

**MONASH GRADUATE ASSOCIATION (MGA)**  
**HDR SURVEY**  
MEDICINE, NURSING AND HEALTH SCIENCES (MNHS)  
FACULTY REPORT 2019





The MGA would like to thank the graduate students who participated in this survey.

For comments and enquiries please contact:

Jenny Reeder, MGA Executive Officer

[jenny.reeder@monash.edu](mailto:jenny.reeder@monash.edu)

Dina Galanopoulos, MGA Research Officer

[dina.galanopoulos@monash.edu](mailto:dina.galanopoulos@monash.edu)

Ryan Edwards, MGA Research Advocate

[ryan.edwards@monash.edu](mailto:ryan.edwards@monash.edu)



## Table of Contents

<b>(i) Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>(ii) Introduction .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>(iii) Data .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1. Supervision .....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 Have you read the Code of Practice for supervision of doctoral/research masters students?.....	12
1.2 Are you aware of your supervisor’s responsibilities towards you? .....	12
1.3 Are you aware of your own responsibilities as a Monash research postgraduate? .....	12
1.4 Have you had any conflict or misunderstanding with any of your supervisors? .....	12
1.5 What was the general nature of the conflict/misunderstanding with your supervisor? .	12
1.6 How did you deal with it? Select as many as relevant.....	14
1.7 Please rate the following statements regarding your supervision experience .....	15
1.8 Opportunity for comments regarding your supervision.....	17
1.9 Summary .....	19
<b>2. Milestones .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Please rate the following statements regarding your experience of the confirmation process.....	21
2.2 Opportunity for comments about the confirmation process.....	21
2.3 Please rate the following statements regarding your experience of the mid-candidature review process.....	24
2.4 Opportunity for comments about the mid-candidature review process.....	24
2.5 Please rate the following statements regarding your experience of the pre-submission review process.....	26
2.6 Opportunity for comments about the pre-submission review process.....	27
2.7 Do you think it's appropriate to face termination of candidature if you fail any of the following milestones? .....	28
2.8 Opportunity for comments about milestones.....	28
2.9 Summary .....	30
<b>3. Coursework.....</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1 Do you believe that research degrees are improved by the inclusion of compulsory discipline-based coursework?.....	32
3.2 Please rate the following statements relating to the discipline-based coursework component of your degree.....	32
3.3 Please select the level of stress you have about the compulsory discipline-based coursework component of your degree.....	33
3.4 Opportunity for comment regarding the inclusion of discipline-based coursework in research degrees.....	33

3.5	Summary .....	35
<b>4.</b>	<b>Professional Development .....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1	Do you believe that professional development units (as offered through "myDevelopment"), should be a compulsory part of a research degree? .....	36
4.2	Please rate the following statements relating to your overall experience of the professional development component of your degree offered by your faculty. ....	36
4.3	Please rate the following statements relating to your overall experience of the professional development component of your degree offered by MGE (central). ....	37
4.4	Have you applied for Recognition of Prior Learning in relation to the professional development component of your degree? .....	37
4.5	Please select the level of stress you have about the professional development component of your degree. ....	38
4.6	Opportunity for comment regarding the inclusion of compulsory professional development units in research degrees. ....	38
4.7	Summary .....	40
<b>5.</b>	<b>Progress delays and discontinuation .....</b>	<b>42</b>
5.1	Has anything significantly delayed the progress of your research degree? .....	42
5.2	Please select all relevant reasons regarding the delay in progress of your research degree. ....	42
5.3	Have you ever considered discontinuing your enrolment? .....	42
5.4	Please select all relevant reasons regarding why you considered discontinuing your enrolment. ....	43
5.5	What made you decide to continue with your degree? .....	43
5.6	The amount of time I have to complete my research ... will allow me to produce a quality research project. ....	45
5.7	What are the three most important things the University could do for you to help you complete on time? .....	45
5.8	Opportunity for comments regarding your general progress. ....	47
5.9	Summary .....	48
<b>6.</b>	<b>School culture and facilities .....</b>	<b>50</b>
6.1	Please rate the following statements in relation to your specific experience in your academic unit: .....	50
6.2	Have you ever experienced any discrimination due to gender, race, religion, family responsibilities etc., within the University? .....	52
6.3	Opportunity for comments regarding the way in which you are treated. ....	53
6.4	Does your academic unit provide any of the following facilities? .....	54
6.5	Overall, I am satisfied with the level of resources and facilities provided to me. ....	55
6.6	What additional facilities would help support you through to completion? .....	55
6.7	Summary .....	57

<b>7.</b>	<b>Stress and wellbeing.....</b>	<b>58</b>
7.1	Please select your level of stress regarding any of the following:.....	58
7.2	What kind of health and wellbeing support would you like to receive from the University? .....	60
7.3	Opportunity for comments regarding health and wellbeing.....	60
7.4	Summary .....	62
<b>8.</b>	<b>Overall comments.....</b>	<b>64</b>
8.1	What are the best aspects of being a Monash research postgraduate?.....	64
8.2	What are the worst aspects of being a Monash research postgraduate?.....	65
8.3	How can the research postgraduate experience be improved?.....	67
8.4	Anything else you'd like to say?.....	69
8.5	Summary .....	71
<b>(iv)</b>	<b>MGA Recommendations .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>(v)</b>	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>(vi)</b>	<b>Appendix 1 .....</b>	<b>75</b>
	<b>Demographics of respondents from MNHS .....</b>	<b>75</b>

## (i) Executive Summary

In 2017, the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) conducted a survey of Monash Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students. The main findings from respondents from the graduate students of the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (MNHS) are summarised below.

### **Supervision**

The overwhelming majority (80%) of MNHS graduate students indicated overall satisfaction with their supervision, while they tended to agree with positive statements relating to how supportive their supervisors were.

### **Milestones**

MNHS respondents overall total agreement (those selecting either *strongly agree* or *somewhat agree*) that milestones were a positive experience increased after confirmation (Confirmation: 83%, Mid-candidature: 91%, Pre-submission: 91%).

The majority of MNHS respondents (55%) believed that termination for failing the confirmation of candidature review was appropriate; however, as candidature progressed, the majority disagreed that termination was appropriate with termination at mid-candidature (43%) and pre-submission (26%) receiving relatively little support.

### **Coursework**

Only 38% of MNHS respondents believed that research degrees were improved by the inclusion of compulsory discipline-based coursework. This figure was the same as the University-wide figure.

Meanwhile, only 43% of MNHS respondents agreed that coursework represented a good use of their time, while only 45% found it relevant to their research.

### **Professional Development**

Just over one in every four MNHS respondents thought that professional development units should be a compulsory part of a research degree, which was in line with the University-wide average. Only 39% of MNHS respondents felt that these units were relevant, while 37% thought it was a good use of their time.

Twenty-five percent (25%) of MNHS respondents had experienced an uncomfortable level of stress (either *a lot* or *a great deal* of stress) because of their professional development requirements.

While some graduate students stated that they could see the potential benefit of professional development courses alongside their academic research training, significant issues with the number of hours, course relevance, flexibility of what is counted towards the requirement and the general execution of the program were cited throughout the responses.

### **Progress, delays and discontinuation**

MNHS graduate students (44%) were more likely to have experienced significant delay in the progress of their research as graduate students enrolled across all campuses (38%); however, they were as likely to have considered discontinuing their enrolment (MNHS: 30%, University: 29%).

While 61% of MNHS graduate students agreed that they had sufficient time to produce a quality research project, despite additional requirements of compulsory milestones/coursework/professional development, 50% also indicated they felt an uncomfortable level of stress about finishing their degree on time.

To help students with timely completion, supervision, administration and professional development were identified as the three most important areas for the University to improve, according to MNHS respondents.

### **School culture and facilities**

MNHS graduate students (70%) were as satisfied with the level of resources and facilities provided to them overall as University respondents (71%).

They were marginally less likely (60%) to agree with the statement '*I feel included in my academic unit*' than were their University peers (64%).

### **Stress and Wellbeing**

The areas in which MNHS respondents expressed they felt the highest level of stress (50% either *a lot or a great deal*) was in response to the statements '*finishing my degree on time*' and '*finding work after completion of my degree.*'

MNHS graduate students nominated '*help with stress management*' as the top thing the University could do to help support their health and wellbeing.

### **Overall comments**

MNHS graduate students identified the facilities, services and resources as the best aspect of being at Monash, while the University's administration systems and management was the worst aspect.

Despite being voted the best aspect of being at Monash, MNHS respondents most wanted to see improvements in the facilities, services and resources on offer at the University.

## (ii) Introduction

The MGA ran a survey of HDR students in August – September 2017. The aim of the survey was to measure the experiences of HDR graduate students at Monash University. The survey was advertised in the MGA newsletter, the MGA website, electronic posters and through contacts with HDR faculty groups and associate deans, many of whom agreed to forward the advertising of the survey to their entire cohorts. Participants were self-selecting, so an incentive scheme (comprising the opportunity to win one of 20 x \$100 cash cards) was used to assist in attracting a representative sample.

A total of six-hundred and sixty-eight responses were received. A preliminary report on the campus-wide quantitative data was published in March 2018 and is available from the MGA. Of the total number of responses received, one-hundred and ninety-one were from research graduate students enrolled through the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (MNHS), which equates to 13% of the total research graduate student population in the Faculty in that year.

This report presents both quantitative and qualitative data from MNHS survey respondents.

In the quantitative analysis, some MNHS graduate student responses were compared to responses from graduate students in the University-wide population. Likewise, a comparison between responses from on-campus MNHS graduate students and those who conducted the majority of their research at a teaching site other than their campus of enrolment (*off-campus*) was also made. Not all respondents answered every question.

The qualitative component comprised sections where participants were invited to make general comments within broad subject areas and/or respond to open-ended questions. There were eighteen such opportunities in the survey, and graduate students from MNHS responded to all of them. Answers were analysed and coded into common themes. Some responses were coded under multiple themes.

While the responses of graduate students have been taken at face-value, it is important to reflect on the positive-negative asymmetry (PNA) effect. The PNA effect is two-part: firstly, it incorporates the positivity bias, which refers to an individual's inclination towards favourable perceptions of phenomena that are novel or do not directly impact them;<sup>1</sup> and, secondly, it incorporates the negativity bias which, in part, relates to how individuals are more curious about negative than positive stimuli and therefore are more mobilised by negative events.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the MGA HDR Survey, this may mean that answers to the quantitative questions are disproportionately positive, while the responses to the qualitative (open-ended) questions are disproportionately negative given that graduate students were not required to provide a response.

All schools of MNHS were represented in terms of responses. Overall respondents were skewed towards full-time (87%), PhD (87%), internally enrolled (84%). Both female (72%) and male (26%) genders were represented, as were domestic (72%) and international (28%) students. Appendix 1 provides the demographics of MNHS respondents.

---

<sup>1</sup> Maria Lewicka, Janusz Czapinski and Guido Peeters, "Positive-negative asymmetry or 'When the heart needs a reason'," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 22 (1992): 426.

<sup>2</sup> Reanna M. Poncheri, Jennifer T. Lindberg, Lori Foster Thompson and Eric A. Surface, "A comment on employee surveys: negativity bias in open-ended responses," *Organizational Research Methods* 11, no. 3 (2008): 615-16.

This report has been produced for circulation to the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, the Graduate Research Committee and the Monash Graduate Research Office.

### (iii) Data

#### 1. Supervision

1.1 Have you read the Code of Practice for supervision of doctoral/research masters students?

Read the Code of Practice	MNHS	University
Yes	117 (61.3%)	386 (57.8%)
No, but I've heard about it	45 (23.6%)	169 (25.3%)
No, I didn't know it existed	29 (15.2%)	113 (16.9%)

1.2 Are you aware of your supervisor's responsibilities towards you?

Aware of supervisor's responsibility	MNHS	University
Yes	153 (80.1%)	533 (79.8%)
No	7 (3.7%)	22 (3.3%)
Not sure	31 (16.2%)	113 (16.9%)

1.3 Are you aware of your own responsibilities as a Monash research postgraduate?

Aware of own responsibilities	MNHS	University
Yes	170 (89%)	592 (88.6%)
No	3 (1.6%)	14 (2.1%)
Not sure	18 (9.4%)	62 (9.3%)

1.4 Have you had any conflict or misunderstanding with any of your supervisors?

Conflict or misunderstanding with your supervisor	MNHS	University
Yes	39 (20.4%)	108 (16.2%)
No	152 (79.6%)	560 (83.8%)

The majority of MNHS respondents (61%) had read the Code of Practice, while one in five reported they had experienced conflict or misunderstanding with a supervisor.

1.5 What was the general nature of the conflict/misunderstanding with your supervisor?

Twenty-nine graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences said that they had experienced conflict with one or more of their supervisors and elaborated on the nature of that conflict.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Unsupportive – poor quality guidance and feedback	19
Different and unrealistic expectations	13
Lack of expertise and/or interest	9
Inaccessible	8
Supervision team issues	8
Inappropriate behaviour – bullying/harassment/tone/intimidation	7
Administrative issues	6
Exploitation/IP authorship/research misconduct	3
Inexperience (supervisor)	3

**Poor quality guidance and feedback** was referenced by many of the graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science who identified as having had conflict or misunderstanding with one or more of their supervisors.

*“Main supervisor didn’t appear to be aware of requirements for confirmation, in terms of how much I had to write in preparation for confirmation and told me ... I needed to write 20,000 words in 2 months.”*

*“Failure to provide support and advice when requested/required. Failure to read drafts in a timely manner and provide constructive feedback.”*

*“They seem to say conflicting things that imply everything is a priority and then I become overwhelmed [and] feel even more inadequate around my progress and begin to dread my meetings with my main supervisor.”*

Of the twenty-nine respondents, thirteen were deemed to have **expectations of the supervisor/student relationship that seemed to differ** to that of their supervisor/s.

*“Work load/too high expectations – poor management on supervisor’s part [and] disagreements about project decisions.”*

*“I did have a row with the [supervisor] about not being able to progress my work because she wasn’t doing what the main supervisor asked them to do ... My PhD work was now being significantly affected.”*

A **lack of expertise and/or interest** was identified several times as a source of conflict between MNHS graduate students and their supervisors.

*“Supervisor doesn’t read my work or understand what I am doing.”*

*“The secondary supervisor demonstrated little to no interest in the research I was undertaking nor the new directions I was hoping to develop for my research.”*

There were several individual references to **supervision team issues** as a cause of conflict or misunderstanding. These included:

*“Different perception between my supervisors. My research is qualitative-grounded theory [and] my first supervisor is [from a] quantitative and mixed methods background. The other*

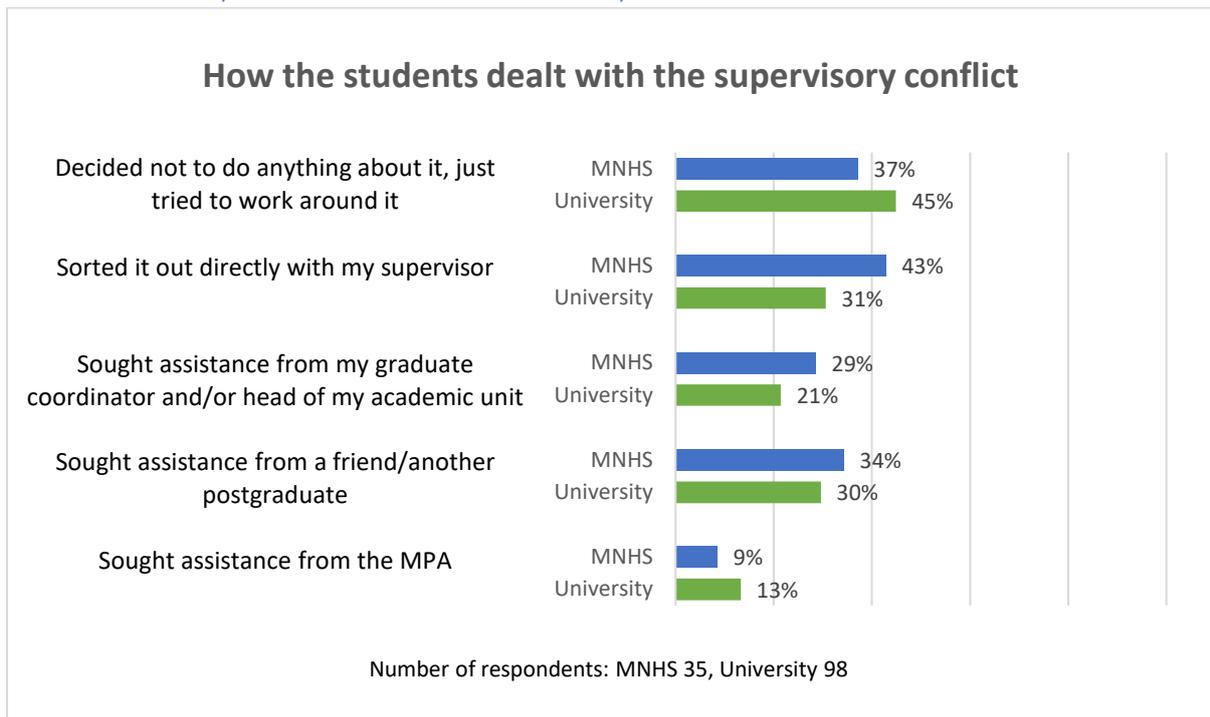
one [has] a qualitative background. We go round and round with our research question and aims.”

**Other notable comments** relating to the conflict and misunderstanding between graduate students of the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science and their supervisors included:

*“Authorship: Supervisor demands authorship on all papers without having to contribute.”*

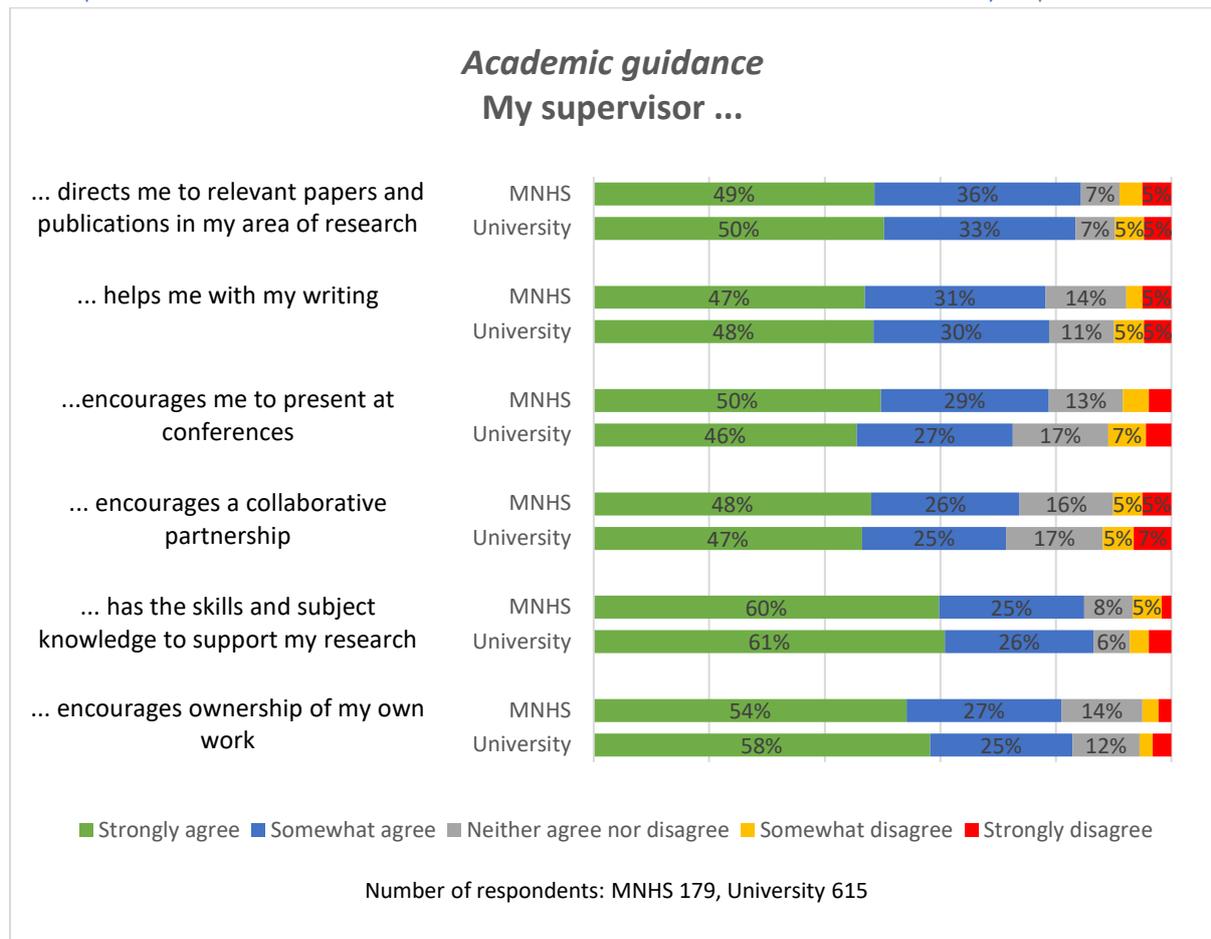
*“My second supervisor is not very supportive and the way he treats me when I ask questions is humiliating. Also, there is a language barrier between us.”*

1.6 How did you deal with it? Select as many as relevant.



MNHS respondents who had experienced conflict or misunderstanding with a supervisor were most likely to have sorted it out directly with their supervisor, followed by deciding not to do anything about it and just trying to work around it.

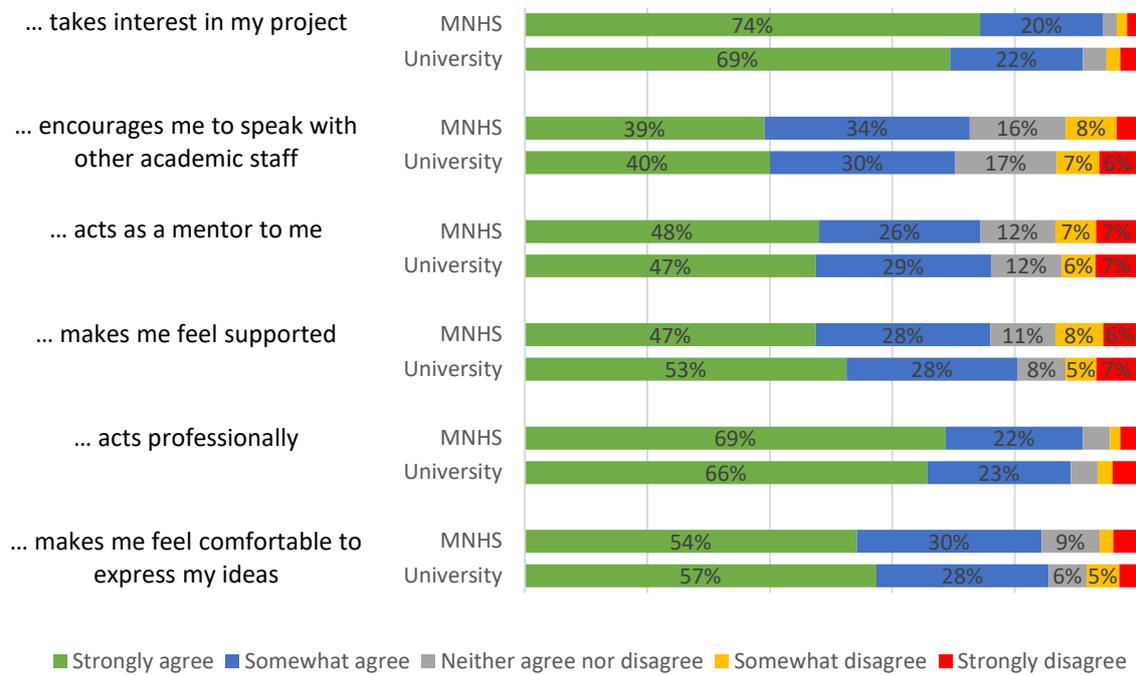
1.7 Please rate the following statements regarding your supervision experience. Select one option for each statement from the list below where "At least one of my supervisors..."<sup>3</sup>



MNHS graduate students tended to agree with positive statements relating to the academic guidance provided by their supervisors. Eighty-five percent (85%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements ‘my supervisor direct me to relevant papers and publications in my area of research’ and ‘my supervisor has the skill and subject knowledge to support my research.’

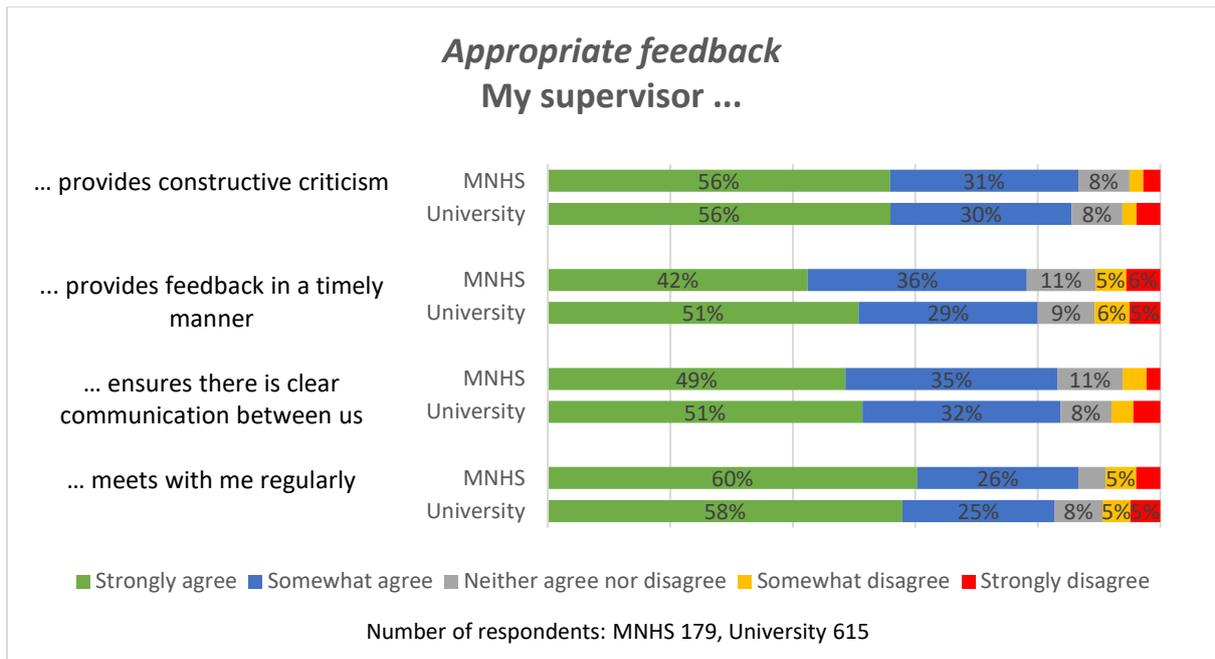
<sup>3</sup> Where responses were less than 5%, the figure has not been included due to lack of space.

### Supportive role My supervisor ...

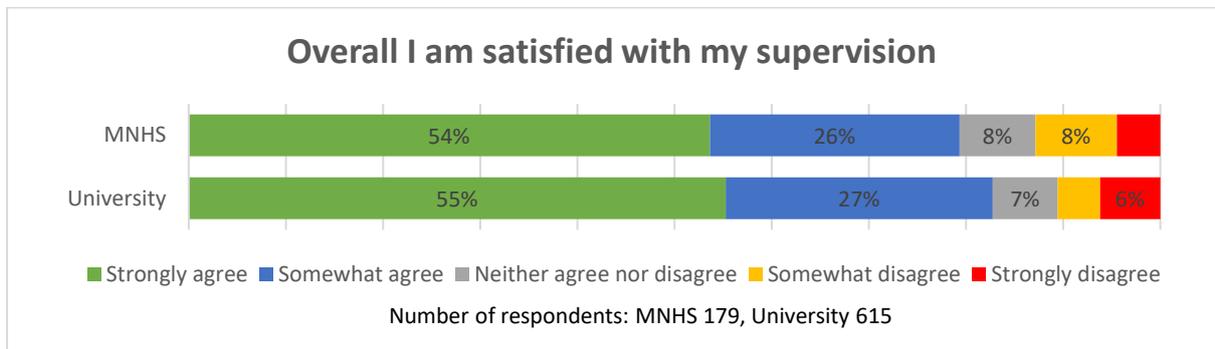


Number of respondents: MNHS 179, University 615

MNHS respondents tended to agree with positive statements relating to the supportive role played by their supervisors. Ninety-four percent (94%) of respondents agreed with the statement ‘my supervisor takes interest in my project.’



MNHS graduate students tended to agree with positive statements relating to the appropriate nature of the feedback provided by their supervisors. For instance, 87% of respondents believed that their supervisor provided constructive criticism.



In terms of overall satisfaction with their supervision, 80% of MNHS respondents answered favourably.

#### 1.8 Opportunity for comments regarding your supervision.

Forty-one graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Positive comments: 21

Negative comments: 15

General theme	Number of responses
Supportive/respectful/engaged/guidance/nurturing/encouraging	12
Inaccessibility	10
Incompetence/unsuitability and lacking appropriate skills/experience/knowledge	10
Changing supervisors	7
Time restraints and/or overworked (students and staff)	7
Bullying/dominating/exploitation/intimidation/abuse	6
Communication and feedback – good and bad	6
Suggested improvements	6
Knowledgeable	4
Mentoring – negative	3
Competing and differing expectations	2
Accessibility	1
Administrative competence/incompetence	1
Mental health concerns	1
Mentoring – positive	1

Half of the respondents from MNHS were **satisfied and positive** about an element of their supervision experience within their degrees. Their comments can be summarised as follows: great, supportive, wonderful, encouraging, accessible, excellent, valuable, knowledgeable, nurturing and awesome.

Specifically, many of those who were satisfied with an element of their supervision experience expressed that they appreciated how **supportive, respectful, engaged, nurturing and encouraging** their supervisor/s had been and/or how they provided good **direction and guidance**. Revealing comments included:

*“Both my supervisors are supportive, encouraging, guiding and allow me to express my own opinions. They are knowledgeable and provide mentorship so I can develop a greater understanding of the research process.”*

*“My three supervisors are really friendly people ... They are kind, supportive human beings. For the past three years, they have never stopped supporting me scientifically for the project and on a personal level ... Trying not to exaggerate, I have huge respect and love for all three of my supervisors.”*

Conversely, many responses were categorised as **unsatisfied and negative** – meaning that a graduate student had been disappointed with an element/s of their supervision experience. These comments can be summarised as such: inaccessible, unsupportive, uninterested, disengaged, inexperienced, uncompromising, disrespectful, bad, useless and inconsistent.

Many of the negative MNHS graduate student comments regarding their supervision were related to the perceived **inaccessibility** of their supervisors.

*“My primary supervisor is never around. I haven’t met with her in months. The supervisor I do meet with regularly is lovely but I am her first PhD student and I feel quite lost.”*

*“My experience of supervision is horrific ... My main supervisor has the expertise and knowledge, but is not available ... I am fed up of hearing ‘everyone at the University knows what they are like,’ ‘everyone’ being those in a position to do something about it, but they clearly don’t as we are all having our PhDs held up and the person is taking on more students.”*

Another theme within the negative comments to emerge related to **bullying, dominating, exploitation, intimidation and abuse**. Notable comments included:

*“My new supervisors are great and collegial, but my previous supervisors were not professional. I felt intimidated and [there was a] huge power differential as one is also my boss at work. [However, the] old faculty research manager and associate dean and new faculty have been fantastic at supporting me despite [my previous supervisor’s] ongoing obstructionist behaviour.”*

*“Supervision has been difficult. Initially had 3 [but] one left due to conflict with other. In my first year bullying occasionally occurred from my primary supervisor towards me and others.”*

**Other notable comments** relating to supervision, included:

*“I am ... unhappy that supervision sessions are spent with me telling them what I have been doing and there is little to no conversation about the content of my PhD – where is the academic/intellectual engagement with my topic??? I feel like I am doing this PhD thing alone. There’s a part of me that loves this freedom, but I thought there would be more support academically.”*

*“I felt that my supervisor was very invested in my PhD project and guarded it closely to her, hence had to really stand up for myself when I wanted to present work at conferences.”*

*“Even though issues with this supervisor have constantly been escalated to higher members of the team, no action ever gets taken. The supervisor in question has her own funding and is still producing papers, so it seems this takes priority over the welfare of the whole team.”*

## 1.9 Summary

Research supervision has become a vital process in the success of postgraduate studies.<sup>4</sup> It plays a critical role in doctoral education, in particular, with links having been made between the quality of supervision and student progression and attrition rates.<sup>5</sup> Increased government emphasis on ‘timely completion’ has led to the introduction of a range of measures for monitoring and managing PhD

---

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Ng Lee Yen Abdullah and Terry Evans, “The relationship between postgraduate research students’ psychological attributes and their supervisors’ supervision training,” *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 31 (2012): 788.

<sup>5</sup> Glenice Ives and Glenn Rowley, “Supervisors selection or allocation and continuity of supervision: PhD. Students’ progress and outcomes,” *Studies in Higher Education* 30, no. 5 (2005): 535-55. Carolyn Richert Bair and Jennifer Grant Haworth, “Doctoral student attrition and persistence: a meta-synthesis of research,” in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* XIX, edited by J. C. Smart (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 495.

candidature (see 2. *Milestones*),<sup>6</sup> given completion rates now have reputational and financial implications for universities in the competitive higher education environment.<sup>7</sup>

To analyse supervision at Monash University, the MGA HDR survey sought responses from Monash graduate students to multiple choice (5) and Likert-scale questions (4), so as to provide a general overview of supervision at the institutional and faculty level, as well as open-ended questions (2), in order to provide a level of insight into the diversity of opinions and the challenges faced by graduate students.

The overall satisfaction with supervision among respondents from MNHS (80%) was slightly lower than it was among all Monash graduate students (82%).

Previous studies have highlighted that **the strongest correlation with student progress was the amount of interaction that they had with their supervisors.**<sup>8</sup> MNHS respondents tended to agree with positive statements regarding the accessibility of their supervisors.

Meanwhile, others have identified that **doctoral students who choose their own supervisor are more likely to complete their course than those assigned a supervisor**, while they are also less likely to experience emotional exhaustion or plan to leave academia.<sup>9</sup> This was not tested in this survey, but should be considered for implementation nevertheless.

**The expertise and knowledge of supervisors is instrumental to the successful completion of an HDR graduate student's thesis.**<sup>10</sup> Overall agreement with the statement '*my supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to support my research*' was slightly lower in MNHS (85%) than it was in the University (87%).

While supervision is clearly important to the overall graduate student research experience, it is also the factor that students tend to rank as most satisfactory (or else among the top factors).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in order to gain insight into the overall satisfaction of Monash graduate students, several other factors associated with their degrees were explored in the MGA HDR survey – starting with milestones (see 2. *Milestones*).

---

<sup>6</sup> Alison Lee and Jo McKenzie, "Evaluating doctoral supervision: tensions in eliciting students' perspectives," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 48, no.1 (2011): 70-71.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Halse and James Malfroy, "Rethorizing doctoral supervision as professional work," *Studies in Higher Education* 31, no. 1 (2010): 79.

<sup>8</sup> Allyson Holbrook, Sid Bourke and Robert Cantwell, "Using research candidate annual report data to examine supervision effectiveness," in *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Knowledge Creation in Testing Times Part 2 – Proceedings*, eds. Margaret Kiley and Gerry Mullins (Adelaide: Quality of Postgraduate Research Conference, 2006): 83.

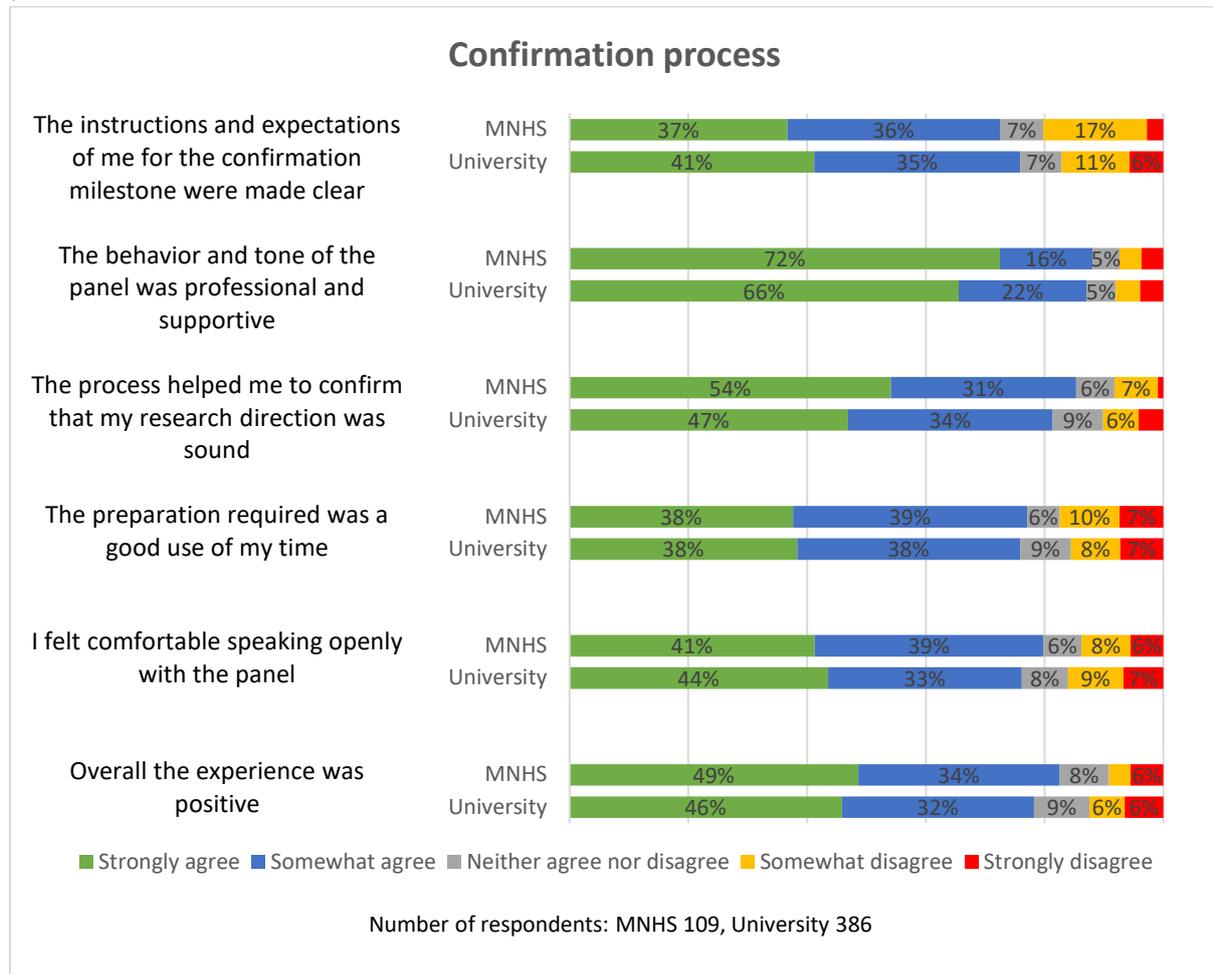
<sup>9</sup> Karen Hunter and Kay Devine, "Doctoral student's emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave academia," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 11 (2016): 40.

<sup>10</sup> Dharmananda Jairam and David H. Kahl, Jr., "Navigating the doctoral experience: The role of social support in successful degree completion," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 7 (2012): 320.

<sup>11</sup> Bridget Juniper, Elaine Walsh, Alan Richardson and Bernard Morley, "A new approach to evaluating the well-being of PhD research students," *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 37, no. 5 (2012): 571. Clair Sight, *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2017*, 12. Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, *2018 Graduate Outcomes Survey*, 106. Allyson Holbrook et al, "PhD candidate expectations: Exploring mis-match with experience," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 9 (2014): 339-40.

## 2. Milestones

2.1 Please rate the following statements regarding your experience of the confirmation process.



Eighty-eight percent (88%) of MNHS respondents agreed with the statement that *‘the behaviour and tone of the panel was professional and supportive,’* while 83% agreed that *‘overall the experience of confirmation was positive.’*

Off-campus MNHS respondents (68%) were less likely than those on-campus (79%) to agree with the statement *‘the instruction and expectations of me for the confirmation milestone were made clear.’*

## 2.2 Opportunity for comments about the confirmation process.

Twenty-six graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 11

Positive comments: 9

General theme	Number of responses
Unclear requirements and bureaucratic/administrative issues	9
Unsuitable/incompetent/insular/inappropriate panel	8
Good and useful feedback from panel	5
Time-consuming process	4
Suggestions for improvements	3
Stress/anxiety/nervousness/poor health	2
Highlighted supervisor failures/flaws	1
Lack of trust in panel	1

Many of the respondents from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences shared a **negative** opinion in relation to the confirmation process. Their responses are summarised as follows: unclear, stressful, unhelpful, time-consuming, misleading and political.

Specifically, much of the negative feedback to do with the confirmation process was regarding frustrations relating to **unclear requirements** and **bureaucratic/administration issues**. Some of the notable comments are included below:

*“Conflicting paperwork between MGE and the school. A lot of administrative templates.”*

*“Finding the requirements for the confirmation milestone was very difficult – the website often directed [me] to the wrong place or didn’t state outright the requirements. Especially when the transition between people starting pre-2015 and post-2015 came through – the requirements were different, but finding out what was expected was way too time-consuming.”*

Likewise, many graduate students from MNHS complained of **unsuitable, incompetent, insular or inappropriate panels**. Particularly revealing comments included:

*“During the confirmation process, supervisors and other members are asked to leave the room so the student may speak frankly and openly with the panel members about their experience and their supervisors. This is not managed well ... I did not feel this was a good forum to bring up concerns I had with one of my supervisors.”*

*“Not that I had much negative things that I wanted to say to the panel, but even if I did, I wouldn’t have felt comfortable doing so because many people on the panel have worked closely with my supervisors for a long time.”*

*“The panel members ask you about any problems or conflict in the lab that you’re working in. But, who, in his right mind, dares to tell them what’s going on? ... What can they do if you tell them ‘my supervisor is a dictator?’ Simply show pity and nothing else.”*

On the other hand, there were nine **positive** responses regarding the confirmation process in MNHS. Most of these related to how **good and useful feedback from the panel** was provided.

*“In the 6 months or so since confirmation, my research focus has become clearer and bears little resemblance to what was presented at confirmation. This was partly due to the feedback provided by the panel.”*

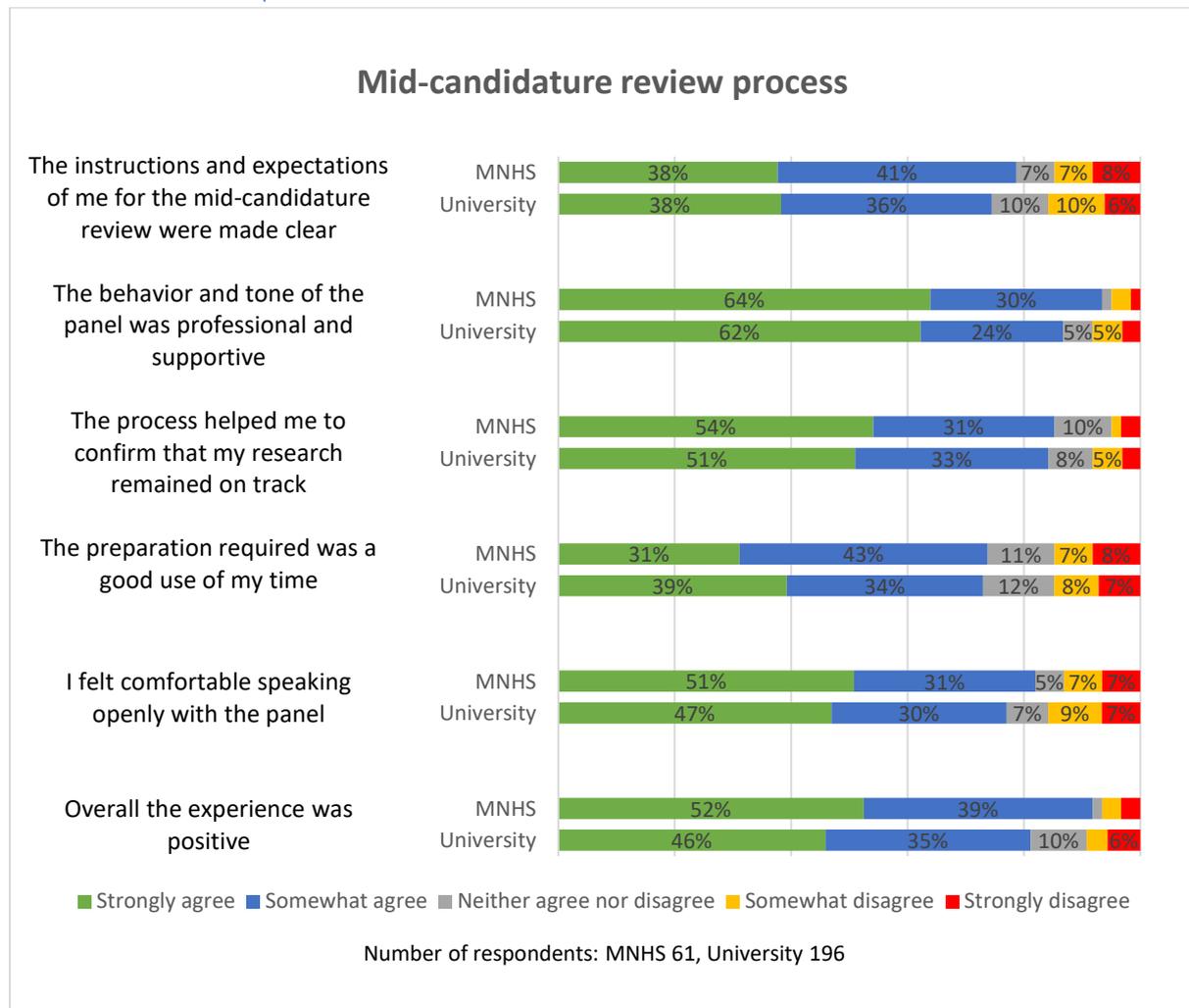
*“I can see that this process is indeed truly supportive, not meant to be confronting or ‘scary’ and a very helpful benchmark as I progress through my PhD.”*

**Other notable comments** from MNHS graduate students relating to the confirmation process, included:

*“I understand the purpose of the confirmation milestone and agree that it is a good platform to start collectively thinking about your thesis chapters and plan for experiments. However, it does take a considerable amount of time to prepare, which I’m not sure outweighs the benefits of the entire process.”*

*“My confirmation was a good experience. One thing that does worry me about these milestones, however, is it seems dependent on who is on your panel and, in particular, who the chair is. I assume they receive guidelines etc. but I hear of other students having more difficult panels or bad experiences.”*

2.3 Please rate the following statements regarding your experience of the mid-candidature review process.



MNHS graduate students (91%) agreed that the overall experience of the mid-candidature review was positive more so than the University-wide graduate students (81%).

Off-campus MNHS respondents (71%) were substantially less likely than those on-campus (95%) to agree with the statement ‘the instruction and expectations of me for the mid-candidature review were made clear.’

2.4 Opportunity for comments about the mid-candidature review process.

Thirteen graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 8

Positive comments: 4

General theme	Number of responses
Time-consuming process	4
Unclear requirements and bureaucratic/administrative issues	4
Good and useful feedback from panel	3
Misdirects energy and focus from research	1
Suggestions for improvements	1
Unsuitable/incompetent/insular/inappropriate panel	1

Despite the overall positive feedback to the previous questions, most of the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences respondents to this question shared a **negative** opinion in relation to the mid-candidature review process. Several of these responses compared the mid-candidature review to confirmation.

*“The mid-candidature review was less useful than confirmation and the instructions and expectations, as for confirmation, were difficult to find and not clearly stated.”*

*“I think the purpose of the confirmation was more important than the mid-candidature review. This seemed repetitive (as my project was on track and had not significantly changed – this may differ to other students), and again, took a considerable amount of time to prepare for.”*

Specifically, much of the negative feedback to do with the mid-candidature review process was regarding frustrations relating to **unclear requirements** and **bureaucratic/administration issues**. Some of the notable comments are included below:

*“What was expected from students specifically [was unclear] – particularly the written report. I have heard similar complaints from other students. A single PowerPoint slide outlining each milestone requirement is insufficient.”*

*“I was disappointed with the “new rule” that the literature review needed to be submitted as part of this process. This was not made clear at the beginning of my candidature, so I find it ridiculous to just add it in last minute and expect students to adhere. I agree that it would be beneficial to have the literature review completed earlier, but as a laboratory-based student, I need to prioritise lab work as this is what takes the longest to complete.”*

Likewise, many graduate students from MNHS complained that the mid-candidature review was a **time-consuming process**. Particularly revealing comments included:

*“Huge amount of time utilised for not much productivity.”*

*“While this is definitely a useful process, this time could have been spent writing up as, at this stage, papers are required to be published and the time can be spent doing that instead.”*

On the other hand, there were a few **positive** responses regarding the mid-candidature review process in MNHS. Most of these related to how **good and useful feedback from the panel** was provided.

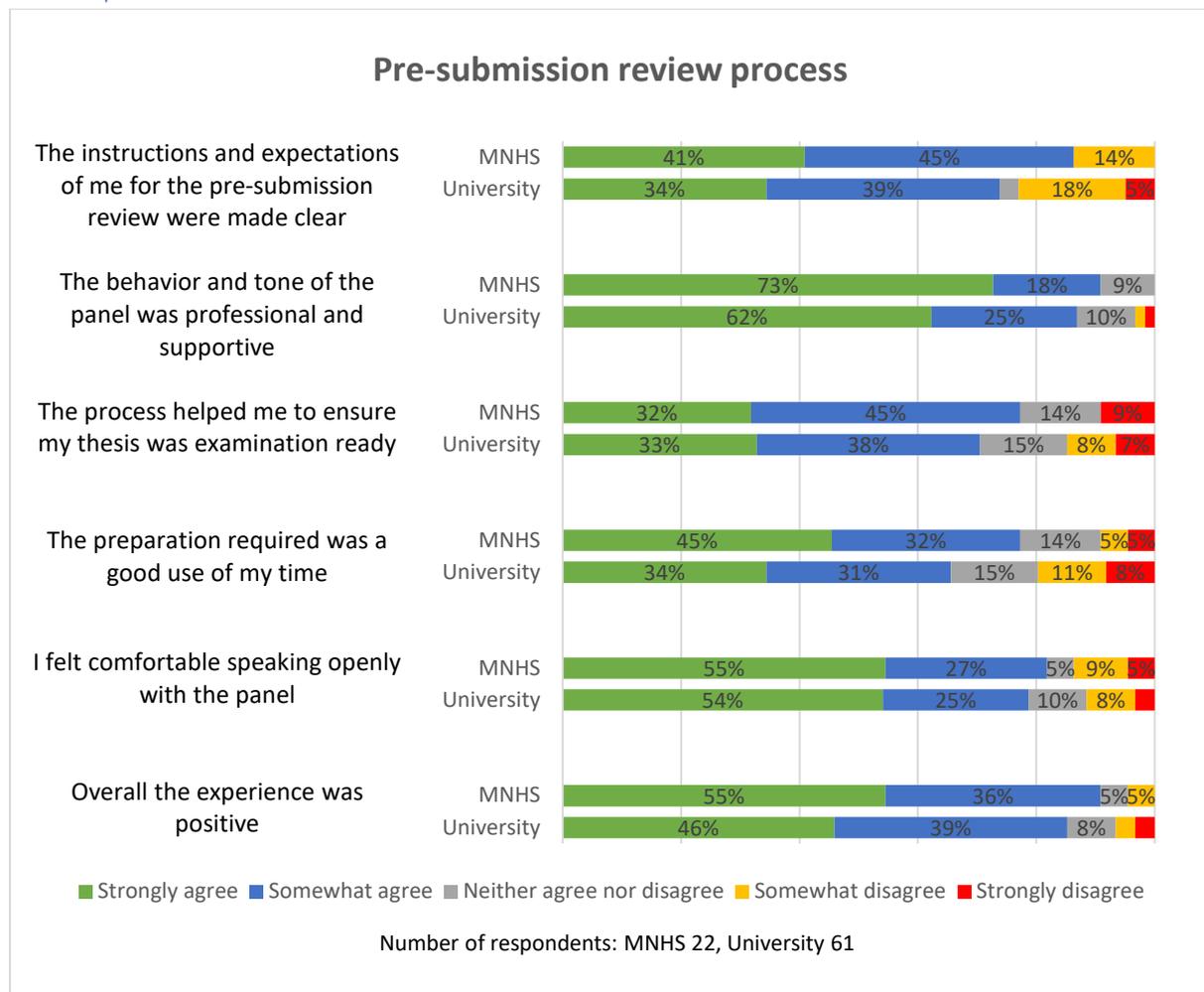
*“I actually found my mid-candidature review to be quite enjoyable. It took more of a tone of a discussion about science and possibilities for analysis, rather than feeling like a scary exam.”*

*“A little less daunting but invaluable process with great feedback and support from the panel.”*

**Other notable comments** from MNHS graduate students relating to the mid-candidature review process, included:

*“I found it very negative and expressed my concerns about timelines. It was so bad that I had no choice but to withdraw from one [faculty] ... I found my new faculty – they and MGE were supportive ... I was granted an extension and will sit for my reconvened progress review in a few months.”*

2.5 Please rate the following statements regarding your experience of the pre-submission review process.



MNHS respondents tended to agree with these positive statements regarding the pre-submission review process with greater frequency than did their University counterparts. Ninety-one percent

(91%) of MNHS respondents agreed that *'overall the experience was positive.'*

## 2.6 Opportunity for comments about the pre-submission review process.

Nine graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 7

Positive comments: 2

General theme	Number of responses
Highlighted supervisor failures/flaws	3
Unclear requirements and bureaucratic/administrative issues	2
Misdirects energy and focus from research	1
Stress/anxiety/nervousness/poor health	1
Suggestions for improvements	1
Time-consuming process	1
Unsuitable/incompetent/insular/inappropriate panel	1

Seven of the nine responses from MNHS graduate students contained a reference that could be categorised as **negative**. Their objections can be summarised as follows: needless, untimely, unclear and confusing.

Several MNHS graduate students believed that the pre-submission review process exposed or highlighted **flaws/failure within their supervision**.

*"My goal for thesis submission was ambitious, but the panel agreed that it would be possible as long as my supervisor provided timely feedback. In the review, my supervisor agreed to these terms, but afterwards made no strong commitments to adhere to the timeline."*

*"My supervisor was unsupportive and said I wasn't working hard enough. No support was put in place, but there was a threat to reconvene the panel if I didn't work harder."*

One **positive** experience from a MNHS graduate student relating to the pre-submission review process was:

*"It was ... valuable to be able to present all the findings to the audience and to get their questions."*



Several graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences provided **negative** feedback regarding their opinions on milestones. Their objections can be summarised as follows: compromising, harsh, time-wasting, unreasonable, inappropriate and unnecessary.

Several MNHS graduate students took this as an opportunity to elaborate on their responses to the preceding questions regarding termination of candidature. As such, many expressed **general disagreement with termination at milestones**. Significant comments, included:

*“No one embarks on a PhD not intending to finish. Milestones can help keep you on track and provide timely guidance. Terminating candidature is a brutal approach and reinforces how students are starting to feel about the enforced pace imposed by these annual hurdles i.e. that PhD students are a commodity and the University is seeking to churn through as many as possible to secure funding on completion. In some circumstances research may be compromised – choosing not to do further analysis because [you] just need something for the next milestone.”*

*“Science is somewhat uncertain and unpredictable – that’s why we need to search and research the way to prove our hypothesis. Therefore, please allow those working very hard, but [failing] to pass the mid-candidature milestone a bit more time or [a] different pathway.”*

*“I think at any stage termination shouldn’t be considered unless steps have been undertaken to help those that need it succeed.”*

More so than in other faculties, MNHS graduate students tended to believe that termination at confirmation was more justifiable than mid-candidature and pre-submission.

*“If a student passes their confirmation, it means that his/her project is feasible and academically appropriate ... Unless there is clear evidence ... I see no reason [for] failing a student who has been working hard to undertake their research.”*

*“I think a candidate needs to prove themselves in the first 12 months. If they aren’t up for the task, then confirmation is a good time to find that out ... Once you are past that point the milestones should focus on identifying problems and finding solutions.”*

On the other hand, many MNHS graduate students were in **general agreement with termination at milestones**. However, opinions varied substantially on at what stage termination of candidature was deemed acceptable and many students were quick to qualify their general agreement by suggesting that termination should only take place after a graduate student has been provided with sufficient time to reflect on feedback and make amendments to their research. Noteworthy comments, included:

*“The confirmation milestone should be a much more rigorous process ... instead of the rubber stamp it seems to be now. Much more emphasis should be placed on having the student demonstrate that they are capable [of] producing good data that leads to publications and significant findings.”*

*“I don’t think anyone should be guaranteed a place in the course indefinitely, so an appropriate measure of progress is necessary. However, I think there should be lots of options available to students if progress is deemed unsatisfactory at any point.”*

Compared with the responses to the three milestones, the number of **positive** responses from MNHS to this statement are comparably low. The comments suggest that this is because students are considering the concept of milestones rather than a specific milestone experience from which they can reflect. As such, while the responses to the three milestones are littered with positive comments about panels providing good and useful feedback, the **positive** comments to this statement are less-specific. Notable comments, include:

*“While it’s stressful, I think that this is ultimately good for students and supervisors – PhDs should not go forever and milestones help keep everyone on track.”*

*“It is good to work towards something rather than just working. I find they help in keeping me on tack and timely.”*

**Other notable comments** from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences graduate students relating to the milestones, included:

*“Supervisors should keep students on track. After confirmation you would have to badly stuff up to fail. Maybe supervisors would need to be reviewed then too.”*

*“My dates do not align with departmental opportunities to meet these deadlines – they’re either two months early or three months late. So when [it] comes to doing the mid-candidature review, I will need to push it back three months, but there doesn’t appear a simple way to do this without taking leave for a few months ... The fixed deadlines may be putting pressure on many students, which I know has caused extreme distress for some.”*

*“It appears that the standards across the different panels are different, based on feedback of other candidates informally sharing their experience with each other. Hence, the standard of passing may appear to not be a very fair process.”*

## 2.9 Summary

In 2010, Monash began to monitor candidature through multiple milestones – confirmation of candidature, mid-candidature review and pre-submission review. This can be seen as being consistent with changes made at other universities across Australia.<sup>12</sup>

MNHS graduate students tended to agree with positive statements regarding their milestones. In regards to the confirmation process, 83% of those responding agreed that *‘overall the experience was positive,’* while total agreement with this statement went up for the subsequent milestones (Mid-candidature review: 91%, Pre-submission review: 91%).

In 2014, the mid-candidature and pre-submission milestones were changed to “hurdles” and are now used as a way to terminate candidature when progress is unsatisfactory. With the exception of confirmation, MNHS graduate students tended to disagree that it was appropriate to face termination for failing a milestone (see 2.7) with this disagreement growing as candidates progressed through the milestones.

---

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Kiley, “Reflections on change in doctoral education: an Australian case study,” *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 8, iss. 2 (2017): 85.

Two of the **recurring criticisms of the milestone process** in the comments of graduate students broadly related to **unclear requirements** and **inappropriate panels**.

Given milestones can be quite stressful (34% of MNHS graduate students experienced an uncomfortable level of stress because of milestones – see section 7.1), clear guidance on the requirements and expectations are essential to supporting students through the process. While clear guidance and communication have been found to be essential to timely completion, with their perceived absence shown to be fundamental in causing delays,<sup>13</sup> clear guidance and communication may also limit stress. The prevalence of comments highlighting uncertainty or inconsistencies in the milestone processes, within this context, can be considered cause for concern.

Perhaps the most concerning element of criticism relating to the suitability of panels was how some graduate students expressed that they were reluctant to share feedback with their panel members because of a fear that what they said may get back to their supervisors. As the Graduate Research Progress Management Procedures state, “Milestones provide an opportunity for students to raise any issues that are affecting progress, so that action to address these issues can be considered and implemented where appropriate.”<sup>14</sup> The introduction of candidate committees or chairpersons to Australian HDR degrees was designed to develop a more open structure in relation to the supervisory relationship;<sup>15</sup> however, the existence of these comments suggest that this is a developing area. This is not to question the professionalism of University staff; rather to simply highlight that some graduate students perceive proximity between University or Faculty staff as a preventative factor as they consider raising issues they potentially have had with supervisors.

---

<sup>13</sup> Rens van de Schoot et al., “What took them so long? Explaining PhD delays among doctoral candidates,” *PLoS One* 8, no. 7 (2013), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Monash University Procedure, *Graduate Research Progress Management Procedures* (Melbourne: Monash University, 2017), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Kiley, “Reflections on change in doctoral education,” 85.

### 3. Coursework

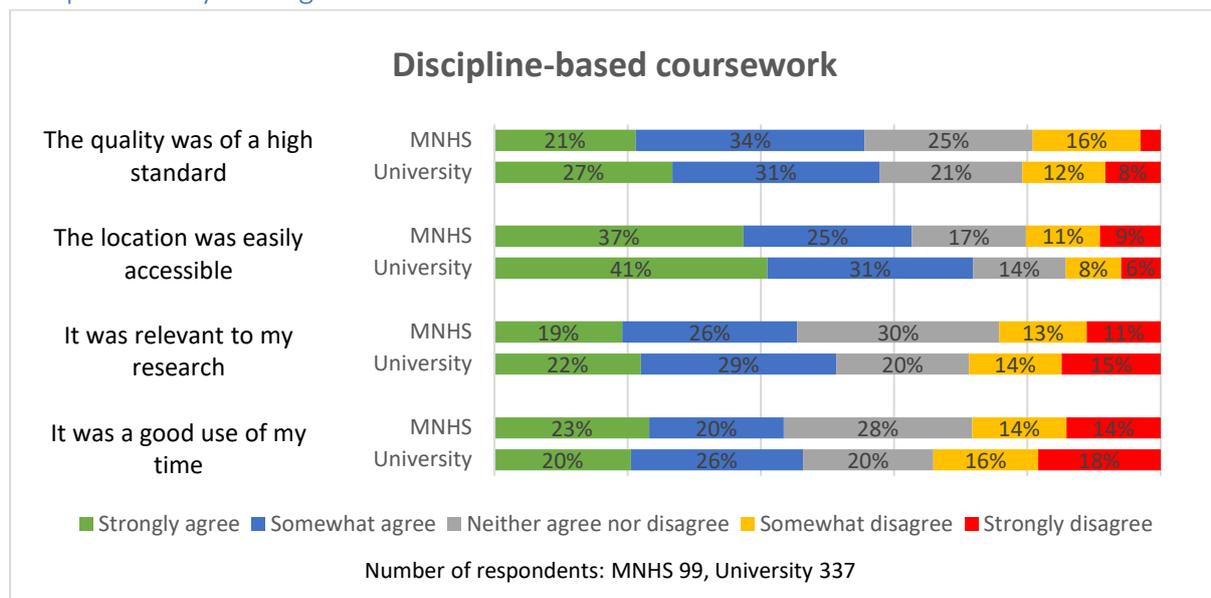
#### 3.1 Do you believe that research degrees are improved by the inclusion of compulsory discipline-based coursework?

Research degrees improved by compulsory coursework units?	MNHS	University
Yes	67 (37.6%)	236 (37.9%)
No	46 (25.8%)	178 (28.6%)
Not sure	65 (36.5%)	209 (33.5%)

Only (38%) of MNHS respondents thought that their research degrees were improved by the inclusion of compulsory discipline-based coursework.

Off-campus MNHS respondents (33.3%) were far more likely than those on-campus (15.8%) to disagree that their research degrees were improved by the inclusion of compulsory discipline-based coursework.

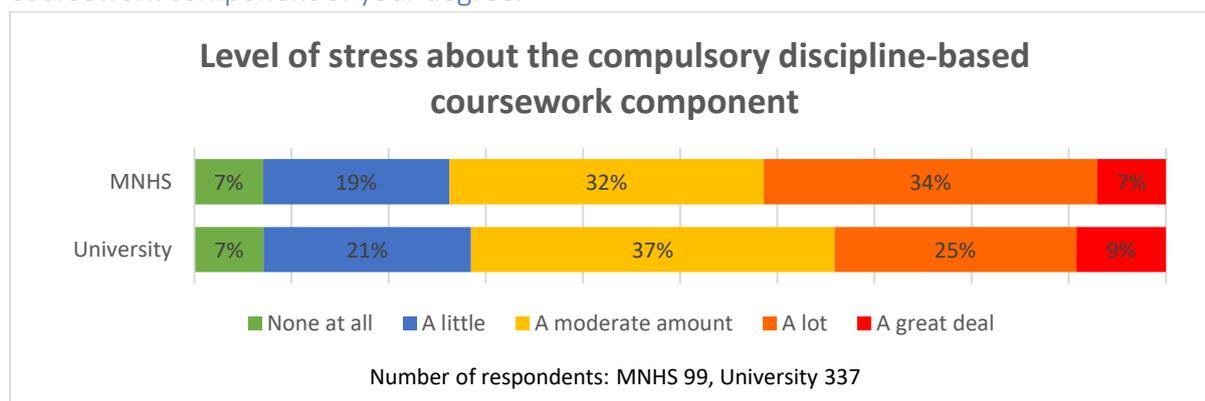
#### 3.2 Please rate the following statements relating to the discipline-based coursework component of your degree.



Less than half of MNHS respondents considered their discipline-based coursework as relevant to their research, while only 43% agreed that it was a good use of their time.

On-campus MNHS graduate students tended to agree with positive statements relating to discipline-based coursework more so than off-campus MNHS respondents. This was especially true of the statement *'It was a good use of my time,'* of which 67% of on-campus MNHS graduate students agreed compared to 33% of off-campus MNHS respondents.

3.3 Please select the level of stress you have about the compulsory discipline-based coursework component of your degree.



MNHS respondents were more likely than their University peers to associate an uncomfortable level of stress with discipline-based coursework.

3.4 Opportunity for comment regarding the inclusion of discipline-based coursework in research degrees.

Sixty graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 24      Positive comments: 20

General theme	Number of responses
Time-consuming/waste of time/misdirected energy	20
Irrelevant/discipline-specific	15
Administrative issues/inconsistencies/solutions	8
Low/poor-quality unit	4
Inconsistent quality (unit/course)	3
Insufficient feedback (assessment)	1

Just under half of the respondents from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science held **negative opinions on coursework** in their degrees. Their objections can be summarised as follows: useless, irrelevant, waste of time, underdeveloped, unnecessary, burdensome and disorganised.

Of those Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science graduate students responding negatively, there were twenty references to how coursework was considered **time consuming and a waste of time**, and how it unnecessarily **directed the student's energy away from their research/thesis**.

*"Needs to be relevant and not take too much time away from research."*

*"Too time-consuming for little learning/reward."*

*"Waste of time that could have been better spent on PhD project work."*

Likewise, several graduate students complained the units were **irrelevant** to their areas of study and **too-specific to particular disciplines** which they were not focused on. Some of the more insightful responses are included below:

*“Introduction of coursework is necessary and beneficial but needs to be tailored to the individual project/needs to a degree to be useful. There should be many electives available to cover multiple aspects of research/communication/industry skills.”*

*“Students should not get to choose what coursework would be of benefit. It should also be done in Year 1, not when pressures start mounting beyond confirmation. Mine simply required that I read a bunch of painfully boring articles of no relevance to my research.”*

*“I feel it’s non-specificity takes away from what I could be doing, which is learning things directly related to my project.”*

On the other hand, there were several references to experiences related to coursework that were **positive**.

*“I believe the discipline-based coursework is useful, particularly for those who embark on a doctorate program other than their expertise background.”*

*“I believe that they keep you on track and helps to keep your basic knowledge fresh and present all the time.”*

*“For our particular degree, the coursework is essential for our professional training. It is sometimes stressful not having as much time to dedicate to research, but again, it is essential. It’s also very interesting!”*

A specific issue that seemed of greater relevance to the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science than to any other faculty was **inconsistency in the allocation of credits** for recognition of prior learning. Several comments related to this issue, including:

*“PhD candidates not being treated with equity with regard to who is eligible for credits vs. who is not.”*

*“There is no coordination between mandatory requirements of the University and the independent research institute resulting in duplication of compulsory events and further wasting of time.”*

*“I have been working in research for many years, but was still expected to undertake a compulsory basic ethics module before being able to progress through the PhD program. I asked if I might be able to receive credit for my experience but was told ‘NO’. Surely this sort of thing needs to be addressed ... We are all individuals; ‘one size’ does NOT fit all.”*

**Other notable comments** relating to the inclusion of discipline-based coursework in research degrees, included:

*“Unfortunately, because the coursework generally runs to the same timeframe as standard semesters, and there is an expectation that PhD students also make a teaching contribution, you can find you have a very high marking workload, at the time you also have your*

*compulsory assignments. For me this was also at the same time confirmation was occurring. Three conflicting priorities with no flexibility to manage their competing deadlines.”*

*“While both the coursework [units] were relevant, [I] cannot say both were run excellently ... Coursework takes a lot of time and effort and if they cannot provide what’s expected of them, it’s best not to make them compulsory.”*

*“Overall, the mandatory coursework would have been better served with internal choice. As it is, it simply intrudes into research time and inhibited my progress.”*

### 3.5 Summary

While there is general support for greater structure within graduate research studies, and there is evidence to suggest that receiving training in rigorous academic writing or any other research skill correlates with successful completion,<sup>16</sup> the concept of coursework has received a mixed reception in Australia.<sup>17</sup> MNHS graduate students were no different in this regard with respondents split over its relevance and usefulness.

Only 45% of MNHS graduate students agreed with the statement that discipline-based coursework was *‘relevant to my research,’* and when given the chance to comment on coursework, respondents re-iterated their frustration with irrelevancy and complaints that the units were discipline-specific receiving 15 mentions.

Only 43% of MNHS graduate students agreed with the statement that discipline-based coursework was *‘a good use of my time.’* The majority of negative comments (20) regarding the inclusion of discipline-based coursework were in relation to how it was a waste of time, time-consuming and misdirected energy away from their research.

---

<sup>16</sup> Rens van de Schoot et al., “What took them so long?” 9.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Kiley, “Reflections on change in doctoral education,” 85.

## 4. Professional Development

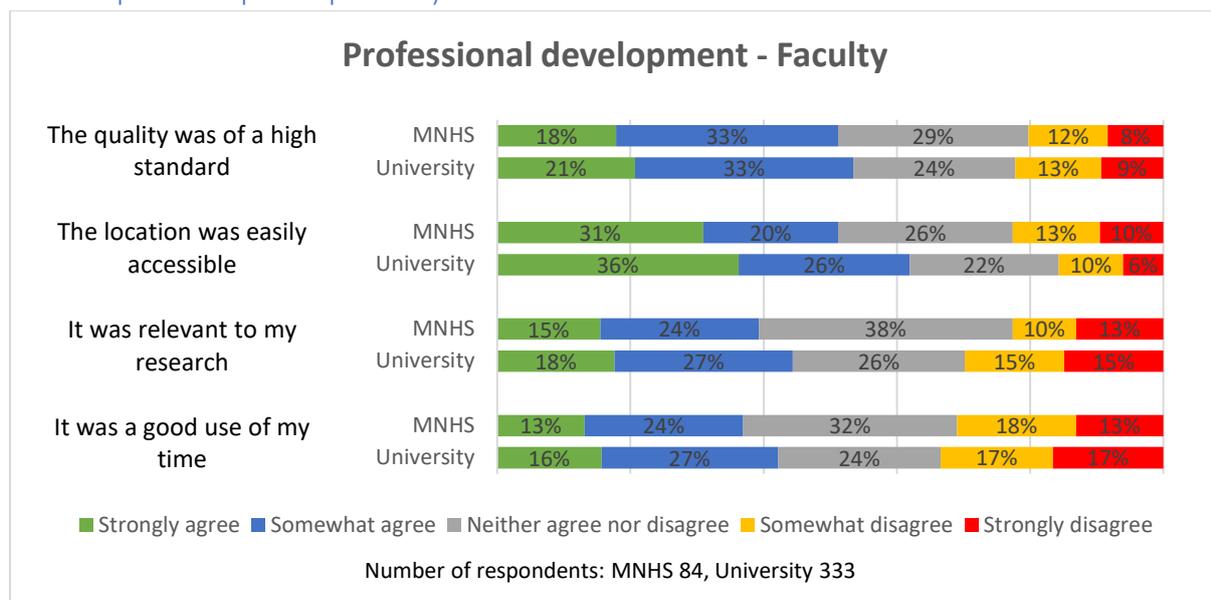
4.1 Do you believe that professional development units (as offered through "myDevelopment"), should be a compulsory part of a research degree?

Should professional development be compulsory?	MNHS	University
Yes	48 (27.3%)	157 (25.4%)
No	83 (47.2%)	283 (45.9%)
Not sure	45 (25.6%)	177 (28.7%)

Just over a quarter (27.3%) of MNHS respondents believed that professional development units should be a compulsory component of their degree, while just under a half (47.2%) thought the opposite.

Off-campus MNHS respondents (51.5%) were more likely than those on-campus (41.3%) to disagree that professional development should be compulsory.

4.2 Please rate the following statements relating to your overall experience of the professional development component of your degree offered by your faculty. (If your faculty does not offer any professional development or you have not participated in any such courses please skip this question).



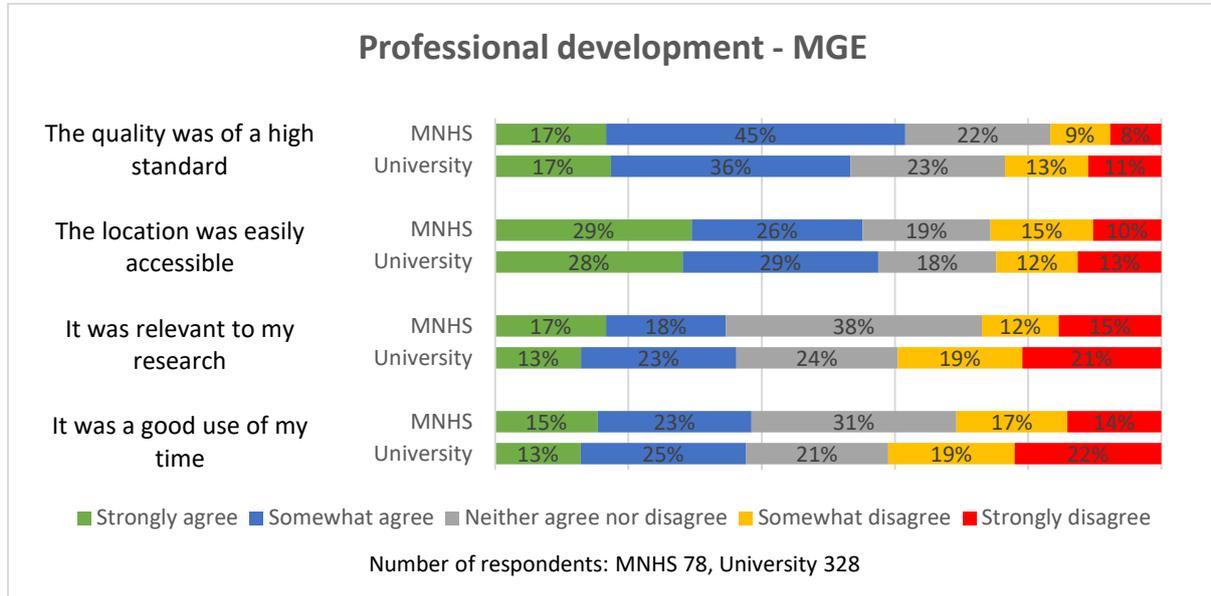
While MNHS graduate students tended to agree rather than disagree with positive statements regarding professional development offered by their faculty, levels of overall agreement paled in contrast to other areas surveyed, such as supervision. Overall agreement with the statements *'it was relevant to my research'* (39%) and *'it was a good use of my time'* (37%) were particularly low.

In contrast to the results of similar questions in coursework (see 3.2) and professional development – MGE (see 4.3), with the exception of accessibility, off-campus respondents tended to agree with positive statements regarding professional development units offered by their faculty more so than on-campus respondents. This was especially evident in relation to the following statements:

- *'The quality was of a high standard.'* (Off-campus: 57%, On-campus: 45%)

- 'It was a good use of my time.' (Off-campus: 43%, On-campus: 31%)

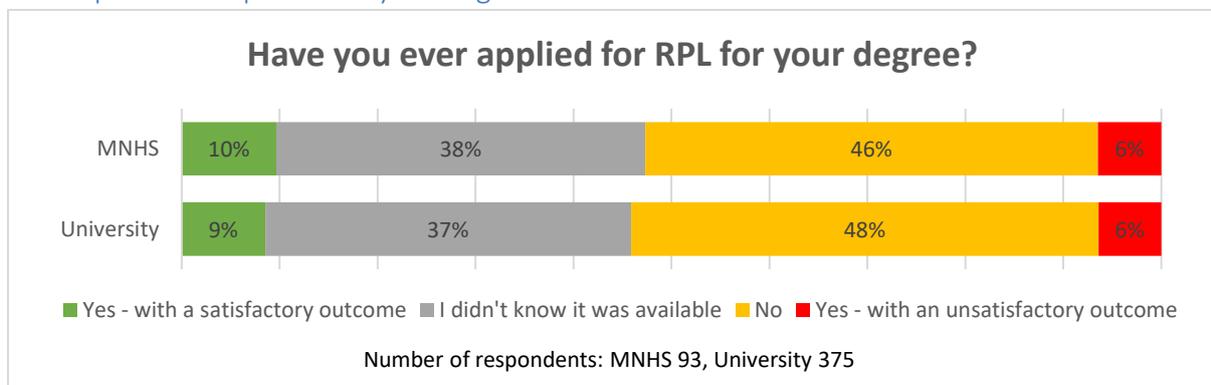
4.3 Please rate the following statements relating to your overall experience of the professional development component of your degree offered by MGE (central). (If you have not participated in any such courses please skip this question).



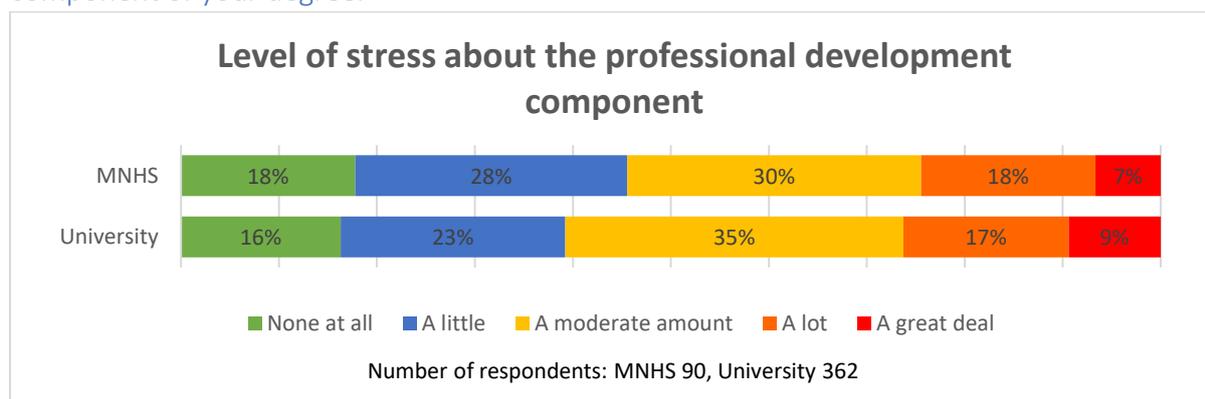
Total agreement levels with positive statements regarding professional development units offered by the MGE were marginally superior to those offered by the Faculty, with the exception of the statement to do with relevance (Faculty: 39%, MGE: 35%). Only 38% believed the MGE units were a good use of their time.

With the exception of the statement on relevance, on-campus MNHS graduate students tended to agree with positive statements relating to professional development run by the MGE more so than off-campus MNHS respondents. For instance, 44% of on-campus respondents agreed with the statement 'It was a good use of my time' compared to 32% of off-campus respondents.

4.4 Have you applied for Recognition of Prior Learning in relation to the professional development component of your degree?



4.5 Please select the level of stress you have about the professional development component of your degree.



One in every four MNHS respondents experienced an uncomfortable level of stress as a result of the professional development component of their degree.

Off-campus respondents (31%) were more likely than on-campus respondents (18%) to experience an uncomfortable level of stress because of professional development.

4.6 Opportunity for comment regarding the inclusion of compulsory professional development units in research degrees.

Forty-one graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 29      Positive comments: 15

General theme	Number of responses
Irrelevant/discipline-specific/lack of options	11
Administrative issues/inconsistencies/unit availability	10
Time-consuming/waste of time/misdirected energy	8
Campus attendance issues (time/travel)	2
Excessive corporate feel/focus	2
Inconsistent quality of units	2
Networking – relationships and support	1

The responses of graduate students from MNHS to compulsory professional development units within their research degrees were **overwhelmingly negative**. Their complaints can be summarised as follows: time-consuming, rigid, irrelevant, poorly executed, misleading and uninteresting.

Approximately half of the negative comments relating to compulsory professional development units included references to how **irrelevant** the units were to individual students and how there were a **lack of options and choices**. Revealing comments, included:

*“The idea is great, but the execution is too general and there is little to be gained from most sessions. The amount of useful and relevant ones are far less than the amount we are required to complete.”*

*“The courses offered were of a low quality and of little relevance to my study.”*

*“I think there is merit to professional development, but there needs to be a good selection of units to ensure that students can pick areas that are relevant to them i.e. not enrolling in units for the sake of ticking off hours.”*

Similarly, there were many individual references to **administrative issues**, such as problems with MyDevelopment, as well as complaints about **unit availability**.

*“An absolute waste of time. Make it optional. Recognise prior work experience or at least reply to the application.”*

*“Very poor management by faculty – programs just aren’t there yet, and some presenters are terrible.”*

*“I have found the MyDevelopment troubleshooting response very poor. I have an online course done through lynda.com that still hasn’t shown up as completed. Three emails to MyDevelopment later; no response.”*

As several of the previous comments indicate, MNHS graduate students also regularly complained about how **time-consuming** it was to complete professional development units and how it unnecessarily – in their opinions – **drew their focus away from their research**.

*“While some courses I have done have utility and are directly translatable to skills used in [a] PhD, a lot of them are possibly a waste of time and a compulsory element would mean that students have a compulsory obligation to waste time.”*

*“It is hard to make time for attending these classes when the research degree involves conducting physical experiments within a lab, especially when working with biological material that can often be time sensitive.”*

Despite the predominantly negative response from MNHS graduate students, several **positive** references to the professional development units were also present. These included:

*“Mostly [a] very positive experience with central programs. I think the professional development is great – I want to come out of my PhD with more than the ability to do experiments and publish papers.”*

*“I have found these CPD course incredibly valuable – I don’t think I could have finished without them.”*

*“I loved the professional development opportunities, but I wish they were the same as for staff, like at ANU. I couldn’t do all the teaching training I wanted to.”*

Included across the responses of the forty-one MNHS graduate students were a number of revealing and insightful suggestions on ways to improve the professional development component of higher

education degrees at Monash University. The following table identifies some of the more popular ideas:

Suggested changes	Number of responses
Should be optional/voluntary/decided case-by-case	10
Include or improve Recognition of Prior Learning process and external PD	5
Should be compulsory	2
Extend HDR course length to account for PD	1

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the predominantly negative response to professional development requirements of graduate students, many advocated for a **change from compulsory to optional**. Noteworthy comments, included:

*“Perhaps professional development should be strongly encouraged but not compulsory, and also encouraged by supervisors. This would ensure students engage in relevant and specific professional development, rather than somewhat random ‘professional development’ simply to meet a requirement.”*

*“I think professional development is one of those things that needs to be self-directed and self-motivated. There should be ample opportunity for students to have access to professional development seminars, but I do not think they should be compulsory as not all units will be relevant for all students.”*

Several MNHS respondents advocated for **an improvement in the processes from which Recognition of Prior Learning is granted**. Graduate students argued that the procedure through which credit is given for prior experience should be more accessible and that it should also be easier to complete professional development units external to Monash University during their candidature. Interesting comments, included:

*“I think that tutoring, lecturing and Honours supervision should be part of the compulsory work of a PhD program, so we are actually prepared for post-graduate jobs.”*

*“I am [a] mature age student and the professional development offered, I attended in my previous employment.”*

## 4.7 Summary

Compared to the other elements of the HDR course experiences explored in this survey, the negativity surrounding professional development stood out. When given the chance to comment on ‘the inclusion of compulsory professional development units in research degrees,’ within the 41 responses from MNHS graduate students were 29 individual negative reflections compared to 15 positive reflections.

As with coursework, MNHS respondents seemed particularly frustrated by the lack of relevance of professional development units – be they faculty or MGE-run – as well as how their attendance did not represent a *good use of time*. This was reflected both in the quantitative (see 4.2 and 4.3) and qualitative data (see 4.6).

Furthermore, MNHS respondents were also frustrated by the administration of professional development. Several raised issues regarding inconsistencies and errors in the online management system, while others complained about units filling up too quickly. Clear guidance and communication have been found to be essential to PhD candidates completing on time, with their perceived absence shown to be fundamental in causing delays.<sup>18</sup>

Just over a quarter (27.3%) of MNHS graduate students thought that professional development units, as offered through *myDevelopment*, should be compulsory.

MNHS graduate students were not necessarily opposed to the concept of professional development; however, there was a general consensus that in its current form, it was unworkable, and that likely skewed results regarding whether it should be compulsory.

---

<sup>18</sup> Rens van de Schoot et al., "What took them so long?" 8.

## 5. Progress delays and discontinuation

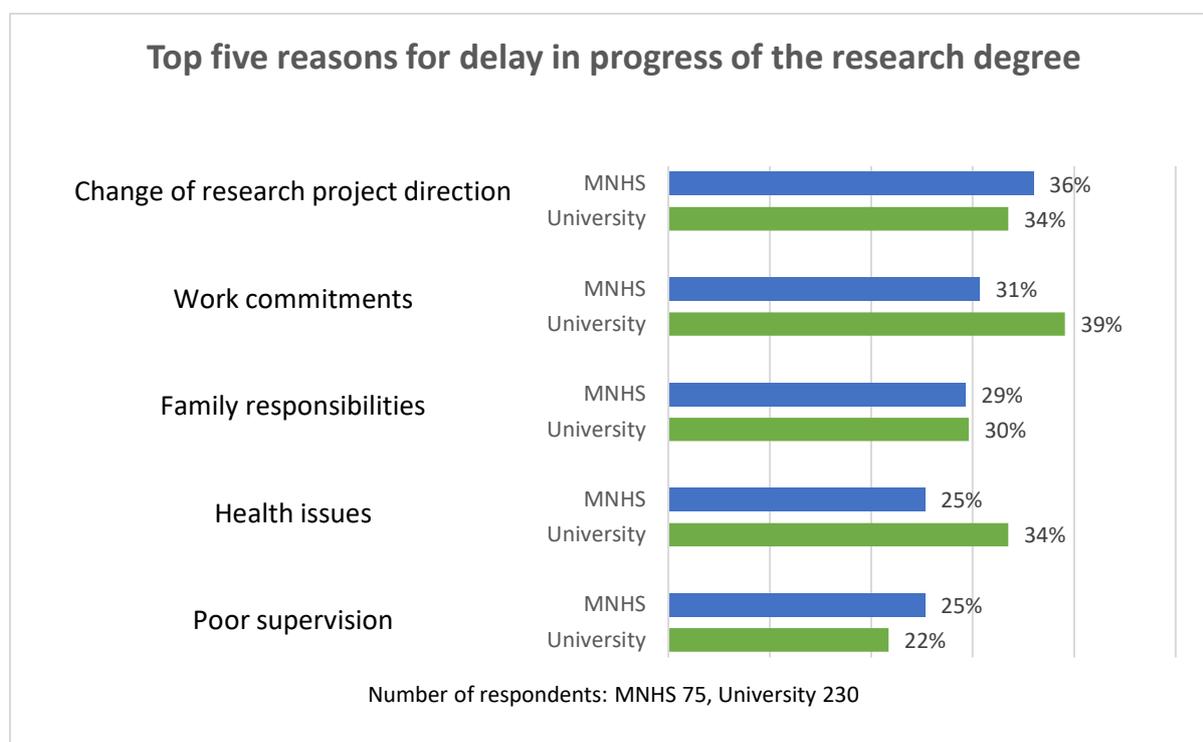
### 5.1 Has anything significantly delayed the progress of your research degree?

Has your research degree progress been delayed?	MNHS	University
Yes	75 (43.6%)	231 (37.8%)
No	97 (56.4%)	380 (62.2%)

Forty-four percent (44%) of MNHS respondents said that they had experienced a significant delay in their research degree. They were more likely to have experienced a delay than were their University counterparts (38%).

### 5.2 Please select all relevant reasons regarding the delay in progress of your research degree.

Where respondents indicated that the progress of their research was significantly delayed the following reasons were identified.



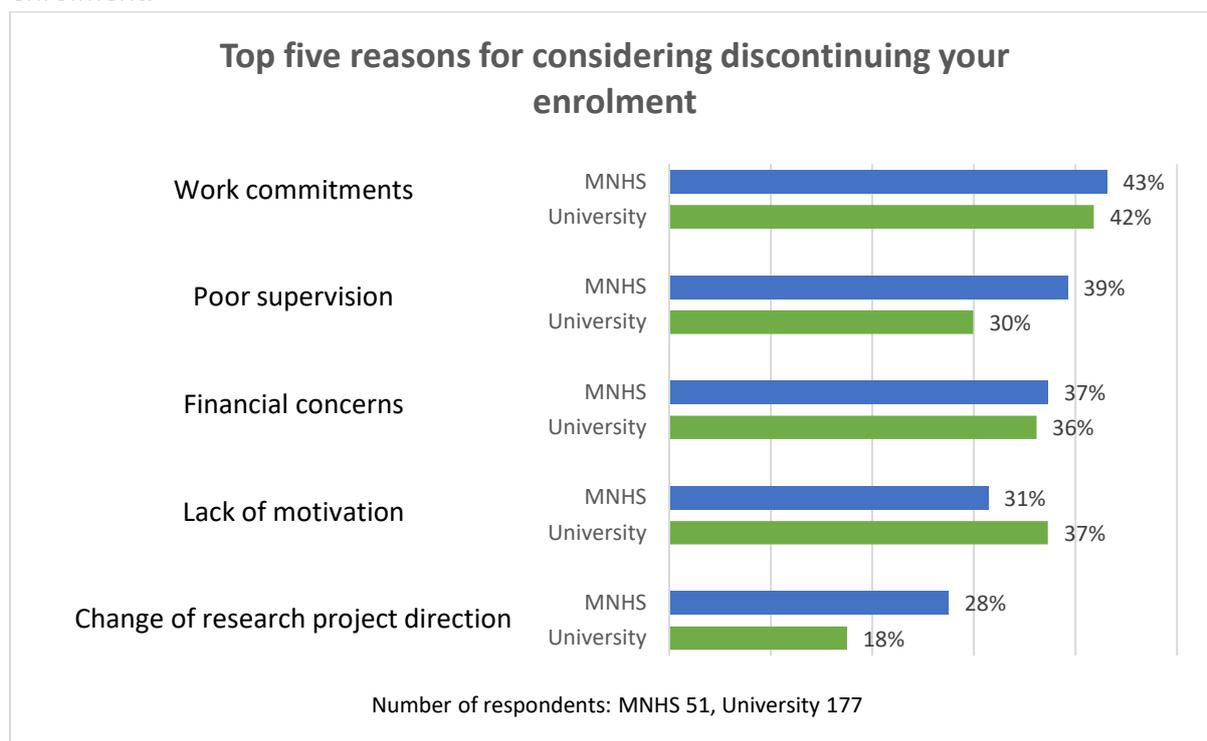
A change in the direction of the research project was the most common reason why MNHS respondents experienced a delay in their degrees.

### 5.3 Have you ever considered discontinuing your enrolment?

Have you considered discontinuing your enrolment?	MNHS	University
Yes	52 (30.2%)	179 (29.3%)
No	120 (69.8%)	431 (70.7%)

MNHS respondents were as likely as their University peers to have considered discontinuation.

5.4 Please select all relevant reasons regarding why you considered discontinuing your enrolment.



Work commitments were the primary reason MNHS respondents had considered discontinuing their enrolment at Monash.

5.5 What made you decide to continue with your degree?

Forty graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Personal characteristics – commitment/determination/passion/fear/stubbornness	16
Support from peers, friends and family	7
Interest in research	6
Support from University staff/services	6
Time, money and effort already invested	4
Scholarship and financial incentives	3
Career prospects	2
Convenience	2
Personal development	2
Success/milestone in research	2
Still uncertain	2
Changed supervisor	1
Opportunism	1

Graduate students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences outlined a range of factors and/or motivations for choosing to continue with their enrolment after considering discontinuation.

**Personal characteristics** were the most prevalent factor and/or motivation referenced by respondents. For MNHS graduate students, these included: pride, resilience, determination, perseverance, belief and stubbornness.

Seven graduate students credited **support** they had received **from their peers, friends and family** as playing a major role in their decision to continue in their course. Five of those commenting here credited their family for providing support, while other interesting comments, included:

*“The reasons I want to continue are if I attend an inspiring event, talk to other PhD students who are supportive and [help me] think about the accomplishments in the long run.”*

Similarly, six graduate students highlighted how crucial the support of their **supervisors or other Monash University staff members** had been. Noteworthy comments, included:

*“I ... have the full support of my supervisors to delay experiments in favour of completing coursework and managing my health.”*

*“Support from old faculty manager.”*

Meanwhile, several students credited their own **interest in research** as playing a defining role in their decision to continue.

*“Because I am passionate about my research topic.”*

*“Once I changed supervisors and passed the steep learning curve, I came to the stage that I felt comfortable going about designing and running experiments. That was when I got really hooked into my project and the basic science aspect of it.”*

Four MNHS graduate students also expressed a reluctance to discontinue given the amount of **time, money and effort** they had already invested in their research projects.

*“The effort that I have put [into] conducting my project in the first place made me [keep] going in hard times. Also, the money that I have spent so far to continue my enrolment in this degree.”*

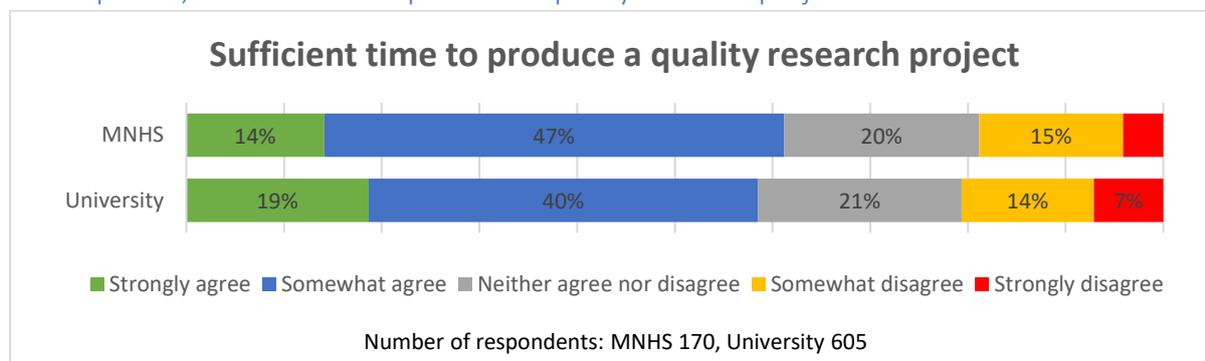
*“Because I had just passed my third year and thought it would be a waste to discontinue at that point so I pushed through.”*

**Other notable comments** from MNHS graduate students regarding their reasons for continuing with their course, included:

*“Accepted publication was a significant step forward.”*

*“Understanding that a PhD is a huge advantage to careers outside of my research, not just a requirement within research.”*

5.6 The amount of time I have to complete my research, after preparing for and completing compulsory milestones/discipline-based coursework units/professional development, will allow me to produce a quality research project.



Sixty-one percent (61%) of MNHS respondents believed they had sufficient time to produce a quality research project.

5.7 What are the three most important things the University could do for you to help you complete on time?

One-hundred and eighteen students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Supervision	47
Administration – guidelines/information/communication/ availability	28
Professional development – changing or removing	24
Funding – scholarship/other financial aid	23
Milestones – changing or removing	20
Compulsory coursework – changing or removing	15
Research environment – networking/mentoring/support groups	15
Access to training/support services	12
Wellbeing – encouragement/motivation/trust/care	11
Improving online/cross-campus service delivery	10
Time/time management	10
Facilities/labs/equipment/software	7
Offices and workspaces	5
Access to research material/resources	4
Extending length of degree/candidature	4
Reducing bureaucratic requirements	3
Staff	3
Career and work opportunities	2
Family-friendly initiatives/support	2
Ethics approvals	1

When considering graduate student responses to this question, it is important to emphasise that comments assigned to each theme are not necessarily negative (although the majority of comments are indeed highlighting perceived flaws, failures or areas for improvement); however, disregarding whether they can be considered positive, neutral or negative reflections, the comments do provide direct insight into what Monash University graduate students think the primary role/s of the University should be in helping them complete their degrees on time.

MNHS graduate students provided a wide range of suggestions regarding what they thought were the most crucial things that the University could do to help with the timely completion of their degrees.

The most frequent area highlighted by MNHS graduate students was **supervision**. Comments related to: accessibility, feedback, expectations, regulating/monitoring supervisors, limit of PhD candidates per supervisor and quality.

Another area frequently highlighted by MNHS graduate students was **University administration**. These comments predominantly related to the following suggestions: Provide clear requirements/instructions in relation to milestones, supervisor/student relationship, coursework and professional development; providing a 'go-to' administrative person; consistency in relation to coursework/professional development requirements; improve communication; improving recognition of prior learning process; and, improve records management.

The prevailing theme in both *Section 3: Coursework* and *Section 4: Professional Development* was that MNHS graduate students tended to have issues with the administration, requirements and purpose of these components of their degrees. This sentiment was again reflected in graduate student responses to this question; however, please refer to these individual chapters for greater analysis.

Likewise, milestones also received substantial emphasis across the responses of MNHS graduate students to this question. See *Section 2: Milestones* for an explanation of these reasons.

Another area that was referred to frequently in the comments was **funding**. Particularly insightful and reflective comments, included:

*“Financial support to reduce paid work requirements and overall stress.”*

*“Funding opportunities [are] not always clear and the online information is difficult and time-consuming to navigate.”*

Several MNHS graduate students emphasised that improving the Monash **research community and network** would serve their pursuit of their academic and professional goals. Comments to this effect related to the following areas: facilitate greater cohesion between students, peer support groups, a mentoring program and better access to academics.

**Other notable areas** frequently discussed in the comments of MNHS graduate students, included:

- **Online/alternative campus services** – several wanted better online systems to support off-campus students or more offerings at campuses outside of Clayton and Caulfield.
- **Time/time management** – Be realistic in expectations placed on students and consider flexible arrangements.

- **Wellbeing** – several graduate students placed emphasis on supporting student mental health and ensuring students’ feel supported, encouraged and motivated to complete.

**Other comments** related to things identified as most crucial to graduate student course completion, included:

*“Provide materials such as laptops for those who require them.”*

*“Support maternity leave (e.g. paid) and transitioning back to PhD after maternity leave.”*

*“Make [completing] ‘on-time’ longer. 3 year + extension is not enough for an interesting PhD (without mental health problems). 4 years should be standard.”*

## 5.8 Opportunity for comments regarding your general progress.

Thirty-four students from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 27

Positive comments: 14

General theme	Number of responses
Professional development	5
Good supervision	4
Poor supervision	4
Health	3
Research environment	3
Slow progress	3
Coursework	2
Financial issues	2
Bad staff	1
Career development and advice	1
Office and workspace	1
Timeframe too short	1

The overwhelming majority of graduate student comments to this statement contained **negative** reflections. Comments that were particularly negative, included:

*“I am disappointed that the length of the PhD has been systematically reduced. It leaves less time for personal development, reading, learning, academic involvement, and the building of true expertise. The PhD is slowly being transformed into a master’s degree and this is a great loss.”*

*“No money for sick leave sucks, as does only 3 years of (low) funding. I’m almost entirely broke – trying to survive for the last 6 months without a scholarship to complete this thing.”*

*“A PhD is stressful and being part of the new cohort of students in the ‘new Monash PhD’ program has put a lot of stress and pressure on me to complete this work within the really*

*tight 3-year timeframe.”*

However, some MNHS graduate students shared **positive** reflections on their course progression at Monash University. Noteworthy comments, included:

*“It has been a rough ride, but I have learnt a lot and grown tremendously as a researcher and an individual.”*

*“I finished in exactly 3 years ... All thanks to my primary supervisor. He was extremely efficient in reviewing my work. He also regularly motivated me to finish on time.”*

*“I am enjoying the overall experience of being at the forefront of my tiny field of research and even getting paid to do it (if modestly). Such opportunities are few and I treasure it. Sure, there are bumps all over the place, but it makes those moments of calm and understanding even better.”*

Other **notable comments**, included:

*“I have passed my confirmation, but I haven’t published anything. My expectation was that I could publish something at least once per year during my candidature. Unfortunately, I felt that my supervisors were not into it.”*

*“As students we are expected to do a ridiculous number of things: generate data, complete a thesis, publish, attend weekly seminars, actively engage in the research community (through additional seminars), go to conferences, network, present our data (and yes, preparing for talks and posters takes up a lot of time), prepare for reviews (which also takes a lot of time), be involved with different committees ... [and] complete coursework. Where is the time left for us to learn, and focus on our research? I agree that these additional tasks help us learn other important skills, but we should be acknowledged for spending additional time on all of this, rather than consistently being reminded that we should finish within 3 years.”*

*“I absolutely will not risk my mental health, nor the well-being of my dependents to meet some arbitrary deadline. You don’t undertake a PhD just to pass. It is a journey and everyone’s will be different. There needs to be some room to go down the wrong path along the way and tight deadlines don’t allow that.”*

## 5.9 Summary

Many MNHS respondents (43.6%) had experienced a delay in their research degree, while just under a third (30.2%) had considered discontinuing their enrolment.

Though it was not directly tracked in this survey, it is interesting to note that there is evidence of a correlation between choosing one’s own supervisor and good and timely progress.<sup>19</sup> Presumably this is because prospective students have taken time to consider who is best placed to support their research, in terms of availability, subject knowledge, personality and so on. The data explored in *1. Supervision* supports the premise that those who had good working relationships with their

---

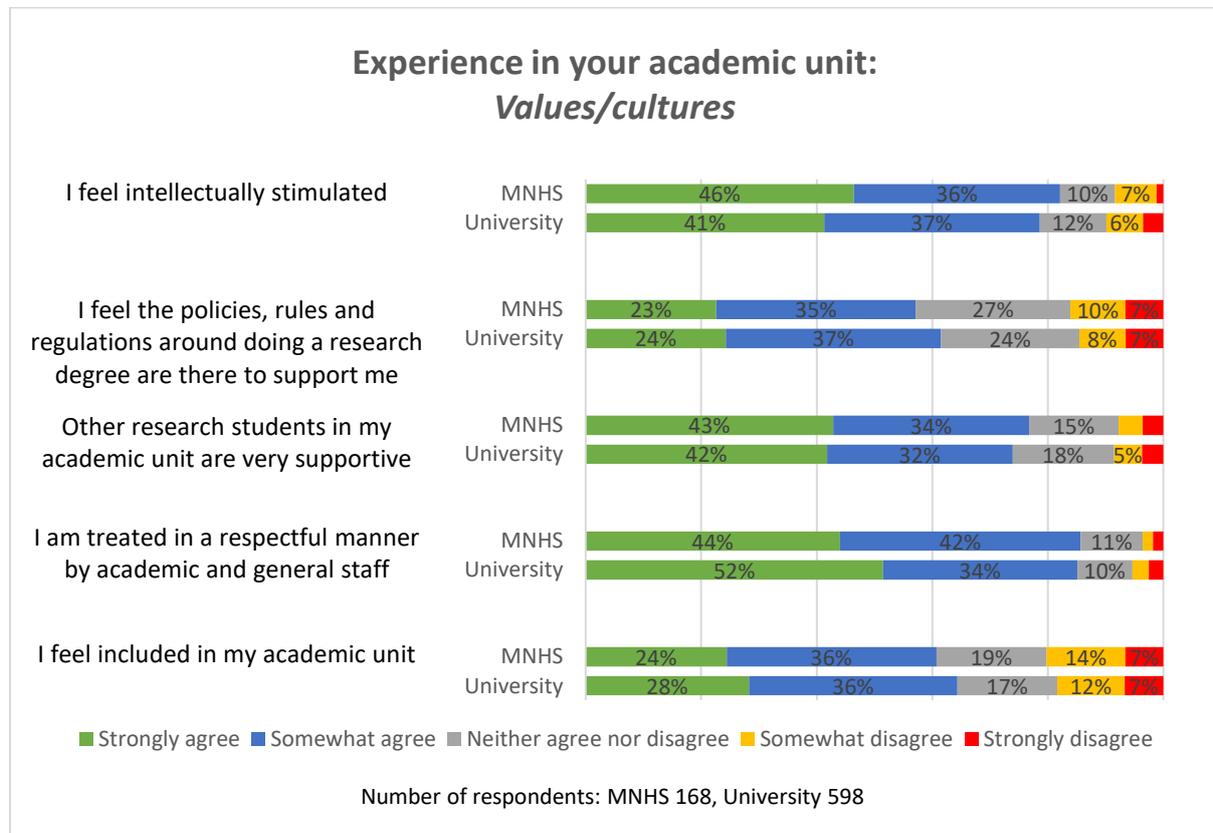
<sup>19</sup> Glenice Ives and Glenn Rowley, “Supervisor selection or allocation and continuity of supervision,” 535.

supervisors were more satisfied and less likely to experience delays and think about discontinuing their degrees.

The feedback in 3. *Coursework* and 4. *Professional Development* revealed that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the attachment of compulsory requirements to these offerings, and this was supported in this section with *changing or removing professional development* being the third most popular suggestion (behind *administration* and *supervision*) on the list of *the most important things the University could do for you to help you complete on time*, while *changing or removing compulsory coursework* was sixth on the list.

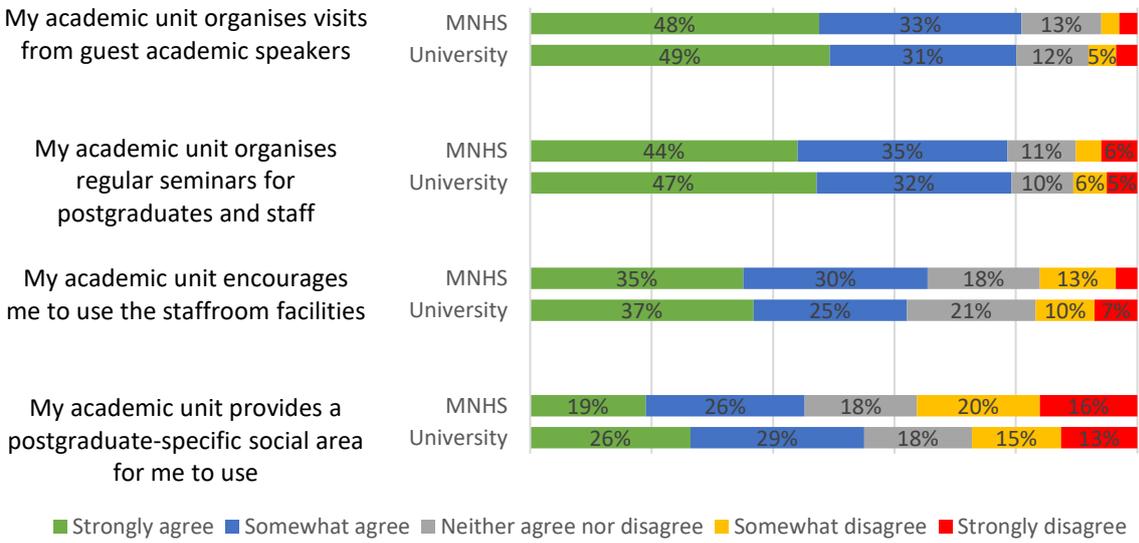
## 6. School culture and facilities

6.1 Please rate the following statements in relation to your specific experience in your academic unit:



MNHS respondents tended to agree with positive statements relating to the values and culture of their faculty. Eighty-six percent (86%) either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement 'I am treated in a respectful manner by academic and general staff,' while 60% agreed that they felt included in their academic unit.

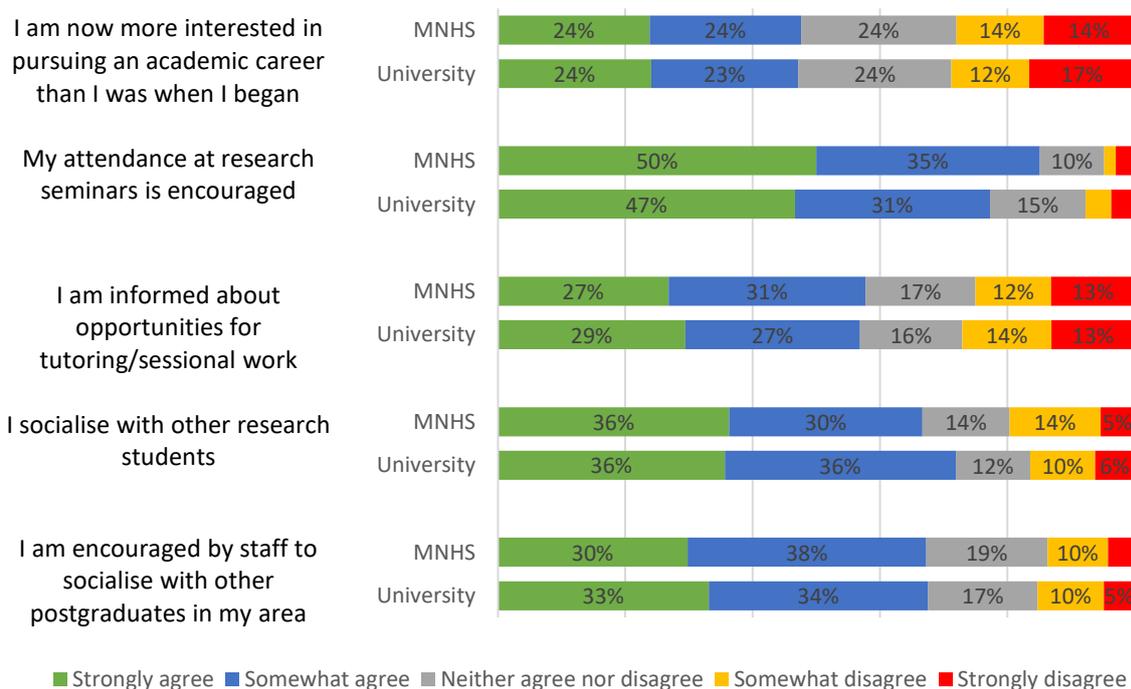
**Experience in your academic unit:  
Facilities/resources**



Number of respondents: MNHS 168, University 598

MNHS graduate students generally agreed with positive statements regarding the facilities and resources available to them as members of their faculty; however, only 45% agreed that their academic unit provided a graduate student-specific social area for their use.

### Experience in your academic unit: *Opportunities*

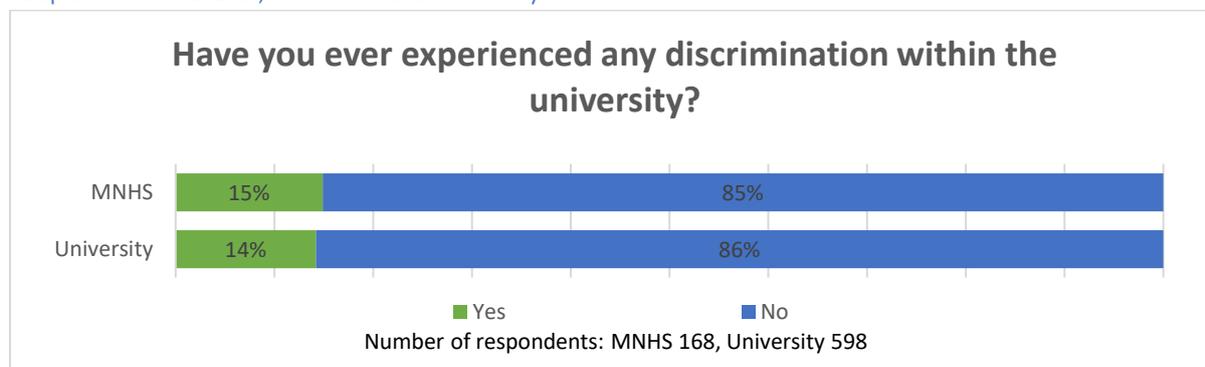


Number of respondents: MNHS 168, University 598

Only 48% of MNHS respondents agreed that they were more interested in pursuing an academic career than they were when they began their, while 85% felt they were encouraged to attend research seminars.

While off-campus respondents (52%) were less likely than on-campus respondents (67%) to agree that they were ‘informed about opportunities for tutorial/sessional work,’ they (73%) were more likely to agree than on-campus respondents (59%) that they were ‘encouraged by staff to socialise with other postgraduates’ in their areas.

### 6.2 Have you ever experienced any discrimination due to gender, race, religion, family responsibilities etc., within the University?



Number of respondents: MNHS 168, University 598

Fifteen percent (15%) of MNHS respondents had experienced discrimination at Monash, which was on par with the University average.

### 6.3 Opportunity for comments regarding the way in which you are treated.

Thirty-eight graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 28      Positive comments: 8

General theme	Number of responses
Research and workplace environment	10
Discrimination – gender	6
Discrimination – families	4
Bad supervisors	3
Off-campus issues	3
Discrimination – culture/religion/nationality	2
Discrimination – disability	1

Responses from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences graduate students to this statement were predominantly negative. One issue of particular relevance was a perceived poor **research and workplace environment**. Revealing comments, included:

*“Complaints regarding workspace should be taken seriously. Loud and noisy offices should not be tolerated. This truly affected my work for at least 6 months.”*

*“I had to work with an abusive member in my lab for the first 2 years of my project.”*

An alarming six responses from MNHS graduate students referenced **gender discrimination**. Insightful comments, included:

*“This is often simply in the language used towards me, or assumptions about my intelligence. Comments have been made about my clothing, and my ability to lift a rotor into a centrifuge was questioned in front of a group of colleagues where I was called a ‘little girl’. The sexism I have experienced is subtle, but undeniable and belittling in my professional environment.”*

*“Gender discrimination on rare occasions – only from co-workers, never from supervisors.”*

Likewise, **discrimination against those with families** was also referenced by a few students.

*“People with caring responsibilities have unpredictable lives and work around the clock (not 9am – 5pm), 7 days a week to get work done. Adding deadlines that are not-negotiable is neither fair nor equitable.”*

*“[My previous supervisor] always blamed my poor quality of work ... [on] ‘excuses given about family responsibilities’.”*

On the other hand, there were several **positive** reflections on how MNHS graduate students felt the University treated them.

*“I am always treated well, with dignity and respect.”*

*“People in my academic unit are friendly and supportive!”*

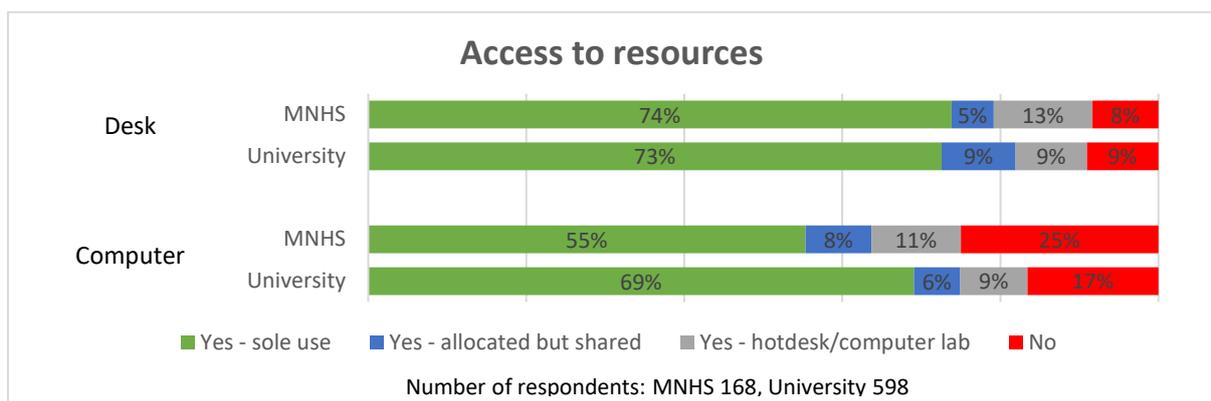
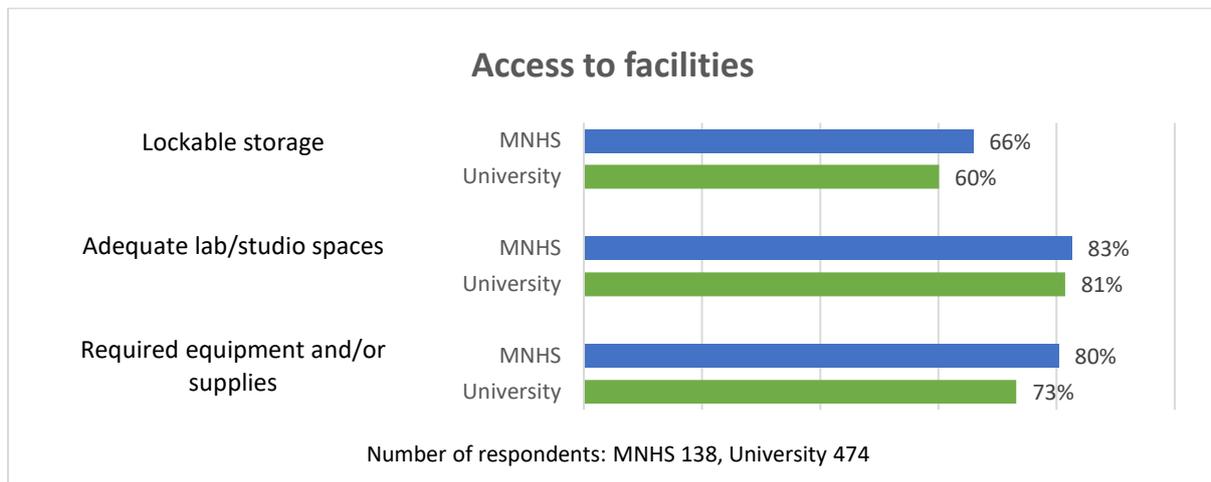
Other **notable comments**, included:

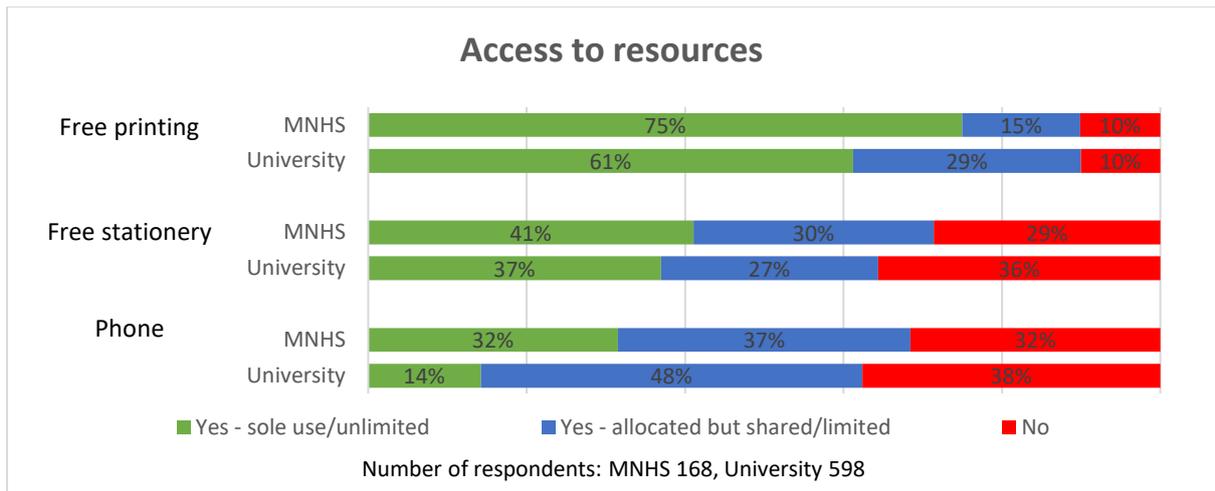
*“Not enough respect for my needs for timely feedback from supervisors.”*

*“Some local students have very strong discriminatory views towards international students.”*

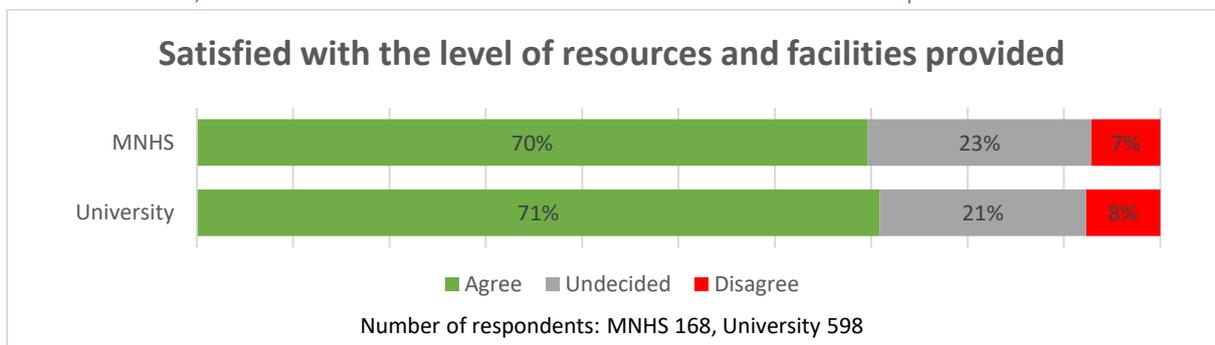
*“Some online PD and HR training fail to include closed captioning, making it difficult [for] a hearing-impaired person.”*

6.4 Does your academic unit provide any of the following facilities? Please select as many as relevant.





6.5 Overall, I am satisfied with the level of resources and facilities provided to me.



MNHS graduate students were predominantly satisfied with the resources and facilities provided to them; however, off-campus respondents (76%) were more satisfied than on-campus respondents (61%).

6.6 Opportunity for comment regarding the adequacy of the facilities you receive. What additional facilities would help support you through to completion?

Forty-six graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Positive comments: 13

Negative comments: 8

General theme	Number of responses
Computers/laptops/monitors	6
Personal desk	5
Phone	5
Private office/studio	5
Stationery	5
Lockers and storage space	4
Printer	2
Unique requests	2
Maintenance	1
Software and licensing agreements/access	1
Standing desks	1
Workshop/lab/studio	1

Thirteen graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences reflected positively on the adequacy of the facilities they receive at Monash University, compared to eight graduate students who reflected negatively. This indicates that MNHS graduate students were substantially more satisfied with the facilities provided to them than graduate students from other faculties.

Regarding facilities that would help support MNHS graduate students complete their degrees, there was a range of suggestions made. The primary suggestion involved improving **computer/laptop/monitor** access.

*“A laptop or desktop should be provided to PhD candidates. I use my own personal laptop for my PhD work and there is no desktop provided for us to use.”*

*“The computer provided isn’t powerful enough for my analysis.”*

*“I have to buy my own laptop and will be reimbursed \$1000. \$1000 is not enough for a computer ... I do have one at my desk, but it is close to 10 years old, has Windows Vista on it, is extremely slow and makes so much noise [that] I’m concerned it may suddenly catch on fire. The school should provide me with one.”*

**Unique requests** of MNHS graduate students, included: more online coursework/professional development classes and free parking on campus.

**Other notable comments**, included:

*“I have had to consistently state my case for why adequate desk and office resources (such as a phone) are critical to my work and indeed if it weren’t for the representation made by the supervisor then I doubt I would have access to all the resources I require to undertake my research.”*

*“Access to computer and internet is great; however, there is no standing desk available for students. As a PhD student who spends hours sitting in front of a computer, I have problems with my back. I am in severe need of a standing desk. I noticed that in the induction videos, students were provided with standing desks, but it doesn’t seem to apply in my unit.”*

*“It would be great if there was a PhD hub provided at the Alfred where the students can quietly write. Currently there is none.”*

*“I was surprised by the lack of stationery in the shared PhD hot desk area, but once known I bought my own supplies with me.”*

*“Lockable draw isn’t ... given. I didn’t have one until I took on someone’s old locked draw. Poor facilities.”*

## 6.7 Summary

Arguably the most direct insight into MNHS graduate students’ sense of belonging is provided through the responses to the statement *‘I feel included in my academic unit.’* **MNHS graduate students were less likely than their University counterparts to express that they were positive about their sense of inclusion in their academic units.**

The absence of a sense of belonging in the research/faculty/scholarly community has been identified as a key cause of stress in postgraduate studies,<sup>20</sup> with PhD students who find themselves well-integrated in their research environments experiencing less stress and burnout.”<sup>21</sup> This was reflected in the MGA HDR survey with those agreeing with the statement *‘I feel included in my academic unit’* repeatedly being less likely to associate an uncomfortable level of stress with all of the stress-related statements in 7. *Stress*.

While 86% of respondents agreed that they were treated *‘in a respectful manner by academic and general staff,’* when given the chance to comment on the way in which they were treated, the majority (28) of the 38 comments were negative. The most frequent negative comments were in reference to the research and workplace environment with several respondents reflecting that socialising in this environment was difficult.

The results of this survey indicate a correlation between the absence of a sense of belonging and academic and social isolation. **These results emphasise the importance of encouraging graduate students to socialise and develop professional relationships with their peers.**

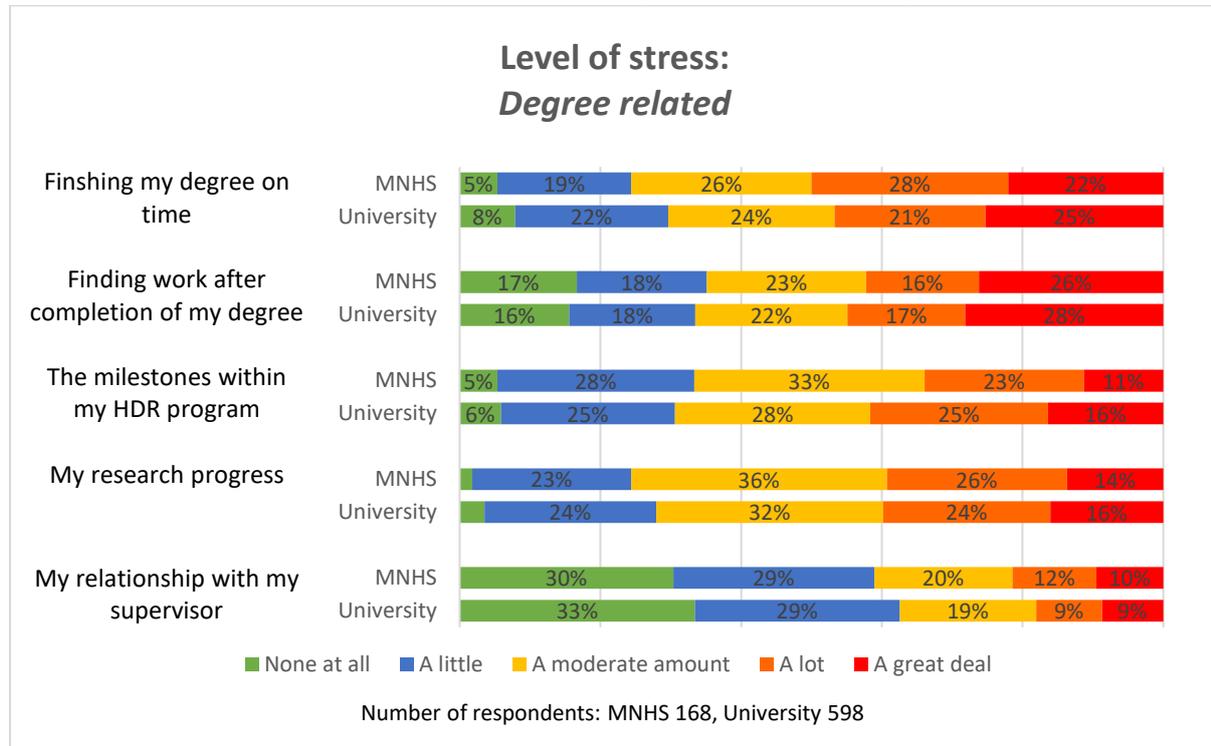
---

<sup>20</sup> Jon Cornwall, Elizabeth C. Mayland, Jacques van der Meer, Rachel A. Spronken-Smith, Charles Tustin and Phil Blyth, “Stressors in early-stage doctoral students,” *Studies in Continuing Education* 41, no. 3 (2019): 367.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Jesper Herrmann and Gitte Wichmann-Hansen, “Validation of the quality in PhD processes questionnaire,” *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 8, no. 2 (2017): 192.

## 7. Stress and wellbeing

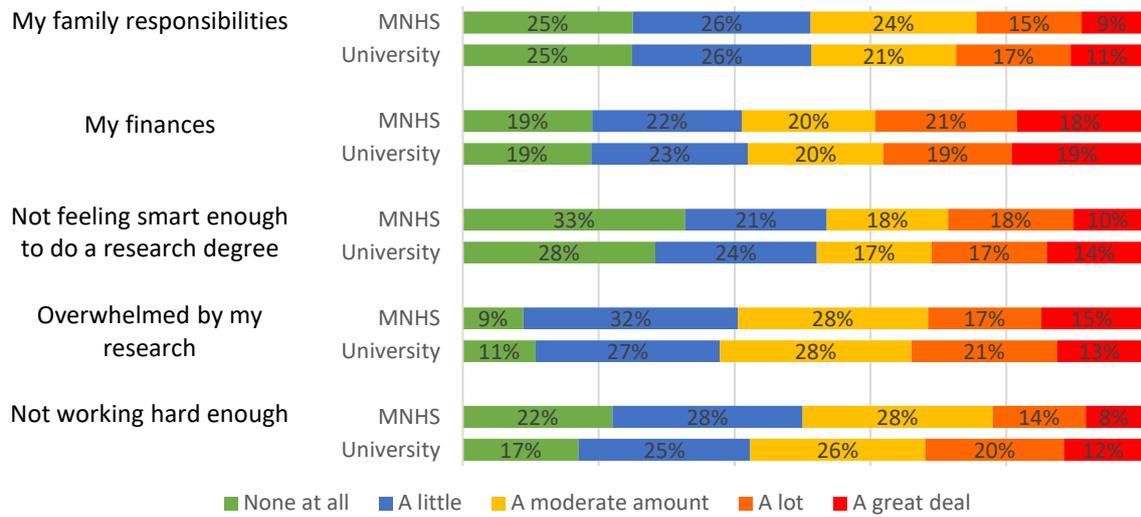
### 7.1 Please select your level of stress regarding any of the following:



The primary cause of degree-related stress for MNHS respondents was related to finishing their degrees on time with one in every two surveyed indicating they experienced an uncomfortable level of stress because of it. At the other end of the scale, only 22% felt an uncomfortable level of stress because of their relationship with their supervisor.

Off-campus respondents (46%) were more likely than those on-campus (36%) to associate an uncomfortable level of stress with finding work after the completion of their degree; however, they (28%) were less likely than on-campus respondents (42%) to associate an uncomfortable level of stress with the milestones in their HDR programs.

**Level of stress:**  
*Personal responsibilities and expectations*

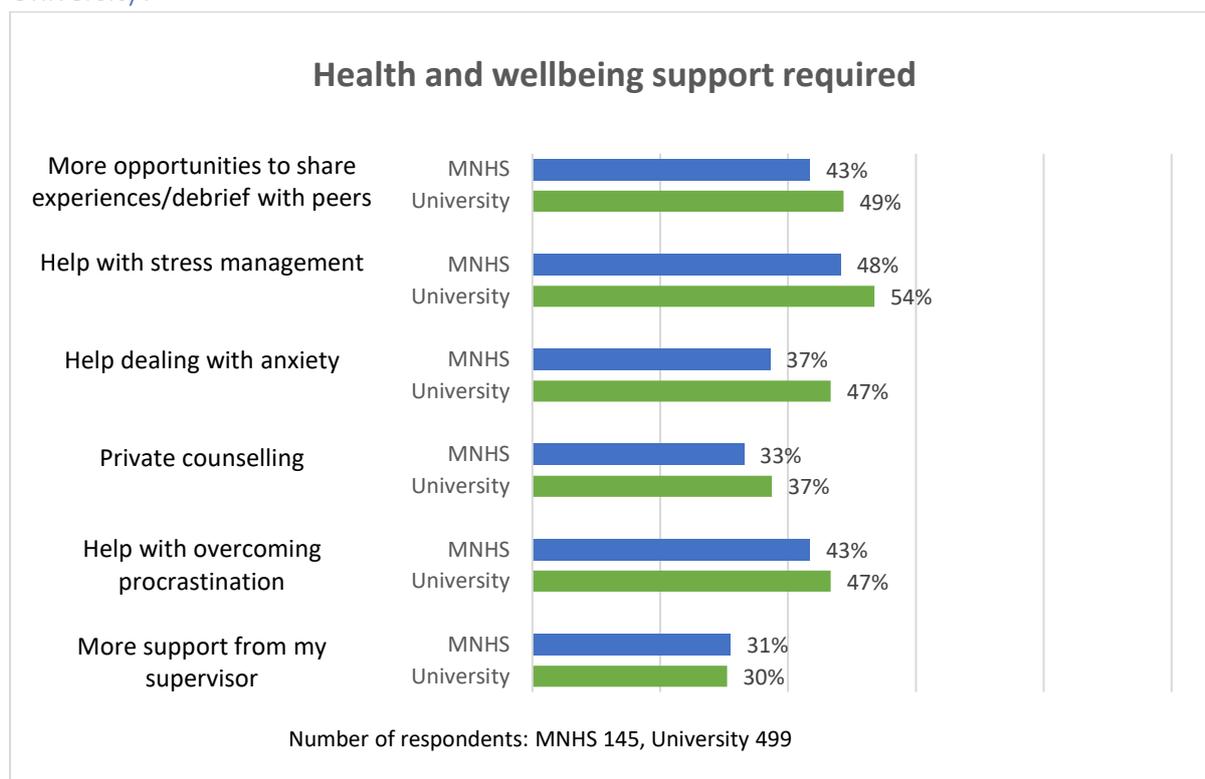


Number of respondents: MNHS 168, University 598

The primary cause of stress related to personal responsibilities and expectations among MNHS respondents was their finances. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of respondents experienced an uncomfortable level of stress as a result of this.

While off-campus respondents (45%) were more likely than on-campus respondents (32%) to experience an uncomfortable level of stress because of their finances, they were less likely to associate an uncomfortable level of stress with the statements ‘not working hard enough’ (Off-campus: 16%, On-campus: 30%) and ‘overwhelmed by my research’ (Off-campus: 26%, On-campus: 38%).

## 7.2 What kind of health and wellbeing support would you like to receive from the University?



MNHS graduate students most wanted to see the University offer help with stress management.

## 7.3 Opportunity for comments regarding health and wellbeing

Thirty-four graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 23      Positive comments: 8

General theme	Number of responses
Stress/anxiety/depression/isolation	9
Financial pressures	7
Family pressures	3
Career anxieties	2
Overwhelmed and overworked	1

The majority of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences graduate students felt that the current services offered by the University in relation to health and wellbeing were **inadequate**; however, opinions ranged on the extent of this inadequacy. Insightful comments, included:

*“I don’t feel that enough attention or support is given to PhD students – especially when there are issues with supervisors. A mentor, who is totally independent of the supervisors,*

*and who can provide confidential debrief and advice on the supervision relationship, would be helpful.”*

*“It feels belittling/invalidating when I’m told that my stress issues are due to poor time management or procrastination. It is helpful when other students are able to confirm that my work load is above what is reasonable, but this is not always reflected in attitudes presented by the faculty.”*

An alarming number of MNHS graduate students referenced **stress, anxiety, depression or isolation** in their responses. Noteworthy comments, included:

*“Doing a PhD in medical research is intensely isolating. I am downstairs in the animal house working long hours by myself and I come in on the weekends ... I also had episodes of fatigue during this period which my supervisors considered laziness when I couldn’t get out of bed in time because I was catching up on sleep. I was depressed for these periods and wish I had sought a counsellor sooner.”*

*“PhDs are still really hard though and work-life balance seems impossible in a PhD. I’m very lucky that I have a friendship group that talk about mental health, but I know it’s rare. I would like to see more around PhD-specific mental health issues. We need to acknowledge the stats around mental health issues for PhD candidates and start talking about it, so people know they’re not alone.”*

*“I have been acutely unwell (mental health) during the PhD, at times. There could be more opportunities created to discuss this (or even disclose) to supervisors. It would be good if they asked more general questions about how PhD life is going.”*

A substantial number of MNHS graduate students also discussed **financial pressures** in their responses.

*“I’m about to pay close to \$100 ... per month for psych support to get me through the next 2+ years (so +\$2k) as the deadlines make me anxious, which slows my progress.”*

*“I think coping with finances is a huge deal for many students. As most supervisors are not fussed about when students finished, they often have to complete months of their PhD without financial support.”*

While the majority of MNHS respondents believed services were inadequate, a small number did believe that health and wellbeing services offered at Monash were **adequate**.

*“I know the University provides lots of help with mental health management – I’m aware of them and have used some of them.”*

*“I’ve accessed lots of different services/personal development provided through the Uni. Mindfulness course was great.”*

*“Its great to see that the counsellor is now coming out to the Alfred Centre. Interestingly, a lot of group PhD student activities would naturally turn into a group debrief session even if that is not what the intended outcome of the session was!”*

**Other notable comments** to emerge, included:

*“I would appreciate more flexibility in terms of how I manage my time. With the deadlines to complete being so short it is difficult to make time for anything else in my life. It is also difficult to imagine finding the time for broad self-directed learning in my field that is not directly related to my project. This is my last opportunity to put my learning first and my work second. It feels that the primary purpose of the PhD, in building new experts in the field is being lost. I would appreciate more time to spend on learning and advanced classes in my field.”*

*“Being overwhelmed tends to be a cyclical occurrence in the PhD process. Not sure what help might be available for those of us that tend to procrastinate.”*

Included across the responses of the ninety-one graduate students were a number of suggestions on health and wellbeing services that they would like to see implemented. Interesting comments in relation to **suggestions for services**, included:

*“Financial planning/counselling would be great. And more flexible PhD arrangements to make: sick leave easier to apply for, and funded; related work (e.g. tutoring, RA work) supported, valued and factored into timelines; and, managing mental health illness while studying less stigmatising.”*

*“Coaching or industry-specific guidance on type of job markets the student may be suitable for will be very helpful.”*

## 7.4 Summary

In relation to their degrees, MNHS respondents were most-stressed about finishing their degree on time and least-stressed about their relationship with their supervisor, while in relation to their personal responsibilities and expectations, they were most-stressed about their finances and least-stressed about not working hard enough.

‘*Help with stress management*’ was identified as the support that MNHS respondents most wanted to receive from the University, followed closely by ‘*more opportunities to share experiences/debrief with peers*’ and ‘*help with overcoming procrastination.*’ This was reflected in the open comments with stress/anxiety/depression/isolation being consistently brought up and again when several respondents suggested more peer-support groups and mindfulness and wellbeing services should be available.

While there was some infrequent support for existing University services related to stress and wellbeing, graduate students were substantially more likely to comment on how inadequate existing services were.

Doctoral candidate attrition has been linked to feelings of social isolation that can stem from confusion about program expectations and a lack of meaningful communication with peers and faculty/University staff.<sup>22</sup> Peers (such as fellow graduate students or postdoctoral researchers) can

---

<sup>22</sup> Dharmananda Jairam and David H. Kahl, Jr., “Navigating the doctoral experience,” 312.

be crucial as, for example, they can be a source of emotional, social and intellectual support which can replace or complement supervisory guidance.<sup>23</sup>

PhD candidates isolating themselves is one of the most important factors in determining delay.<sup>24</sup> Peer interaction has been found to be related to persistence (with HDR degrees), insofar as degree completers are more likely to be involved with their academic peers than those who drop out.<sup>25</sup> Peer support initiatives are also useful in creating a positive research community and facilitating a sense of belonging,<sup>26</sup> so increasing the opportunities for graduate students to socialise with each other should also result in a greater rate of retention. As such, the results of the MGA HDR survey suggest that **MNHS graduate students could benefit from an increase in social support and wellbeing services.**

---

<sup>23</sup> Lilia Mantai and Robyn Dowling, "Supporting the PhD journey: insights from acknowledgements," *International Journal for Research Development* 6, no. 2 (2015): 106-07.

<sup>24</sup> Rens van de Schoot et al., "What took them so long?" 3.

<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Richert Bair and Jennifer Grant Haworth, "Doctoral student attrition and persistence," 491.

<sup>26</sup> Jon Cornwall et al, "Stressors in early-stage doctoral students," 367.

## 8. Overall comments

### 8.1 What are the best aspects of being a Monash research postgraduate?

One-hundred and nine graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Facilities/services/resources	37
Research – intellectual stimulation and development	35
Monash academics/faculties/staff	28
Monash reputation	20
Supportive environment and culture	20
Student peers and colleagues	17
Supervisors	14
Social events/environment	10
Networking opportunities	8
Training/coursework/professional development	6
Career opportunities	2
Location	1
MGA	1

Many Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences graduate students were particularly pleased with the **facilities, services and/or resources** provided to them as students of the University. Relative comments covered a range of areas, including: labs, office space, accessible facilities, journal articles, personal and professional support, software for personal use, world-class facilities, research facilities, equipment, reliable IT, library help and free training.

Furthermore, several MNHS graduate researchers referenced **research and intellectual stimulation and development** as being one of the best aspects of their Monash experience. Insightful comments, included:

*“Meeting the incredible academics and exploring more of the area of research that I’m interested in, as well as areas that are similar.”*

*“That I’m finally doing something that I’ve wanted to achieve for a long time.”*

*“Freedom to exercise intellectual curiosity and research your own ideas.”*

Also receiving several references were **Monash academics, staff and faculties**. Praise was directed at academic staff, specific faculties and schools, library staff, IT services and administrative staff. Interesting comments, included:

*“I feel well-supported by the faculty (everything I need, I feel I receive).”*

*“This is my 5<sup>th</sup> year with Monash, I feel at home at Monash and have the support of many staff and students there.”*

*“High-quality teaching staff.”*

Several of the respondents perceived Monash as a **supportive environment** with a **supportive culture**.

*“Extremely supportive people around me.”*

*“People are generally encouraging and supportive of your research. Most staff and academics are approachable and friendly.”*

*“There have been plenty of resources at Monash that helped me get through the most stressful nightmares of my PhD. Although none of them could solve the problem, they showed support and it was heart-warming.”*

Another theme to receive significant mentions related to the **reputation of Monash University**. Revealing comments, included:

*“Completing with a Monash degree at the end of it all.”*

*“Monash is a highly regarded Uni.”*

*“The Uni name.”*

**Other notable comments**, included:

*“The large support network with other students.”*

*“Strong history of success – my supervisors have had many students complete, which gave me confidence.”*

*“Being part of a diverse community of aspiring researchers.”*

## 8.2 What are the worst aspects of being a Monash research postgraduate?

One-hundred and six graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Administration and communication	17
Location	13
Stress and wellbeing	13
Course length and workload	10
Facilities/services/resources	10
Lack of support/value	10
Financial issues	9
Isolation	9
Professional development	9
Supervisors	6
Staff	5
Unclear requirements	5
Compulsory coursework	3
Lack of community and socialising	3
Monash priorities	3
Off-campus issues	3
Milestones	2
Campus issues	1
Lack of international student support	1
Lack of teaching/career opportunities	1

The primary complaint of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences graduate students related to the University's **administration systems and management**. Notable comments, included:

*"I feel like Monash is faceless. It's very hard to find the information that you need. The my.monash website is not very intuitive."*

*"No recognition of my prior learning or work experience. My travel expenses never get refunded. It's as if the online system doesn't think I exist."*

Issues with **stress and wellbeing** were also high on the list of worst aspects related to graduate students' degrees at MNHS. Interesting comments, included:

*"Too much pressure and stress."*

*"Poor work/life balance due to working almost all weekends."*

*"Being a postgraduate student, I don't think it is a Monash-specific problem (more systemic in postgraduate courses everywhere) but when it is the 'norm' for a degree to push its members to breaking point – THERE IS A PROBLEM. The only justification I have ever received while discussing poor mental health with members of my faculty is 'everyone has been there'. I think people need to realise that just because it is normal, does not mean that it is okay! There is something wrong with a degree that routinely pushes people to breaking point."*

**Other notable themes**, included:

- **Professional development** – MNHS graduate students were largely negative about professional development requirements with complaints largely focused on how irrelevant units were and how they were a waste of time.
- **Lack of community and socialising** – some graduate students protested the lack of a sense of community at Monash or that socialising and social events were not plentiful or encouraged.
- **Facilities, services and resources** – several MNHS respondents were dissatisfied with University infrastructure and offerings.
- **Course length and workload** – as with responses to some previous questions, MNHS researchers were frustrated by the expected completion timeframe and workload.
- **Lack of support/value** – several respondents complained that they did not feel valued by the University and/or adequately supported.
- **Isolation** – feeling alone or isolated from other students/staff was an issue raised by several MNHS students.
- **Finances** - a few MNHS respondents were frustrated by limited access to funding and scholarships.

Some **other notable comments**, included:

*“Monash treats you like cattle. They’re only in it for the money and don’t ... [care] about people.”*

*“Isolation. The offices are tiny, and it can feel like no one is present at the department. Communal workspaces for postgrad students, rather than individual offices would be better.”*

*“Trying to juggle work and [a] PhD and balance this with the need for money!”*

### 8.3 How can the research postgraduate experience be improved?

Ninety-five graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Facilities/services/resources	22
Community and culture	16
Professional development	12
Administration/communication	11
Coursework	11
Funding/finances	10
Supervisors	9
Milestones	7
Monash priorities	6
Mentoring	5
Off-campus	5
Course length and time	4
Career opportunities/development	3
Orientation/induction	3
Training	3
Health and wellbeing support	2
Myki discount	1

The primary suggestion that Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences graduate students made related to improving the **facilities, services and/or resources** provided to them as students of the University. Relative comments covered a range of areas, including: clearer guidelines, personal desks, family services, improve software, location and laptops/computers.

Another well-supported suggestion of MNHS graduate students related to improving the **sense of community and culture** within the University. Notable comments, included:

*“Teach all staff and students racial harmony and how to be fair and just [when] treating others.”*

*“More support groups for those with family responsibilities. A lot of activities seem geared towards those who are able to stay back late after office hours or on weekends.”*

*“There needs to be more opportunities for postgrad research students to socialise. I’m sure that there are heaps of opportunities, but they aren’t very visible at the moment to us.”*

**Professional development** was another area where a substantial number of students wished to see improvements made.

*“Remove the 120 hours of compulsory training that is additional – it should be left to the students to decide when and what extra seminars/workshops they attend.”*

*“More discipline-specific workshops and seminars.”*

*“More professional development opportunities for off-campus students. Also, run those sessions that book out early [again] fairly soon after the first offering.”*

An improved **administrative service** with the capability to **communicate better** was another suggestion that had significant references. Memorable comments, included:

*“Stop changing all the requirements/milestones etc. These add huge stress and, at times, are extremely time-consuming.”*

*“Admin staff should be made well aware of the course structure – they have great responsibilities to make sure students’ courses go smoothly.”*

**Other notable themes**, included:

- **Funding/finances** – MNHS graduate students suggested their course experience would be improved by greater access to scholarships and grants (travel, study).
- **Coursework** – respondents from MNHS wanted to see coursework improved or removed.
- **Milestones** – some suggested milestones be scrapped, while others wanted greater flexibility in how, when and in front of whom they are run.
- **Supervision** – several MNHS respondents wanted improvements to supervision that would empower the student and identify and penalise poor or inadequate supervisors.

Some **other notable comments** from MNHS graduate students, included:

*“Helping share the realities of a PhD and what progress looks like. Often my peers and I feel that we are not progressing, that we will never finish, and that our supervisors have higher expectations of us than we can offer.”*

*“Supervisors have to be aware and fulfil their responsibilities. Their work has to be reviewed and assessed as well.”*

*“More time [and] more support in pursuing advanced knowledge in my field. It is important to pursue advanced understanding across the field, not simply surrounding my research project.”*

*“I think there needs to be more external bodies in place to overview the ongoing of a research project or panel.”*

8.4 Anything else you'd like to say? This is an opportunity to make any comment that is pertinent to your experience as a research student at Monash. We want to hear it so fire away!

Thirty-five graduate students from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Monash staff and services dissatisfaction	12
Monash general dissatisfaction	10
MGA appreciation	5
Financial dissatisfaction	4
Monash staff and services appreciation	4
Monash appreciation	3
PhD challenges	3
MGA events	2
MGA suggestions	2

Most frequently the comments from Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences graduate students related to **dissatisfaction with Monash staff and services**. Noteworthy comments, included:

*“There needs to be more accountability on supervisor performance.”*

*“This has not been a good experience, and if I had the opportunity over again, I wouldn’t do a PhD at Monash because of significant issues within the school.”*

*“Most oftentimes I need to chase up Monash for paperwork to be processed or remind them they have not sent me/my supervisors the paperwork so we can move on to the next step of the application process.”*

Likewise, several MNHS graduate students left comments in relation to **general dissatisfaction with Monash University**. These were predominantly in reference to the University’s models and systems, as well as the general nature of the University. Noteworthy comments, included:

*“It must be impossible to cater to the number and variety of students! However, I’m 42 years old, have a kid and am doing the PhD because I want to research this one topic and then I’m happy to be a part-time research assistant. So, a lot of the pressure, extra activities and encouragement to ‘do more’ are just adding stress to my life! Some allowance for those of us ... who know what we want and how to achieve it would be lovely =).”*

*“I hate being called a ‘student’ ... Language is important. Something like ‘graduate researchers’ would be better ... Make postgraduate students’ ‘staff’ for administrative purposes.”*

**Other notable themes**, included:

- **MGA appreciation** – several MNHS graduate students were appreciative of the role the Monash Graduate Association play in their candidature/course.
- **Financial dissatisfaction** – some respondents expressed that they had issues with prices for food and facilities on campus and/or the scholarship allowance.
- **Monash staff and services appreciation** – several graduate students were grateful for their supervision and interactions with Monash staff, as well as for the services offered by the University.

Some **other notable comments** from MNHS graduate students, included:

*“I am deeply concerned about the financial implications of undertaking postgraduate research. I am a part-time candidate; therefore, my scholarship payments are taxable. Furthermore, I accrue no superannuation in relation to these payments. Whilst I do undertake some paid work, my capacity to do so is limited because of my commitments to my family and my PhD. I believe that this problem is significant. I would hesitate to recommend postgraduate research to others, because of the financial implications.”*

*“I would say that Monash is doing everything right for PhD students academically/professionally, but could do more [for the] social aspect in order to combat certain emotional or mental health issues, like loss of motivation, feelings of isolation, depression etc.”*

*“Supervisors make the difference between a positive and rewarding PhD and a negative, horrible experience. Students should be informed how important this is.”*

*“I really wish there was a way for our supervisors to be evaluated so that they can get the feedback they need to really improve.”*

## 8.5 Summary

Perhaps in part because it is a broad theme, and also one that is principally subjective, *facilities, services and resources* came up repeatedly when graduate students were considering the best and the worst aspects of their degrees, as well as how they could be improved. These statements often related to the respondent’s infrastructure and learning expectations and requirements.

*The intellectual stimulation and development of research* ranked high in ‘*the best aspects of being a Monash research postgraduate*’ responses, as did *Monash academic, faculties and staff*.

*Administration and communication* were ranked as the worst aspects of being a Monash research graduate student, while *stress and wellbeing* (see 7. *Stress*) and *location* were second.

When it came to the question ‘*How can the research postgraduate experience be improved?*’ one of the primary suggestions from MNHS graduate students related to improving the sense of community and culture within the University.

## (iv) MGA Recommendations

Based on the findings of this survey and direct contact with the MNHS graduate student community, the MGA proposes the following recommendations:

### **Supervision:**

1. *That the Faculty consider encouraging and supporting prospective and incoming HDR students to choose their own supervisor.*

### **Milestones:**

2. *That graduate students are provided with clear, thorough and consistent information regarding milestone requirements.*
3. *More information made available to off-campus graduate students regarding milestone requirements.*

### **Coursework:**

4. *That coursework units become more relevant to graduate students' research degrees.*

### **Professional Development:**

5. *That MGRO consider making changes to myDevelopment,<sup>27</sup> such as:*
  - *making the program optional or reducing the number of compulsory hours;*
  - *increasing the course offerings so that more relevant courses are available;*
  - *increasing flexibility of what can be counted towards the required hours;*
  - *improving guidelines and processes relating to Recognition of Prior Learning;*
  - *improving information and communication between students and MGRO regarding the program, registration, keeping track of completed hours etc.; and,*
  - *creating an easier, more user-friendly online navigation system.*

### **School culture and facilities:**

6. *That the Faculty improve opportunities for interaction, networking and discussions among postgraduate peers.*
7. *That graduate students are offered seminars or workshops relating to 'preventing procrastination,' 'dealing with anxiety' and 'help with stress management.' They should also consider offering additional career seminars.*

---

<sup>27</sup> We note that the data in this report is from 2017 and acknowledge that efforts have since been made to tackle some of these issues.

## (v) Bibliography

Abdullah, Melissa Ng Lee Yen, and Terry Evans. "The relationship between postgraduates research students' psychological attributes and their supervisors' supervision training." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 31 (2012): 788-93.

Bair, Carolyn Richert, and Jennifer Grant Haworth. "Doctoral student attrition and persistence: a meta-synthesis of research." In *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research XIX*, edited by J. C. Smart, 481-534. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004.

Cornwall, Jon, Elizabeth C. Mayland, Jacques van der Meer, Rachel A. Spronken-Smith, Charles Tustin, and Phil Blyth. "Stressors in early-stage doctoral students." *Studies in Continuing Education* 41, no. 3 (2019): 363-80.

Halse, Christine, and James Malfroy. "Retheorizing doctoral supervision as professional work." *Studies in Higher Education* 31, no. 1 (2010): 79-92.

Herrmann, Kim Jesper, and Gitte Wichmann-Hansen. "Validation of the quality in PhD processes questionnaire," *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 8, no. 2 (2017): 189-204.

Holbrook, Allyson, Sid Bourke, and Robert Cantwell. "Using research candidate annual report data to examine supervision effectiveness," in *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Knowledge Creation in Testing Times Part 2 – Proceedings*, edited by Margaret Kiley and Gerry Mullins, 83-98. Adelaide: Quality of Postgraduate Research Conference, 2006.

Ives, Glenice, and Glenn Rowley. "Supervisors selection or allocation and continuity of supervision: PhD. Students' progress and outcomes." *Studies in Higher Education* 30, no. 5 (2005): 535-55.

Jairam, Dharmananda, and David H. Kahl Jr. Navigating the doctoral experience: The role of social support in successful degree completion." *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 7 (2012): 312-29.

Juniper, Bridget, Elaine Walsh, Alan Richardson, and Bernard Morley. "A new approach to evaluating the well-being of PhD research students," *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 37, no. 5 (2012): 563-76.

Kiley, Margaret. "Reflections on change in doctoral education: an Australian case study." *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 8, iss. 2 (2017): 78-87.

Lee, Alison, and Jo McKenzie. "Evaluating doctoral supervision: tensions in eliciting students' perspectives." *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 48, no.1 (2011): 69-78.

Lewicka, Maria, Janusz Czapinski and Guido Peeters. "Positive-negative asymmetry or 'When the heart needs a reason'." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 22 (1992): 425-34.

Mantai, Lilia, and Robyn Dowling. "Supporting the PhD journey: insights from acknowledgements." *International Journal for Research Development* 6, no. 2 (2015): 106-21.

Monash University Procedure. *Graduate Research Progress Management Procedures*. Melbourne: Monash University, 2017.

Poncheri, Reanna M., Jennifer T. Lindberg, Lori Foster Thompson and Eric A. Surface. "A comment on employee surveys: negativity bias in open-ended responses." *Organizational Research Methods* 11, no. 3 (2008): 614-630.

Rice, Kenneth G., Merideth E. Ray, Don E. Davis, Cirleen DeBlare, and Jeffrey S. Ashby. "Perfectionism and longitudinal patterns of stress for STEM majors: implications for academic performance." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 62, no. 4 (2015): 718-31.

Sight, Clair. *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2017: Experiences and personal outlook of postgraduate researchers*. Heslington (UK): The Higher Education Academy, 2017.

Van de Schoot, Rens, Mara A. Yerkes, Jolien M. Mouw, and Hans Sonneveld. "What took them so long? Explaining PhD delays among doctoral candidates." *PLoS One* 8, no. 7 (2013).

## (vi) Appendix 1

### Demographics of respondents from MNHS

<b>Faculty (Schools)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Australian Regenerative Medicine Institute	3	1.6%
Central Clinical School	18	9.4%
Eastern Health Clinical School	2	1.0%
Education Portfolio	2	1.0%
Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences (Malaysia)	4	2.1%
Monash Institute of Cognitive and Clinical Neurosciences	1	0.5%
Other	2	1.0%
School of Biomedical Sciences	41	21.5%
School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health	23	12.0%
School of Nursing and Midwifery	10	5.2%
School of Primary and Allied Health Care	18	9.4%
School of Psychological Sciences	33	17.3%
School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine	31	16.2%
School of Rural Health	3	1.6%

<b>Mode of attendance</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Internal	160	83.8%
External	26	13.6%
Multi-modal	5	2.6%

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Domestic student	138	72.3%
International student	53	27.7%

<b>Attendance type</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Full-time	166	86.9%
Part-time	25	13.1%

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	138	72.3%
Male	50	26.2%
Prefer not to say	1	0.5%
Prefer to self-describe, please specify	1	0.5%
Transgender	1	0.5%

<b>Enrolled Program</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
PhD	166	86.9%
Masters by research	8	4.2%
Other	17	8.9%

<b>Scholarship</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Receives Scholarship	158	82.7%
No scholarship	25	13.1%
No, but I have previously held a scholarship	8	4.2%

<b>Location</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
On-campus	83	43.5%
Off-campus <sup>28</sup>	108	56.5%

---

<sup>28</sup> Off-campus students are those who have a majority of their research conducted at a teaching site other than the students' campus of enrolment.