Confidence:

Arts students show the highest completion confidence and are comfortably ahead of the university average (66% vs. 55% completely/mostly confident). Meanwhile, 14% are either “not at all” or “slightly confident” of timely completion – which is also the lowest recorded across the faculties.



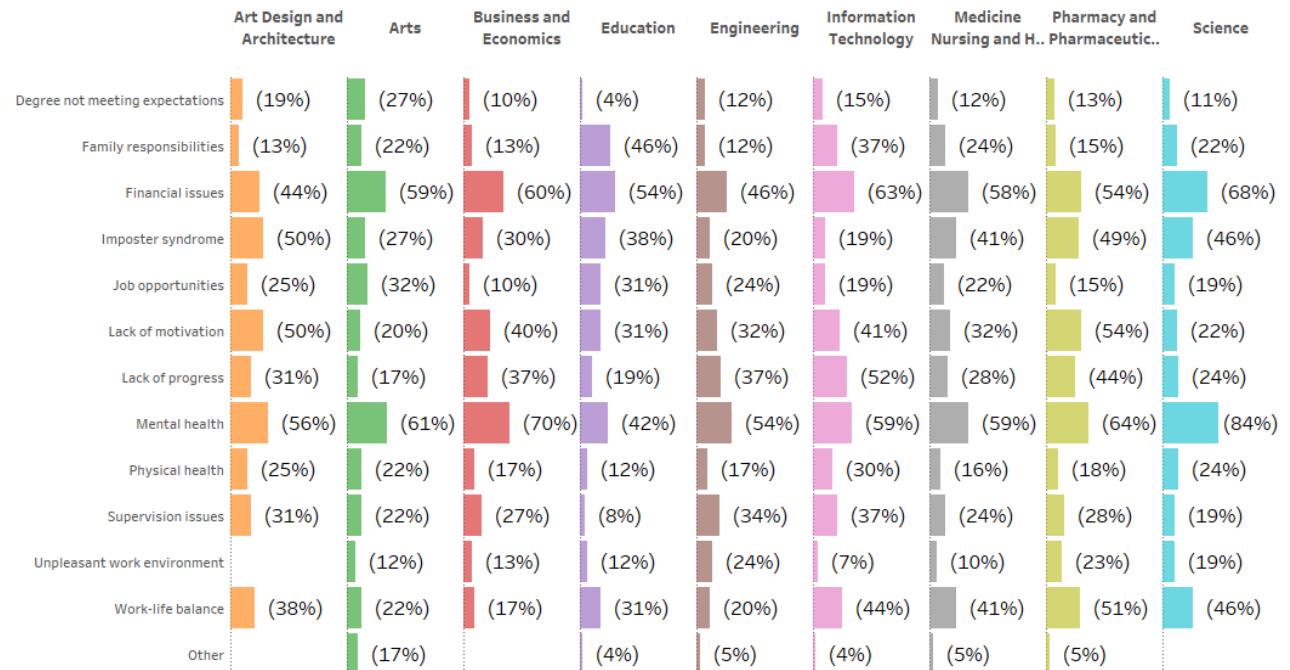
## Considering Leaving:

Consideration of leaving one's degree represents a normal part of the graduate research journey for many students, reflecting moments when challenges feel overwhelming or alternative paths appear more appealing. Examining how frequently Arts students experience these thoughts and how this compares to university-wide patterns, provides important context for understanding retention risks and the effectiveness of current support systems in sustaining students through difficult periods.



Two-fifths (40%) of Arts students have considered leaving at some point, which is lower than the 46% university-wide average.

## Primary Reasons for Considering Leaving (among those who have considered):



Among Arts students who have considered leaving, the pattern of reasons requires careful analysis of discipline-specific pressures and support needs. The combination of factors driving consideration of leaving among Arts students reveals both shared challenges with the broader graduate research population and distinctive patterns that warrant targeted faculty-level interventions focused on

sustaining students through difficult periods while addressing the specific pressures facing humanities and social sciences researchers.

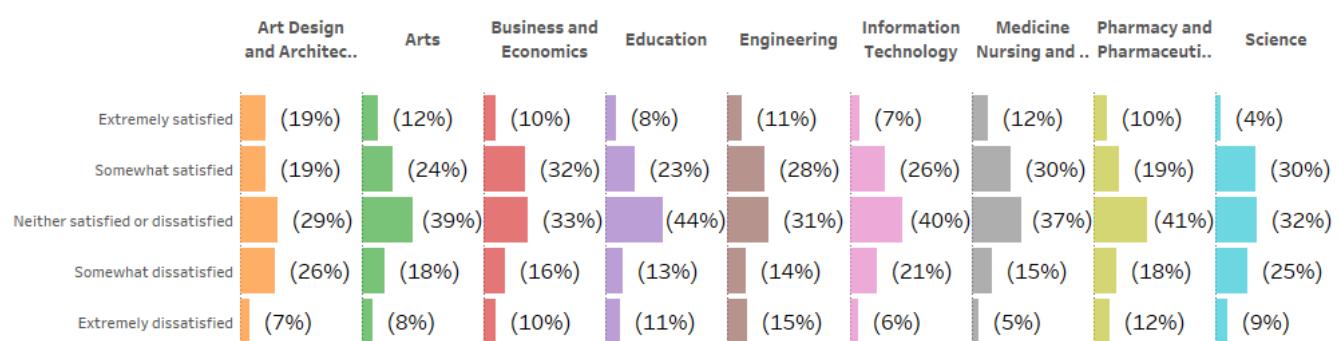
Despite having close to the best access rates for mental health support, mental health still rates as the primary reason Arts students consider leaving their degree (with 61% of students considering leaving citing mental health as the reason). Humanities research generates distinctive psychological pressures that support services address but may not fully resolve. Unlike other faculties where students may be more likely to work in research teams, the extended solitary nature of reading, writing and conceptual development in Arts, combined with interpretive work where standards of “sufficient contribution” remain more ambiguous than in other faculties, creates sustained challenges for students to feel secure and supported throughout their research studies.

Financial issues represent the second most common reason at 59%, consistent with the substantial financial pressures documented throughout this report. This reflects both immediate financial pressures and career uncertainty in humanities academic job markets where successful PhD completion may not lead to stable employment opportunities – at least in the short term.

Notably, lack of progress and lack of motivation are mentioned at relatively low rates compared to most other faculties, indicating that Arts students maintain strong intellectual investment in their research despite external challenges. Instead, Arts students question whether they can complete given systemic barriers, not whether they want to – pointing toward a need for investment in retention strategies addressing structural obstacles (financial sustainability, career pathways) rather than research engagement.

#### **Career Guidance Satisfaction:**

Career guidance represents a critical component of graduate research training, yet one that often receives less attention than academic supervision or research skill development. Graduate researchers must navigate complex career decisions – including whether to pursue academic positions, transition to industry, or explore alternative pathways – while simultaneously managing the demands of their research projects. The timing, networking strategies, skill development priorities and application approaches differ substantially across these trajectories, making discipline-specific career guidance particularly valuable. Understanding how satisfied Arts students are with the career support they receive provides insight into whether current services adequately prepare them for the diverse professional pathways available to PhDs.



Arts students show patterns in career guidance satisfaction that suggest opportunities for enhancement. The complexity of humanities and social sciences career pathways – spanning

academic positions, cultural sector roles, policy analysis, NGO work, publishing, education and various “alt-ac” (alternative academic career) trajectories – requires discipline-specific guidance that generic university career services may struggle to provide.

#### **Student Voices on Career Guidance:**

Student feedback reveals specific gaps in current career support for Arts researchers. The testimonies below illustrate both what students need – proactive outreach, discipline-specific guidance, industry connections – and what current services may be missing:

*“If there could be more opportunities and information available that is more course-centric and tailored for student requirements.”*

*“I don't even know what the point of the career guidance services at Monash are for. The only advice I was able to get from careers at Monash was to create a LinkedIn which I already had.”*

*“I have not received much yet since I am in my first year. However I am planning on engaging in this with my supervisor in the coming years.”*

*“Actually have a dedicated team for graduate career guidance for one.”*

*“I don't believe that it exists so I suppose even having career guidance would be a start.”*

*“Targeted one-on-one consultations for HDR students who may not find the one-size-fits-all career services/workshops useful. more opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement through classes workshops can enable networking collaboration and possibly assist one's career.”*

*“Providing more area specific and relevant support. I find most opportunities offered to us are directed towards STEM students and are not helpful for us ... I feel cornered into working in academia as I have not developed skills on connecting with industry that is relevant to my field. The only opportunity we have is an unpaid internship - which we cannot afford and should not be expected to do this far into our career or this late in life.”*

*“One improvement would be to facilitate better communication channels between students and academic staff as it can be difficult to connect with supervisors or professors due to their heavy workloads. I would also appreciate more structured opportunities provided by the university to access academic and career development programs such as research assistantships networking events or publication workshops.”*

*“For PhDs realistically the best contact are academics and they are overworked and hard to get in contact with. It's not easy to solve this else it would be solved.”*

*“I once asked the Graduate Research Office (Faculty and General) for career guidance or resources relating to post-doctoral or post-PhD positions. They advised me they had none.”*

#### **The Arts Career Challenge:**

Arts graduate research students face unique career navigation challenges:

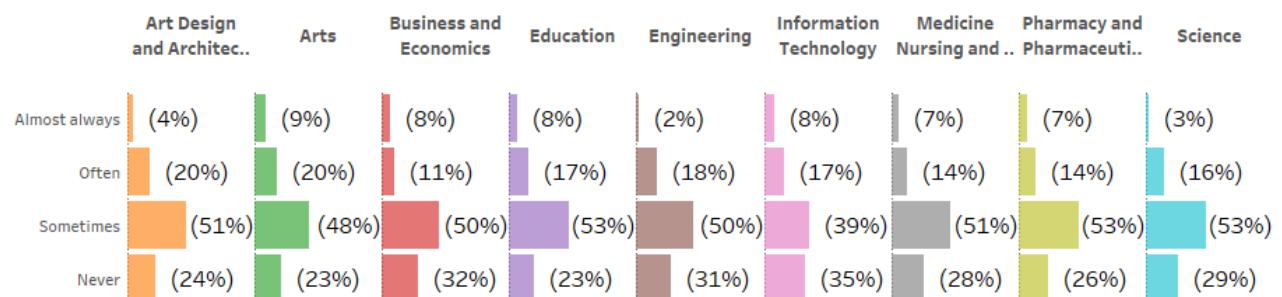
- **Academic job market realities:** Understanding the highly competitive academic job market in humanities and social sciences, including the prevalence of casual/adjunct positions and the importance of publication records, teaching experience and professional networks.
- **Diverse career trajectories:** Academic positions, cultural sector roles (museums, galleries, heritage organisations), policy analysis, NGO and advocacy work, publishing and editing, secondary/tertiary education, research institutes or “portfolio careers” combining multiple income streams – each requiring different networking strategies, skill development and professional positioning.
- **Translating research to non-academic contexts:** Articulating the value of humanities PhD training to employers outside academia who may not understand how research skills transfer to policy analysis, strategic communication, program evaluation or organisational research.
- **“Alt-ac” pathway navigation:** Identifying and pursuing alternative academic careers that utilise research training without traditional faculty positions, including university administration, research support roles, academic publishing or educational technology.
- **Timing and skill development:** Balancing the need to build a competitive academic CV (publications, conferences, teaching) with developing skills for non-academic pathways (project management, data visualisation, public communication, grant writing for non-academic contexts) without clear guidance on which trajectory to prioritise.

#### 4. Peer Connection and Disciplinary Community

Social connection and peer relationships provide essential support throughout the extended graduate research journey, yet the independent nature of doctoral work creates particular challenges for community building. This section examines how Arts students experience isolation, belonging and meaningful contact across different relationship types. Understanding these patterns reveals where existing community-building efforts reach Arts students effectively and where discipline-specific factors – such as methodological diversity, competitive cultures or varied career orientations – may create barriers to connection.

##### Isolation and Belonging:

Feelings of isolation and lack of belonging represent common challenges in graduate research, where students often work independently on specialised projects over extended periods. The following data reveal how Arts students experience connection – or disconnection – within their academic community.



- 77% of Arts students experience some degree of isolation (vs. 72% university-wide).
- 29% experience high levels of isolation (“often” or “almost always”) vs. 22% university-wide.

### **Student Voices on Isolation**

While the quantitative data reveals patterns in isolation and connection among IT students, hearing directly from students themselves illuminates the lived reality behind these statistics. The following testimonies reveal how isolation manifests in the daily experience of graduate research – from the solitary nature of creative work to the challenge of finding peers who understand discipline-specific pressures.

*“Because I don’t have a friend who is deeply connected. My family members are not here as well.”*

*“Typically when I feel like social opportunities are rarely viable. I want to benefit from HDR social events and build supportive connections but have been unable to attend events because I work alongside study and rarely have time in my schedule.”*

*“Lack of meaningful opportunity to connect with Arts postgraduate students at Monash Clayton lack of Arts opportunities and representation at the university.”*

*“I am often alone in my workspace - the other desks often vacant. I also have struggled to make friends since moving to Melbourne.”*

*“There is no community.”*

*“Nobody comes to campus spaces are open plan rather than specific to the needs of research students the university doesn’t help and refuses to provide assistance there is no PhD community at all in general.”*

*“The family responsibilities sometimes hinder me from making more connections or miss opportunities.”*

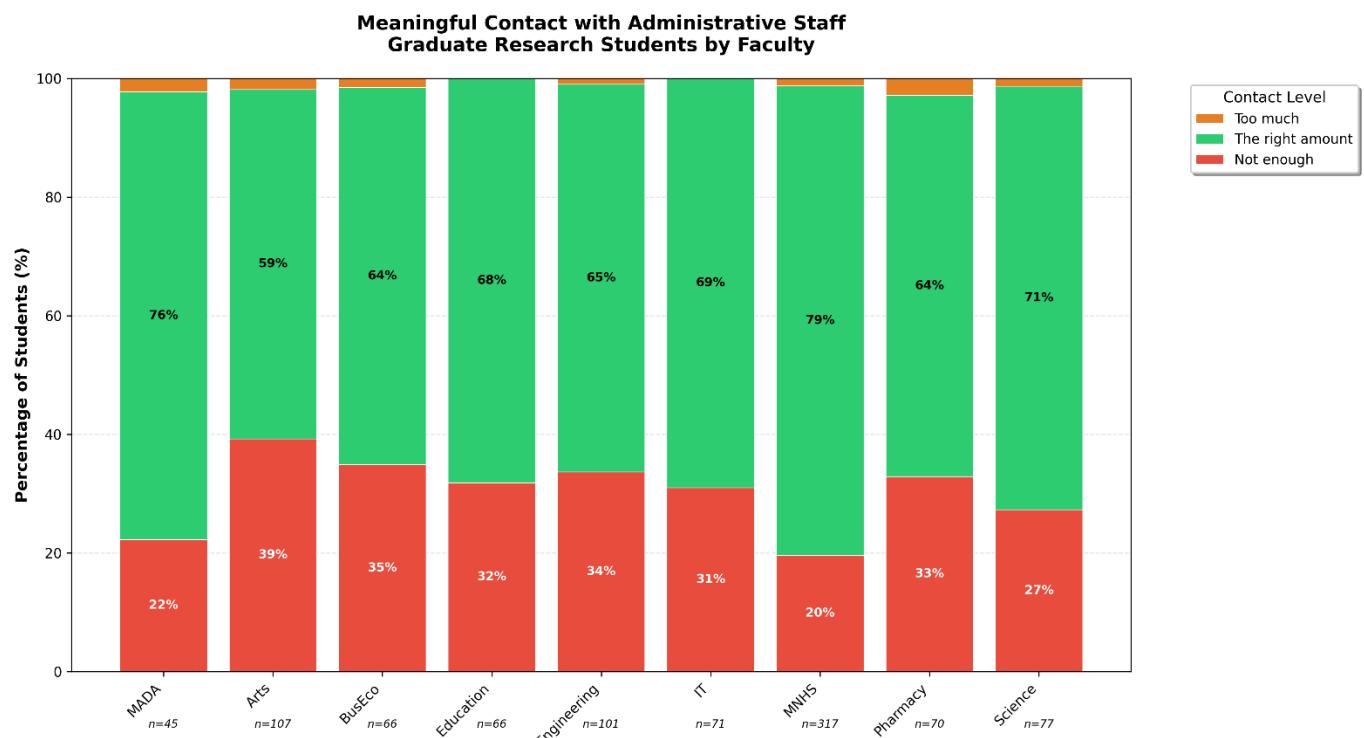
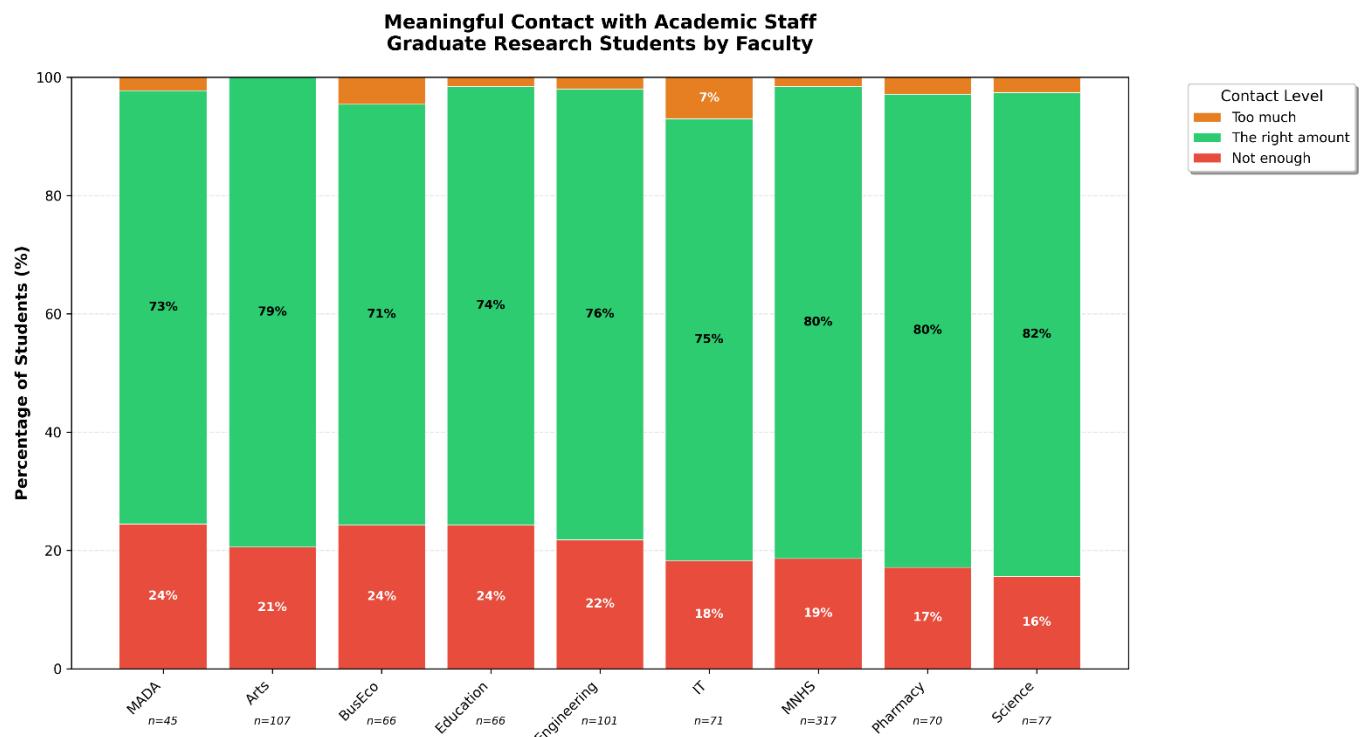
*“Limited social interactions with other PhD students’ hierarchical academic structures that exclude or undermine PhD students. Always having to actively seek connection with the broader ... community rather than being given different opportunities.”*

*“No sense of culture. Nobody comes into the office so no point going in. Even when people do attend the office culture is closed door or not a particularly nice one.”*

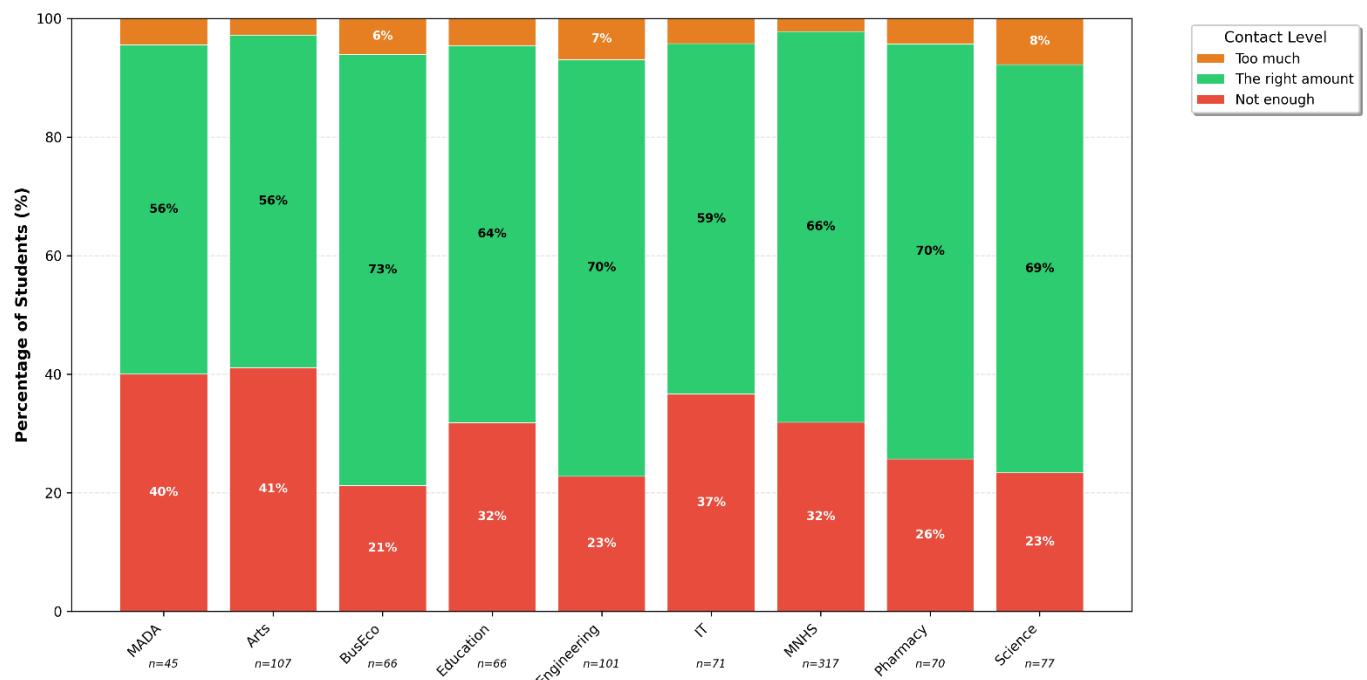
*“I generally have felt isolated because of an inability to attend social events both with my friends and/or academic peers. Since I work alongside study, I don’t have much free time and often fall into a cycle of thinking that any free time should be capitalised on for extra study. The need to feel/be productive even if I have been on-top of my studies and work is often overwhelming and discourages me from feeling like I can make time to catch up with friends or attend the advertised HDR social events. I end of feeling isolated as a result but it’s really an issue I’ve created for myself.”*

### Meaningful Contact:

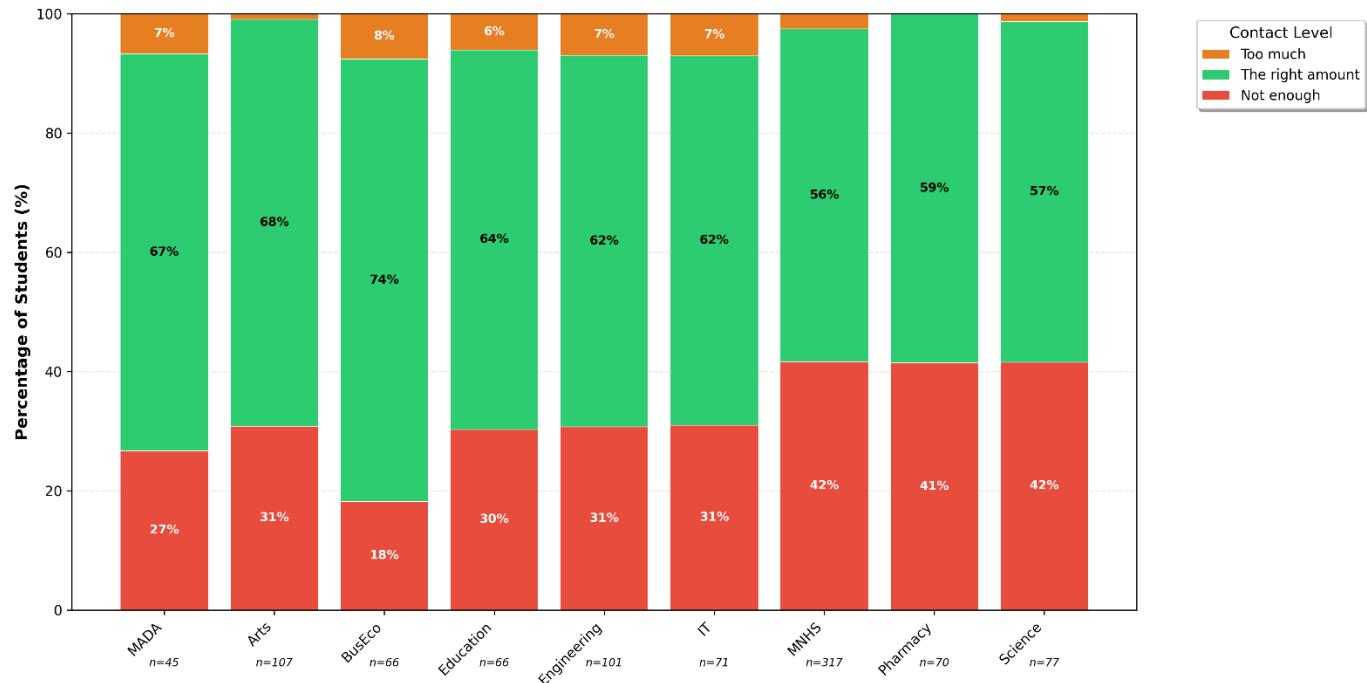
To better understand connection patterns, students were asked to evaluate whether they have sufficient meaningful contact with five key groups: academic staff, administrative staff, peers, friends and family. The following data reveal where Arts students feel adequately connected and where they experience insufficient contact.

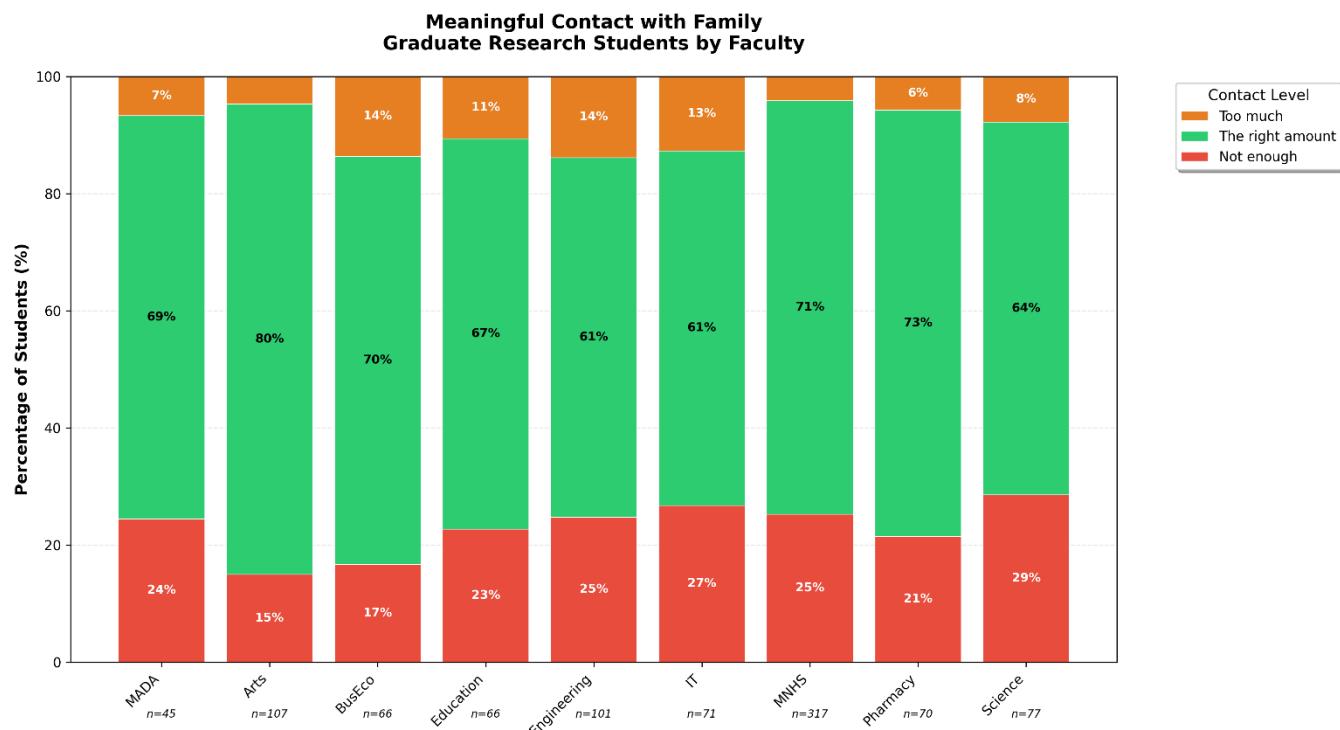


**Meaningful Contact with Other Students/Peers**  
**Graduate Research Students by Faculty**



**Meaningful Contact with Friends**  
**Graduate Research Students by Faculty**





These patterns of meaningful contact reveal a generally positive picture for Arts students, with connection rates broadly consistent with university-wide averages across most relationship types. Arts students report moderate levels of connection with academic staff and administrative staff, family and friends; however, the percentage reporting “not enough” peer contact and administrative staff contact are both the highest of any faculty.

These aggregate patterns may mask important variations. The students experiencing insufficient contact – whether with peers, supervisors or broader support networks – represent important minorities whose isolation may be obscured by overall moderate patterns. For Arts students, whose research often involves intensive solo work with texts, archives or qualitative data, peer connection provides not only social support but also intellectual community, methodological troubleshooting and the validation of research directions that can feel uncertain in interpretive disciplines.

The faculty's challenge lies in ensuring that connection opportunities remain accessible to all students – including part-time students whose schedules differ from full-time cohorts, students working primarily off-campus or in archives, international students who may face cultural barriers to joining informal networks and students whose financial constraints limit participation in social activities. Understanding what enables successful peer connection among the majority of Arts students – whether through structured cohort activities, writing groups, regular seminars or informal departmental culture – should inform efforts to extend similar benefits to students currently experiencing isolation.

### Student Voices on Isolation

While the quantitative data reveals patterns in isolation and connection among Arts students, hearing directly from students themselves illuminates the lived reality behind these statistics. The following testimonies reveal how isolation manifests in the daily experience of graduate research – from the solitary nature of creative work to the challenge of finding peers who understand discipline-specific pressures.

*“Lack of meaningful opportunity to connect with Arts postgraduate students at Monash Clayton.”*

*“Nobody comes to campus, spaces are open plan rather than specific to the needs of research students, the university doesn’t help and refuses to provide assistance. There is no PhD community at all in general.”*

*“Feeling pressure to use the HDR office space or it would be repurposed. Feeling like there’s no online community or social options. My illnesses have made it difficult to attend campus with any regularity in the last year.”*

*“Because I don’t have a friend who is deeply connected. My family members are not here as well.”*

*“I am often alone in my workspace - the other desks often vacant. I also have struggled to make friends since moving to Melbourne.”*

*“The last part of PhD before submission is quite dragging and I think I am more sensitive so I avoided people a lot in order not to be triggered or over stimulated. But at the same time, I also needed to go out meet people so I don’t feel too isolated. It’s this confusion of finding the balance that’s sometimes makes the feeling of isolated becomes worse, if not tiring.”*

*“The family responsibilities sometimes hinder me from making more connections or miss opportunities.”*

*“Not seeing friends for a while due to busy schedules.”*

*“No sense of culture. Nobody comes into the office so no point going in. Even when people do attend the office culture is closed door or not a particularly nice one.”*

*“Not being on campus means I don’t feel like part of the cohort and I don’t have anyone to talk about my studies / difficulties with. This means that I don’t know if what I’m experiencing is normal or not.”*

*“Increase in Zoom meetings/classes. I find I do not form relationships with other students anymore as I did pre-Covid. I have long-term friendships I have kept from my undergraduate degree then when I started my MA and PhD during and after Covid I have found it more difficult to build up new friendships because everything is on Zoom. University is not the same anymore. The times I got on campus I am by myself in the library or meeting my supervisor.”*

*“I was in the final stages of editing my PhD thesis ahead of submission and in order to maximise the time I was working on that my supervisors cancelled our remaining scheduled meetings. While this was well-intentioned it meant that I felt increasingly isolated at the very moment I wanted more support.”*

*“Being far away from my family and usual support system. Even as an adult it can be quite isolating even more while you’re doing a PhD. The fact that Australians as well lack a sense of community compared to other cultures make it difficult to genuinely connect since you rarely get authentic friendships and Australians tend to be shallow in forming connections.”*

*“I rarely go to the workstation or attend the faculty activities since I’m still not confident with my expression and cannot join their academic arguments. I’m not good at dealing with such situations and scared others have long English conversations with me.”*

*“Lack of any real engagement with peers/cohort lack of in-person classes/workshops for HDRs indifferent attitude of admin towards genuine issues HDRs face top-down communication practices from the uni without any real consultation with HDRs housing precarity and related stress overall identity as an international student.”*

*“I generally have felt isolated because of an inability to attend social events both with my friends and/or academic peers. Since I work alongside study, I don't have much free time and often fall into a cycle of thinking that any free time should be capitalised on for extra study. The need to feel/be productive even if I have been on-top of my studies and work is often overwhelming and discourages me from feeling like I can make time to catch up with friends or attend the advertised HDR social events. I end of feeling isolated as a result but it's really an issue I've created for myself.”*

## What Makes Arts Distinct: Key Themes

Based on both quantitative patterns and qualitative student voices, two themes distinguish the Arts graduate research experience from most other disciplines at Monash.

### Mental Health Support Leadership: High Access Rates and Cultural Normalisation

Arts students demonstrate the second-highest mental health support access rate across all Monash faculties (62% vs. 42% university-wide), with elevated access among both domestic students (79% vs. 62% university-wide) and international students (43% vs. 32% university-wide). This pattern suggests that Arts has successfully created conditions where help-seeking is normalised and accessible – a significant achievement given that many faculties struggle to encourage students to access available support. The faculty's success likely reflects multiple reinforcing factors: a disciplinary culture that explicitly validates emotional labour and psychological processing as legitimate aspects of humanities and social sciences research; strong institutional connections between Arts faculty and campus mental health services; peer networks that normalise discussion of mental health challenges rather than treating them as taboo; and perhaps supervisory practices that proactively address wellbeing alongside academic progress.

However, the 36-percentage point gap between domestic and international students within Arts (79% vs. 43%) indicates that despite overall success, international students still face significant barriers. While Arts international students access support at higher rates than their international student peers university-wide, the within-faculty disparity suggests that cultural factors, visa concerns, language barriers or unfamiliarity with Australian mental health systems continue to impede access for a substantial portion of international students. The faculty's demonstrated success in supporting domestic students provides a foundation for extending similar accessibility to international students through targeted interventions.

The combination of high support access and strong completion confidence (58% vs. 55% university-wide) suggests that Arts has created an environment where students both recognise psychological challenges and feel empowered to seek help – a crucial pairing that transforms mental health from a hidden crisis into a manageable dimension of the research journey.

### Moderate Financial Stress with Discipline-Specific Implications

Arts students report financial wellbeing patterns broadly consistent with university averages (67% “just coping” or “having trouble” vs. 64% university-wide), with similar rates of financial stress impacting research completion (42% vs. 44% university-wide), concentration (41% vs. 40% university-wide) and campus attendance (32% vs. 28% university-wide). This similarity might initially suggest that financial pressures are not a distinctive Arts concern. However, this interpretation overlooks important discipline-specific implications of financial stress for humanities and social sciences researchers.

Unlike STEM fields where laboratory access, equipment or materials often necessitate campus presence, Arts research frequently involves archival work, library research or textual analysis, much of which can theoretically be conducted off-campus. This flexibility means that financially stressed

Arts students may reduce campus attendance to save transport costs, work additional hours in unrelated employment or skip conferences – choices that feel optional in the moment but cumulatively undermine the peer connections, intellectual community and professional visibility essential for humanities careers. The 67% of Arts students reporting extreme or big financial impact on travel for fieldwork, conferences or research collaborations represents a particularly concerning pattern for a discipline where conference presentations, archival research trips and professional networking often determine who receives postdoctoral positions, publication opportunities and visibility within specialised research communities.

The fact that Arts students report financial stress at rates similar to university averages despite these discipline-specific vulnerabilities suggests that targeted interventions addressing travel funding, conference support and extended candidature financial planning could have substantial impact on Arts students' research quality and career prospects.

## Faculty-Specific Recommendations

These recommendations are tailored to patterns observed among Arts students and prioritise actions the faculty can take to enhance support. For detailed implementation guidance, see the corresponding recommendations in *Graduate Research at Monash: Student Experience, Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancement*.

Based on the data, Arts should focus faculty efforts on three distinctive opportunities where targeted intervention will have maximum impact:

### 1. Extend Mental Health Support Access to International Students

**The Opportunity:** Arts achieves the second-highest mental health support access rate across Monash faculties (62% vs. 42% university-wide), demonstrating successful normalisation of help-seeking. However, a 36-percentage point gap exists between domestic students (79%) and international students (43%), indicating that cultural barriers, visa concerns or service unfamiliarity continue to impede international student access despite faculty-wide success.

#### What the Faculty Can Do:

##### Immediate Actions:

- Leverage Arts' existing success: Document what makes Arts domestic students comfortable accessing support (peer culture, supervisor normalisation, disciplinary validation of emotional labour) and adapt these approaches for international students.
- Partner with Monash Counselling services to develop Arts-specific mental health messaging for international students featuring testimonials from international humanities students who accessed support successfully.
- Integrate mental health information into Arts-specific orientation emphasising that accessing support does not affect visa status and is consistent with high-performing research practice.

**Success Metrics:** Increase international student access from 43% toward domestic rate of 79%; student feedback on messaging relevance; reduction in domestic-international gap.

For detailed implementation, see main report: Level 1 – “Develop Culturally Responsive Mental Health Service Delivery.”

### 2. Support Professional Development Through Targeted Travel and Conference Funding

**The Problem:** 67% of Arts students report that financial stress has an extreme or big financial impact on ability to travel for fieldwork, conferences or research collaborations. In humanities and social sciences, conference presentations, archival research trips and professional networking often determine postdoctoral opportunities, publication invitations and visibility within research

communities. Students unable to afford travel miss career-critical opportunities despite strong research.

#### **What the Faculty Can Do:**

##### **Immediate Actions:**

- In addition to existing programs, initiate a competitive Arts Graduate Research ‘Top Up’ Travel Grant program (\$1,000-\$2,500 per student per year) supporting conference attendance, archival research or field work.
- Create transparent application process emphasising career development value rather than purely merit-based selection.
- Provide application writing workshops helping students articulate professional development benefits of proposed travel.
- Develop online resource hub with budget-conscious conference attendance strategies, low-cost accommodation options and tips for maximising networking opportunities.

##### **Faculty Actions:**

- Associate Dean Graduate Research coordinates program development and secures funding commitment.
- Budget approximately \$30-50K annually (targeting 20-30 students with \$1,000-\$2,500 grants).
- Track recipients' subsequent conference presentations, publications and career outcomes.

**Success Metrics:** Number of students supported; reduction in financial impact on travel from 67%; student feedback on career impact; tracking of subsequent conference presentations and publications.

For detailed implementation, see main report: Level 2 – “Expand Emergency Financial Support and Hardship Assistance.”

### [3. Establish Arts-Specific Career Pathways Program](#)

**The Problem:** Arts students navigate uniquely complex career pathways spanning academic positions, cultural sector roles, policy analysis, NGO work, publishing and “alt-ac” trajectories. Generic university career services cannot adequately address discipline-specific challenges like translating humanities research to non-academic employers, understanding competitive academic job markets in humanities or developing and navigating portfolio careers. Students need Arts-specific guidance.

#### **What the Faculty Can Do:**

##### **Immediate Actions:**

- Integrate career discussions into milestone reviews with conversation prompts for supervisors and Arts alumni contact list organised by career pathway.

- Launch quarterly alumni career panels featuring diverse pathways: cultural sector careers (museums, galleries, heritage), policy and advocacy, publishing and editing, educational leadership, alt-ac trajectories.
- Host discipline-specific workshops: “The Humanities PhD in Policy and Advocacy,” “From Archives to Impact: Cultural Sector Careers,” “Alt-Ac Pathways for Arts PhDs,” “Articulating Research Skills Beyond Academia.”

**Short-Term Program (6-12 months):**

- Partner with Arts Faculty's industry connections and alumni network for networking events connecting graduate researchers with cultural sector, policy and education sector professionals.
- Offer individual career planning conversations with trained peer mentors addressing specific Arts career concerns.

**Long-Term Investment (2+ years):**

- Advocate for dedicated 0.5 FTE Arts Graduate Research Career Advisor with humanities sector expertise to provide comprehensive support, relationship building and program coordination.

**Success Metrics:** Career guidance satisfaction improvement; event attendance; student feedback on discipline-relevance; career outcome tracking showing diverse successful pathways beyond academia.

For detailed implementation, see main report: Level 1 – “Enhance Supervisor Capacity for Career Conversations”; Level 2 – “Develop Alumni Mentoring Network”; Level 3 – “Establish Discipline-Embedded Career Advisors.”

## Conclusion

These three recommendations directly address Arts' most distinctive opportunities – extending mental health support success to international students, supporting professional development through targeted travel funding and providing career guidance appropriate for humanities and social sciences pathways. All three build from Arts' existing strengths (mental health support culture, moderate financial stress management) while addressing specific gaps that targeted faculty-level interventions can meaningfully improve. By focusing efforts on these priorities, Arts can enhance outcomes for graduate research students while establishing a model for discipline-responsive support that recognises the distinctive nature of humanities and social sciences research training.

## Appendix: Arts Demographics

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	15 (13%)
Clayton	86 (75%)
Caulfield	38 (33%)
Peninsula	0 (0%)
Parkville	2 (2%)
Malaysia	2 (2%)
Hospital or Medical Centre	0 (0%)
Indonesia	1 (1%)
Suzhou	0 (0%)
other	0 (0%)

School/Department	Respondents
Arts and Social Sciences (Malaysia)	2 (2%)
Languages Literature Culture and Linguistics (LLCL)	29 (25%)
Media Film and Journalism (MFJ)	20 (17%)
Philosophical Historical and International Studies (SOPHIS)	16 (14%)
Sir Zelman Cowen Centre School of Music	3 (3%)
Social Sciences (SOSS)	41 (36%)
Other	4 (4%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	63 (55%)
International student	52 (45%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	102 (86%)
Part-time	14 (12%)
On leave from study	2 (2%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	32 (28%)
Mix of on-campus and off-campus	66 (57%)
Entirely off-campus	18 (16%)
Other	0 (0%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	32 (28%)
1-5 years	59 (51%)
6-10 years	15 (13%)
11+ years	9 (8%)

Degree progress	Respondents
First year	52 (44%)
Second year	28 (24%)
Third year and beyond	38 (32%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	2 (2%)
6-10	10 (9%)
11-20	17 (15%)
21-30	32 (28%)
31-40	40 (35%)
Over 40 hours	15 (13%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	81 (70%)
Advanced	19 (17%)
Intermediate	13 (11%)
Elementary	2 (2%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	89 (77%)
Man	18 (16%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	4 (4%)
Prefer to self-describe	1 (1%)
Prefer not to say	3 (3%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	36 (31%)
No	72 (63%)
Prefer not to disclose	7 (6%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	61 (97%)
Prefer not to disclose	2 (3%)

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	19 (17%)
No	88 (77%)
Prefer not to disclose	8 (7%)

<b>Registered disability with DSS</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	11 (58%)
No	8 (42%)

<b>Age</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
24 or under	13 (11%)
25-29	39 (34%)
30-39	44 (38%)
40 and over	19 (17%)

<b>Parental status</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes – living with me	17 (16%)
Yes – not living with me	1 (1%)
No	89 (83%)

<b>Primary carer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	12 (71%)
Shared responsibility	7 (41%)
No	0 (0%)

<b>Carer status</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	8 (8%)
No	99 (93%)

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Full-time	16 (15%)
Part-time	21 (20%)
Casual	31 (29%)
Unemployed and looking for work	17 (16%)
Not employed and not looking for work	22 (21%)

<b>Work hours</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than 5	13 (20%)
6-10	21 (31%)
11-20	18 (27%)
21-30	3 (5%)
31-40	9 (13%)
More than 40	3 (5%)

<b>Scholarship recipients</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	74 (71%)
No, but I previously held a scholarship	10 (10%)
No	21 (20%)

<b>Value of scholarship</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than \$33,511	8 (11%)
\$33,511 (National full-time RTP stipend minimum)	12 (16%)
\$33,512 - \$36,062	5 (7%)
\$36,063 (Monash full-time RTP stipend)	42 (57%)
\$36,064 - \$47,626	5 (7%)
More than \$47,627 (National minimum wage)	2 (3%)