Graduate Research in Education:

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

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Introduction

This report examines the experiences of 68 graduate research students in the Faculty of Education 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 Education.

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

- 68 Education graduate research students participated.
- Response rate represents approximately 23% of enrolled Education 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 Education graduate research contexts.
- Financial pressures and their discipline-specific manifestations.
- Academic progression, career uncertainty and attrition considerations.
- Peer connection and support needs unique to Education 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 Education students and what the faculty can do to enhance support.

Key Findings for Education

This section presents core findings from the 72 Education 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 Education 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.
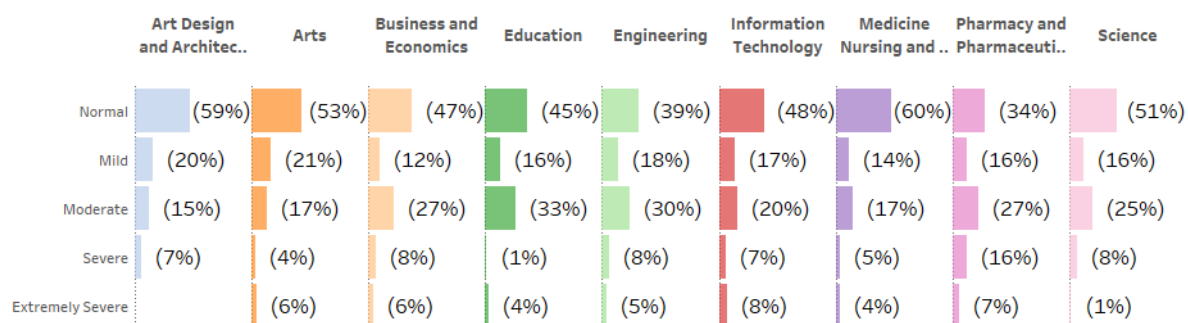
1. Mental Health and Wellbeing

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 Education students, comparing them to university-wide averages. These findings reveal where Education students face similar challenges to their peers and where discipline-specific factors may create unique barriers or pressures.

DASS21 Indicators:

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

Depression:

	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Normal	(59%)	(53%)	(47%)	(45%)	(39%)	(48%)	(60%)	(34%)	(51%)
Mild	(20%)	(21%)	(12%)	(16%)	(18%)	(17%)	(14%)	(16%)	(16%)
Moderate	(15%)	(17%)	(27%)	(33%)	(30%)	(20%)	(17%)	(27%)	(25%)
Severe	(7%)	(4%)	(8%)	(1%)	(8%)	(7%)	(5%)	(16%)	(8%)
Extremely Severe		(6%)	(6%)	(4%)	(5%)	(8%)	(4%)	(7%)	(1%)

Anxiety:

	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Normal	(59%)	(47%)	(35%)	(34%)	(39%)	(41%)	(55%)	(40%)	(47%)
Mild	(17%)	(21%)	(29%)	(28%)	(21%)	(14%)	(16%)	(16%)	(14%)
Moderate	(11%)	(9%)	(14%)	(27%)	(22%)	(23%)	(12%)	(17%)	(22%)
Severe	(11%)	(14%)	(8%)	(3%)	(8%)	(10%)	(7%)	(11%)	(16%)
Extremely Severe	(2%)	(9%)	(15%)	(7%)	(11%)	(13%)	(9%)	(16%)	(1%)

Stress:

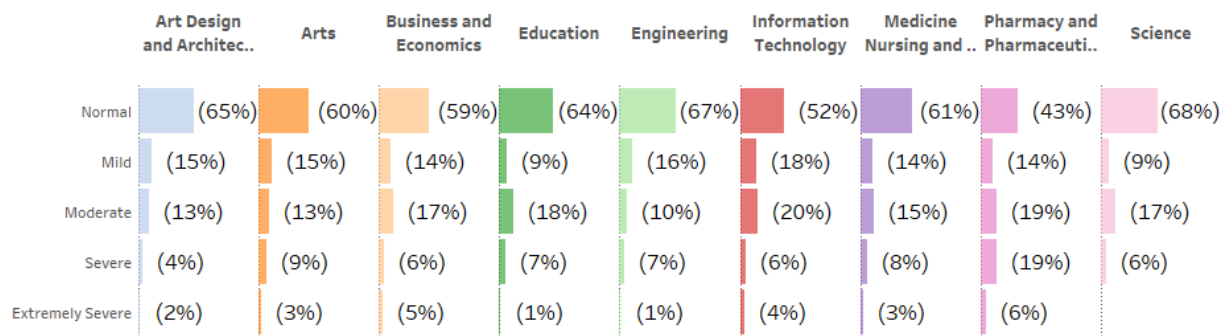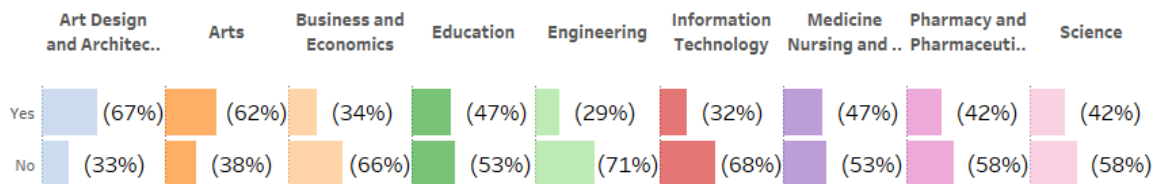|	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Normal	(65%)	(60%)	(59%)	(64%)	(67%)	(52%)	(61%)	(43%)	(68%)
Mild	(15%)	(15%)	(14%)	(9%)	(16%)	(18%)	(14%)	(14%)	(9%)
Moderate	(13%)	(13%)	(17%)	(18%)	(10%)	(20%)	(15%)	(19%)	(17%)
Severe	(4%)	(9%)	(6%)	(7%)	(7%)	(6%)	(8%)	(19%)	(6%)
Extremely Severe	(2%)	(3%)	(5%)	(1%)	(1%)	(4%)	(3%)	(6%)	

These patterns suggest that Education students experience mental health challenges at rates comparable to the broader Monash graduate research population; however, Education students reported elevated levels of anxiety compared to their peers across the University. While specific DASS21 breakdowns show variation across depression, anxiety and stress indicators, the overall pattern indicates that approximately one-quarter to one-third of Education students experience moderate to extremely severe symptoms across these domains. These substantial proportions indicate that mental health support remains a critical need for approximately one-third of Education graduate researchers.

Mental Health Support Access:

Education respondents are approximately as likely as not to have accessed support for a mental related issue at some point.

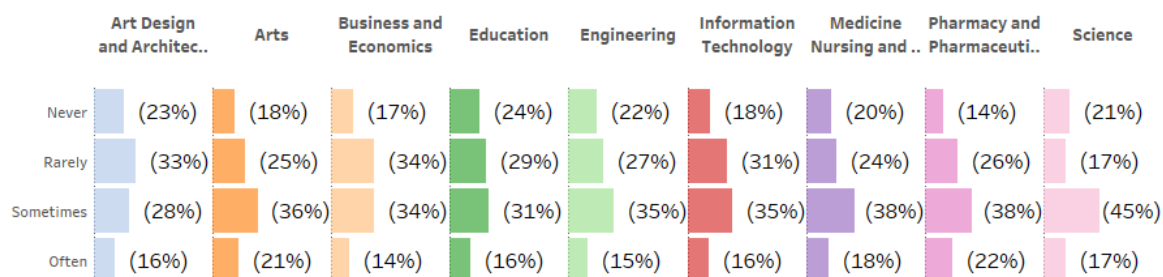|	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Yes	(67%)	(62%)	(34%)	(47%)	(29%)	(32%)	(47%)	(42%)	(42%)
No	(33%)	(38%)	(66%)	(53%)	(71%)	(68%)	(53%)	(58%)	(58%)

Key demographic insights:

- 47% of Education students have accessed mental health support (vs. 42% University-wide).
- 65% of domestic students (n. 32) and 30% of international students (n. 35) have accessed support. Both of these roughly align with the University-wide average for these demographics (Domestic = 62%, International = 32%).
- 62% of men (n.12) and 43% of women (n.53) had accessed support. Although the sample size is low, the access rate for men in the faculty is twice as high compared to across the University (31%), while the access rate for women is lower in the faculty than across the University 52%).

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.

	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Never	(23%)	(18%)	(17%)	(24%)	(22%)	(18%)	(20%)	(14%)	(21%)
Rarely	(33%)	(25%)	(34%)	(29%)	(27%)	(31%)	(24%)	(26%)	(17%)
Sometimes	(28%)	(36%)	(34%)	(31%)	(35%)	(35%)	(38%)	(38%)	(45%)
Often	(16%)	(21%)	(14%)	(16%)	(15%)	(16%)	(18%)	(22%)	(17%)

- 76% of Education students reported experiencing imposter syndrome at some point (vs. 83% University-wide).

Student Voices from Education:

While the quantitative data reveals patterns in mental health outcomes, research pressures and imposter syndrome among Education 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 Education:

> *"Sometimes I'm not sure what I'm really doing with the PhD. My supervisor is helpful but I'm doing something that they don't know a lot about. So, it is really me leading myself a lot of the time."*

> *"I just do not feel confident in myself."*

> *"Feel no one understand what I'm doing and nobody cares - sometimes I question the value of my PhD work."*

> *"The lack of opportunities to socialise. I am an introvert and seeking out a conversation is difficult. I do feel that there is a lack of enough social activity in my life."*

> *"Lack of guidance lack of clarity of what I needed to be working on and how. Lack of clarity for career options post-graduation. Lack of clarity of upcoming deadlines."*

These testimonies reveal the emotional toll of research isolation, unclear expectations and limited peer connection that characterise many Education students' experiences.

What This Means for Education:

Education's mental health profile presents both encouraging and concerning patterns. While clinical indicators align with institutional averages, the pronounced international student disadvantage in accessing support services demands immediate attention. The 35-percentage point gap between domestic and international students' mental health service access suggests that generic university support structures fail to reach international Education students effectively.
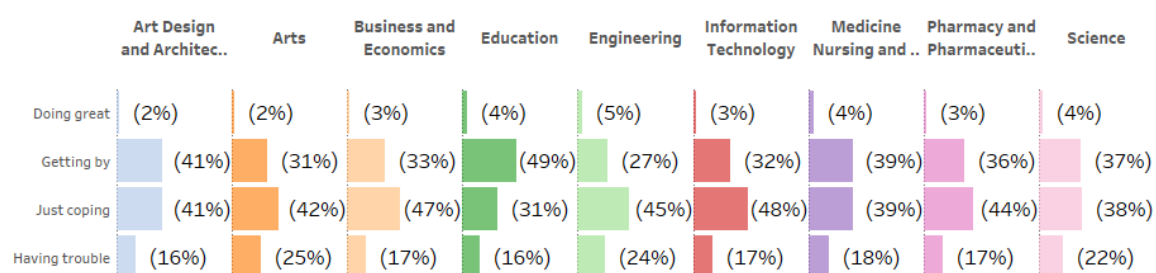
The combination of moderate mental health burden and exceptional barriers for international students creates a risk profile requiring targeted intervention. The faculty should prioritise culturally responsive, proactively offered mental health support that reaches beyond students who self-identify and seek help.

2. Financial Circumstances and Career Pressure

This section examines two interrelated dimensions of the Education graduate research experience: financial circumstances and career navigation. Beyond standard financial wellbeing measures, Education students face discipline-specific pressures including international conference/fieldwork expectations, professional presentation standards 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.
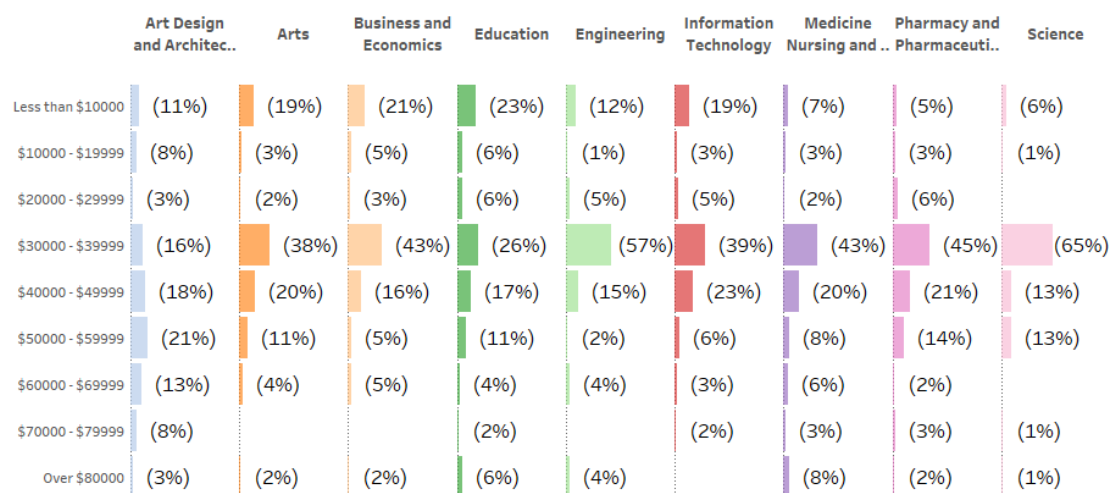
Melbourne Institute's Financial Wellbeing:

Education graduate research students show the best financial wellbeing patterns of any faculty with 53% "doing great" or "getting by"; however, with 47% still "having trouble" or "just coping" there is little to celebrate.

|	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Doing great	(2%)	(2%)	(3%)	(4%)	(5%)	(3%)	(4%)	(3%)	(4%)
Getting by	(41%)	(31%)	(33%)	(49%)	(27%)	(32%)	(39%)	(36%)	(37%)
Just coping	(41%)	(42%)	(47%)	(31%)	(45%)	(48%)	(39%)	(44%)	(38%)
Having trouble	(16%)	(25%)	(17%)	(16%)	(24%)	(17%)	(18%)	(17%)	(22%)

Estimated Annual Income (AUD)

Education students show income patterns broadly consistent with university trends, with full-time students reporting median incomes in the $30,000-$39,999 range (reflecting scholarship levels), while part-time students report significantly higher median incomes.

|	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Less than $10000	(11%)	(19%)	(21%)	(23%)	(12%)	(19%)	(7%)	(5%)	(6%)
$10000 - $19999	(8%)	(3%)	(5%)	(6%)	(1%)	(3%)	(3%)	(3%)	(1%)
$20000 - $29999	(3%)	(2%)	(3%)	(6%)	(5%)	(5%)	(2%)	(6%)	
$30000 - $39999	(16%)	(38%)	(43%)	(26%)	(57%)	(39%)	(43%)	(45%)	(65%)
$40000 - $49999	(18%)	(20%)	(16%)	(17%)	(15%)	(23%)	(20%)	(21%)	(13%)
$50000 - $59999	(21%)	(11%)	(5%)	(11%)	(2%)	(6%)	(8%)	(14%)	(13%)
$60000 - $69999	(13%)	(4%)	(5%)	(4%)	(4%)	(3%)	(6%)	(2%)	
$70000 - $79999	(8%)			(2%)		(2%)	(3%)	(3%)	(1%)
Over $80000	(3%)	(2%)	(2%)	(6%)	(4%)		(8%)	(2%)	(1%)

## How Financial Pressures Affect Academic Activities

Financial pressures directly impact Education 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:
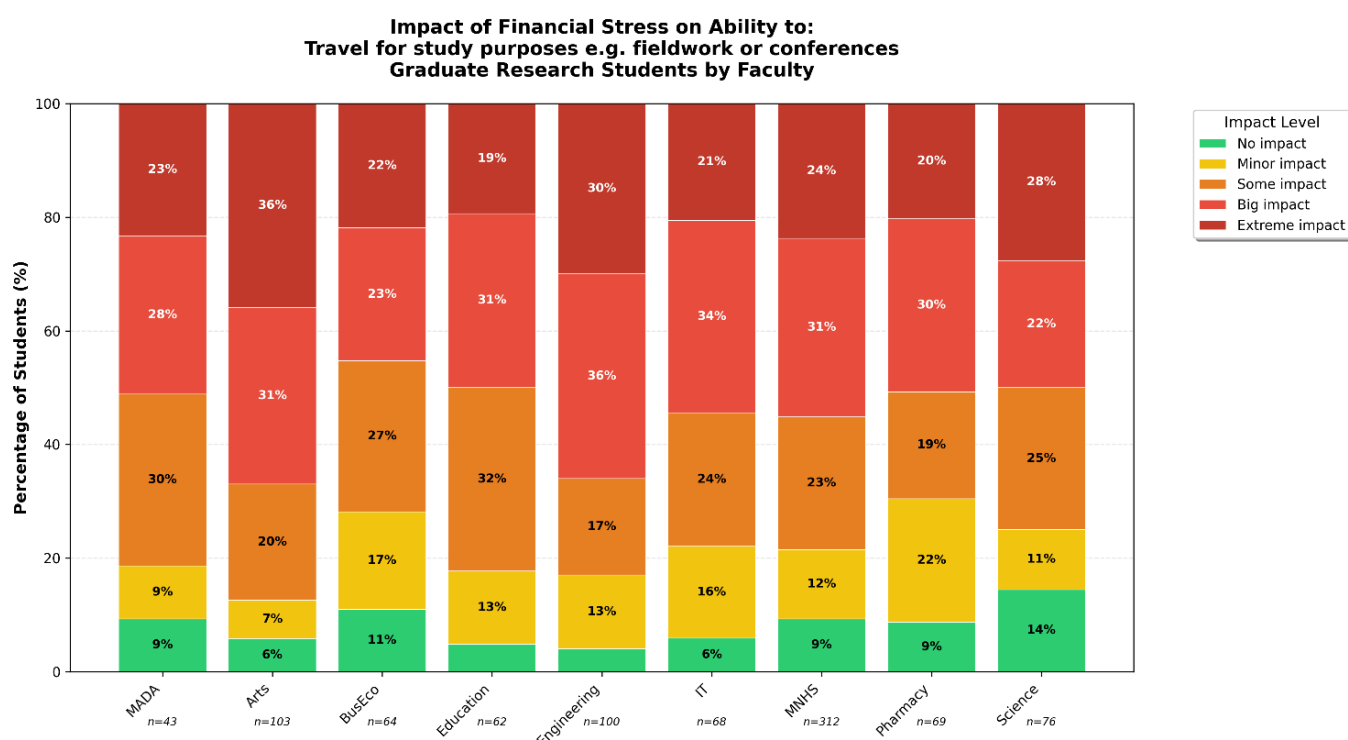

Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to Complete Research
Graduate Research Students by Faculty
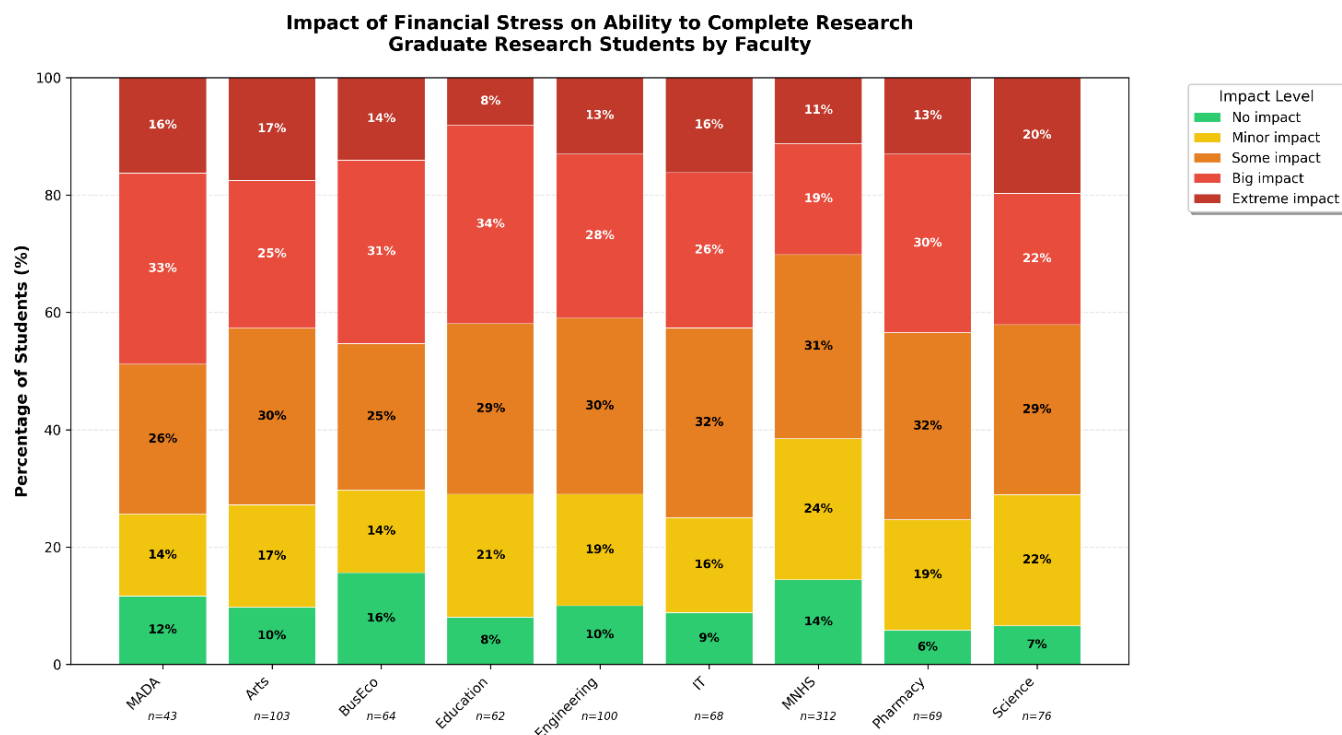
Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to:
Attend classes/study/research on campus
Graduate Research Students by Faculty
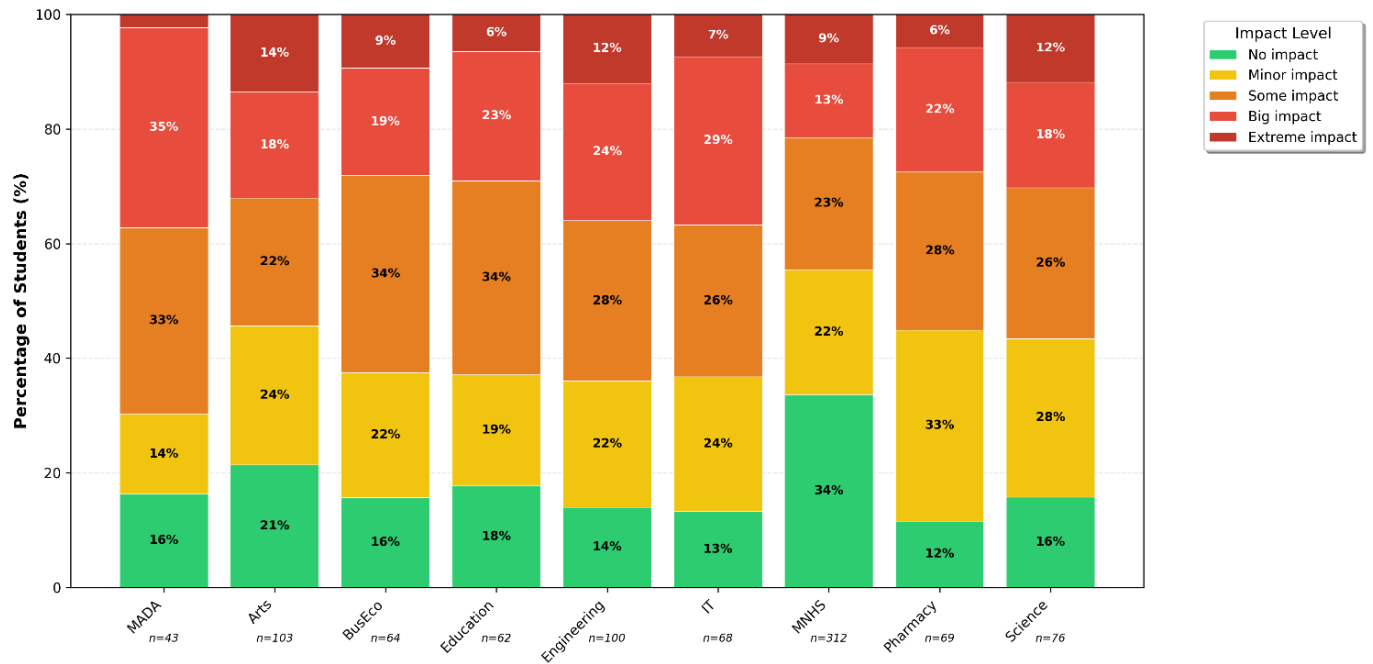
Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to:
Concentrate on your course/research
Graduate Research Students by Faculty

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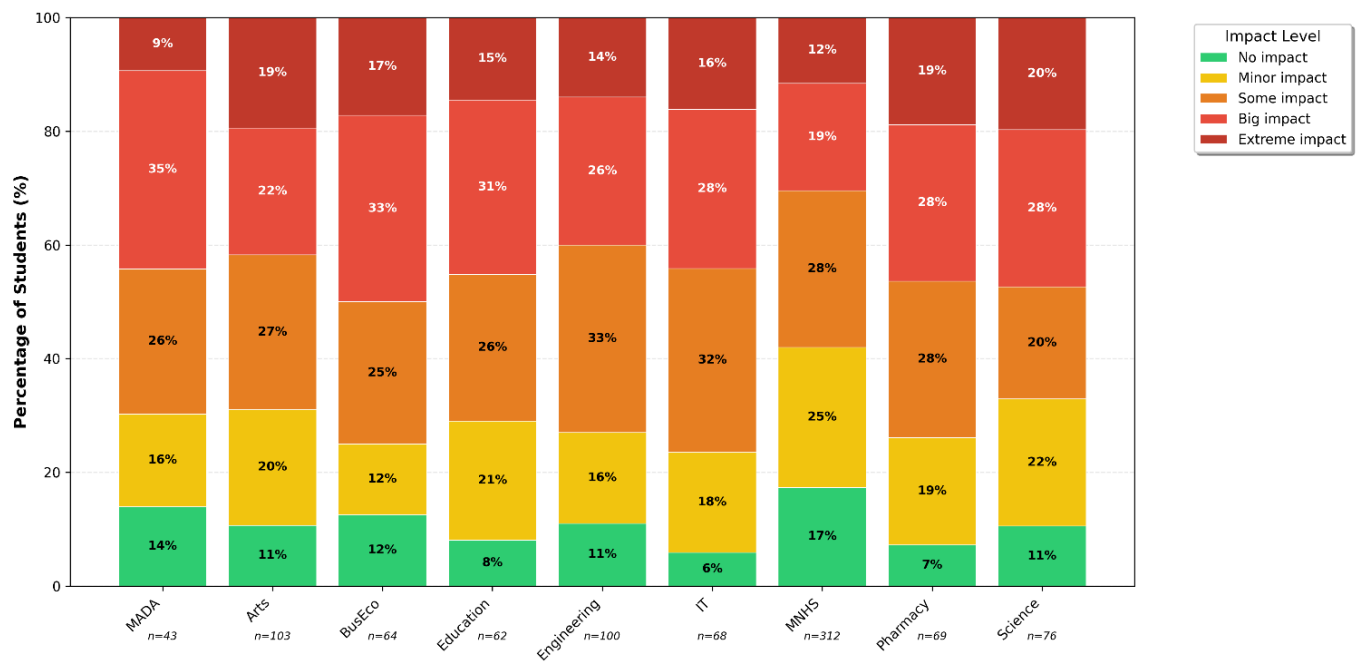
Key Findings on Financial Impact:

- **Research completion capacity:** 42% of Education 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**: 29% of Education 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**: 46% of Education 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 Education students experiencing rates similar to peers across the university.

- **Professional development through travel:** 52% of Education 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). 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.

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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 Education – from managing basic living expenses to affording professional conferences and navigating the tension between stipend constraints and the financial expectations of a business-oriented discipline.

> *"I have a scholarship but still I am looking for a job to cover my expenses. The scholarship does pay for rent and groceries and I am thankful for it but it is unfortunately barely enough to cover expenses. For example, I am always stressed about having a dental health issue because I know I will not be able to cover the expenses."*

> *"The scholarship is helpful but it is not enough to live on and then there are restriction on work placed. Very poor regard for current cost of living."*

> *"As a renter this places the biggest strain on my finances. Over the past 2 years my rent has increased by over 8 and 9% annually and I was already paying well above the 30% of income to rent threshold."*

> *"With this financial condition it's hard to manage to send my youngest child to day-care. So, most of the time I study while taking care of my child."*

> *"It is mainly related to the childcare expenses. Since it is too much for an international student like me, I cannot send my child to the child care centre. As I result, I have to struggle with my study being a full-time mum and a night time PhD student."*

> *"Doing a PhD as a mature-aged student has its own unique challenges due to added responsibilities of having a family."*

> *"Glad my partner has taken care a lot of the financial responsibility so that I could focus on my study."*

> *"My financial situation is not as good as I want because of being unemployed."*

> *"I'm doing my best to make it work. I'm seeking supports I'm keeping a budget tracking expenditure reflecting periodically and trying to adjust my behaviour to reduce spending. If everything goes well with no upsets then it's ok. Anything unexpected happens even minor it puts strain on the budget."*

> *"On paper it seems like I'm earning a lot and comparatively I probably am. But I have to work nearly full time to survive and that means I study 10pm to 2am or 5am to 7am."*

> *"I spend hours of my life every month deferring paying bills. It's a huge cognitive load on top of managing my [relative's] recent illness."*

> *"After graduation I'm aware that my financial situation might become more challenging especially during the transition period before finding stable employment."*

These testimonies reveal childcare costs as an especially acute burden for Education students, many of whom pursue research while parenting (41%). The combination of inadequate scholarship levels, rising rental costs and childcare expenses creates financial pressure that can force either impossible work-study schedules or withdrawal from research engagement.

Employment Patterns:

The employment patterns among Education 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 Education students navigate.

Employment Status of Full-Time Students Across the Faculties:
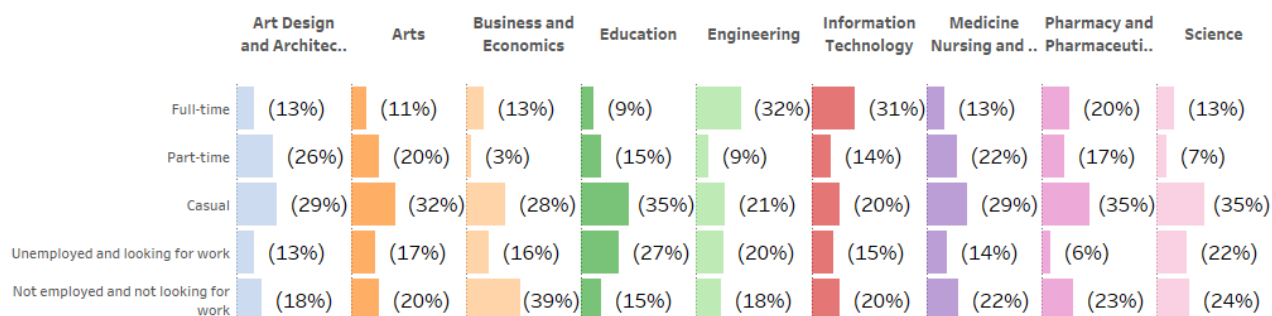
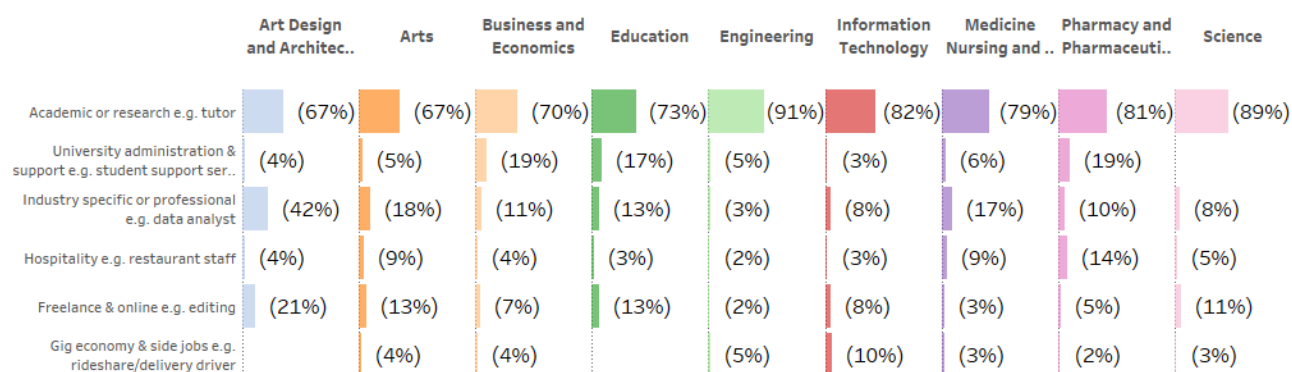|	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Full-time	(13%)	(11%)	(13%)	(9%)	(32%)	(31%)	(13%)	(20%)	(13%)
Part-time	(26%)	(20%)	(3%)	(15%)	(9%)	(14%)	(22%)	(17%)	(7%)
Casual	(29%)	(32%)	(28%)	(35%)	(21%)	(20%)	(29%)	(35%)	(35%)
Unemployed and looking for work	(13%)	(17%)	(16%)	(27%)	(20%)	(15%)	(14%)	(6%)	(22%)
Not employed and not looking for work	(18%)	(20%)	(39%)	(15%)	(18%)	(20%)	(22%)	(23%)	(24%)

Employment patterns among Education students reveal the complex relationship between financial necessity, professional development and research progress. With 35% employed casually, 15% part-time and 9% full-time, over half of Education students balance research with employment demands. Meanwhile, 27% are unemployed and seeking work, while 15% are not employed and not seeking work – likely reflecting either sufficient financial resources (scholarships, partner support) or withdrawal from the labour market due to caring responsibilities or visa restrictions.

The Type of Jobs Students are Employed In:

	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Academic or research e.g. tutor	(67%)	(67%)	(70%)	(73%)	(91%)	(82%)	(79%)	(81%)	(89%)
University administration & support e.g. student support ser..	(4%)	(5%)	(19%)	(17%)	(5%)	(3%)	(6%)	(19%)	
Industry specific or professional e.g. data analyst	(42%)	(18%)	(11%)	(13%)	(3%)	(8%)	(17%)	(10%)	(8%)
Hospitality e.g. restaurant staff	(4%)	(9%)	(4%)	(3%)	(2%)	(3%)	(9%)	(14%)	(5%)
Freelance & online e.g. editing	(21%)	(13%)	(7%)	(13%)	(2%)	(8%)	(3%)	(5%)	(11%)
Gig economy & side jobs e.g. rideshare/delivery driver		(4%)	(4%)		(5%)	(10%)	(3%)	(2%)	(3%)

Almost three-quarters (73%) of employed Education graduate researchers are employed in academia.
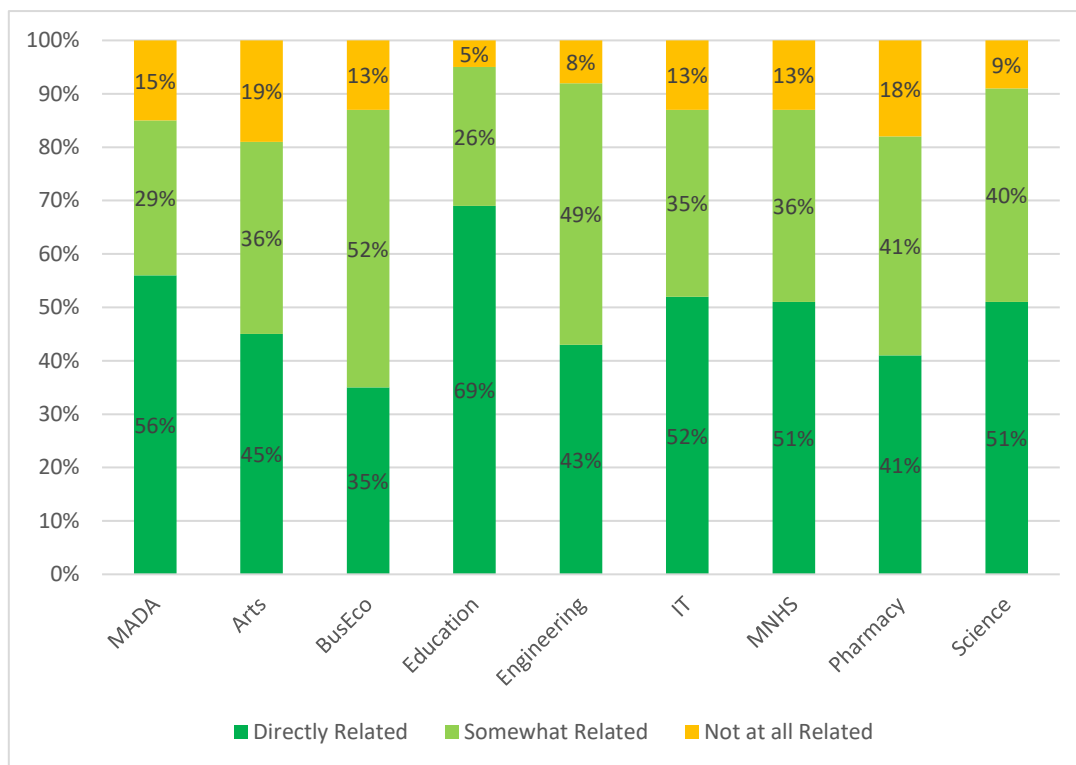
Education students in employment are significantly more likely than students from other faculties to work in jobs directly related to their research.

What this means for Education

These patterns present a paradox: education sector employment can provide professionally relevant experience (teaching, research assistance, curriculum development), potentially enhancing rather than competing with doctoral training. However, the necessity to work substantial hours for financial survival – as evidenced by a student's testimony about 10pm-2am study schedules – suggests that some employment represents financial survival rather than strategic professional development.

The employment patterns require nuanced faculty response. Not all employment represents problematic distraction from research; teaching assistantships, research support roles and education sector work can build skills directly applicable to post-PhD careers. However, students working extreme hours out of financial necessity face compromised research capacity that no amount of "time management" advice can overcome.
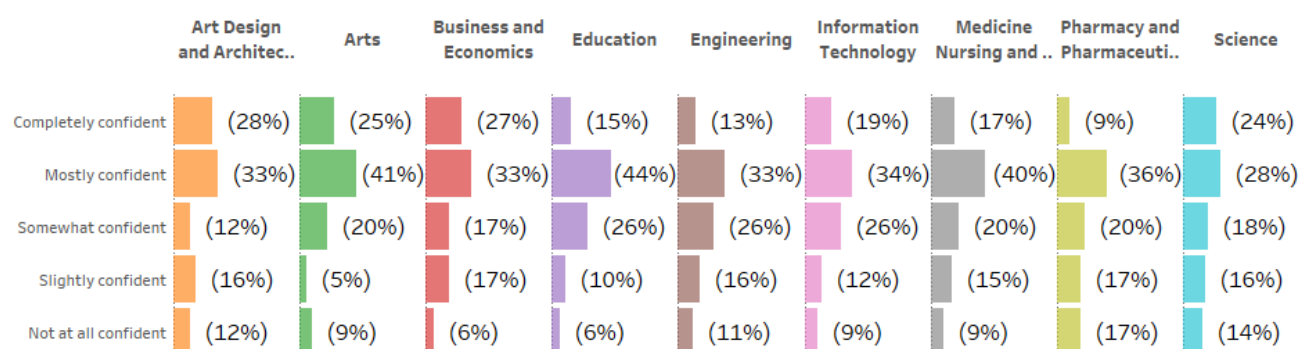
The 47% of Education students reporting financial stress face material constraints that compromise research quality. Those working substantial hours to cover living costs have less time and energy for research. Parents unable to afford childcare conduct research while simultaneously caring for children. International students facing visa restrictions on work hours must choose between financial survival and research progress. These aren't merely quality-of-life concerns; they represent structural barriers to research excellence.

3. Academic Progression and Career Uncertainty

Beyond the immediate pressures of mental health and financial stress, Education 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 Education students. Understanding these patterns reveals how the distinctive pressures facing Education students – including the tension between academic and industry pathways – affect their sense of progress and professional direction.
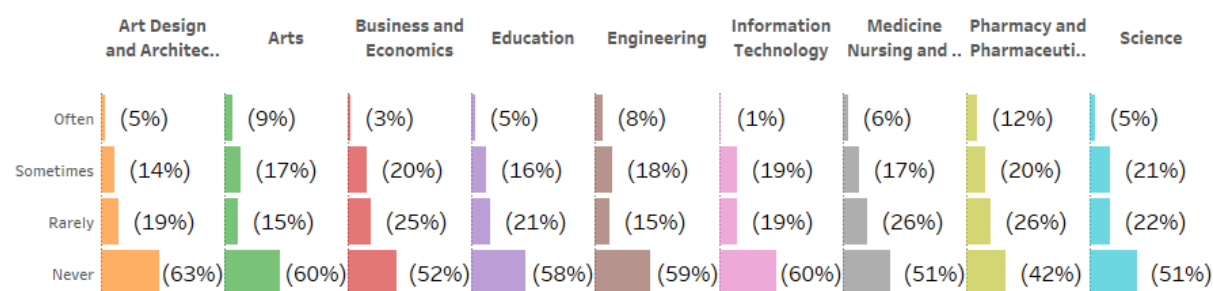
Completion Confidence:

Education students show modestly higher completion confidence than the university average (59% vs. 55% completely/mostly confident). However, a significant minority still harbor doubts about timely completion.

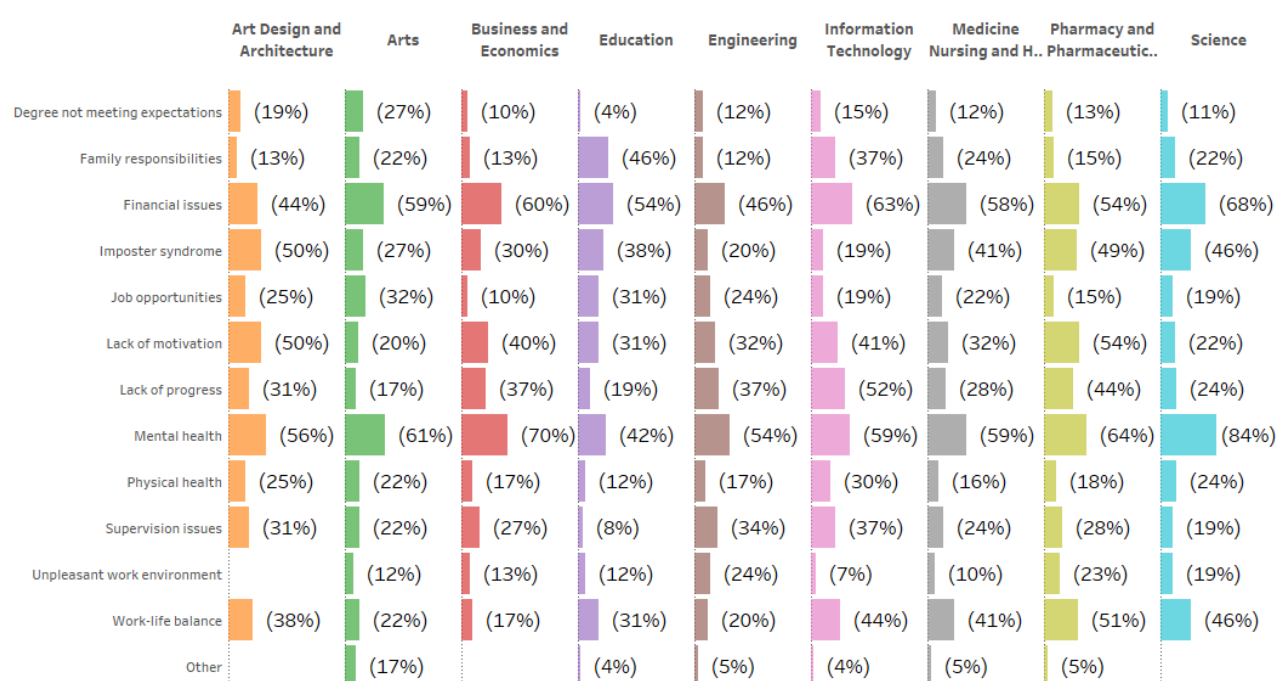|	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Completely confident	(28%)	(25%)	(27%)	(15%)	(13%)	(19%)	(17%)	(9%)	(24%)
Mostly confident	(33%)	(41%)	(33%)	(44%)	(33%)	(34%)	(40%)	(36%)	(28%)
Somewhat confident	(12%)	(20%)	(17%)	(26%)	(26%)	(26%)	(20%)	(20%)	(18%)
Slightly confident	(16%)	(5%)	(17%)	(10%)	(16%)	(12%)	(15%)	(17%)	(16%)
Not at all confident	(12%)	(9%)	(6%)	(6%)	(11%)	(9%)	(9%)	(17%)	(14%)

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 Education 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.

	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Often	(5%)	(9%)	(3%)	(5%)	(8%)	(1%)	(6%)	(12%)	(5%)
Sometimes	(14%)	(17%)	(20%)	(16%)	(18%)	(19%)	(17%)	(20%)	(21%)
Rarely	(19%)	(15%)	(25%)	(21%)	(15%)	(19%)	(26%)	(26%)	(22%)
Never	(63%)	(60%)	(52%)	(58%)	(59%)	(60%)	(51%)	(42%)	(51%)

Over two-fifths (42%) of Education students have considered leaving at some point, which is lower than the 46% university-wide average. This pattern warrants attention as it indicates that consideration of leaving represents a somewhat common part of the graduate research journey for Education students. While consideration of leaving doesn't necessarily translate to actual attrition, it signals periods of acute distress when students question their ability to continue or the value of completing their degree.

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

Understanding why students consider leaving requires examining the intersection of mental health pressures, financial stress, isolation, unclear expectations and career uncertainty. For many Education students, consideration of leaving likely reflects moments when these pressures compound – when financial stress exacerbates mental health challenges, isolation amplifies self-doubt or unclear career pathways make the investment of years of research feel uncertain.

	Art Design and Architecture	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and H..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceutic..	Science
Degree not meeting expectations	(19%)	(27%)	(10%)	(4%)	(12%)	(15%)	(12%)	(13%)	(11%)
Family responsibilities	(13%)	(22%)	(13%)	(46%)	(12%)	(37%)	(24%)	(15%)	(22%)
Financial issues	(44%)	(59%)	(60%)	(54%)	(46%)	(63%)	(58%)	(54%)	(68%)
Imposter syndrome	(50%)	(27%)	(30%)	(38%)	(20%)	(19%)	(41%)	(49%)	(46%)
Job opportunities	(25%)	(32%)	(10%)	(31%)	(24%)	(19%)	(22%)	(15%)	(19%)
Lack of motivation	(50%)	(20%)	(40%)	(31%)	(32%)	(41%)	(32%)	(54%)	(22%)
Lack of progress	(31%)	(17%)	(37%)	(19%)	(37%)	(52%)	(28%)	(44%)	(24%)
Mental health	(56%)	(61%)	(70%)	(42%)	(54%)	(59%)	(59%)	(64%)	(84%)
Physical health	(25%)	(22%)	(17%)	(12%)	(17%)	(30%)	(16%)	(18%)	(24%)
Supervision issues	(31%)	(22%)	(27%)	(8%)	(34%)	(37%)	(24%)	(28%)	(19%)
Unpleasant work environment		(12%)	(13%)	(12%)	(24%)	(7%)	(10%)	(23%)	(19%)
Work-life balance	(38%)	(22%)	(17%)	(31%)	(20%)	(44%)	(41%)	(51%)	(46%)
Other		(17%)		(4%)	(5%)	(4%)	(5%)	(5%)	

Among Education 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 Education 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 education researchers.
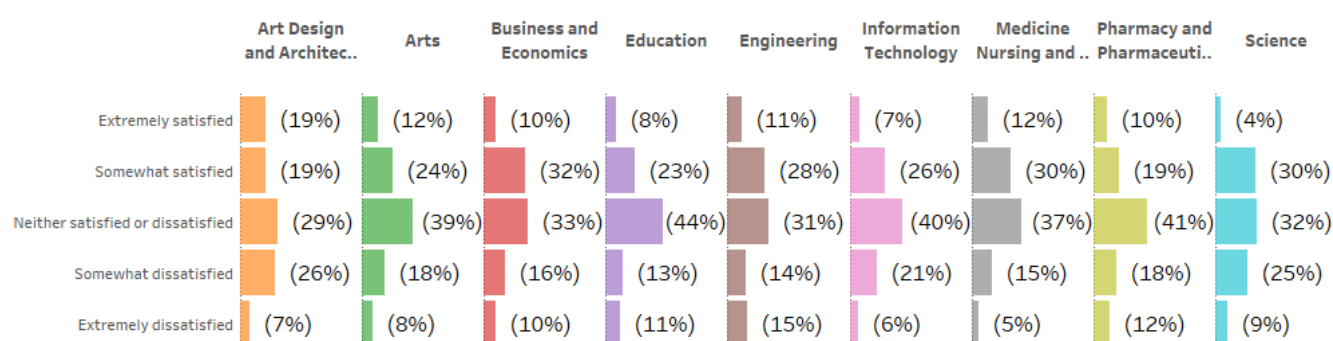
For instance, for all but one other faculty (IT) mental health is the primary reason students consider leaving; however, in Education, it ranks third behind financial issues (54%) and family responsibilities (46%).

Financial issues as a reason for considering leaving is elevated across the University, but the prevalence of "family responsibilities" is somewhat unique to Education – the faculty with the highest proportion of parents.

Pleasingly for the faculty, "supervision issues" were a factor for only 8% of students considering leaving – well below the University average (25%).

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 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 Education 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.

	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Extremely satisfied	(19%)	(12%)	(10%)	(8%)	(11%)	(7%)	(12%)	(10%)	(4%)
Somewhat satisfied	(19%)	(24%)	(32%)	(23%)	(28%)	(26%)	(30%)	(19%)	(30%)
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	(29%)	(39%)	(33%)	(44%)	(31%)	(40%)	(37%)	(41%)	(32%)
Somewhat dissatisfied	(26%)	(18%)	(16%)	(13%)	(14%)	(21%)	(15%)	(18%)	(25%)
Extremely dissatisfied	(7%)	(8%)	(10%)	(11%)	(15%)	(6%)	(5%)	(12%)	(9%)

Education students recorded the highest proportion of indifference to careers support (44% neither satisfied or dissatisfied), which may reflect relatively clearer post-PhD career than in other faculties; however, 31% were satisfied and 24% were dissatisfied with the support they received in this area.

Student Voices on Career Guidance:

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

> *"Research field specific career guidance or at least faculty based."*

> *"More information/suggestions about possible career development for PhD students in Education would be valuable."*

> *"Give much clearer expectations methods meaningful professional development more links to industry clarification of work options (during and after PhD)."*

"I would suggest the following improvements for career guidance services: 1. Personalised Services: Provide tailored career advice based on individuals' interests [and] personalities and abilities instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach. 2. Industry Connections: Strengthen partnerships with companies across various industries to offer more internship opportunities or job shadowing and guest lectures helping clients understand real workplace environments. 3. Skills Training: In addition to career planning offer practical training in resume writing interview skills workplace communication and other essential soft skills. 4. Follow-up and Feedback System: Establish a long-term tracking and feedback mechanism to monitor users' career progress and adjust guidance strategies accordingly.

The Education Career Challenge:

Education graduate research students face unique career navigation challenges:

- **Practitioner-researcher identity navigation**: Many Education PhD candidates are mid-career educators seeking to advance from practice into research-intensive roles, yet face uncertainty about whether to return to improved school/sector positions, pursue teaching-intensive academic roles at teaching-focused universities, transition to research-intensive academic positions requiring strong publication records, or leverage research expertise in educational leadership and policy roles – each requiring different professional positioning during candidature.
- **Diverse education sector pathways beyond traditional teaching**: The expanding education landscape encompasses educational technology companies, learning design and instructional design roles, education policy organisations, international education consulting, corporate learning and development, curriculum development for ed-tech platforms, educational research institutes and government education departments – yet students can receive limited exposure to these non-traditional pathways or connections to professionals working in these sectors.
- **Academic market stratification and teaching expectations**: Understanding the distinction between research-intensive universities (Group of Eight) requiring strong publication records and competitive research profiles versus teaching-intensive institutions prioritising teaching excellence and student engagement, while many Education PhDs enter programs as experienced teachers yet struggle to translate classroom teaching into "evidence" valued by university hiring committees.
- **Translating education research to policy and organisational contexts**: Articulating how education research methodologies, program evaluation skills, data analysis expertise and understanding of learning systems transfer to policy analysis, organisational change management, program design for government/NGO contexts or strategic planning roles – particularly when non-academic employers may undervalue qualitative research approaches common in education scholarship.
- **International and cross-cultural career complexity**: With substantial proportions of international students, Education PhD holders must navigate:
  - Returning to home countries with different education systems and academic cultures.
  - Understanding Australian education sector career pathways while on temporary visas; translating research across different educational contexts and policy environments.
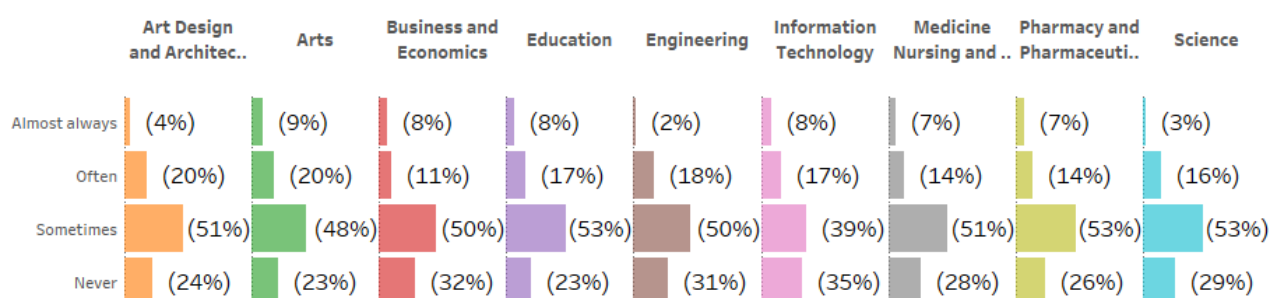
o   Recognising that international education consulting, comparative education research and cross-cultural educational leadership represent distinct career specialisations requiring deliberate network building.

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 Education students experience isolation, belonging and meaningful contact across different relationship types. Understanding these patterns reveals where existing community-building efforts reach Education 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 Education students experience connection – or disconnection – within their academic community.

	Art Design and Architec..	Arts	Business and Economics	Education	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine Nursing and ..	Pharmacy and Pharmaceuti..	Science
Almost always	(4%)	(9%)	(8%)	(8%)	(2%)	(8%)	(7%)	(7%)	(3%)
Often	(20%)	(20%)	(11%)	(17%)	(18%)	(17%)	(14%)	(14%)	(16%)
Sometimes	(51%)	(48%)	(50%)	(53%)	(50%)	(39%)	(51%)	(53%)	(53%)
Never	(24%)	(23%)	(32%)	(23%)	(31%)	(35%)	(28%)	(26%)	(29%)

- 77% of Education students experience some degree of isolation (vs. 72% university-wide).
- 25% 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 Education 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.

"Not being in the presence of other PhD students and not feeling connected to my peers."

"It's mostly due to the fact that I am doing my course completely remotely but my peers are not. This means that I miss out on lunches or physical meetings that my peers get. And when we do have group supervision sessions, I am just a face on a screen."

"Studying from home usually before dawn (and before going to work). Not really knowing anybody else going through the same experiences (full time job, part-time PhD research, 3 young children)."

"Solo parenting work from home due to high childcare costs."

"Students who come from the same backgrounds forming groups and talking in their language which often makes it difficult to get into conversations."

"I stay home all the time looking after my young kids and only go out to drop off and pick up my older daughter from school."
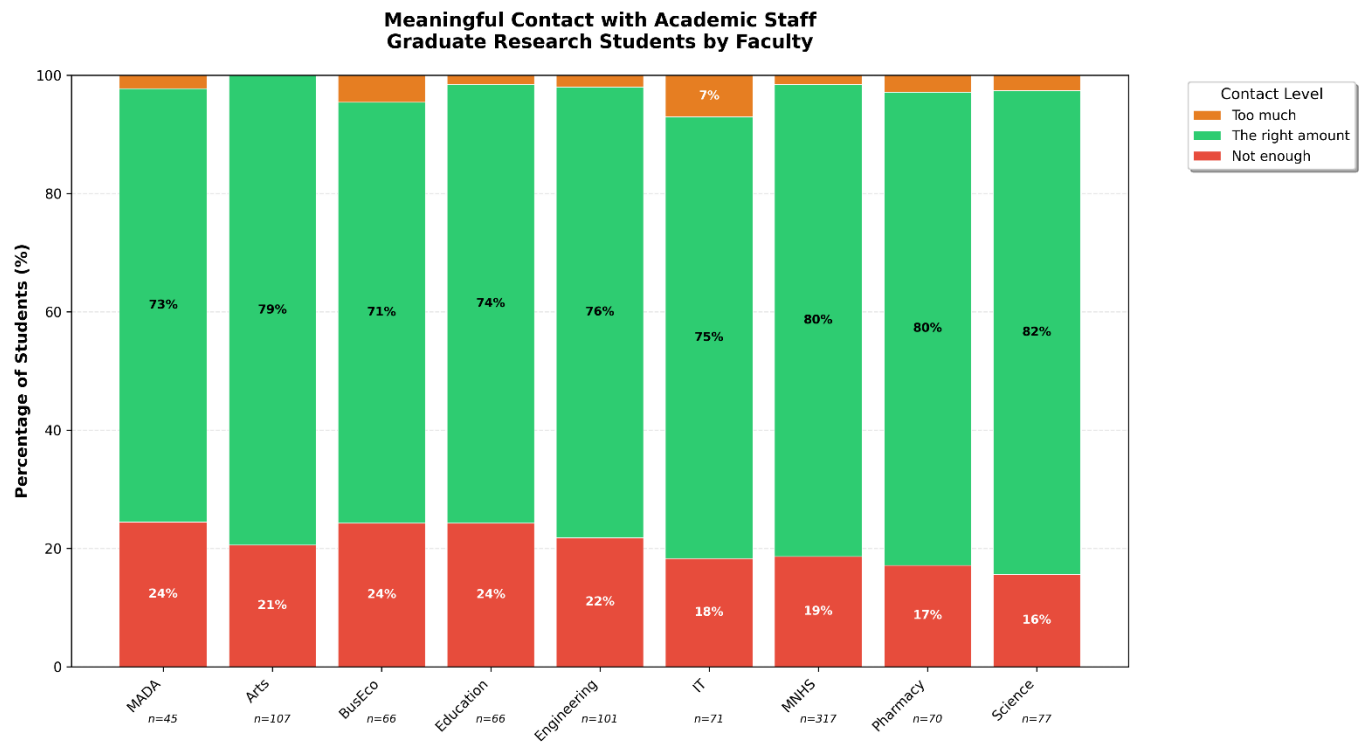
"There is no time to do anything with friends or family because I have too much study to do."
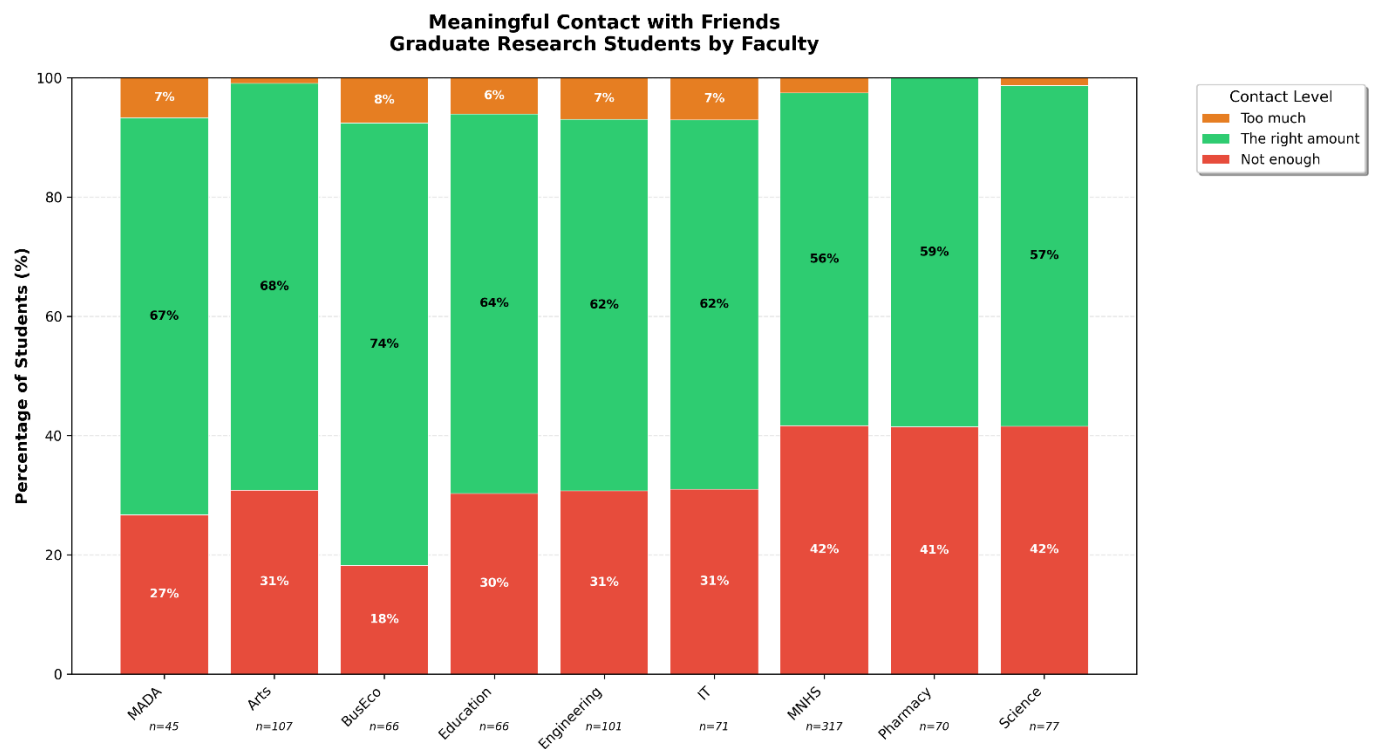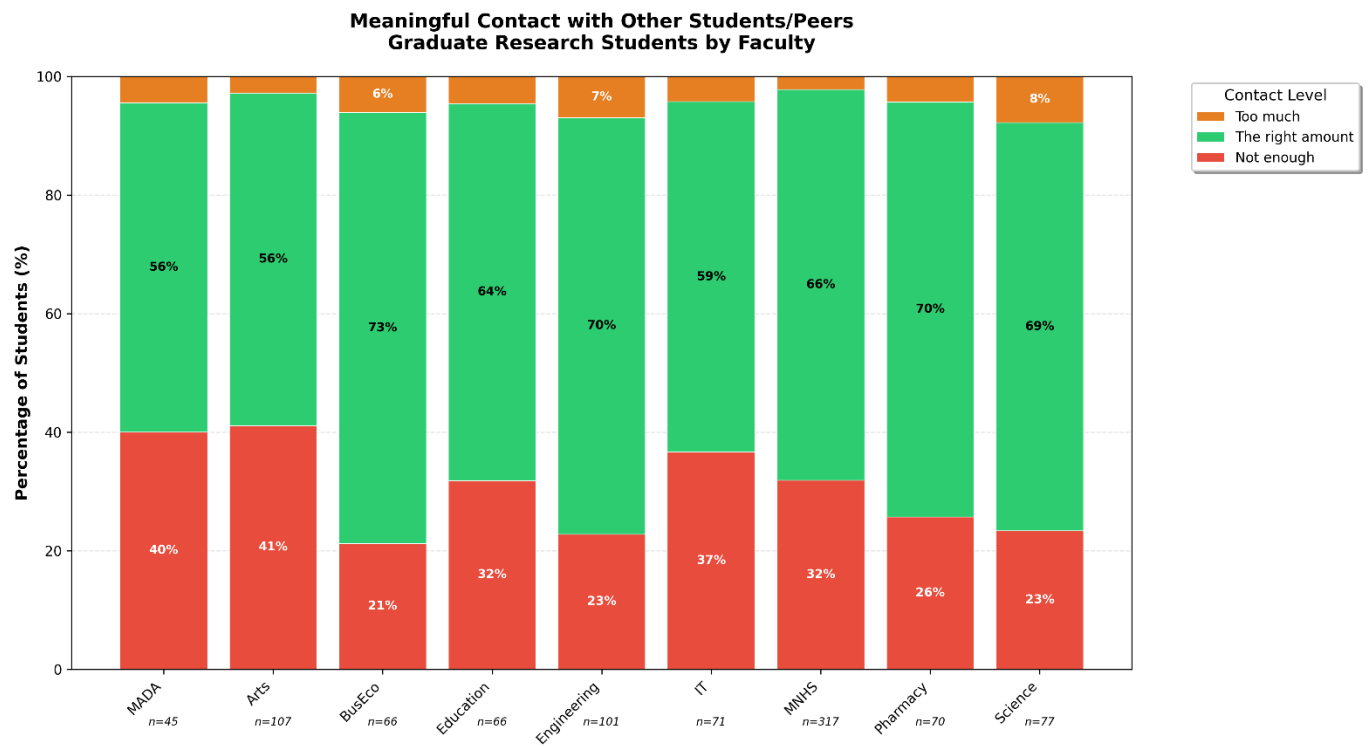
"The lack of a designated working space the lack of a genuine connection with supervisors limited or no access to other academics with similar research areas."
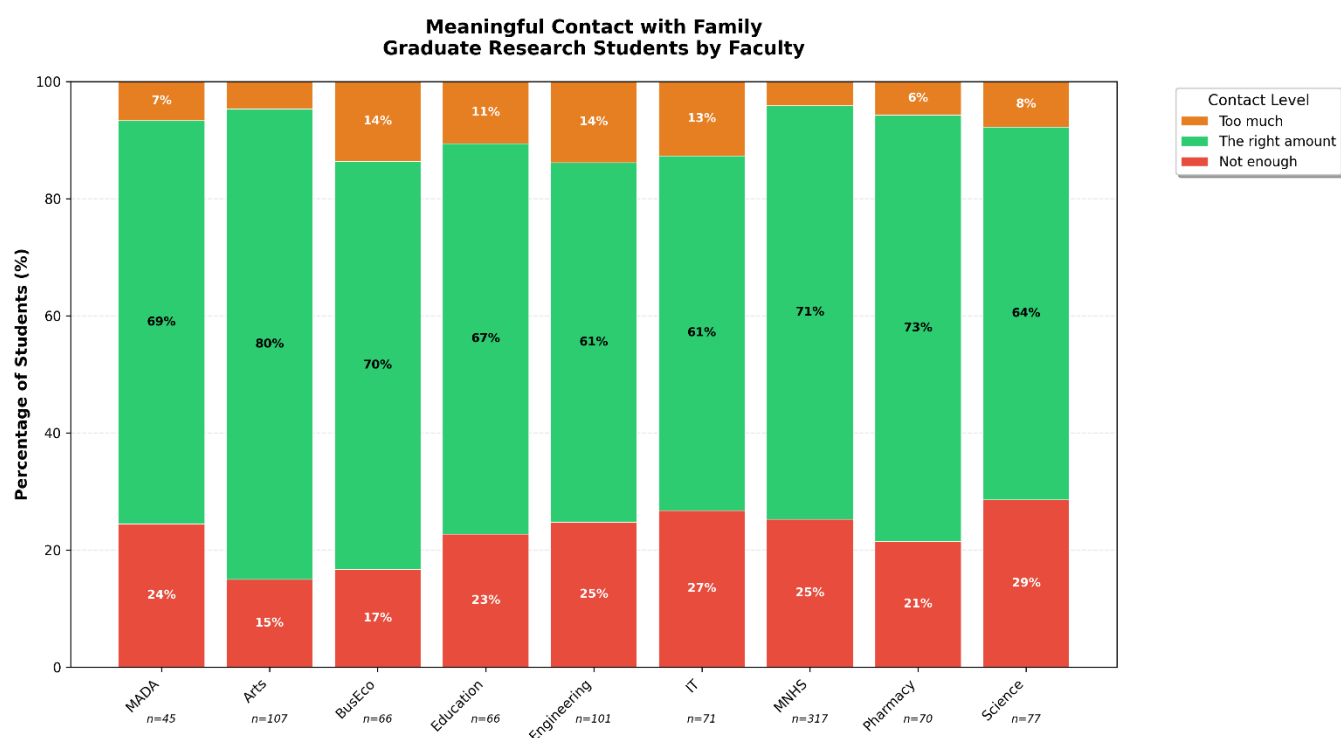
These testimonies reveal isolation arising from remote study, parenting responsibilities, working hours incompatible with campus presence, cultural and linguistic barriers, and lack of appropriate physical infrastructure. Addressing this peer contact issue rate requires understanding that many Education students face structural barriers to traditional peer connection rather than simply choosing not to participate.

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 Education students feel adequately connected and where they experience insufficient contact.

Meaningful Contact with Academic Staff
Graduate Research Students by Faculty

Meaningful Contact with Administrative Staff
Graduate Research Students by Faculty

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

Contact Level
- Too much
- The right amount
- Not enough

Faculty	Not enough	The right amount	Too much
MADA (n=45)	40%	56%	
Arts (n=107)	41%	56%	
BusEco (n=66)	21%	73%	6%
Education (n=66)	32%	64%	
Engineering (n=101)	23%	70%	7%
IT (n=71)	37%	59%	
MNHS (n=317)	32%	66%	
Pharmacy (n=70)	26%	70%	
Science (n=77)	23%	69%	8%

Meaningful Contact with Friends
Graduate Research Students by Faculty

Contact Level
- Too much
- The right amount
- Not enough

Faculty	Not enough	The right amount	Too much
MADA (n=45)	27%	67%	7%
Arts (n=107)	31%	68%	
BusEco (n=66)	18%	74%	8%
Education (n=66)	30%	64%	6%
Engineering (n=101)	31%	62%	7%
IT (n=71)	31%	62%	7%
MNHS (n=317)	42%	56%	
Pharmacy (n=70)	41%	59%	
Science (n=77)	42%	57%	

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Meaningful Contact with Family
Graduate Research Students by Faculty

Contact Level: Too much, The right amount, Not enough

Faculty	Not enough	The right amount	Too much
MADA (n=45)	24%	69%	7%
Arts (n=107)	15%	80%	—
BusEco (n=66)	17%	70%	14%
Education (n=66)	23%	67%	11%
Engineering (n=101)	25%	61%	14%
IT (n=71)	27%	61%	13%
MNHS (n=317)	25%	71%	—
Pharmacy (n=70)	21%	73%	6%
Science (n=77)	29%	64%	8%

These patterns of meaningful contact reveal a concerning picture for Education students, with 32% reporting insufficient peer contact. While largely in line with the 33% university-wide average, one in three reporting insufficient peer contact is a point of concern.

The students experiencing insufficient peer contact – particularly parent-researchers, mid-career professionals studying alongside careers, remote/part-time students and international students facing cultural or linguistic barriers – represent substantial rather than marginal populations within Education's doctoral community. For Education students, whose research often explores learning, pedagogy and educational systems, peer connection provides not only social support but also methodological exchange across diverse research approaches (from large-scale quantitative studies to intimate qualitative investigations), validation of practitioner-research insights and professional networks spanning both academic and education sector careers.

The faculty's challenge lies in ensuring that connection opportunities remain accessible to students whose life circumstances differ from traditional full-time, campus-based patterns. Parent-researchers cannot attend evening seminars or social events during childcare hours. Career-practitioners balancing teaching positions study before dawn or late at night, missing informal peer interaction. Remote and part-time students – often necessary patterns for those managing families and careers – face structural isolation from campus-based networks. International students may encounter cultural barriers to joining informal groups or find themselves excluded from language-based social clusters. Understanding what enables successful peer connection among the minority of Education students who report adequate contact – whether through flexible virtual communities, daytime parent-friendly sessions, cohort models accommodating varied schedules or explicitly inclusive departmental culture – should inform efforts to extend similar benefits to the substantial majority currently experiencing isolation.

What Makes Education Distinct: Key Themes

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

The Parent-Researcher Paradox: Career Practitioners Balancing Multiple Identities

Education graduate research attracts substantial proportions of students who are simultaneously: practicing educators, parents themselves and/or mature-age career professionals. This creates a distinctive demographic profile where many students pursue doctorates not as early-career training but as mid-career professional development while managing teaching careers, parenting responsibilities and research demands.

The financial and time pressures facing these multi-role students differ fundamentally from traditional full-time early-career researchers. Childcare costs emerge repeatedly in qualitative responses as a defining financial burden, with students describing how "my entire scholarship goes to the day-care" or being unable to afford childcare and instead "struggling with my study being a full-time mum and a night-time PhD student." Students describe studying "10pm to 2am or 5am to 7am" around work and family responsibilities, creating unsustainable schedules that compromise both research quality and wellbeing.

Peer connection challenges reflect this demographic reality. Students with young children cannot attend evening seminars or social events. Those working may study outside 9am – 5pm, missing the informal peer interaction that builds community. Remote and part-time study patterns – necessary for those balancing careers and families – create structural isolation from campus-based peer networks.

The paradox is that these mature, career-practitioner students bring substantial professional expertise and research-practice connections that enrich Education's research culture, yet face systematic barriers to thriving in doctoral structures designed for younger, full-time, unencumbered researchers.

The Material Pressures Attrition Profile: When Life Circumstances Override Mental Health

Education demonstrates a fundamentally different attrition risk profile than other Monash facultics. While mental health represents the primary reason graduate researchers consider leaving across nearly all disciplines, Education students cite financial issues (54%) and family responsibilities (46%) as their primary drivers, with mental health (42%) ranking only third. This distinctive pattern reveals how Education's demographic reality – substantial proportions of parent-researchers and mid-career professionals – creates attrition pressures that differ fundamentally from traditional doctoral challenges.

This material pressures profile occurs despite Education demonstrating the strongest financial wellbeing indicators of any Monash faculty (53% "doing great" or "getting by") and remarkably low supervision dissatisfaction (only 8% cite supervision issues as a reason for leaving compared to 25%

university-wide). The paradox suggests that even when financial circumstances appear relatively favourable and supervisory relationships function well, the compounding demands of parenting responsibilities, career obligations and research commitments create unsustainable pressures that generic doctoral support structures cannot address.

The distinction matters for retention strategy. Standard interventions targeting research skills, supervisory relationships or even mental health support – while valuable – may inadequately address the structural life circumstances driving Education students' consideration of leaving. When students describe choosing between childcare costs and continuing their research, or maintaining impossible study schedules around parenting and work, addressing these retention risks may require material support (childcare subsidies, flexible progression models, financial supplements for dependents) rather than purely pastoral or academic interventions.

Faculty-Specific Recommendations

These recommendations are tailored to patterns observed among Education 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, Education should focus faculty efforts on two distinctive challenges where targeted intervention will have maximum impact:

1: Establish Parent-Research Support Infrastructure

The Challenge: Education attracts substantial proportions of students balancing parenting, professional careers and research. Childcare costs emerge repeatedly as a defining financial burden, with students describing how scholarships are consumed entirely by childcare or being forced to study while providing full-time childcare. Students working teaching careers describe unsustainable 10pm-2am or 5am-7am study schedules, while parents cannot access evening peer connection opportunities.

Recommended Actions:

- Advocate for enhanced childcare subsidies specifically for graduate research students, recognising that standard scholarships inadequately account for dependent costs.
- Create flexible peer connection opportunities specifically designed for parents: daytime parent-friendly sessions, virtual connection platforms and occasional family-inclusive events.
- Develop cohort models that explicitly accommodate part-time and remote study, normalising rather than marginalising these patterns.
- Provide supervisor training on supporting students with parenting and career responsibilities, emphasising flexibility, understanding of limited campus availability and recognition that part-time progress represents full engagement given other responsibilities.
- Establish peer mentoring connecting current parent-researchers with incoming students facing similar juggling challenges.

Expected Impact: Reduces financial burden causing parents to choose between childcare and research engagement; creates peer connection opportunities accessible to those unable to attend traditional campus events; normalises parent-researcher identity rather than treating it as exceptional circumstance requiring accommodation.

2. Proactive International Student Support and Cultural Connection

The Challenge: Only 30% of international Education students access mental health support (vs. 65% domestic students), representing a massive citizenship gap. International students describe compounding challenges including language barriers to peer connection, cultural adjustment stress, homesickness, family separation, unaffordable childcare for those with dependents and financial pressures.

Recommended Actions:

- Implement *proactive* rather than *reactive* mental health support: faculty-initiated check-ins, embedded wellbeing contacts in graduate research areas and culturally responsive mental health resources delivered through trusted faculty channels rather than expecting students to self-identify and seek central services.
- Create structured peer connection programs specifically for international students, recognising that generic events may not provide culturally safe spaces: international student cohort groups, cultural celebration events and peer mentoring pairing international students with those who have successfully navigated similar challenges.
- Develop multilingual and culturally appropriate resources explaining Australian educational culture, research expectations, supervisor relationships and available support services.
- Provide supervisor training specifically on supporting international students, addressing: cultural differences in communication styles and help-seeking, visa and work restrictions affecting financial capacity, family separation and isolation, and recognising signs of struggle in students from cultures where direct communication of difficulties is uncommon.
- Advocate within Monash for enhanced financial support recognising international students' limited work rights and often substantial family support responsibilities across borders.

Expected Impact: Increases mental health support access among international students from 30% toward domestic students' 65% level; reduces isolation through culturally responsive peer connection; ensures supervisors can recognise and respond to international students' distinctive support needs; reduces compounding disadvantages currently invisible in aggregate faculty statistics.

Conclusion

Education graduate research students demonstrate both distinctive strengths and systematic challenges requiring targeted faculty response. Low critical supervision issues and above-average completion confidence (59% vs. 55% university-wide) represent positive foundations. However, these aggregate indicators mask acute challenges facing specific student populations.

The 77% experiencing some form of isolation (the highest across the faculties), pronounced international student disadvantage in mental health support access (30% vs. 65% for domestic students) and pervasive financial pressures related to childcare costs demand attention. Education's student population – characterised by substantial proportions of parent-researchers, career-practitioners pursuing mid-career professional doctorates and international students with complex family responsibilities – requires doctoral structures that accommodate rather than penalise these realities.

The recommended focus on parent-researcher infrastructure and proactive international student support directly addresses Education's most distinctive challenges. Successful implementation would position Education as a model for supporting diverse doctoral students whose lives don't conform to traditional full-time, early-career, unencumbered researcher assumptions. The alternative – maintaining structures designed for a student population that may no longer reflect the lived reality

– perpetuates systematic disadvantage for substantial proportions of Education's doctoral community.

Appendix: Education Demographics

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	17 (25%)
Clayton	57 (85%)
Caulfield	3 (5%)
Peninsula	5 (8%)
Parkville	0 (0%)
Malaysia	0 (0%)
Hospital or Medical Centre	0 (0%)
Indonesia	0 (0%)
Suzhou	0 (0%)
other	0 (0%)

School/Department	Respondents
Curriculum Teaching and Inclusive Education	36 (54%)
Education Culture and Society	13 (19%)
Education Psychology and Counselling	14 (21%)
Other	4 (6%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	32 (47%)
International student	36 (53%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	59 (87%)
Part-time	9 (13%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	21 (31%)
Mix of on-campus and off-campus	28 (41%)
Entirely off-campus	19 (28%)
Other	0 (0%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	13 (19%)
1-5 years	32 (48%)
6-10 years	17 (25%)
11+ years	5 (8%)

Degree progress	Respondents
First year	31 (46%)
Second year	14 (21%)
Third year and beyond	23 (34%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	1 (2%)
6-10	8 (12%)
11-20	7 (10%)
21-30	17 (25%)
31-40	23 (34%)
Over 40 hours	12 (18%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	37 (55%)
Advanced	17 (25%)
Intermediate	12 (18%)
Elementary	1 (2%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	53 (79%)
Man	12 (18%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	0 (0%)
Prefer to self-describe	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	2 (3%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	2 (3%)
No	62 (93%)
Prefer not to disclose	3 (5%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	30 (94%)
Prefer not to disclose	2 (6%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	7 (10%)
No	57 (85%)
Prefer not to disclose	3 (5%)

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

Age	Respondents
24 or under	5 (7%)
25-29	16 (24%)
30-39	30 (44%)
40 and over	17 (25%)

Parental status	Respondents
Yes – living with me	23 (36%)
Yes – not living with me	3 (5%)
No	38 (59%)

Primary carer	Respondents
Yes	15 (65%)
Shared responsibility	7 (30%)
No	1 (4%)

Carer status	Respondents
Yes	9 (14%)
No	55 (86%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	8 (13%)
Part-time	10 (16%)
Casual	20 (31%)
Unemployed and looking for work	17 (27%)
Not employed and not looking for work	9 (14%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	13 (34%)
6-10	6 (16%)
11-20	11 (29%)
21-30	3 (8%)
31-40	2 (5%)
More than 40	3 (8%)

Scholarship recipients	Respondents
Yes	37 (59%)
No, but I previously held a scholarship	3 (5%)
No	23 (37%)

Value of scholarship	Respondents
Less than $33,511	6 (16%)
$33,511 (National full-time RTP stipend minimum)	4 (11%)
$33,512 - $36,062	7 (19%)
$36,063 (Monash full-time RTP stipend)	14 (38%)
$36,064 - $47,626	2 (5%)
More than $47,627 (National minimum wage)	4 (11%)