

Graduate Research in Pharmacy:

Student Experiences,
Challenges and Opportunities
for Enhancement



Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

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

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

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

Report Production

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

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

Use of Generative AI

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

How to Cite this Report

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Introduction

This report examines the experiences of 77 graduate research students in the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (Pharmacy) 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 Pharmacy.

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

Survey Participation

- 77 Pharmacy graduate research students participated.
- Response rate represents approximately 33% of enrolled Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy graduate research contexts.
- Financial pressures and their discipline-specific manifestations.
- Academic progression, career uncertainty and attrition considerations.
- Peer connection and support needs unique to Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy students and what the faculty can do to enhance support.

Key Findings for Pharmacy

This section presents core findings from the 77 Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy 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.

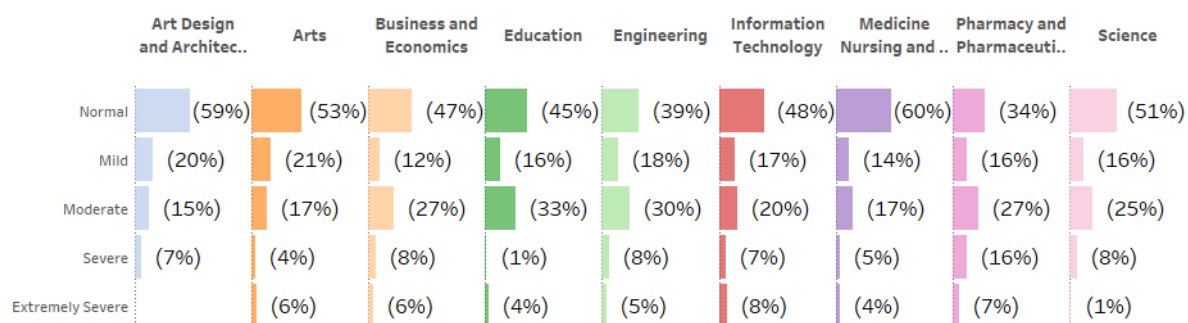
1. Mental Health and Wellbeing

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

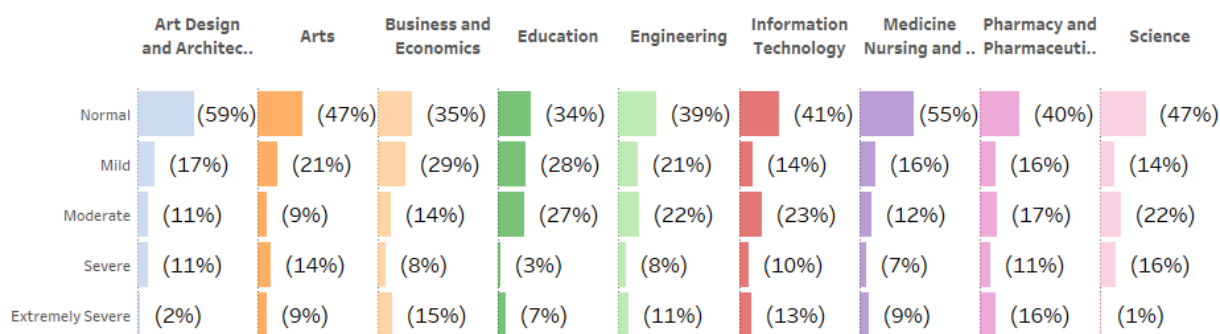
DASS21 Indicators:

Pharmacy students show mixed mental health patterns compared to the Monash average.

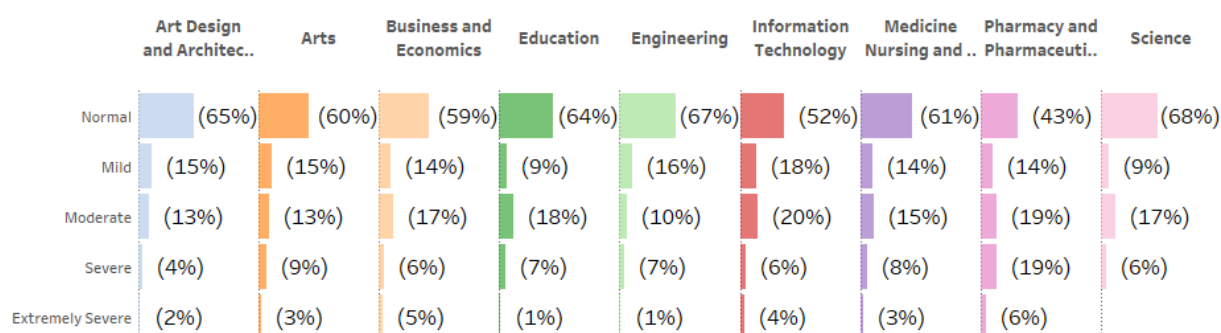
Depression:



Anxiety:



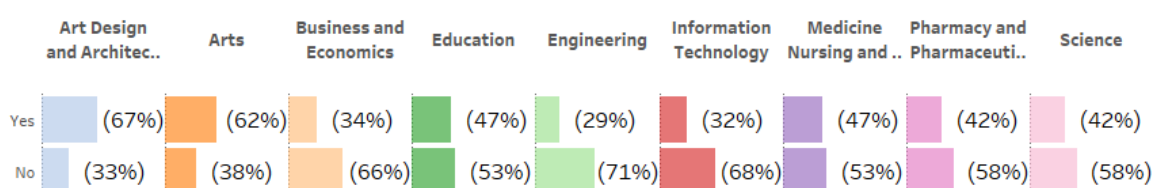
Stress:



These patterns suggest that Pharmacy students experience mental health challenges at rates well above the average across the Monash graduate research population. Only 34% of Pharmacy students report normal depression levels and 43% report normal stress levels – both the lowest rate across all faculties by some distance. Pharmacy students also report normal anxiety levels at rates well below the university average (40% compared to 46%). Of concern, across all three dimensions of Depression, Anxiety and Stress, Pharmacy has the highest rates at the severe or extremely severe end of the scale, compared with the rest of the faculties.

Mental Health Support Access:

Pharmacy respondents access mental health support as frequently as those across the university.

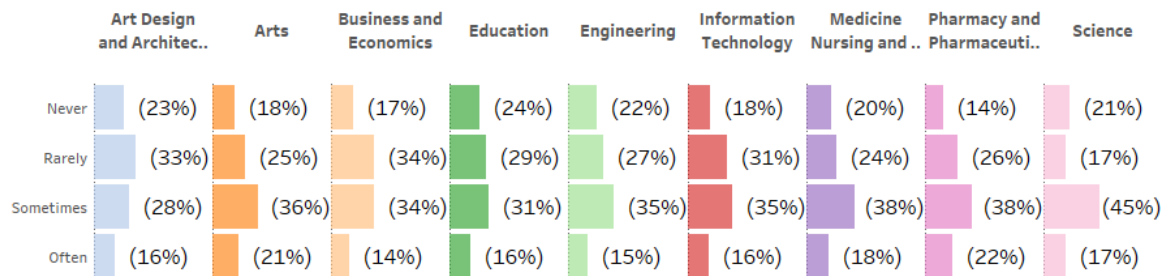


Key demographic insights:

- 42% of Pharmacy students have accessed mental health support (vs. 45% university-wide).
- 49% of domestic students (n.41) and 33% of international students (n.29) had accessed support. The rate of access among domestic students in the faculty is far below the rate across the university (62%); however, the rate of access among international students is on par with the average among this cohort (32%).
- 32% of men (n. 30) and 50% of women (n.38) had accessed support. Both of these are on par with the averages across the university for these demographic groups (men = 31%, women = 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.



- 86% of Pharmacy students reported experiencing imposter syndrome at some point (vs. 80% university-wide).
- Meanwhile, 22% reported experiencing this feeling “often” – the highest figure across the faculties.

Student Voices from Pharmacy:

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

“Workload - feeling like I had too much to do and had to withdraw from other aspects of my life e.g. social.”

“Being overworked and needing to prioritise work to reach deadlines.”

“Too high expectations from people (other than my supervisor) e.g. staff on units I teach in ... meaning to complete all the requirements of me I had to work 70 hours per week.”

“Having depression - so I really preferred to keep to myself rather than talk about my feelings to others as I felt they would not understand my perspective/thoughts.”

“No one around me to speak with. No one around me to tell what type of mental stress I have. I was doing a lot but nothing has worked in my favour. Loneliness less emotional support are the key contributors.”

“The main reason is usually myself. I can be overly sensitive to trivial or insignificant things and people.”

“Imposter syndrome - Not knowing where to progress in my career.”

What This Means for Pharmacy:

The mental health data reveal three interconnected challenges requiring faculty attention:

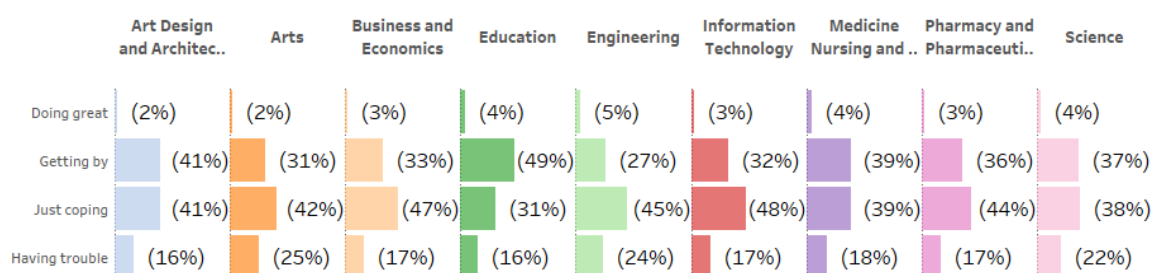
- **Elevated distress without proportionate support access** – Pharmacy students report higher rates of elevated mental health issues, yet access support at marginally lower rates (42% vs. 45% university-wide). The gap is most pronounced among domestic students, where Pharmacy’s 49% access rate falls well below the 62% university-wide average.
- **Imposter syndrome as a distinctive challenge** – With 86% experiencing imposter syndrome and 22% experiencing it “often” (the highest rate across faculties), Pharmacy students appear particularly vulnerable to self-doubt.
- **Workload and isolation as compounding factors** – Student testimonies consistently reference feeling overworked (70-hour weeks mentioned explicitly), lacking emotional support and having no peers who understand their pressures. These conditions allow mental health challenges to intensify without adequate intervention.

2. Financial Circumstances and Career Pressure

This section examines two interrelated dimensions of the Pharmacy graduate research experience: financial circumstances and career navigation. Beyond standard financial wellbeing measures, Pharmacy 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.

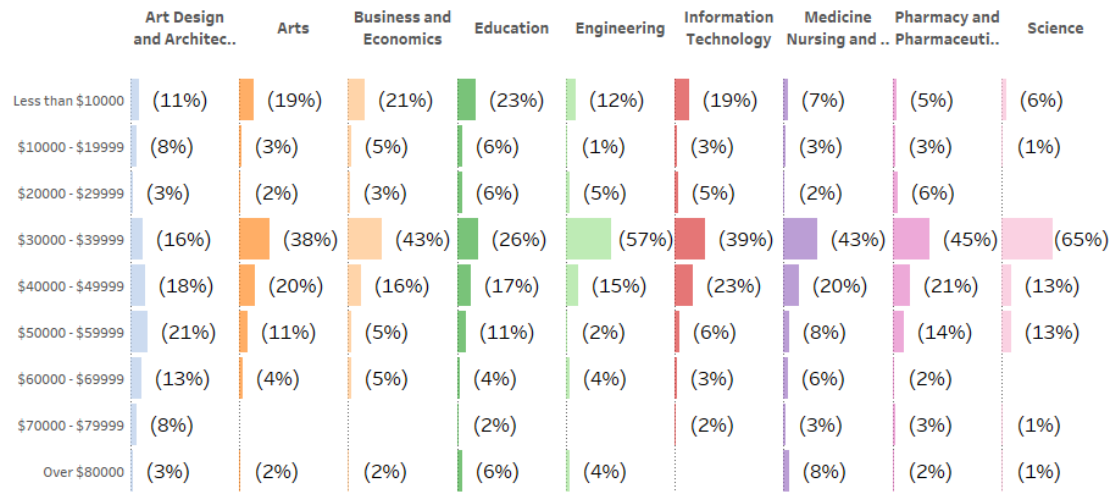
Melbourne Institute’s Financial Wellbeing:

Pharmacy graduate research students show financial wellbeing patterns similar to the Monash average with 61% of the faculty’s students either “just coping” or “having trouble.”



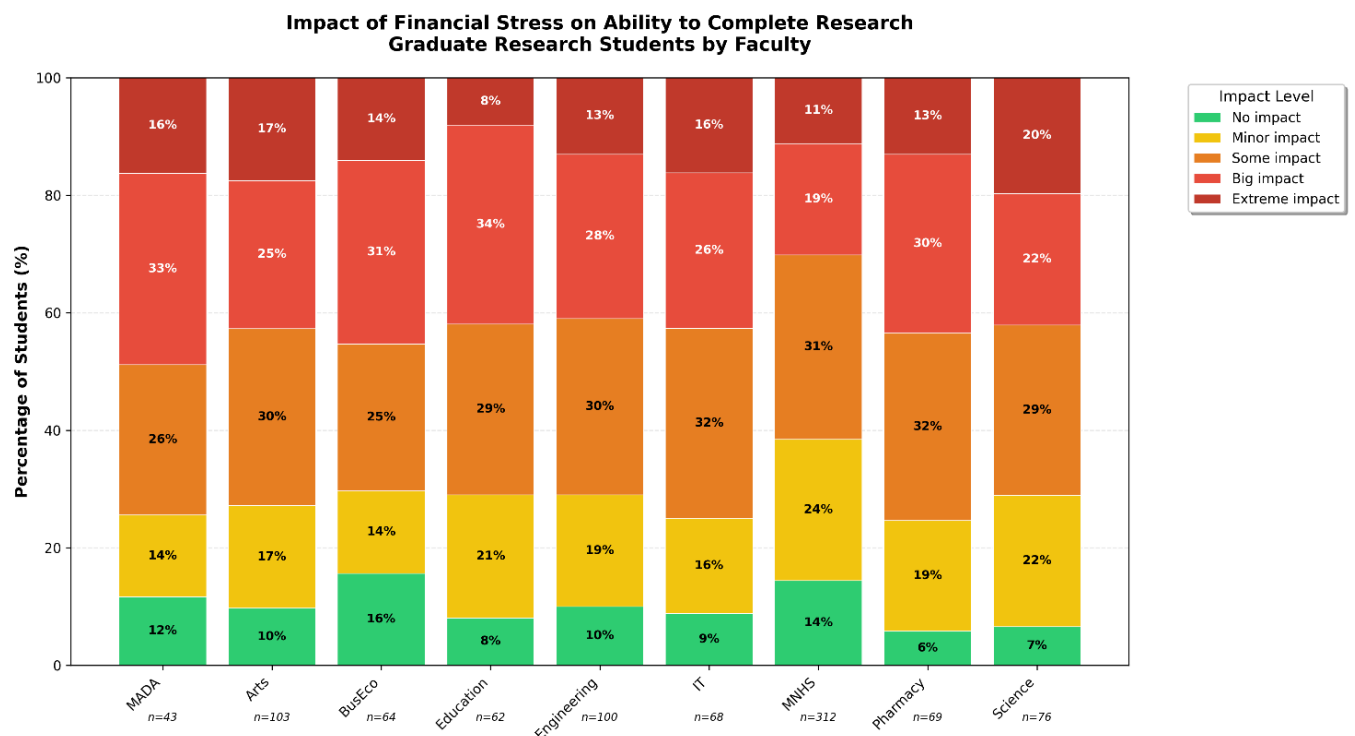
Estimated Annual Income (AUD):

Pharmacy 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).

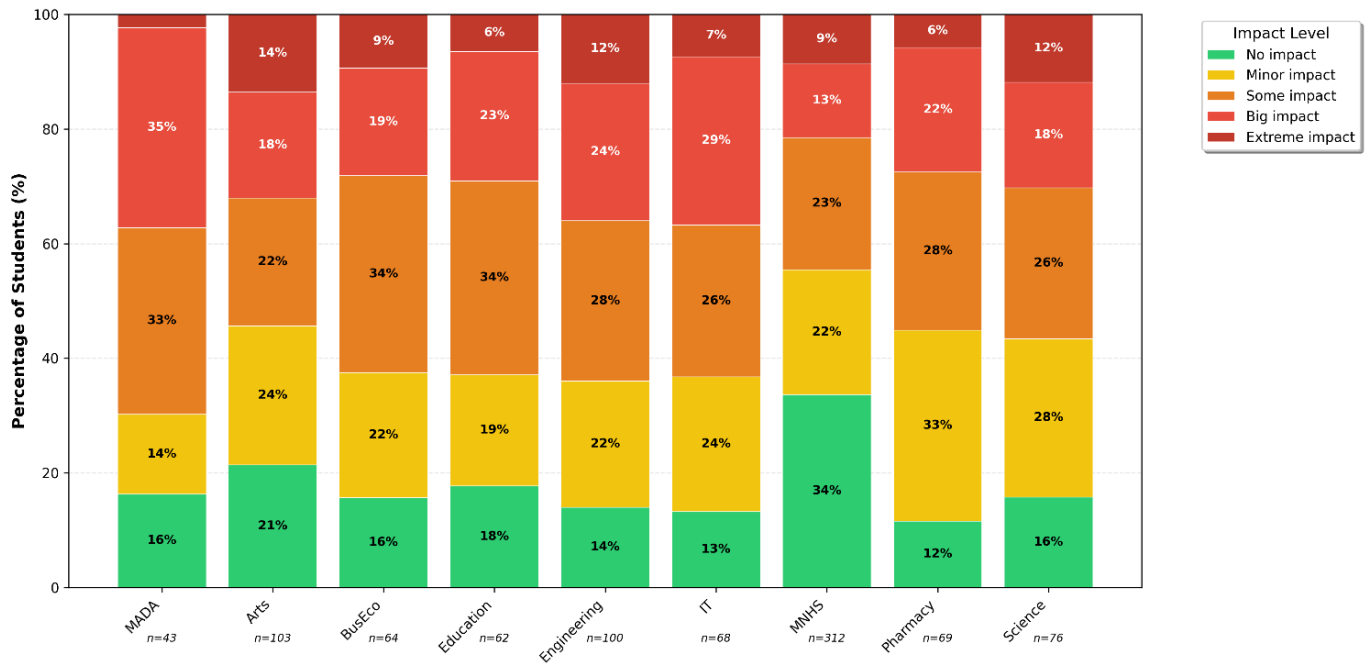


How Financial Pressures Affect Academic Activities:

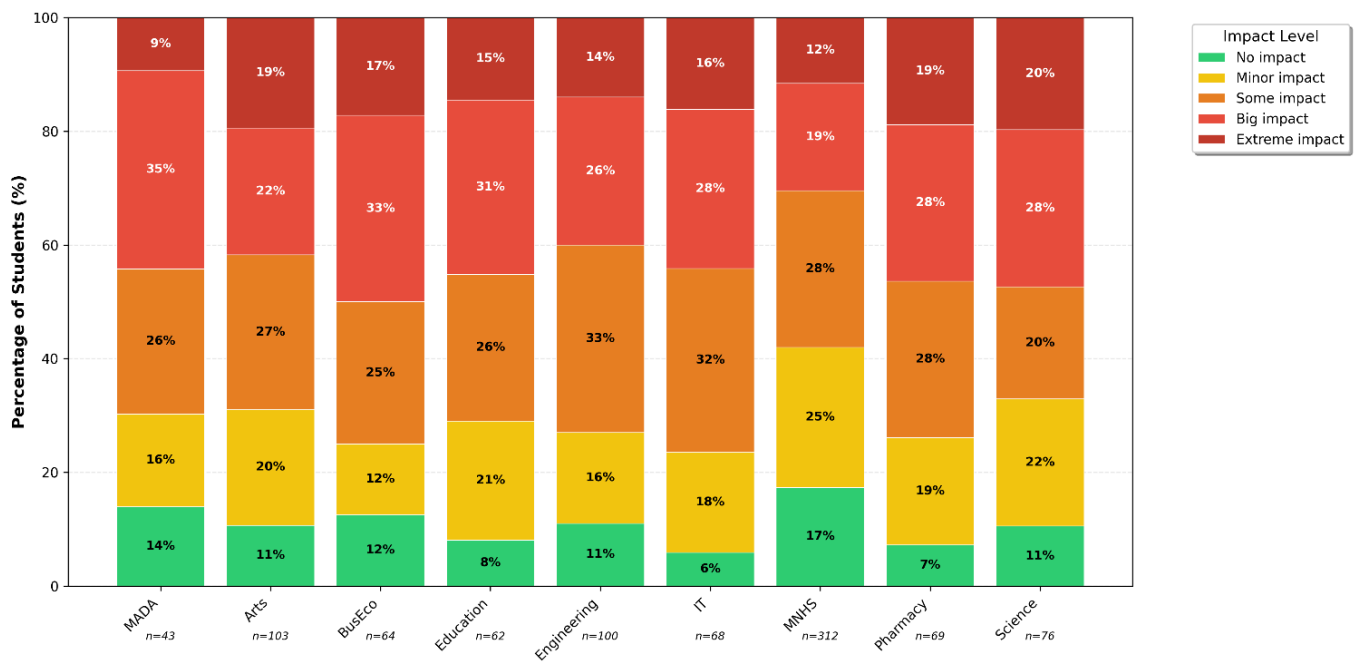
Financial pressures directly impact Pharmacy students' ability to engage fully with their research and professional development opportunities. The following data reveal how financial stress affects key aspects of academic engagement:

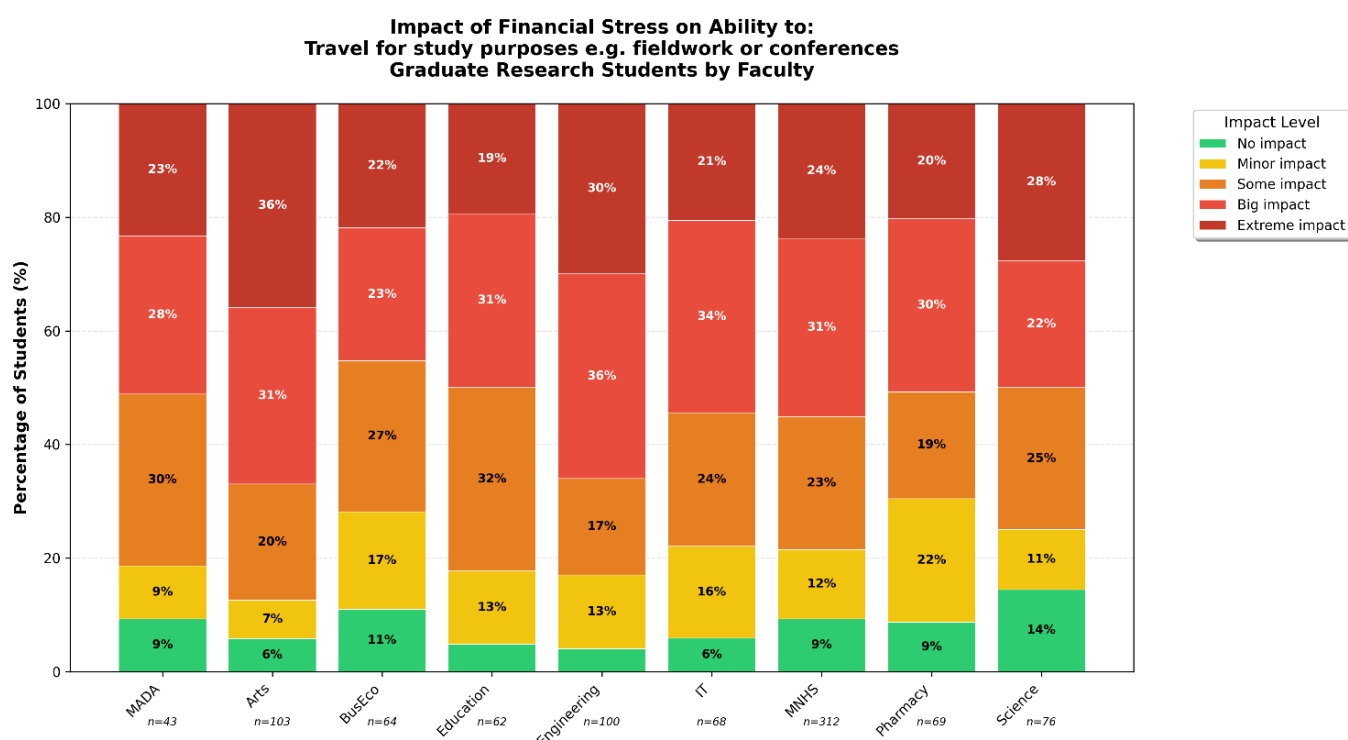


**Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to:
Attend classes/study/research on campus
Graduate Research Students by Faculty**



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





Key Findings on Financial Impact:

- **Research completion capacity:** 43% indicate that financial stress has an extreme or big impact on their capability to complete their research to the best of their ability (vs. 44% 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:** 28% 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:** 47% of Pharmacy 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 Pharmacy students experiencing higher rates compared to peers across the university.
- **Professional development through travel:** 50% 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 expected – if not required – for successful academic or industry careers.

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 Pharmacy – from managing basic living expenses to affording professional conferences.

“I am an international student in receipt of annual stipend which is my sole means of income at the moment. Considering that I am based at Parkville campus it is getting very difficult for me to make ends meet because the cost of living is so high here. Accommodation and bills are taking up 92% of my stipend every month and I am unable to manage food transport groceries and any unexpected expense in the rest of the 8% income. I am getting help from savings back home. This is affecting my mental health and performance in university. I am also searching for a job these days so that I can be able to make ends meet and save some money for rainy days.”

“I suggest more time/opportunity/somewhat mandatory for students to be able to conduct an industry internship/part time job.”

“Sometimes need to take money from parents.”

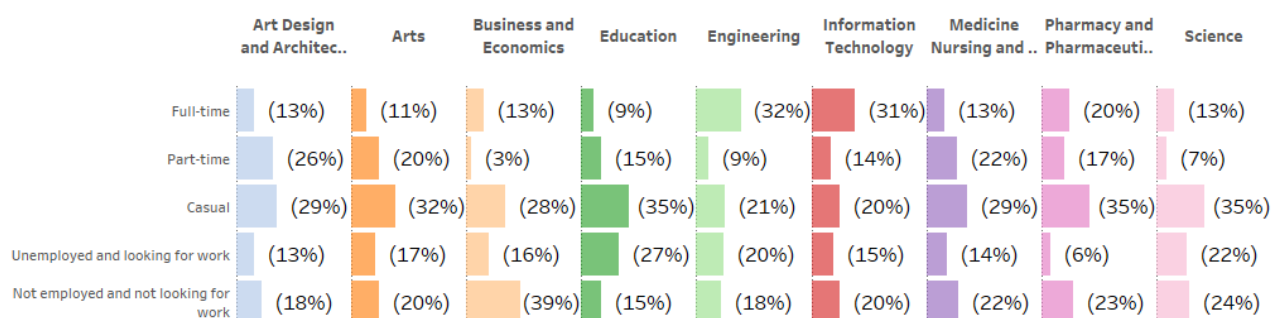
“I have moved back in with my parents because I am not able to reliably afford to live somewhere else which means that I spend ~3 hours each day transporting to campus. For something as lengthy as a PhD (I am only in my first year) this eats away so much free time over a long period and makes it much harder to continue the PhD.”

“I’m about to reach the end of my PhD with the possibility to extend without scholarship. Most students in my department extend so my supervisors want me to extend. That is putting an extreme economical pressure on me as I will need to use all my savings.”

Employment Patterns:

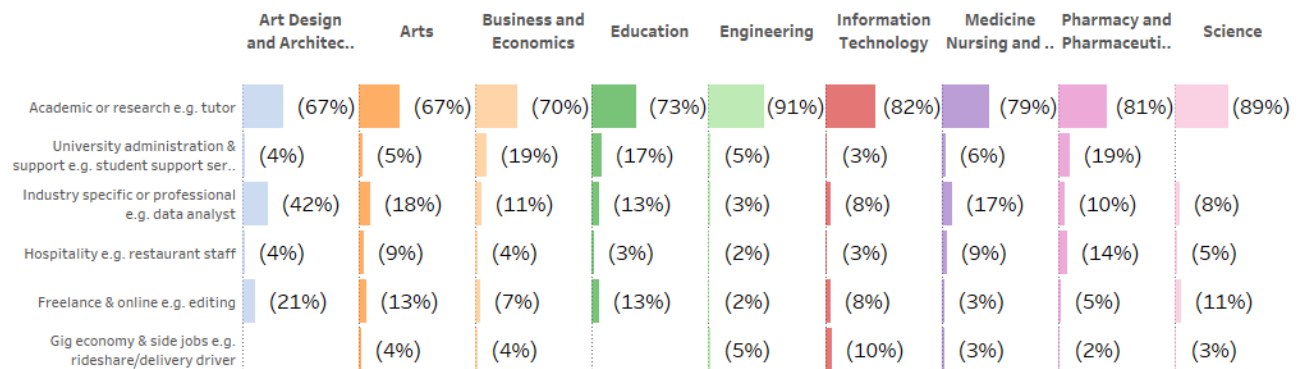
The employment patterns among Pharmacy students reveal the complex relationship between financial necessity, professional development and research progress. Understanding who works, in what capacity and how employment relates to research provides insight into the discipline-specific challenges Pharmacy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

Employment Status of Full-Time Students Across the Faculties:



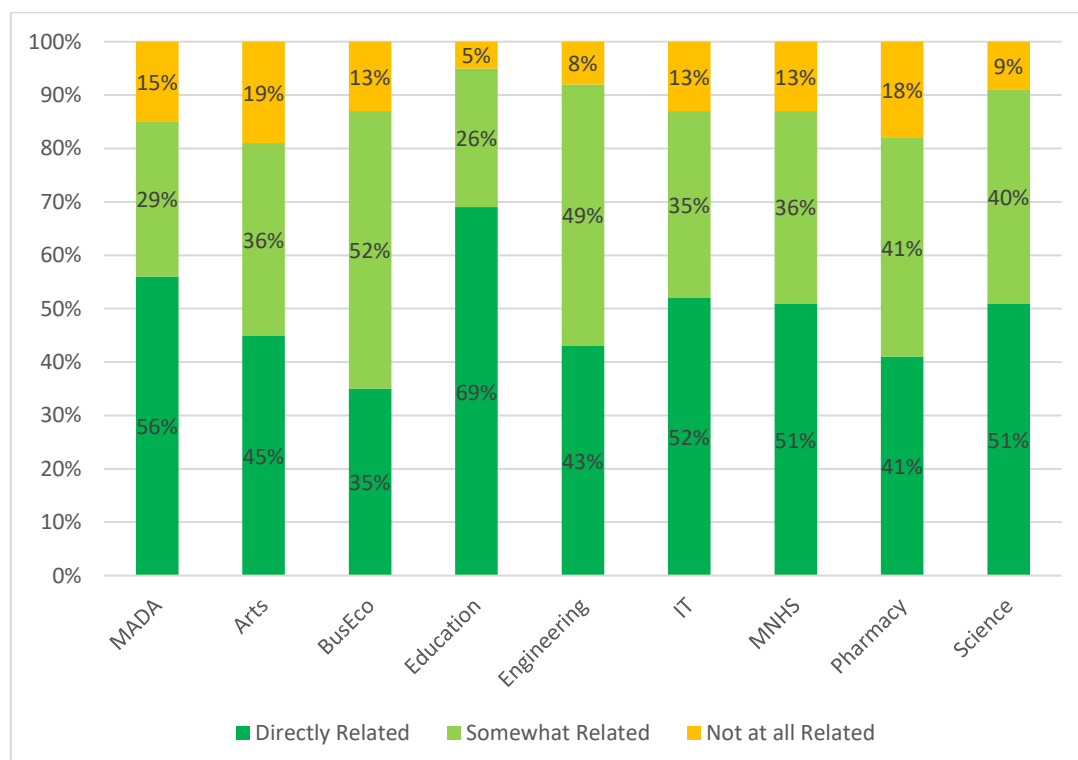
By some distance, Pharmacy has the lowest proportion of students unemployed and looking for work (6%); however, 23% are not employed and not looking for work. Meanwhile, 20% are employed full-time, which is quite high considering only 6% of respondents are enrolled part-time.

The Type of Jobs Students are Employed In:



A comfortable majority of employed Pharmacy respondents had a job in academia. Meanwhile, a further 19% were employed in a university administration role.

Relation of Job to Research



These patterns reveal a mixed employment landscape among Pharmacy students. 41% work in jobs directly related to their studies, 41% in somewhat related positions and 18% in roles not at all

related to their research (compared to 49%, 38% and 13% respectively across Monash STEM fields and 52%, 35% and 13% in HASS).

The 82% working in directly/somewhat related roles suggests that a substantial number of Pharmacy students successfully integrate their employment with professional development, potentially through research assistant positions or tutoring/teaching roles (81%), consulting work or industry research collaborations. These students may experience employment as less burdensome and more complementary to their academic work.

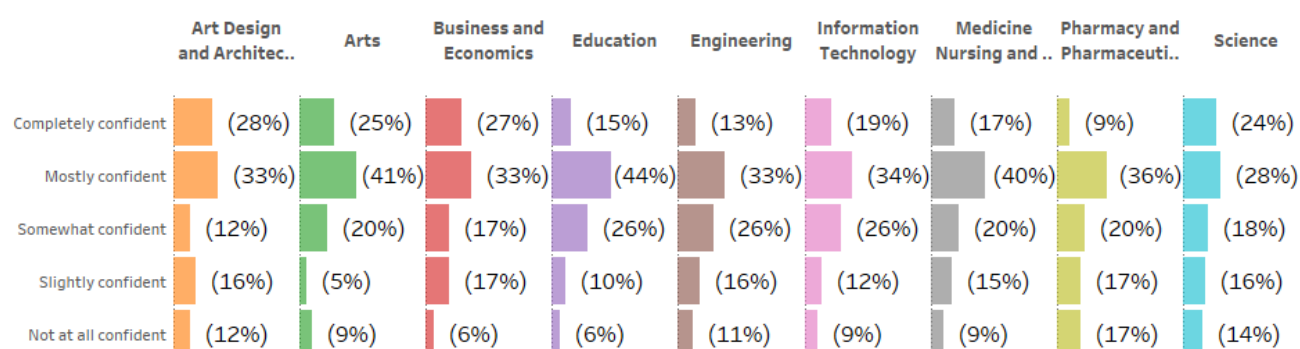
However, the 18% working in jobs unrelated to their studies highlight students for whom employment represents pure financial necessity rather than career building. These individuals face the particular challenge of devoting significant time and energy to work that offers no direct advancement toward their research or professional goals – a double burden of competing demands and missed opportunity costs. This combined with the 29% of students who are currently unemployed and either looking or not looking for work, highlights a potential area of need for the faculty to provide greater career planning engagement and opportunities for relevant employment. For a discipline where career trajectories increasingly span both academic and industry pathways, ensuring students have access to professionally relevant employment opportunities (whether through expanded teaching assistant roles, research collaborations or industry partnerships) could transform employment from a competing pressure into a professional development asset.

3. Academic Progression and Career Uncertainty

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

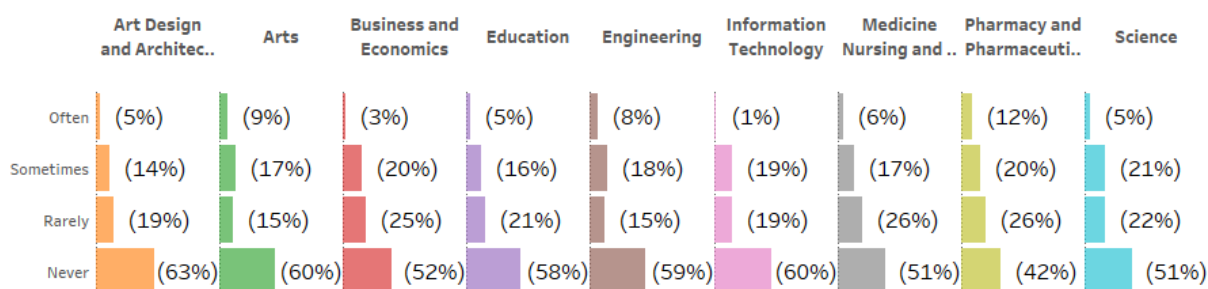
Completion Confidence:

Pharmacy students show the lowest completion confidence of any faculty and are well below the university average (45% vs. 55% completely/mostly confident). Meanwhile, 34% harbour a high degree of doubt about timely completion.



Considering Leaving:

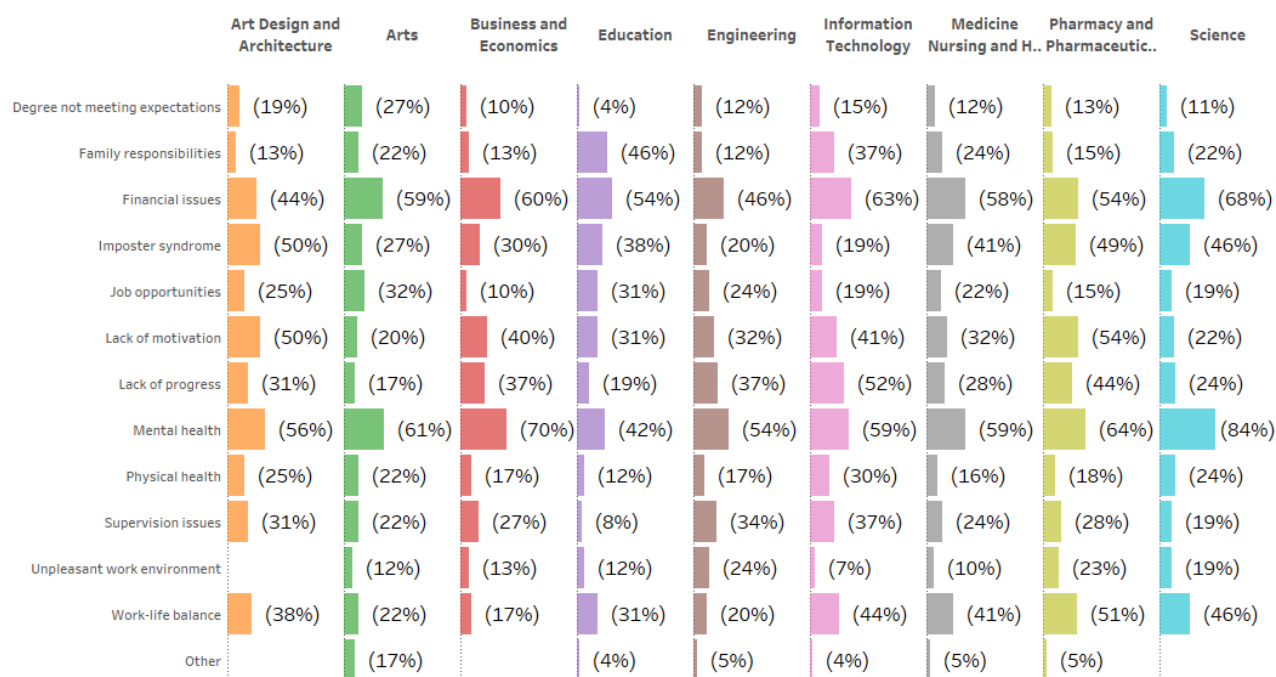
Consideration of leaving one's degree represents a normal part of the graduate research journey for many students, reflecting moments when challenges feel overwhelming or alternative paths appear more appealing. Examining how frequently Pharmacy students experience these thoughts and how this compares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



More than half (58%) of Pharmacy students have considered leaving at some point, well above the 46% university-wide average, with 12% considering leaving often (double the 6% university-wide average).

These elevated rates signal concerning retention risks within Pharmacy and suggest that the mental health, financial and workload pressures documented throughout this report are indeed pushing some students toward departure. The proportion considering leaving “often” is particularly noteworthy – these students experience persistent rather than occasional doubts about continuation, indicating they may be approaching critical decision points. While considering leaving occasionally represents a normal part of navigating the extended PhD journey, the frequency and intensity of these considerations among Pharmacy students – combined with their low completion confidence (45% vs. 55% university-wide) – suggest systemic rather than individual challenges. Understanding what drives these considerations provides essential insight into where targeted support might meaningfully improve retention.

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



Among Pharmacy students who have considered leaving, the pattern of reasons reveals both shared challenges with the broader graduate research population and some distinctive emphases. Mental health emerges as the overwhelmingly dominant factor, cited by 64% of Pharmacy students who have considered leaving. Combined with the elevated mental health issues and lower support access rates documented earlier (42% vs. 45% university-wide), this suggests a critical gap: Pharmacy students experience severe mental health impacts on their persistence yet access support at lower rates than their peers.

Financial issues represent the second most common reason at 54%, consistent with the substantial financial pressures documented throughout this report. While high, this rate is comparable to or slightly lower than several other faculties, suggesting that financial stress affects consideration of leaving across disciplines rather than being unique to Pharmacy.

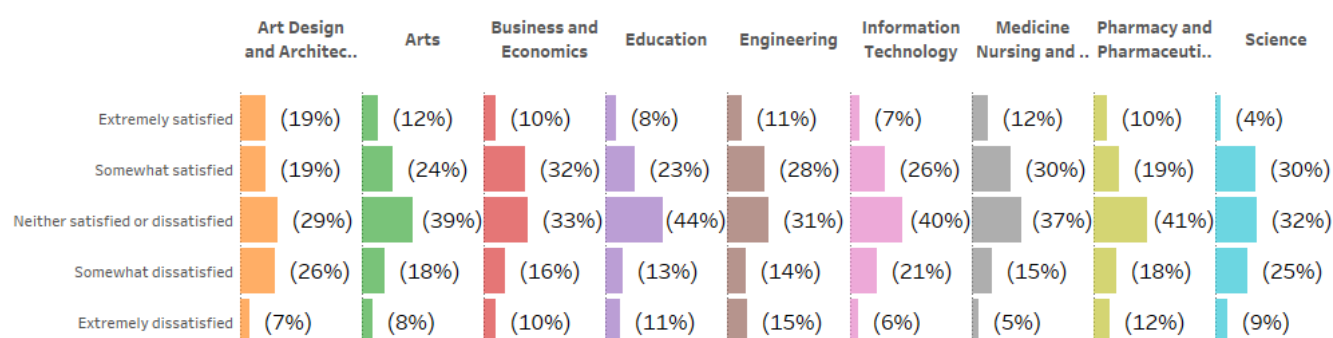
Lack of motivation (54%) and work-life balance challenges (51%) are particularly elevated in Pharmacy relative to other faculties, while job opportunities (15%) and degree not meeting expectations (13%) are both relatively low. The notable presence of lack of progress (44%) alongside work-life balance concerns points to students feeling overwhelmed by work demands without making sufficient headway. Further, Pharmacy has the second highest responses for unpleasant work environment (23%) across the faculties, suggesting that faculty culture may also be a relevant factor for considerations of leaving.

The cumulative pattern – high mental health concerns, substantial financial stress, low motivation and perceived lack of progress – suggests that consideration of leaving among Pharmacy students stems from compounding psychological and financial pressures rather than any single factor. While work demands are difficult to address systematically, the priority areas identified throughout this report remain the most actionable: improving mental health support access and addressing financial

sustainability are the most critical interventions for supporting retention within Pharmacy, along with faculty cultural expectation (e.g., expected hours of work and workplace environment).

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 Pharmacy 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.



Pharmacy students' satisfaction with career guidance reveals an important area for potential improvement. Although indifference (41%) is the most-popular response, Pharmacy is the only faculty in which dissatisfaction with career guidance outscores satisfaction (30% vs. 29% respectively).

The Pharmacy Career Challenge:

Pharmacy graduate research students face unique career navigation challenges:

- **Geographic isolation from career services:** Parkville campus separation from Clayton and Caulfield means limited access to main campus career resources, fewer opportunities for cross-disciplinary networking events and reduced visibility of university-wide professional development programs.
- **Academic vs. industry tension:** Pressure to choose between academic career paths and pharmaceutical industry opportunities, with industry roles often offering substantially higher salaries but potentially less alignment with research training.
- **Diverse pharmaceutical trajectories:** Industry R&D, regulatory affairs, clinical trials, hospital pharmacy, consulting, academia, government health agencies – each requiring different networking strategies, skill emphases and professional connections that generic career advice cannot adequately address.
- **Timing and integration questions:** When to pursue industry internships, consulting projects or professional certifications without derailing research progress; how to build industry networks while meeting academic publication expectations.

- **Discipline-specific guidance gap:** Generic university career services lack pharmaceutical industry expertise, regulatory pathway knowledge and connections to key employers (pharmaceutical companies, contract research organisations, regulatory agencies), leaving students and supervisors to navigate these specialised pathways alone.

Student Voices on Career Guidance:

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

“Ensure your services are actually reaching grassroots level.”

“Actually have career guidance services at Parkville.”

“Providing teaching or casual jobs to PhD graduates so that they are not forced to do odd jobs until getting a related job. Either govt or the university should support them.”

“PhD students have no guidance on the spectrum of work after our studies - all we have is student organisations running panels. I’d like to see more faculty involvement.”

“To create more opportunities (e.g. conferences) for students to interact with industries especially in R and D. It's unfortunate to see how other universities give more opportunities and encouragement for students to support in creating start-ups compared to Monash.”

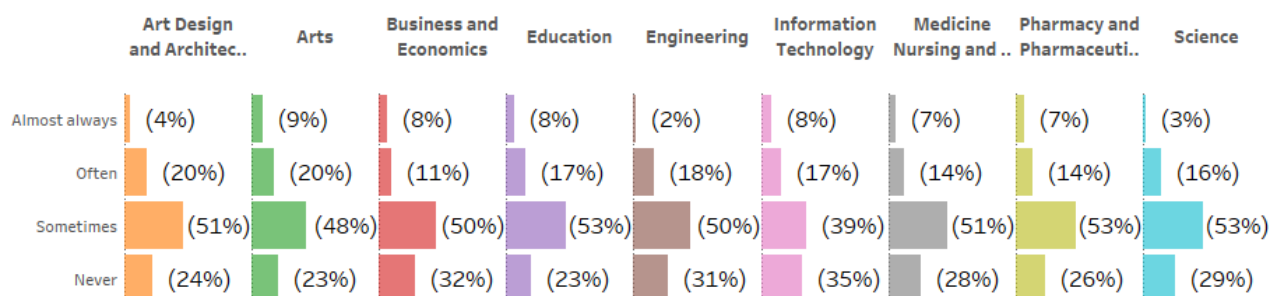
“Exposing us more to potential jobs and career pathways during our study to help us - A dedicated guidance counsellor.”

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



- 74% of Pharmacy students experience some degree of isolation (vs. 72% university-wide).
- 21% 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 Pharmacy 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 relatability with others and having social anxiety.”

“Feeling like an outsider within my own faculty because I'm not in a big group nor in a theme that faculty really majorly cares about because we don't pull in millions of funding.”

“Co-workers are not friends.”

“Everyone is very busy so I don't want to interrupt them.”

“My friends are all too busy and no one is there to listen to my problems.”

“Feeling alone in my group. They're helping and collaborating with each other but I stand alone unable to connect with them or ask for help.”

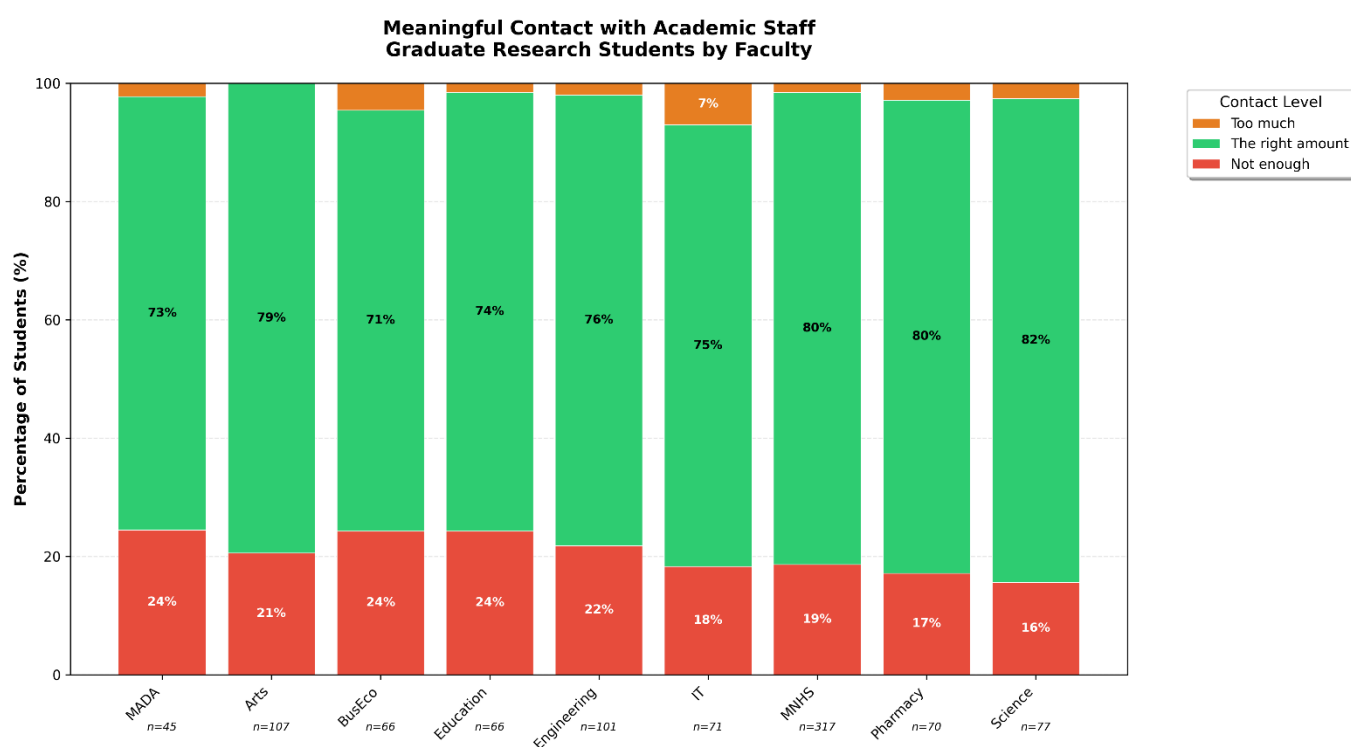
“Environment highly competitive in the department. Not many spaces to interact in a relaxed manner. I had personal problem with people from my group so I prefer to keep a professional relationship with them ... My family and most of my friends live overseas.”

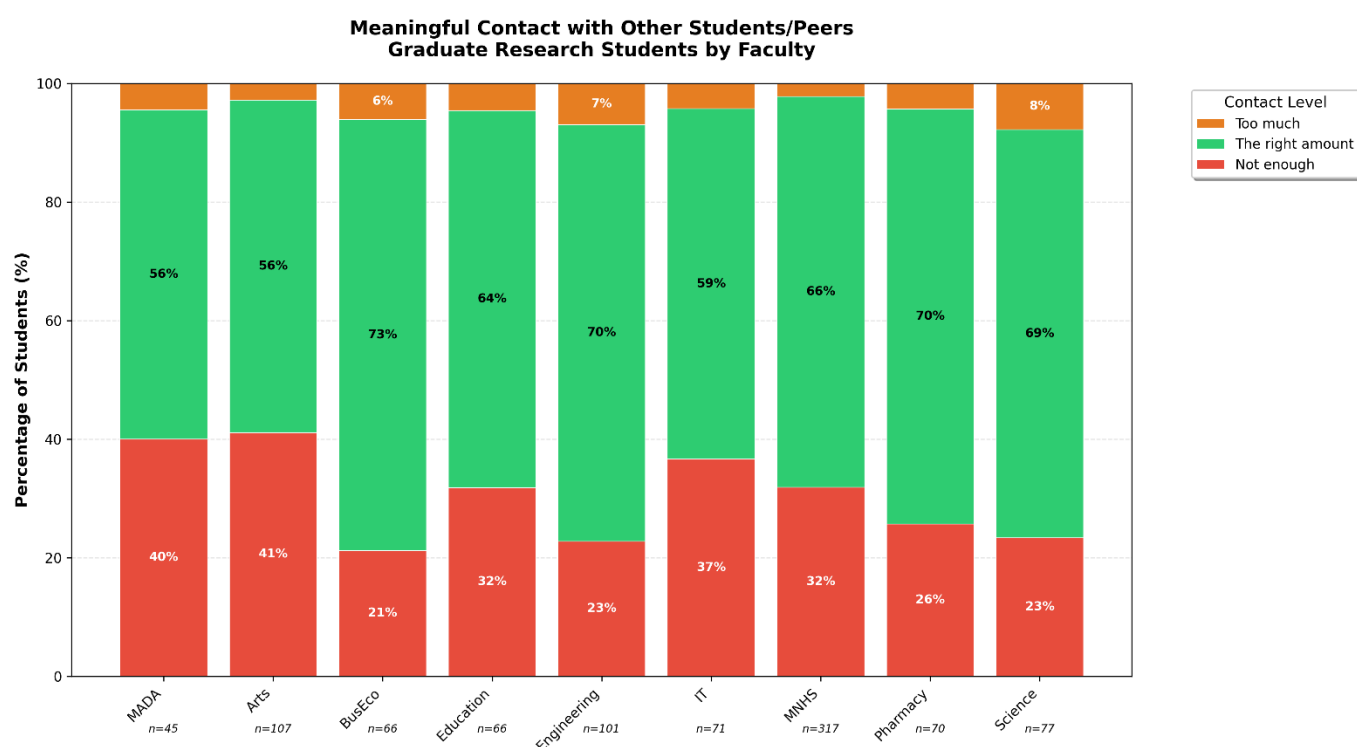
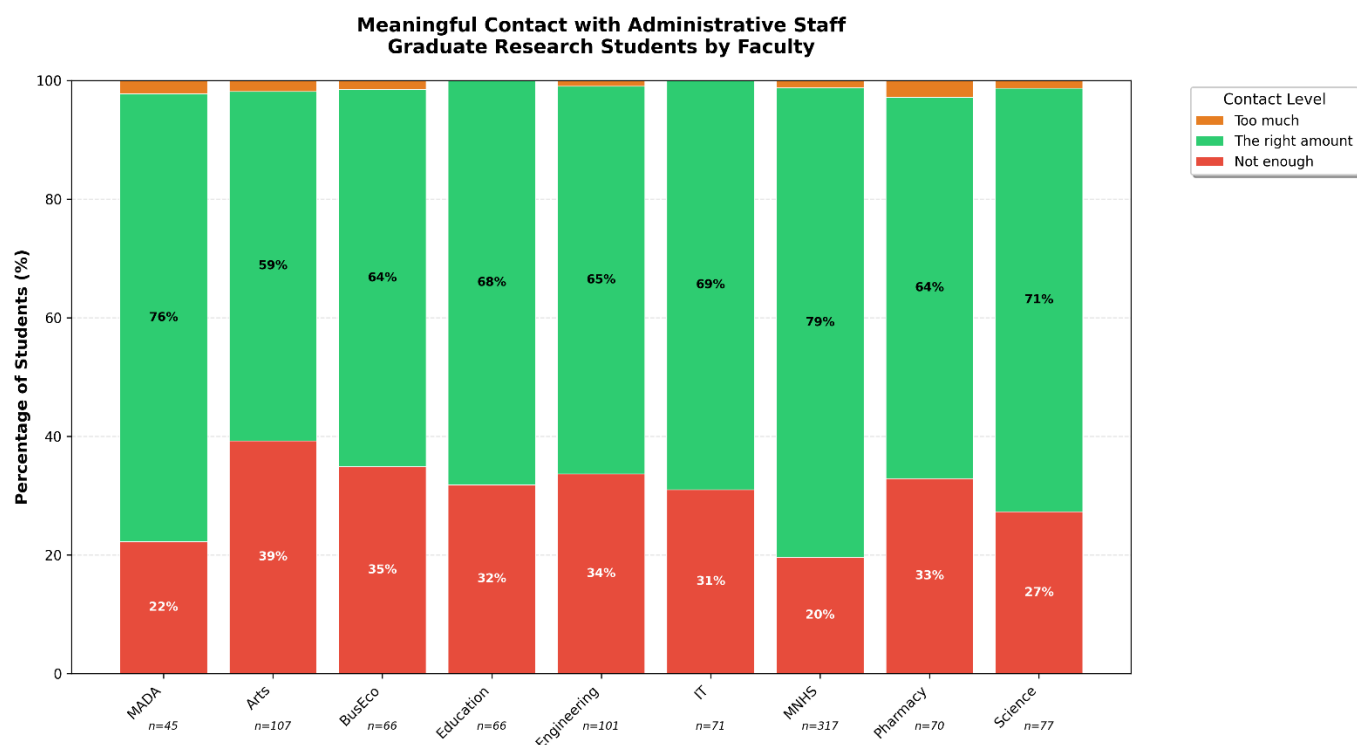
“My lack of communication with my peers unable to find an activity or social event that suits me.”

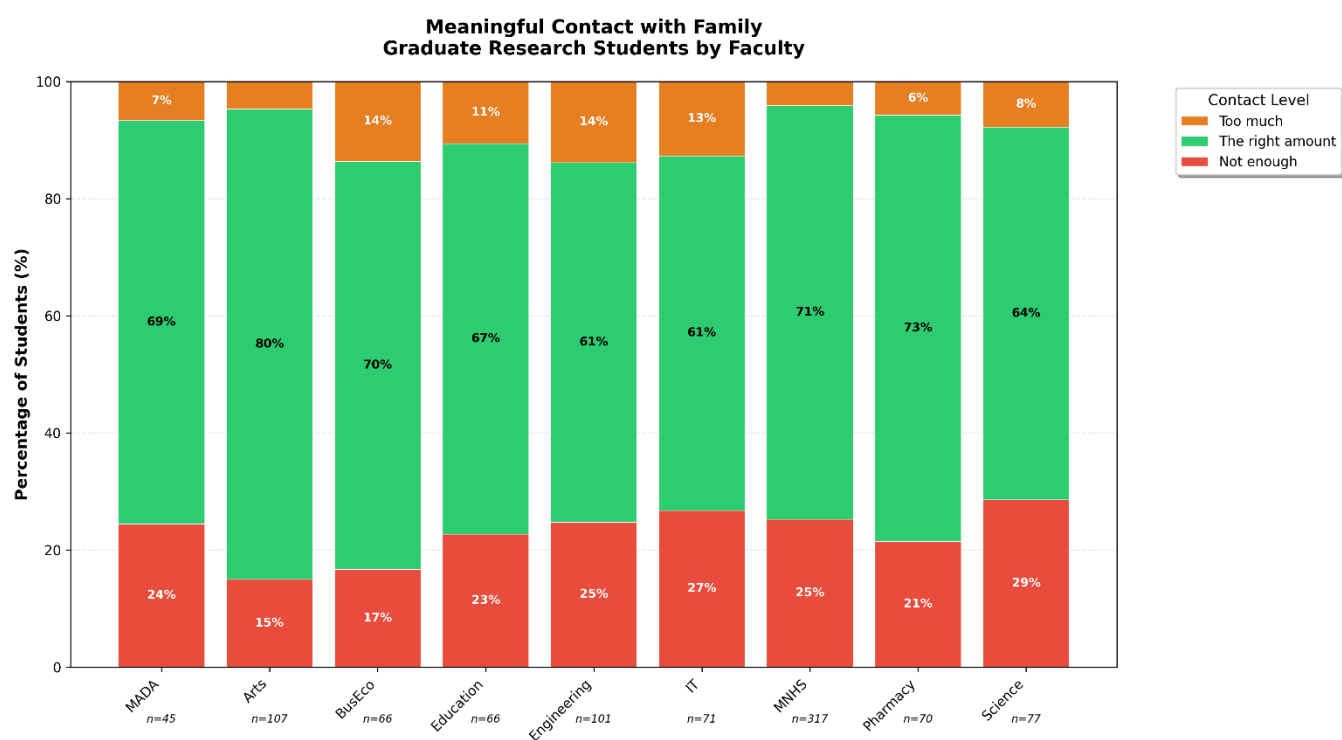
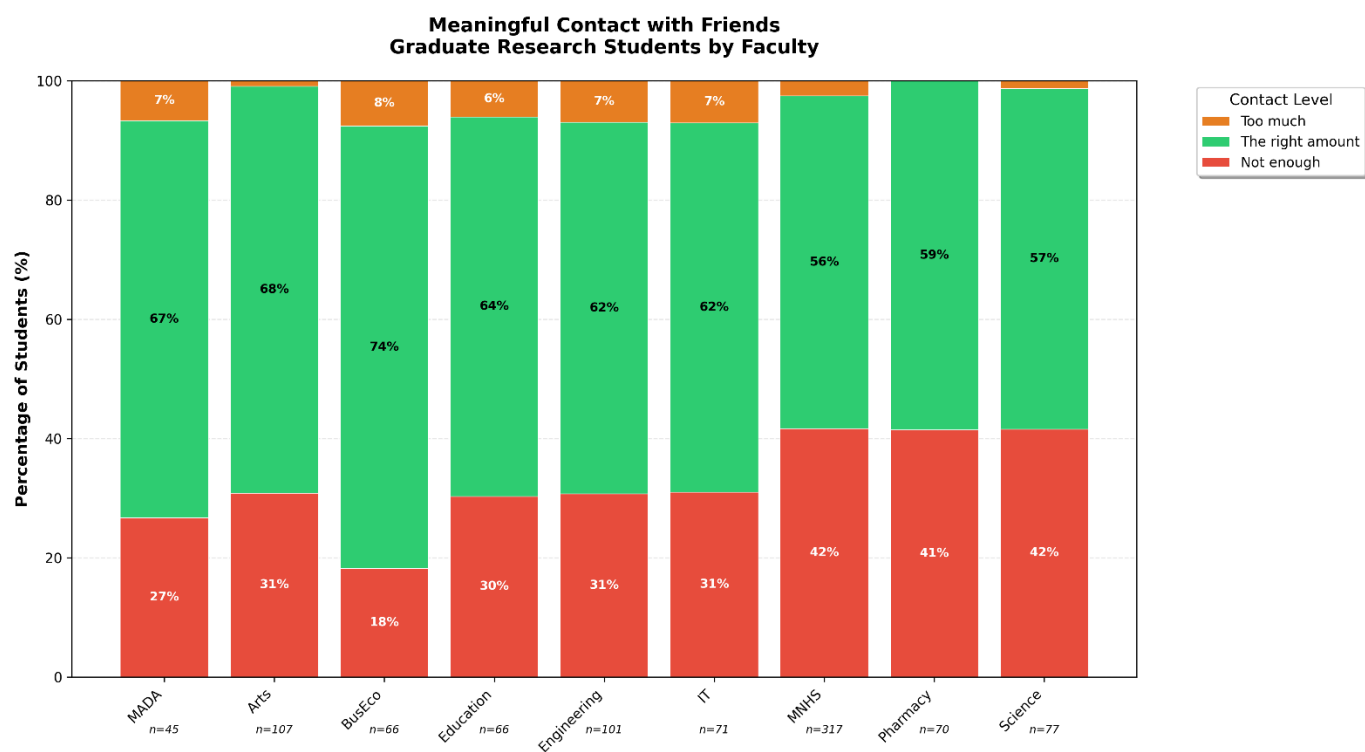
“Not having the time and/or energy to put into socialising with friends or family in a meaningful way which has had a negative impact on my social relationships.”

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







These patterns of meaningful contact reveal a mixed picture for Pharmacy students.

Academic staff contact is a relative strength (80% report the right amount), suggesting supervisory relationships function reasonably well for most students, though 17% reporting insufficient contact represents an important minority potentially experiencing inadequate guidance.

Administrative staff contact is a relative weakness compared to other faculties, with 64% reporting the right amount of contact – the equal second-lowest rate across the faculties.

Peer contact is marginally better in Pharmacy than in most other faculties with 26% reporting insufficient contact. This relative strength likely reflects Parkville's concentrated graduate research community and shared laboratory spaces that facilitate informal interaction, though more than a quarter still experience insufficient peer connection.

Friend and family contact reveals a mixed picture in relation to these key support networks, with 41% reporting insufficient contact with friends and 21% with family. The demands of Pharmacy research can crowd out personal relationships. The combination of intensive laboratory work, extended hours (40% work over 40 hours weekly on research alone) and Parkville's distance from residential areas may limit students' capacity to maintain social connections outside the research environment.

What Makes Pharmacy Distinct: Key Themes

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

Acute mental health pressures within intensive research culture

Pharmacy students report higher rates of elevated mental health issues, yet access support at marginally lower rates (42% vs. 45% university-wide). The gap is most pronounced among domestic students, where Pharmacy's 49% access rate falls well below the 62% university-wide average. Simultaneously, 40% of respondents dedicate more than 40 hours a week to their research alone.

The combination of high-stakes pharmaceutical research, precision-oriented laboratory work and competitive environments creates highly stressful situations for many students. With 22% experiencing imposter syndrome "often" – the highest rate university-wide – and 12% frequently considering leaving (double the university average), Pharmacy faces a distinctive mental health and retention challenge requiring intervention.

Geographic isolation compounding support access barriers

Parkville's separation from Clayton and Caulfield creates cascading disadvantages: limited access to main campus events and career services (potentially contributing to Pharmacy being the only faculty where career dissatisfaction exceeds satisfaction), reduced visibility of university-wide support programs and weaker administrative touchpoints (64% report adequate administrative contact, equal second-lowest across faculties). Student testimonies explicitly request "career guidance services at Parkville" and note the difficulty of long commutes when living remains unaffordable near campus, potentially affecting students' broader capacity to maintain regular social connections with family and friends. This physical separation transforms institutional support gaps into accessibility barriers somewhat unique to Pharmacy students.

Career navigation uncertainty at the academic-industry crossroads

Pharmacy students face distinctive tension between academic research training and lucrative pharmaceutical industry pathways, yet many express that they receive inadequate guidance navigating this choice. While 82% work in directly or somewhat related roles (suggesting successful integration of employment and professional development for many), the 30% dissatisfied with career guidance – and student requests for industry connections, R&D exposure and start-up support – reveal a substantial unmet need for discipline-specific career mentorship that understands pharmaceutical career trajectories beyond generic academic pathways.

Faculty-Specific Recommendations

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

1. Address Acute Mental Health Pressures Through Cultural Normalisation

The Problem: Pharmacy students report the most concerning mental health profile across all faculties (64% above normal depression, 60% above normal stress, 86% imposter syndrome), yet they access support at marginally lower rates than their peers across the university.

What the Faculty Can Do:

Immediate Actions:

Normalise mental health support within Pharmacy's research culture:

- Explicitly acknowledge in town halls, orientations and milestone meetings that pharmaceutical research creates unique psychological pressures and that successful researchers proactively manage wellbeing.
- Reframe mental health support as “maintaining research precision under pressure” and “sustaining capacity for high-stakes pharmaceutical work” rather than crisis intervention.
- Share testimonies from successful pharmaceutical researchers (faculty, postdocs, alumni) who accessed mental health support and integrated it into their research practice.

Embed wellbeing into existing Pharmacy structures:

- Integrate brief wellbeing check-ins into the curriculum.
- Create Pharmacy-specific mental health workshops addressing discipline-specific stressors: “Managing Imposter Syndrome in Pharmaceutical Research,” “Sustaining Focus in Laboratory-Intensive Work,” “Navigating Academic-Industry Career Uncertainty.”
- Establish peer support networks where students can discuss research pressures with others who understand pharmaceutical research demands.

Success Metrics: Reduce proportion experiencing moderate-to-extremely severe depression/stress; increase normal-range mental health rates; reduction in frequent consideration of leaving from 12% toward 6% university average.

For detailed implementation guidance, see main report: Level 1 – “Integrate Wellbeing Check-ins into Existing Academic Milestones” and “Redesign Mental Health Service Communications for Underserved Populations”; Level 2 – “Develop Preventative Mental Health Workshops Delivered by

CAPS for Graduate Research Students.”

2. Overcome Geographic Isolation Through Parkville-Embedded Support and Pharmacy Career Infrastructure

The Problem: Parkville’s physical separation from Clayton and Caulfield creates cascading support access barriers unique to Pharmacy students. Only 64% report adequate administrative staff contact (equal second-lowest across faculties), while career guidance satisfaction reveals Pharmacy as the only faculty where dissatisfaction exceeds satisfaction. Student testimonies explicitly request “career guidance services at Parkville.” This geographic isolation transforms institutional support gaps into accessibility barriers—students cannot easily access main campus services, requiring substantial travel time and cost. Pharmacy students experience systemic disadvantage accessing supports their Clayton and Caulfield peers reach during research breaks.

What the Faculty Can Do:

Immediate Actions:

Establish Parkville-based support presence:

- Advocate for dedicated career advisor hours at Parkville (even if part-time) ensuring students can access discipline-specific guidance without traveling to Clayton.
- Host faculty-level drop-in sessions where students can raise administrative, progression or support questions directly with accessible staff.

Create Parkville-specific programming:

- Deliver career workshops at Parkville covering pharmaceutical career trajectories: industry R&D, regulatory affairs, clinical trials, consulting and academic pathways.
- Facilitate industry connections through Parkville-based events: alumni panels, pharmaceutical company visits, networking sessions with regulatory agencies and contract research organisations.
- Organise Pharmacy-specific peer connection events (research seminars, writing groups, social gatherings) that don’t require travel to other campuses.

Success Metrics: Increase administrative staff contact satisfaction from 64% toward faculty averages; shift career guidance from net dissatisfaction to net satisfaction; student feedback on Parkville support accessibility; reduction in geographic isolation as barrier to accessing services.

For detailed implementation guidance, see main report: Level 3 – “Establish Discipline-Embedded Career Advisors”; Level 2 – “Develop graduate research Alumni Mentoring Network.”

Conclusion

This analysis of 77 Pharmacy graduate research students reveals a faculty facing distinctive and urgent challenges. Pharmacy students report the most concerning mental health profile across all faculties, the highest rates of considering leaving (58%, with 12% often) and the lowest completion

confidence (45%) – yet access mental health support at rates below their distress levels, particularly among domestic students. Geographic isolation at Parkville compounds these challenges, creating barriers to career guidance and administrative support that students at Clayton and Caulfield campuses are less likely to face. The combination of intensive research demands, competitive laboratory cultures and support infrastructure that are not reaching students creates conditions where talented researchers struggle unnecessarily and contemplate departure at alarming rates.

Yet these challenges can be mitigated through targeted action. The two recommendations presented here – normalising mental health support within Pharmacy’s research culture and establishing Parkville-embedded career and administrative infrastructure – directly respond to patterns identified in student data and voices. By embedding wellbeing conversations into existing milestone structures, reframing support as research performance optimisation and bringing specialised pharmaceutical career guidance directly to Parkville, the faculty can meaningfully improve student experiences without requiring wholesale institutional transformation. The evidence is clear, the priorities are defined and the pathway forward requires sustained commitment to ensuring that Pharmacy's graduate researchers receive the support necessary to thrive throughout their candidature and transition successfully into diverse pharmaceutical careers.

Appendix: Pharmacy Demographics

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	0 (0%)
Clayton	7 (9%)
Caulfield	3 (4%)
Peninsula	1 (1%)
Parkville	74 (99%)
Malaysia	0 (0%)
Hospital or Medical Centre	0 (0%)
Indonesia	0 (0%)
Suzhou	0 (0%)
other	0 (0%)

School/Department	Respondents
Centre for Medicine Use and Safety	7 (9%)
Drug Delivery Disposition and Dynamics	23 (31%)
Drug Discovery Biology	20 (27%)
Medicinal Chemistry	17 (23%)
Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science Education	8 (11%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	44 (59%)
International student	31 (41%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	73 (95%)
Part-time	4 (5%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	54 (72%)
Mix of on-campus and off-campus	20 (27%)
Entirely off-campus	1 (1%)
Other	0 (0%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	38 (51%)
1-5 years	29 (39%)
6-10 years	8 (11%)
11+ years	0 (0%)

Degree progress	Respondents
First year	24 (31%)
Second year	17 (22%)
Third year and beyond	36 (47%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	4 (5%)
6-10	4 (5%)
11-20	6 (8%)
21-30	6 (8%)
31-40	25 (33%)
Over 40 hours	30 (40%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	51 (68%)
Advanced	18 (24%)
Intermediate	5 (7%)
Elementary	1 (1%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	42 (56%)
Man	31 (41%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	1 (1%)
Prefer to self-describe	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	1 (1%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	8 (11%)
No	58 (77%)
Prefer not to disclose	9 (12%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	44 (100%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	5 (7%)
No	66 (88%)
Prefer not to disclose	4 (5%)

Registered disability with DSS	Respondents
Yes	3 (60%)
No	2 (40%)

Age	Respondents
24 or under	11 (15%)
25-29	40 (53%)
30-39	23 (31%)
40 and over	1 (1%)

Parental status	Respondents
Yes – living with me	8 (11%)
Yes – not living with me	2 (3%)
No	60 (86%)

Primary carer	Respondents
Yes	4 (50%)
Shared responsibility	4 (50%)
No	0 (0%)

Carer status	Respondents
Yes	7 (10%)
No	63 (90%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	15 (21%)
Part-time	12 (17%)
Casual	24 (34%)
Unemployed and looking for work	4 (6%)
Not employed and not looking for work	15 (21%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	15 (29%)
6-10	17 (33%)
11-20	9 (18%)
21-30	1 (2%)
31-40	5 (10%)
More than 40	4 (8%)

Scholarship recipients	Respondents
Yes	60 (86%)
No, but I previously held a scholarship	3 (4%)
No	7 (10%)

Value of scholarship	Respondents
Less than \$33,511	2 (3%)
\$33,511 (National full-time RTP stipend minimum)	11 (18%)
\$33,512 - \$36,062	3 (5%)
\$36,063 (Monash full-time RTP stipend)	41 (68%)
\$36,064 - \$47,626	2 (3%)
More than \$47,627 (National minimum wage)	1 (2%)