

Identifying Graduate Research Student Satisfaction



Faculty of Arts

Monash University 2024



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

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Executive summary

In April and May 2024, the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) conducted a survey of graduate students at Monash and nine other Australian universities. Similar surveys were conducted in 2017 and 2021, which have allowed for some comparisons throughout this report.

The main findings as they relate to graduate research students enrolled in the Faculty of Arts are summarised below:

Arts graduate researchers are overwhelmingly positive in relation to their supervision experience

The sentiment of Arts respondents in relation to supervision was overwhelmingly positive.

The University's recommended meeting frequency was mostly met with 66% of full-time graduate researchers meeting with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 78% of part-time Arts respondents met once a month or more frequently.

Supervisors were largely meeting the expectations and needs of their students. The most important aspects of supervision, according to Arts graduate researchers, were receiving constructive feedback and having skilled supervisors. Of the sixteen aspects surveyed, these areas ranked fourth and third respectively for satisfaction.

Help with networking (-14.63%) and help with feeling like they belong academically (-14.00%) were the two areas where the gap between importance and satisfaction were widest.

Student satisfaction with their academic unit high

Across the board, Arts graduate researchers were predominantly satisfied with the department or school in which they were enrolled.

The most common response as to the most satisfying aspect of their academic unit was that they were treated in a respectful manner, while the most common dissatisfying aspect was in relation to feeling like they could have a career in a place like this.

Confirmation process is largely satisfactory

Respondents were widely satisfied their confirmation experience. In particular, they were satisfied that the behaviour and tone of the panel was professional.

The most common response as to the most useful aspect of confirmation was the beneficial feedback received, while the least useful aspect related to issues with the administration of the milestone.

Professional Development opportunities

Having Professional Development (PD) opportunities that focus on publishing skills was of the utmost importance to Arts graduate researchers, while experiencing PD with students from other fields was the least important.

Respondents were most satisfied with PD on professional ethics and least satisfied with industry exposure, while having coursework relevant to their research had widest gap between importance and satisfaction. Grant writing, presenting skills and publishing skills were other areas where the gap was wide.

In terms of additions to existing PD, opportunities to improve their research skills was the clear stand out.

Minor increase in number of graduate researchers working for the University, but Arts respondent do not feel they are paid appropriately for their work

There was a slight rise of Arts respondents reporting that they had worked for the University - up from 51% in 2021 to 56% in 2024. Of those who had worked for Monash, 76% were employed on a casual contract, while 18% had a fixed-term contract.

The majority of Arts respondents (55%) believed that they were definitely not paid appropriately for the work they did for the University and a further 21% indicated they were probably not paid appropriately. This contrasts sharply with respondents studying humanities at other universities of whom 0% said they were definitely not paid appropriately and 27% said they were probably not. Although not as dramatic a contrast, the pay dissatisfaction in Arts was also higher than that recorded across HASS at Monash.

Doubts, delays and drop outs

The majority of Arts graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 31% indicating that they experienced this feeling “often.”

One-quarter of Arts graduate researchers (25%) had never experienced a delay in their research, while 19% indicated that they often experienced delays.

Cost of living and/or financial concerns was the most common response for a delay in research among Arts graduate research students – more than doubling since 2021 levels. This was much more common in the Faculty than it was elsewhere.

Arts graduate researchers were more likely than their colleagues across HASS and those doing humanities degrees at other universities to have considered leaving their degree.

The most common reasons for considering leaving were mental health and financial issues.

The most common responses for continuing with their degree were time already invested and a personal interest or passion for the project.

MGA engagement and satisfaction better among international students and those who attend campus

Domestic part-time graduate researchers were the most likely to have not engaged with the MGA – followed by students who study entirely off-campus.

Students were most likely to have a neutral opinion of the MGA; however, substantially more were satisfied than dissatisfied.

Introduction

The Monash Graduate Association (MGA) ran a survey of graduate students in April and May 2024 across nine Australian universities. In relation to graduate research students, the aim of the MGA's *National Postgraduate Student Satisfaction Survey* was to better understand their degree experience.

This report explores many of the pillars of a research degree, including supervision, the academic unit, confirmation and professional development. It also looks into some common associated experiences, including paid employment opportunities, imposter syndrome, research delays and thoughts of dropping out. Finally, the report highlights the engagement and satisfaction of Monash graduate research students with the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) and includes suggestions for how the MGA could better support the University's students.

This report provides data and findings specifically for respondents enrolled at in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University. In Arts, a total of 80 graduate research students participated in the survey (see *Appendix 1: Demographics*), which we estimate to be approximately 19% of enrolled graduate research students at the Faculty.

The survey was advertised in the MGA newsletter, on the MGA website, through MGA social media channels and through contacts with Monash faculty groups and associate deans, many of whom agreed to forward the advertising of the survey to their students. Participants were self-selecting, so an incentive scheme (comprising the opportunity to win one of 100 gift cards worth \$50 in value) was used to assist in attracting a representative sample.

With the support of colleagues at student associations across Australia, this survey was offered to postgraduate students at nine other universities. Respondents from the University of Queensland, Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, Southern Cross University, University of Sydney, University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, Victoria University and Federation University are all represented in this survey. A total of 30 graduate research students in the field of humanities completed the survey across these universities.

Where appropriate, comparisons between Monash and non-Monash respondents have been made.

This research has been approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 41520).

Limitations

While this report provides valuable insight into graduate research student satisfaction, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the interpretation of results. Two such limitations are outlined below.

Over- and under-representation of demographic groups

When considering results, it is important to acknowledge that the response rate is not consistent across demographic groups.

For example, international enrolments accounted for approximately 30% of total graduate research enrolments at the Faculty of Arts in 2024. In this survey, international students accounted for 51% of total responses in the Faculty. As a result, international students are over-represented and domestic students are under-represented. This is true also of full-time (over-represented) and part-time (under-represented) students.

Positive-negative asymmetry (PNA) effect

Across the entire report, the responses of students have been taken at face-value. As such, 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,¹ 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.² In the context of this report, this may mean that answers to the quantitative questions in the survey are disproportionately positive, while the responses to the qualitative (open-ended) questions are disproportionately negative, given that students were not required to provide a response.

In relation to the qualitative questions in this survey, effort was made to overcome the PNA effect by splitting questions and asking for a positive and negative reflection.

¹ 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.

² 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.

Supervision

Respondents were asked a series of questions in relation to their supervision experience.

Choice of supervisor

Did you choose your supervisor?	Arts 2021	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Yes	82%	60%	65%	83%
No	18%	40%	35%	17%

There has been a sharp drop since 2021 in Arts PhD candidates choosing their own supervisors.

The result in Arts is only slightly behind that across HASS at Monash; however, it was substantially below that of students studying in the field of humanities across other participating universities.

Previous studies have identified that doctoral students who choose their own supervisor are more likely to complete their degree than those assigned a supervisor.³

Choice of topic

Did you choose your own topic?	Arts 2021	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Yes	97%	93%	86%	97%
No	3%	7%	14%	3%

Between 2021 and 2024, there was a marginal drop in the proportion of Arts respondents choosing their own research topic.

Students choosing their own topic was more likely in Arts than it was across HASS at Monash, but less likely than it was in the field of humanities across other participating universities.

³ Karen Hunter and Kay Devine, "Doctoral student's emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave academia," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 11 (2016): 40.

Contact with supervisors

Participants were asked, on average, how often they meet with their supervisors?

How often do you meet with your supervisor?	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Weekly	10%	15%	13%
Fortnightly	49%	47%	37%
Once every 3 weeks	9%	6%	13%
Once a month	19%	16%	23%
Less than once a month	14%	16%	13%

The majority of Arts graduate research respondents met with their supervisors on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

The Monash University *Graduate Research Student Supervision Procedure* recommends full-time graduate researchers meet with their main supervisor at least every two weeks, while part-time students should meet monthly.

Of full-time Arts respondents, 66% met with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 78% of part-time Arts respondents met once a month or more frequently.

Those who met their supervisors once a month or less were asked to respond to the question ***Why don't you meet more frequently with your supervisors?***

Comments included:

"Because I can only produce meaningful work so fast!"

"Because they are not available as most are on fieldwork for their own research projects."

"Currently negotiating a regular, more frequent scheduled; one supervisor set to leave the university, looking for another."

"I have family responsibilities, which can impact the frequency."

"I'm at the stage where he wants to see me when something is written so we can discuss it."

"In my second year, I asked if I can have more time in writing my chapters than doing a fortnightly consultation like in my first year since it takes more time to read, write and revise. Having at least 3 weeks for that is helpful in my progress."

"It's hard to get everyone together and I have health issues."

"My supervisors only want to meet when I have a new complete draft for them to read."

"Supervisors often seem very busy. I am very confident working on my thesis in my own time and submitting drafts to supervisors when appropriate."

"We meet more frequently when needed and around deadlines, but monthly is a set time."

Supervision: Importance and Satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate how important certain aspects of supervision were and how satisfied they were with their own experience. For the purposes of analysis, this 7-point *Likert*-scale has been converted to a numerical value and averaged across graduate research respondents.

The gap was calculated as below:

$$\text{Gap} = \frac{(\text{Satisfaction} - \text{Importance})}{\text{Importance (\%)}}$$

In regard to satisfaction, respondents were asked to consider their supervision experience overall or as a collective, rather than their experience with individual supervisors.

	Importance (1-7)	Satisfaction (1-7)	Gap (%)
Constructive feedback	6.67	6.15	-7.80%
Skilled supervisors	6.65	6.21	-6.62%
I am heard	6.48	5.97	-7.87%
Guide me through the degree	6.38	5.81	-8.93%
Access to supervisors	6.36	6.01	-5.50%
Timely feedback	6.30	6.04	-4.13%
Act professionally	6.28	6.30	0.32%
Support for work/life balance	6.28	5.99	-4.62%
Mentor me	6.26	5.43	-13.26%
Encourage ownership	6.25	6.30	0.80%
Help me belong academically	6.00	5.16	-14.00%
Clear role delegation	5.97	5.93	-0.67%
I am a priority	5.83	5.66	-2.92%
Help me network	5.74	4.90	-14.63%
Career pathway	5.57	4.88	-12.39%
Inform me of support services	5.52	5.24	-5.07%
	6.16	5.75	-6.71%

Receiving constructive feedback and having their research supported by skilled supervisors were the most important aspect of supervision according to Arts respondents.

Meanwhile, supervisors acting professionally and encouraging ownership of respondents' research were the two aspects Arts respondents were most satisfied with.

The widest gaps between importance and satisfaction were recorded for help with networking and helping them feel like they belong academically.

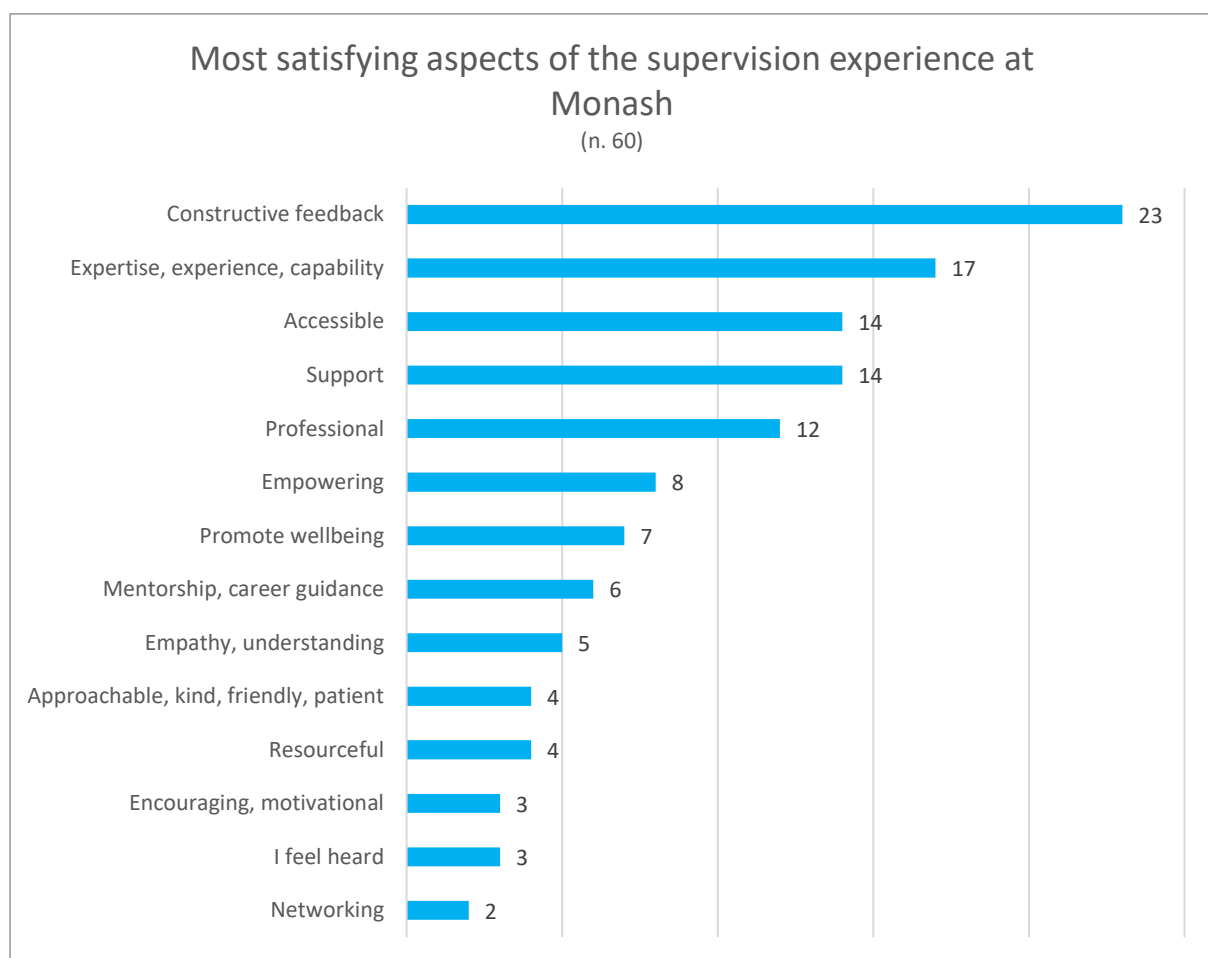
The supervision experience

Participants were asked to reflect on what aspects of their supervision experience they found most satisfying and what aspects they found most dissatisfying.

Most satisfying aspects of supervision

In order to gain further insight into what graduate research students most value in their supervisors, participants were asked to *Tell us about what aspects are most satisfying about your supervision experience.*

Below is a summary of the responses from Arts:



The primary theme to emerge from the responses related to the **constructive nature of feedback** of supervisors. Comments included:

“My supervisors are (rightly) critical of my work. They also acknowledge when I've been able to rectify things. They are experts and I can learn from them. Also, it's very satisfying to have someone read my work attentively, and pick out any slip-ups, however small, that detract

from the quality of the work. Their attention to detail is gratifying, making it seem that they take my work seriously."

"My supervisors have been extremely professional in all their engagements with me, and I have often received constructive feedback from most of them. Their focus has always been on my project, and their enthusiasm is encouraging to witness."

"My supervisors give me constructive feedback in each meeting. They give good advice on how to approach the writing of my thesis."

Other interesting comments included:

"My supervisors have adjusted to what I communicate are my needs at any point in time; they are flexible and interested in providing genuine support and scaffolding. They have provided me with a range of opportunities, both teaching, research, and networking. They are kind."

"I have the space to be intellectually curious without judgment. Supervisor is able to make me aware of broader debates within which my work can fit and draw on. Supervisor provides hugely helpful feedback and talks me through the issues I'm having when I get to an intellectual roadblock."

"Supervisors have expertise in their fields, but are willing to let me pursue my own research interests more or less independently - they are sounding boards for advice and feedback, rather than necessarily directing my research. I appreciate that they challenge me, treat me as an equal, and are willing to engage with me in discussions about my research area."

"One of the most satisfying aspects of my supervision experience is the dynamic and engaging method of supervision, where meetings often take place while walking around Monash University's Clayton campus. This not only enriches our discussions but also familiarizes me with the campus environment. Additionally, my supervisor's expertise in my field of study is incredibly valuable as he provides me with a wealth of relevant literature, which greatly enhances my research and understanding of the topic."

"They are always very supportive and encouraging, even at time when I don't feel like my work is particularly important. They help me look at the bigger picture, and are very understanding of conflicting events with my caring duties. They always go the extra mile to support me in all aspects of my life."

"My supervisor recognises that I have parenting/caring responsibilities and is very supportive and flexible with meeting times etc. My supervisor is also very organised and provides great, constructive feedback - as such I feel on track with my research."

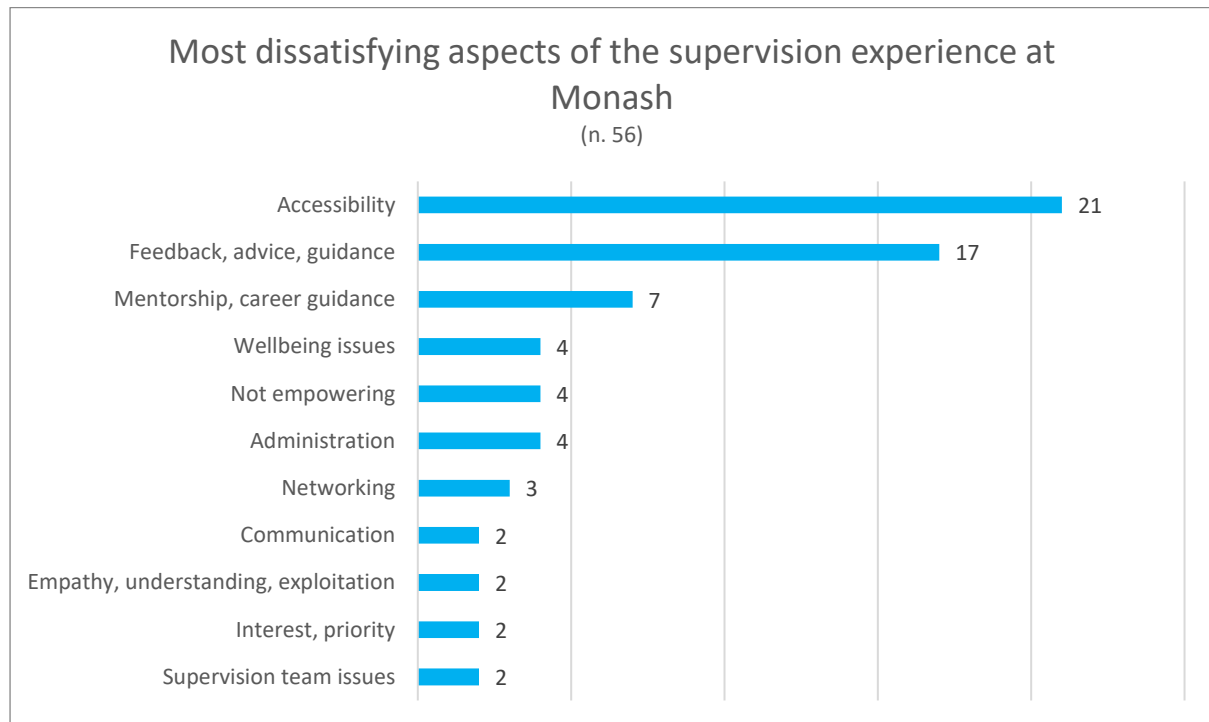
"My supervisor is incredibly well connected and knows their field inside and out. However, my supervisor and I are a marriage of convenience and not a natural fit. We both know this, and at least this is acknowledged and recognised."

"My supervisors are excellent - I was always told that the choice of supervisors is key to the success of a PhD and so far, I think I've chosen well."

Most dissatisfying aspects of supervision

In order to gain insight into what traits graduate research students find most problematic about their supervisors, participants were asked to *tell us about what aspects are most dissatisfying about your supervision experience.*

Below is a summary of responses from Arts:



The most common frustration with supervisors related to **accessibility issues**. These included:

“The way the institution is structured supports shorter meetings more frequently, rather than longer meetings less frequently. The latter would work better for me, but is often not possible. I wish I could have occasional additional supervisors from other faculties to draw upon, but the institution also hampers this. The university actively prevents interdisciplinary potential, which is most frustrating and disappointing.”

“Sometimes, their time is constrained to provide feedback for me. At times I feel, they do not have adequate time to understand the nuances of my research.”

“While my supervisors are very kind and knowledgeable, getting in touch with them or getting feedback in a timely manner is very difficult. I understand they are also busy with teaching, other PhD students, research and their own personal lives, so perhaps the expectation of how many hours they can dedicate to me has not been realistic from the start. When the feedback arrives it is always great, but I wish I didn't have to constantly reschedule meetings or have to send reminders for everything.”

Another common theme to emerge related to issues with **feedback, advice and guidance**.

Comments included:

“One of my supervisors has been very difficult to work with. They have not been receptive to my ideas and have been unable to change their style of supervision to accommodate my needs. This has led to a tense relationship and roadblocks in my work.”

“I am often left to fend for myself when it comes to gaining information about relevant conferences or grants. My supervisors are aware of my limited financial resources as an international student, but they do not direct me towards resources that would help make this better. I do not feel like I belong in the academic community because I am often playing catch-up as my peers gain access to more info about grants, conferences, while I have to either Google for myself or find them on social media through my own effort. There is not much discussion about jobs, career pathways or publications. While my supervisors are focused on my project (which is good), there is no broader vision or discussion re: my future career pathways/goals and aligning my resume in that way, from supervisors.”

“My supervisors seem to have a limited understanding of administrative issues - they are relatively unfamiliar with, for instance, what counts as Professional Development, how to navigate Monash administration, etc. Meetings are also relatively infrequent, which is understandable; and I feel they could be doing more to help me to make the transition from feeling like a student to a member of an academic community.”

Other interesting comments included:

“My research is not a priority, I myself am unimportant to them.”

“Due to the nature of academic work, my supervisors are often burnt out / overworked which impacts the attention they can give to me and timeliness of responses etc. My PhD would benefit if they had better working conditions.”

“I have had zero introduction other academics. They have not helped me make like within academia at all. This has been very disappointing.”

“I think, I am more on the lucky side because the supervision team I have has been nothing but supportive and responsive to what I need in terms of making sure my PhD journey would be less overwhelming or lonely. I wouldn't say I'm dissatisfied but rather an area that maybe Monash Uni could think of to improve. There are aspect of central administration requirement that seems to be beyond supervisors knowledge, and I (as student) sometimes have to ask around in order to find out more details about this administration requirement (such as study away requirement etc). In my impression this might've been because the scale of Monash Uni as the largest uni in Australia but that says something about maybe there are few things should be make easier for the supervisor as well so that they can do their role as supervisor.”

“Generally, I am extremely satisfied with my supervisors. It would however be great if we met more in person for our regular supervision meetings. Since the COVID lockdowns ended, the undergraduate student life returned to campus, but the academic life of postgraduates and academic staff has mostly moved online. This makes the studying experience more dissatisfying. Before starting my PhD, I had hoped that there would be more interactions

between postgraduates and academic staff. As the term "PHD students" suggests, we are often treated more like students than colleagues. I think the studying experience would improve a lot if there were more interactions between postgraduates and academic staff (not just the supervisors). This would feel more like an academic community rather promoting the feeling that writing a PhD is a solitary activity."

"Since we don't meet often in-person it is slightly isolating."

"I feel like there is a wall between me and them sometimes that I cannot remove. They are so successful and busy I feel like a burden or an outsider at times. We meet only online I wish there was a chance to meet in person."

"They do not get along with one another, decisions are not made together. Feedback on written work is not timely."

"As all 4 supervisors come from different fields, they provide different perspectives and often times these are not aligned with each other and I have to figure out how to gel it all together."

"Having to work with my first primary supervisor was the most dissatisfying aspect of my supervision experience. It was a traumatic experience that negatively impacted my mental health and progression of my PhD. I wish supervisor obligations were taken more seriously by the individual staff and faculty so that supervisors who acted in this manner were not able to continue taking on students."

Conflict with supervisor

Have you ever had a disagreement with a supervisor that was challenging to overcome?	Arts 2017*	Arts 2021*	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
No, I've never had a serious disagreement with a supervisor	(no) 83%	(no) 86%	68%	69%	65%
Yes, but it was only minor	(yes) 17%	(yes) 14%	23%	22%	23%
Yes, I have had a serious disagreement			9%	9%	12%

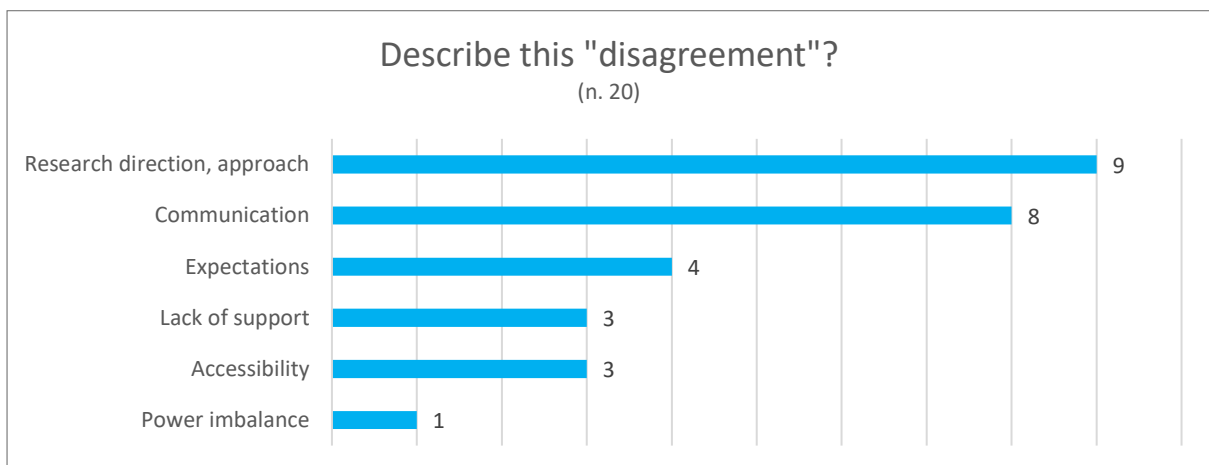
*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a “yes” or “no” question and “conflict or misunderstanding” was used in place of “disagreement.”

Respondents from Arts were less likely to have had a serious disagreement with a supervisor than humanities respondents from other universities.

Type of conflict

Respondents who had experienced a disagreement with a supervisor (“minor” or “serious”) were asked to describe this disagreement.

Below is a summary of the responses of Arts respondents:



The most common form of conflict related to the **direction of/approach to research**. Comments included:

“Over the direction and future of my work and how I approach research. The biggest issue was that this was not clearly and transparently spoken about with me.”

“Which one?! I have fought to be able to do the project I want from the very beginning 6 years ago. My supervisors have had to “nudge” me in the right direction. I am an a-typical student, not seeking an academic career but looking for new information in my area, and it

was hard at times to reconcile this with my supervisors' wish to push me through the system to attain the qualification. There have been lots of discussions about my purpose for doing this PhD, and ironically now that I am within a year of completion I am wanting to rush to finish while my supervisors are now keen that the work should be as excellent as it can be! So, I think our years of "discussions" have been productive!"

"A supervisor was pushing for my research to be more aligned towards her area of expertise."

"They are unsupportive and not giving me direction, just telling me that I should know or should figure it out."

Communication issues were also frequently raised as a source of conflict. Comment included:

"I wished for more support when my personal circumstances were so bad I could not focus on my work at all. While my supervisors understood, they made it clear extending more support was not part of their job. So, as a researcher, I felt more like a tool, than a human, because I expected some compassion. I understand they're also overworked and managing their own personal stressors. I would call it a minor gap in communication and setting up of expectations."

"I wanted them to supervise. They didn't want to do any supervision. Didn't respond to emails, didn't provide feedback (written or otherwise), didn't turn up to one of only two meetings they _needed_ to attend in a two-year period. I tried to organise multiple meetings, wrote and asked for SPECIFIC written feedback on numerous occasions, got nothing. Still promoted though. Good times."

"I have 3 supervisors and they were often unable to meet at the same time due to competing work demands, which meant I would be encouraged by one supervisor to go down one path, and then the next meeting would be pulled in the other direction without that supervisor there to back me up, which was extremely confusing and frustrating. I raised this in the confirmation milestone, and since then they have been meeting with me all together, which I really appreciate."

Other interesting comments included:

"Two disagreements. One because I wanted to move part-time for a combination physical and mental health and financial reasons and they said they didn't want to supervise my project for that long. Another because they expected to be an author on all papers from my PhD, by virtue of being a supervisor and not due to contribution."

"My supervisor was resistant to me taking intermission of 6 months so that I could transit from part-time to full-time student by making arrangements at work. I persisted and she relented."

"I wanted to have a leave, but he insisted me to finish the draft (which was an impossible task). I asked for an extension of the deadline (could it be after my leave?) and he said no."

Dealing with conflict

Respondents who had experienced a form of conflict were asked to select if they had dealt with it and, if so, the ways in which they had dealt with it.

How did you deal with this "disagreement"?	Arts 2017*	Arts 2021*	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Decided to do nothing	50%	30%	10%	12%	11%
Sorted it out directly with supervisor(s)	25%	30%	62%	64%	56%
Sought assistance from a friend/colleague	25%	10%	29%	24%	33%
Sought assistance from student association	13%	10%	10%	5%	11%
Sought assistance from my chair	NA	NA	19%	14%	22%
Sought assistance from grad. coordinator or head of school	6%	10%	19%	14%	22%
Other	NA	10%	19%	17%	22%

* Please note, when we asked this question in 2017 and 2021, "conflict" was used in place of "disagreement" i.e. *How did you deal with the conflict?*

The proportion of respondents at Arts who directly respond to conflict by speaking with their supervisor continues to increase.

Similarly, the proportion of respondents who decided to do nothing decreased substantially in 2024.

Changing supervisors

Participants were asked a series of questions relating to changing supervisors.

Considered changing supervisors

Have you thought about changing supervisors?	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Never	68%	69%	69%
Rarely	17%	16%	23%
Often	6%	9%	4%
All the time	9%	6%	4%

Arts respondents were as likely as those from other universities and the HASS faculties at Monash to have considered changing their supervisors; however, the faculty had the highest proportion of respondents selecting that they thought about it “all the time.”

Supervisor changes

Have you ever changed supervisors?	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
No	69%	69%	73%
Yes, but it wasn't my choice	15%	17%	8%
Yes, my supervisor and I agreed to make a change	6%	5%	8%
Yes, I decided to change a supervisor(s) even though they did not want to be replaced	3%	3%	0%
Other	11%	8%	15%

Arts respondents were as likely as those across HASS at Monash and marginally less likely than Arts students from other universities to have changed supervisors.

Why students did not change supervisors

Respondents who had not changed supervisors, but who had considered it, were asked what stopped them from changing supervisors.

Arts respondents mostly indicated they had not changed supervisors because they were satisfied enough with what they had. These included:

"The knowledge that the supervisor was excellent at "nit-picking" and this was probably what I needed."

"My supervisory team is excellent in providing me with timely feedback on my drafts. I have heard horror stories from peers where they lost so much time waiting for this feedback. I thought I should be grateful that I got this."

"Used to the dynamic, do not want to start again."

Other comments included:

"Honestly, I didn't want to offend the supervisor, particularly because they have given me various opportunities outside of the PhD."

"Power dynamics and worry about negative consequences - I've sought feedback and since my first supervisor provides good supervision, I was told that it might not be the best option for me to change my secondary supervisor (potential negative repercussions). Plus, there isn't really an alternative, I don't know anyone that could fill in for my second supervisor."

"My main supervisor is influential ... If I change supervisors, nobody under [their] care would want to take me due to power politics. This is based on my own judgement."

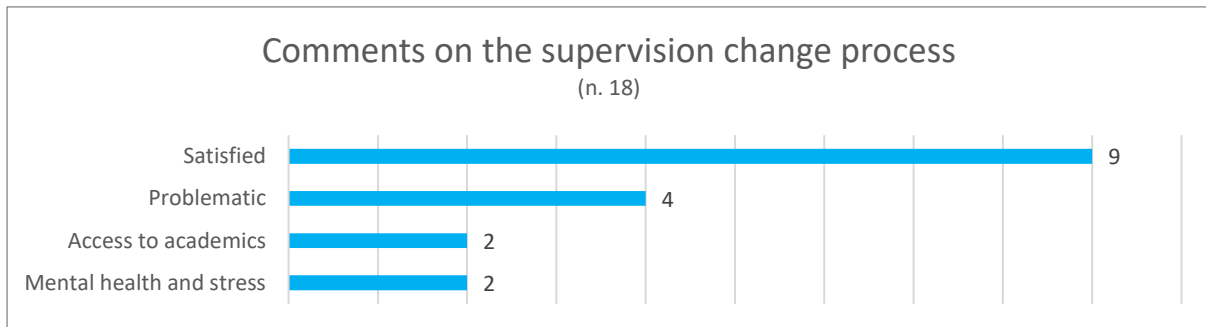
"Not sure my options and also I'm just into my 2nd year."

"I am worried that it will impact my reputation in the field of study. As I would like to continue working in academia, I felt that it was impossible to change supervisors."

Comments on the process of changing supervisors

Respondents who had changed supervisors were asked to comment on the process of changing supervisors.

The responses from Arts are summarised below:



Most of the students who had changed supervisors were **satisfied** with the process. Their comments included:

“I have done this once (not my choice) but it was a hassle-free process for me.”

“I have been really supported in my last change and I wish I had changed sooner.”

“I think in terms of administration the process was quite straightforward. But open and effective communication is really the key to a smooth process.”

Other interesting comments included:

“Once you get to that point the process is not difficult. However, I experienced a year of stress and anxiety before reaching this point. I even contacted the MGA but they were not helpful in their advice and I was left feeling as though I was just stuck with the situation.”

“There is some difficulty in finding a replacement supervisor whose area of expertise matches my research interests, who doesn't already have a full load. Some potential supervisors are unenthusiastic about my approach and relatively unwelcoming - one gets the sense that there would be frequent disagreements (and not constructive disagreements), or they would like to have a large role in directing the project towards their own area of interest.”

“I ultimately didn't get the supervisor I needed to finish my thesis in line with my research aims so I'm not sure how to answer this. I got an excellent supervisor, but not the one I needed. The school was too engaged with its own internal politics to care enough about what I wanted and acted solely to advance its own interests. Firstly, it wanted to protect the reputation of one of its own (which it did) and secondly, because the faculty was engaged in a land-grab for students (and I assume the funding that comes with them) to stop and reflect on what the people studying actually wanted to do with their research, I was forced to stay in the same faculty. If I could have brought on a supervisor that I needed, or indeed been permitted to change schools (WITHIN THE SAME FACULTY) it would have been fine. Instead, I was forced to pay my own after-tax income to pay for professional help to assist with the

elements of my thesis that a supervisor (the one I wanted) could and should arguably have helped with. I finished A thesis, not THE thesis I wanted to write. Poor supervision has bricked my career options (in terms of what I actually wanted to do professionally), it has killed my passion for my subject and it damn near broke me. I'll never forgive the university for that."

Academic Unit

The following questions were asked in relation to the faculty, department or school in which a student was enrolled.

Academic unit satisfaction

Participants were asked how satisfied they were with their academic unit across a range of areas.

The results of Arts graduate researchers are presented below:

	Extremely Dissatisfied	Moderately Dissatisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Neutral	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
I feel included in my academic unit	10%	8%	10%	12%	22%	19%	19%
I am treated in a respectful manner	2%	2%		8%	8%	25%	54%
I am encouraged by staff to socialise with other research students in my area	5%	8%	3%	15%	10%	29%	29%
I am informed about opportunities for tutoring/sessional work	5%	5%	14%	14%	14%	29%	20%
My academic unit provides appropriate facilities for my field of research	3%	7%	5%	15%	17%	25%	27%
My academic unit provides a student-specific social area for me to use	5%	7%	5%	14%	12%	32%	25%
My academic unit organises regular seminars and guest speakers for research ..	7%	7%	7%	7%	14%	27%	32%
Other research students in my academic unit are supportive			2%	15%	10%	34%	39%
I feel the policies, rules and regulations around doing research are there to sup..	8%	10%	3%	22%	10%	29%	17%
Provides an academically stimulating environment	8%	7%	3%	14%	22%	24%	22%
I can see myself having a career in a place like this	17%	3%	10%	17%	15%	17%	20%

Across the board, Arts graduate researchers were predominantly satisfied with their academic unit.

Satisfaction was highest in relation to respondents feeling that they are treated in a respectful manner (87%), while dissatisfaction was highest in relation to respondents feeling like they could have a career in a place like this (30%).

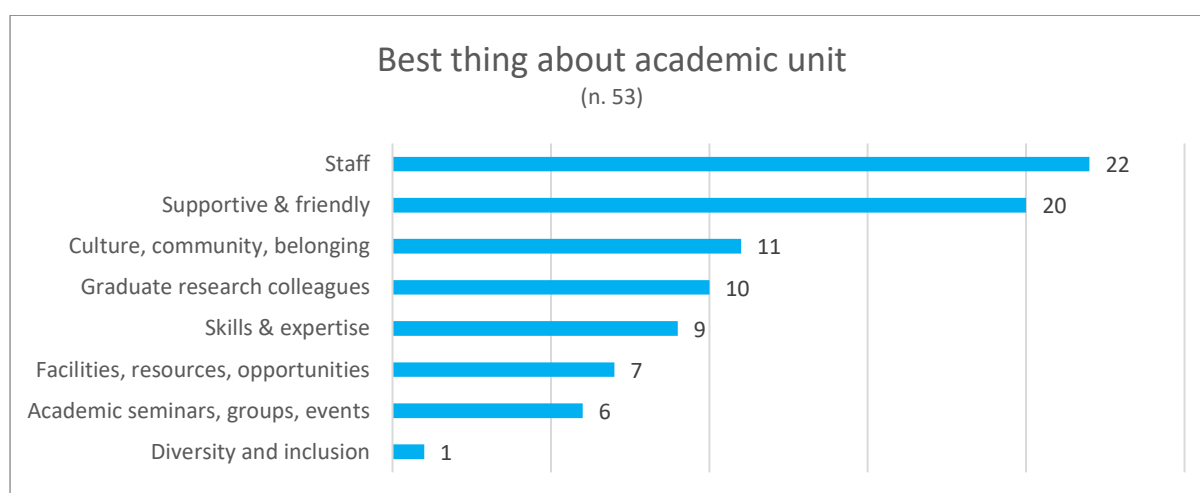
Academic unit comments

Respondents were asked to reflect on what aspects of their supervision experience they found most satisfying and what aspects they found most dissatisfying.

Best aspects of academic unit

Participants were asked to comment on what they thought was the best thing about their academic unit.

The responses of Arts graduate researchers are summarised below:



The most common response related to **staff**. These included:

"I love how professional the staff is. They're very responsive to students' needs."

"Being treated as close to an equal colleague by the faculty."

"Many interesting and expert academics to interact with in a range of ways."

"Staff are prompt in answering queries and providing support."

Other interesting comments included:

"The best thing about my academic unit is the supportive community structure it fosters through forums that connect postgraduate students with coordinators and representatives. This proximity, both physically and organizationally, allows for frequent and meaningful interactions among students and staff, enhancing the overall learning and collaborative environment. Additionally, having student representatives who are accessible and on the same level as other students encourages a more integrated and responsive academic "community."

“Other PhD students are very supportive, especially as we often feel neglected by the faculty. My supervisors are very supportive as well, but it shouldn't fall on them to make up for the failings of the faculty.”

“It provides a very supportive environment, especially for research scholars like me who have moved from other countries. They make us feel part of their organization and are always ready to help whatever academic or administrative difficulties I may face.”

“Other PhD students are very supportive, especially as we often feel neglected by the faculty. My supervisors are very supportive as well, but it shouldn't fall on them to make up for the failings of the faculty.”

“Supportive culture, many opportunities to get to know staff and other postgrad students.”

“The community seems to be supportive and embracing you to be a part of them. They are also keen to help me to adjust to the new environment.”

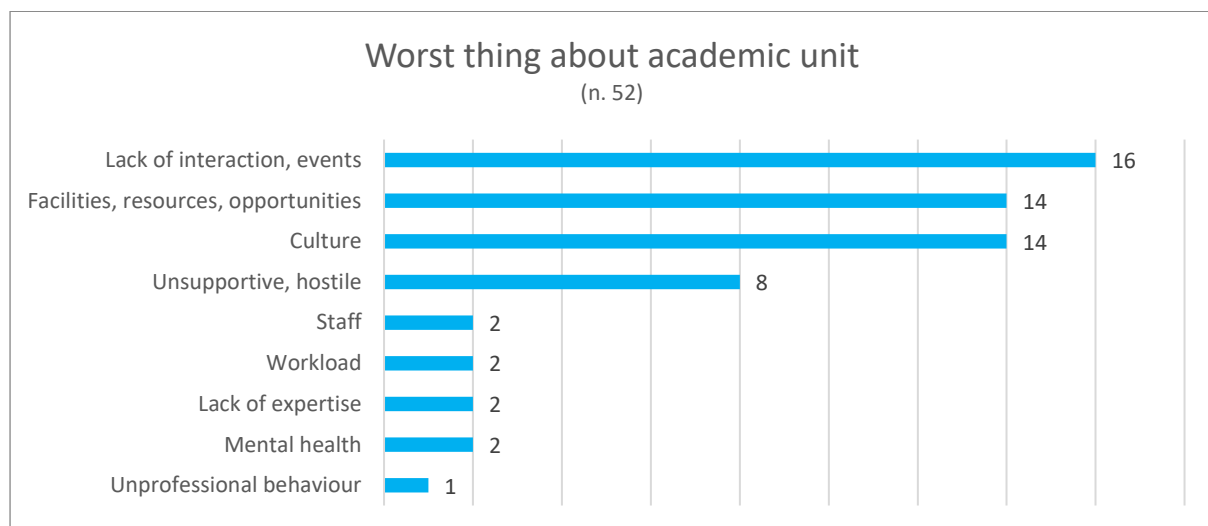
“The people are nice, it feels easy to go up and ask questions and they are really on the ball about helping get items I need.”

“There has been an emphasis in the past on community building and offering seminars and workshops for HDR students.”

Worst aspects of academic unit

Participants were asked to comment on what they thought was most-dissatisfying about their academic unit.

The responses of Arts graduate researchers are summarised below:



The most common grievance Arts graduate researchers had with their academic unit related to a perceived **lack of interaction and events**. These included:

"There is no office culture. There's hardly anyone in office including staff, people often don't attend events."

"It has taken me a year to meet/get to know other HDRs in my field of research. An earlier opportunity to meet others would have been appreciated."

"Lack of casual exchange/conversation between PhD students?"

"I feel like I rarely see them. The unit always organise group events at the very last minute, e.g. with notice 2 days before. So, I haven't seen my peers all together in maybe a year or so?"

"It feels like a ghost town. I turn up and there is no one around. I do not feel part of a collective or a community, I feel like I am trespassing in an abandoned building. Those who I come across are nice, but I do not really know them beyond saying hi when getting tea or coffee. I am jealous hearing the community they have in other disciplines on campus, and at times have considered moving. I do not feel motivated to come in, the building is old. My supervisors are not even in that area anymore they've moved."

"The problem is that there are not enough interactions between postgraduates and academic staff."

Other interesting comments included:

"Lack of admin staff who can act as a "clearing house" for information (there was admin when I started but we haven't had that for years now!). There's no social space to go to informally, where we might just accidentally meet someone. Also, I have no idea what some of the staff are researching or teaching - I think it would be great to have staff present on their work in-house."

"The university seems profoundly disinterested in the needs and interests of Arts students. Monash Arts doctoral programme guidelines are a byzantine nightmare, the Monash Arts Graduate Office is obviously underfunded and understaffed, and the academic culture at Monash seems geared increasingly towards STEM fields which, although valid and valuable, are promoted to the exclusion of an Arts education, which is made to seem without value. A PhD is isolating, and it is difficult to make the cognitive transition from student to research colleague. The difficulties of navigating the garbled, sometimes contradictory administrative guidelines has knock-on effects - it impacts my supervisors' ability to guide me (because they also have difficulty understanding), and it creates an environment which feels extremely insecure as a prospective academic - there is little information or guidance on how, for instance, one should actually go about trying to be published."

"The communication skills of the staff. There's this sense, a feeling, that people know better than we do; that we should be more grateful for what we have; that we don't have a right to ask for anything. That we can't expect better than whatever it is that others decided for us. It's not collegial. It's infantilising, and I didn't expect it at this point in my career. I wouldn't have come back to do a PhD if I knew it would have been like this."

"Everyone is overworked and doesn't have time to properly socialise. Most people you never really see. I would like to go to campus more but no one is around so there's not much point."

“Honestly, the politics of the Faculty of Arts and Monash in general discouraged me from ever pursuing an academic career here.”

“The Politics and IR department has been decimated by staff loss and morale is poor. Graduate student culture in the section is poor to non-existent. It used to be better, but attempts to improve it seemed not to eventuate. For example, like a Pol and IR postgrad reading group. I have very little sense now of who my peers are or what their research is. As I said, there are some wonderful staff in the section but I also feel that many newer, younger Level B staff were very ‘cliquey’ and were not open or interested in interacting with the PhD student cohort as colleagues. I feel like there is very little awareness and interest in which students need RA or TA work. Things used to be very different.”

“I did most of my PhD during COVID lockdowns, and I felt completely isolated from everyone except my supervisors. Zooms and social get-togethers don't cut it for me and never have. Really compounded the loneliness of 1) doing a PhD 2) in a niche field 3) when the world is literally on fire.”

“Sometimes a bit disorganized and hard to know where to go for things, but I know they try and I appreciate that.”

Confirmation

Relevant participants were asked to reflect on their experience of confirmation.

Have you passed your confirmation?	Respondents
We don't have this requirement where I study	2 (3%)
No, I'm not at this stage yet	15 (23%)
No, I presented my research, but I need to make amendments	1 (2%)
Yes, I passed first time	45 (70%)
Yes, I passed, but after I needed to make amendments	1 (2%)

Satisfaction with confirmation process

Participants were firstly asked how satisfied they were with the confirmation process.

The overwhelming majority of respondents expressed that they were satisfied (32% extremely satisfied, 32% moderately satisfied, 11% slightly satisfied), while a small proportion indicated that they were dissatisfied (7% extremely dissatisfied, 7% moderately dissatisfied, 2% slightly dissatisfied).

Participants were then asked a series of questions about their satisfaction with certain aspects of the confirmation milestone.

The responses of Arts graduate researchers are summarised below:

	Extremely Dissatisfied	Moderately Dissatisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Neutral	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
The expectations for my confirmation were clear	2%	2%		7%	16%	45%	27%
My supervisor(s) guided me through the confirmation process			2%	5%	9%	32%	52%
The preparation required was a good use of my time	14%	2%	2%	5%	16%	25%	36%
I felt comfortable speaking openly with the panel	2%	2%	9%	9%	2%	30%	45%
The behaviour and tone of the panel was professional	2%	2%			5%	20%	70%
The panel provided useful feedback	5%		2%	7%	16%	32%	39%

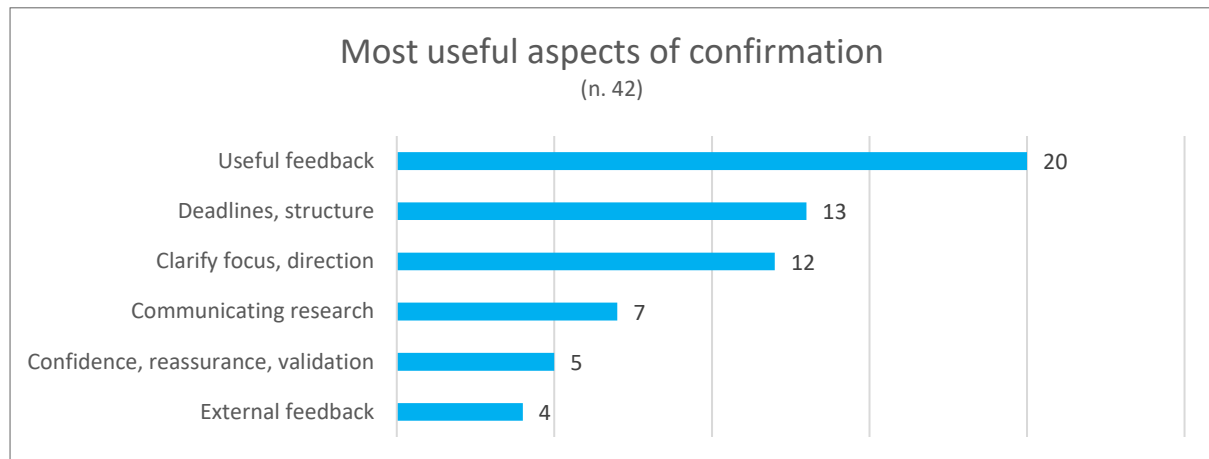
Respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with confirmation. In particular, Arts graduate researchers were satisfied with the behaviour and tone of the panel.

The highest level of overall dissatisfaction (18%) was in relation to the preparation required being a good use of my time.

Most useful aspects of confirmation

Respondents were asked to reflect on what they found most useful about the confirmation process.

Below is a summary of their responses:



The most common response from Monash graduate researchers related to how **helpful or useful the feedback** they received was. Comments included:

"I really enjoyed presenting before the expert panel. The panel was very professional and offered useful feedback. I was extremely nervous at first but they helped me relax."

"It was great to hear the opinion of someone outside my supervisory team, and they gave me a few suggestions that were well spotted and helped me develop my research project further, especially when I had one month between confirmation and doing fieldwork."

"The confirmation process and the feedback I got helped me understand my work better and give a direction to it. The panel provided me new insights which are very critical for my work. Now my work is in much better shape compared to what it was before. My supervisors also helped me in organizing the sections of my thesis chapter and read more relevant literature."

Other interesting comments included:

"Validation from the university that the project was worthwhile and likely to yield interesting results."

"Having a deadline to prepare for is useful across a multi-year project."

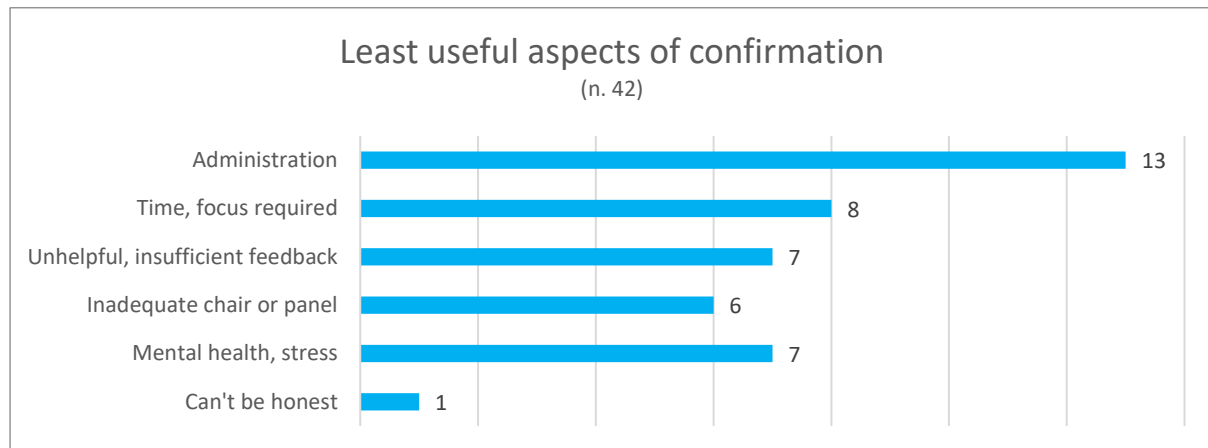
"It really did help me to draw together what I'd done so far and see what my project is about, and made me realise that the style of writing for thesis is much easier than for journals, and that word count won't be a problem at all."

"Learning how to write compact statements, instead of narrativising an experience. More importantly, I've adjusted my writing style to fit the requirements. The time is also right since you have more than a few months to prepare in terms of reading, writing, and polishing your document."

Least useful aspects of confirmation

Respondents were asked to reflect on what they found least useful about the confirmation process.

Below is a summary of their responses:



The least useful aspect of confirmation, according to Arts graduate researchers, related to **administration**. This was a broad area of criticism spanning from disagreement that it was required to issues with how it was run. Comments included:

"The restricted level of feedback provided (2-3 points). Not being able to direct the feedback or point to what I needed to know. How obviously performative it was. I feel like it was mostly about the institution checking up on me, rather than anything that was for my benefit, but the framing was all geared toward the latter, which left me feeling resentful once I realised the level of feedback I would get would be so light. I thought it would be a small moment to engage with researchers about my own work. It was not."

"It felt as it was more useful to the university than to me. I didn't really get anything out of it and would have rather spend that time on my own work."

"Not knowing that I could comment about my supervisors without them hearing (I was blind-sided and didn't do this, as I would have needed to prepare for this!). It was a lot of time spent outside the project work at a stage when I could have been doing much more useful things to progress the research."

"I was so panicked and stress trying to locate WHERE to upload my document, and how to fill out the form. As at the time it was still not announced who all the members on the panel would be, but the form required me to put it in. It is NOT made clear how to access or easily find the submission portal - this should be its own clear tile on the Monash student home page."

Other interesting comments included:

"Some of the comments made by one of the panel members in particular were very shocking and insensitive. It was not regarding my research but unwarranted concerns for my safety that clearly showed the panel member was not at all aware of my particular context. I know this panel member was reprimanded by supervisors and other panel members, but it was still

disappointing to have to hear such a horrible biased view of my given context (especially when my project was designed to break this stereotype). It made me feel like this particular member did not read my document at all."

"One of the panel members used confirmation as an opportunity to bully me, which was noted afterwards by my supervisor, but nothing was done. This experience had serious consequences for my confidence and significantly impacted the progress of my thesis."

"My panel chair was not related to my field of research he was a Prof from a whole other social science discipline."

"The stress before and after the panel. Generally, I find that postgraduates, including me, spend too much time fretting about the confirmation panel than is helpful. It'd be better if the confirmation panel would not be considered as such a big deal."

"I found it stressful having to get the 20,000 words written - and as it turns out, most of what I produced (for my first attempt) turns to not to be very relevant as my thesis has changed direction since confirmation and the mid-degree review."

"Sometimes panel members are the spouses of supervisors making it difficult to raise issues."

Professional Development

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of Professional Development at their university.

Only students for whom Professional Development was relevant (i.e. included in their degree) and who had completed some Professional Development units were asked to respond in regard to their satisfaction and experiences.

Professional Development included in degree

Is Professional Development included in your degree?	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
No	7%	13%	38%
Yes, but it was optional	3%	11%	42%
Yes, it is mandatory	90%	76%	21%

Professional Development was mandatory for the overwhelming majority of Arts respondents. It was mandatory for 76% of respondents from HASS at Monash, but only 21% of those studying humanities at a different university.

Professional Development: Importance and Satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate how important certain Professional Development themes were and how satisfied they were with what Monash University provides in relation to that theme.

Question	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap (%)
<i>Publishing skills and knowledge</i>	6.34	4.56	-28.08%
<i>Research methodologies</i>	6.10	4.55	-25.41%
<i>Presenting findings e.g. conferences, meetings, seminars</i>	5.92	4.24	-28.38%
<i>Grant writing</i>	5.67	3.98	-29.81%
<i>Project/research management</i>	5.67	4.58	-19.22%
<i>Coursework relevant to my research</i>	5.64	3.83	-32.09%
<i>Networking skills</i>	5.44	4.27	-21.51%
<i>Data analysis techniques</i>	5.41	4.10	-24.21%
<i>Mental health and wellbeing</i>	5.39	4.55	-15.58%
<i>Career planning</i>	5.38	4.00	-25.65%
<i>Industry exposure</i>	5.30	3.82	-27.92%
<i>Professional ethics</i>	5.16	4.78	-7.36%
<i>Entrepreneurial skills</i>	4.43	3.96	-10.61%
<i>PD with students from other fields</i>	4.38	4.38	0.00%
	5.45	4.26	-21.13%

Having Professional Development opportunities that focus on publishing skills was of the utmost importance to Arts graduate researchers, while experiencing PD with students from other fields was the least important of the themes.

Respondents were most satisfied with PD on professional ethics and least satisfied with industry exposure. The widest gap between importance and satisfaction was in relation to coursework being relevant to their research.

Professional Development ideas

Participants were asked what they would like to see offered in relation to Professional Development that was not currently available to them.

Below is a summary of the responses of Arts graduate researchers.



The stand out area in which Monash graduate researchers wanted more PD opportunities related to **research skills**. Comments included:

“Actual research training would be nice. Training and reading lists for research methods, a few methodologically focused classes. Data analysis classes run by professional teachers rather than student peers. Industry-related options in the Arts (are there any? They never seem advertised). I want in person classes run by professional researchers who work at Monash, not third-party operators that any workplace could get me access to. I didn't come here for LinkedIn learning or sad equivalents of such. At the very least I would like a professional development platform that lets me open links in tabs rather than forcing me to use the current window (the functionality of MyDevelopment is an embarrassment, frankly) and to be updated as to whether a class is likely to run that year rather than it being a mystery every time I log on as to whether I can get what I need.”

“I would like to see more professional development (PD) offerings focused on advanced research methods and data analysis skills that are not currently available. Specifically, PD sessions that cover the latest statistical software tools and techniques, workshops on qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, and hands-on training in data visualization and interpretation. These sessions should be tailored to accommodate researchers from different disciplines, providing them with the practical skills needed to conduct robust research and effectively analyse their data.”

“There were almost no workshops or courses on data analysis and only the one methods course that was very superficial and did not give me any new information, I was expecting more depth and better quality. All the workshops I found were essentially done by my supervisors to cover the gaping hole in the SOSS department, or I had to source them from

elsewhere (i.e. other university)."

Other interesting comments included:

"Researchers need to be trained in quantitative AND qualitative methods both, even if they're using either in their work. It helps them upskill and offers relevant skillsets for future jobs. Training on the ethics review process should be necessary. Discipline-specific information and resource sharing on publishing papers is extremely important too."

"Any of the categories above would be excellent and Monash does offer these things. Unfortunately, they are all slap dash and no thought it actually given to each of these. I appreciate that Monash lets you choose your own research and agenda, that's fantastic of them, but they from my experience they do little to provide you with the tools to succeed. It's either sink or swim."

"I would like the chance to log in hours and receive credit for presenting at conferences, including external conferences. It is annoying this is not counted when I think this is the most important and valuable opportunity."

"Managing transition (e.g. for mid-career switchers who are now embarking on their PhD journey and have not been in academia for many years)."

"PD is a waste of time - clicking through online courses is not how to learn. Yet things like teaching which are literally professional development experience are not included as PD! Likewise, winning fellowships/ grants and undertaking them is not considered PD, nor is running conferences/ workshops - all things which are actual requirements of the job in academia."

"Language courses, option to audit post grad classes."

"More opportunities (sponsored by the university - not student graduate group-sponsored activities) for collaboration with students from other fields; more clarity surrounding what qualifies as PD; more interest in the needs and interests of Arts students, and less of an overriding emphasis on "entrepreneurship" and "industry engagement"."

"Publication training, grant writing, academic career prep, opportunities to interact with other universities/scholars and industry, much more thorough and innovative and interdisciplinary research methodologies."

"Training that is actually relevant to my topic of interest. More leniency on gaining credits for external training opportunities."

"I do a lot of things in my field outside of the university that are useful for my professional development (e.g. organising events, working for film festivals, publishing, teaching, and attending conferences) that are clearly a form of professional development but these aren't acknowledged even though they are much more useful than all of the PD courses that I was required to do as a part of my degree."

Paid Employment Opportunities

The following questions were asked in relation to paid employment opportunities.

Paid work at the University

Participants were asked whether they had been given the opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university.

Have you conducted paid work for the faculty or university?	Arts 2021	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Yes	51%	56%	54%	63%
No	49%	44%	46%	38%

*Please note that in 2021 the wording of this question was slightly different. It asked if participants had been given the opportunity to "tutor."

The likelihood of an Arts graduate researcher at Monash being given an opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university increased over the past three years; however, a graduate researcher studying in the field of humanities at another university was more likely to have had the opportunity to conduct paid work at their university.

Position at the University

Monash respondents were asked to specify the nature of their position at the University.

What was your position at Monash?	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024
Fixed-term (one of the 450 fixed-term roles offered at Monash)	18%	21%
Casual	76%	71%
Other	6%	8%

The overwhelming majority of Arts graduate researchers employed by the University were on (or had been on) casual contracts.

Paid appropriately

Participants were asked if they felt they were paid appropriately for the work they conducted for their university.

Were you paid appropriately for your work at the university?	Arts 2021	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Definitely not	<i>(no)</i>	55%	32%	0%
Probably not	42%	21%	18%	27%
Probably yes	<i>(yes)</i>	12%	29%	53%
Definitely yes	58%	12%	21%	20%

*Please note that in 2021 this question related to being paid for tutoring only and participants could only answer “yes” or “no”.

The majority of Arts respondents (55%) believed that they were definitely not paid appropriately for the work they did for the University and a further 21% indicated they were probably not paid appropriately. This contrasts sharply with respondents studying humanities at other universities of whom 0% said they were definitely not paid appropriately and 27% said they were probably not. Although not as dramatic a contrast, the pay dissatisfaction in Arts was also higher than that recorded across HASS at Monash.

Doubt, Delays and Drop Outs

The following section explores research delays and if and why graduate researchers consider leaving their degree.

Imposter syndrome

Participants were asked: Do you ever feel like you don't belong in your field of study despite evidence of your accomplishments and abilities?

Do you ever feel like you don't belong in your field of study...?	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Never	17%	21%	17%
Rarely	24%	30%	33%
Sometimes	29%	28%	29%
Often	31%	21%	21%

The majority of Arts graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 31% indicating that they experienced this feeling "often."

Imposter syndrome levels in Arts were largely on par with those experienced across HASS at Monash and at other universities; however, those experiencing it often was elevated in Arts.

Research delay

Participants were asked if they had experienced delays in the progress of their research.

Have you experienced delays in the progress of your research?	Arts 2017*	Arts 2021*	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Never	(no) 62%	(no) 45%	25%	21%	13%
Rarely	(yes) 38%	(yes) 55%	19%	30%	25%
Sometimes			37%	28%	46%
Often			19%	21%	17%

*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a "yes" or "no" question.

One-quarter of Arts graduate researchers (25%) had never experienced a delay in their research, while 19% indicated that they often experienced delays.

Reasons for delay

Respondents who had experienced a delay in the progress of their research were asked to select the reasons for that delay from a list of prepared reasons.

Please select all relevant reasons regarding the delay in progress to your research	Arts 2021	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Change of research project direction	18%	32%	23%	17%
Poor supervision	28%	23%	15%	13%
Lack of resources for my research	18%	18%	11%	8%
Preparing for hurdles/milestones	20%	41%	30%	25%
Unpleasant workplace/research environment	3%	11%	9%	13%
Lack of motivation	33%	48%	31%	38%
Procrastination	NA	45%	29%	42%
Health issues	35%	45%	30%	17%
Family responsibilities	45%	41%	25%	38%
Cost of living/financial concerns	23%	50%	30%	21%
Work commitments	15%	43%	25%	29%
Data collection issues	NA	16%	17%	17%
COVID-19	73%	32%	21%	29%
Other	20%	14%	12%	13%

Cost of living and/or financial concerns was the most common response for a delay in research among Arts graduate research students – more than doubling since 2021 levels. This was much more common in the Faculty than it was elsewhere.

Considered leaving

Participants were asked if they had ever considered leaving their course.

Have you ever considered leaving your course?	Arts 2021*	Arts 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other Arts 2024
Never	(no) 30%	49%	59%	54%
Rarely	(yes) 70%	32%	22%	29%
Sometimes		9%	13%	17%
Often		10%	6%	0%

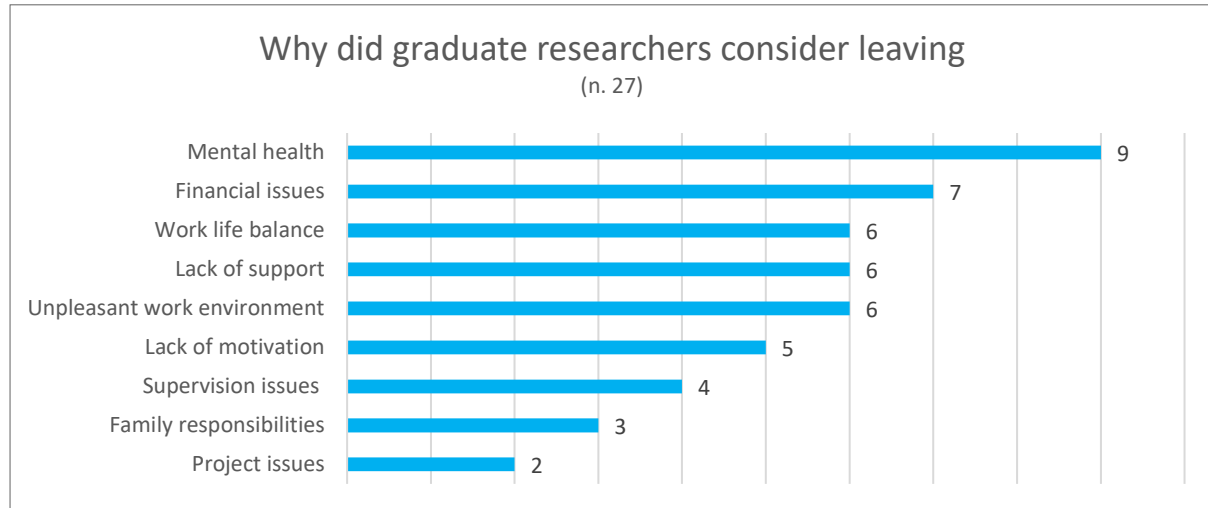
*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a “yes” or “no” question.

Monash graduate researchers were more likely than their colleagues across HASS and those doing humanities degrees at other universities to have considered leaving their degree.

Why leave

Respondents who had considered leaving were asked to elaborate as to why.

The responses of Arts graduate researchers are summarised below:



The most common reason Arts respondents gave related to their **mental health**. Comments included:

“Mental health. Mostly, lack of institutional support, especially financially; I’m about to complete my PhD and I was not even REMOTELY fairly compensated for the shit my degree put me through.”

“My mental health was deteriorating because of family responsibilities and cost of living.”

“Wanting a work-life balance that was not so draining emotionally and cognitively.”

“I feel miserable, being pushed with over-work from tutoring work, with terrible time-crunching. I feel like I kept constantly falling behind and was struggling to catch up. I routinely had to pull multiple all-nighters in a row to complete marking (3 and 4 days consistently marking with no sleep). I would go in and out for weeks without coming in contact with people, I felt isolated and alone, and lonely.”

Financial concerns were also a common response. These included:

“The lack of research training provided. The culture of my academic unit. Being paid so poorly to do full-time work without adequate resources. The general misery.”

“Limited opportunities at the end and the financial burden of studying when I could be working in a professional role is very tough.”

“I wasn’t supported enough both in terms of my research but also financially.”

Other interesting comments include:

“Lack of support from the university; worst educational experience I’ve ever had.”

“Because my supervision was (largely) terrible, because I was forced down a path that I didn’t want to go down, because the PD options were terrible and utterly pointless, because unless you fit into a neat little box you just don’t fit in, because the university policies and procedures are so ridiculously complex that you’d need a PhD to understand them - the list could go on.”

“The stipend is not enough to survive on full-time. I have kids so this means that without my husband’s support I would not be able to pursue this degree. I often wonder whether it is better to abandon the degree and just get a stable full-time job and pay my debt. I also see that the work/life balance of academic life is insane. and it is only getting worse.”

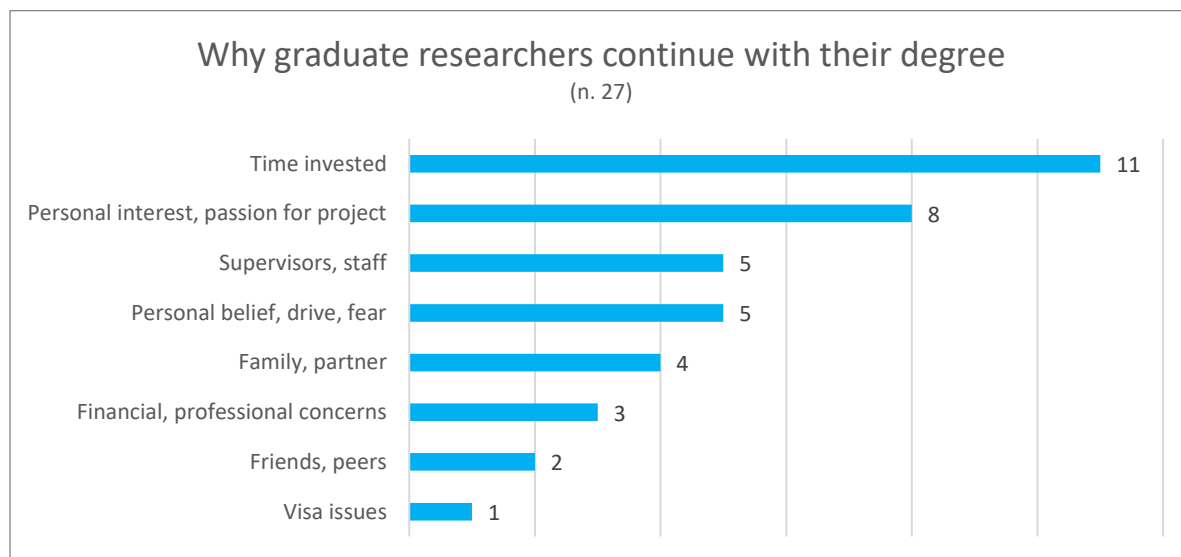
“As a PhD student, the research seems never-ending.”

“Currently going through a bad patch of health, let things slide, and having some difficulty getting motivated and starting again. Only just beginning to write again.”

Why continue

Respondents who had considered leaving their course were asked why they had decided to continue.

The responses of Arts graduate researchers are summarised below:



The most common reason Monash graduate researchers continue with their degree despite considering leaving is because of the **time they have already invested**. Comments include:

“I’m almost finished and so thought it would be a waste not to.”

"I don't like to leave jobs half-finished and it seemed like a huge waste of time, energy and resources to quit halfway through. Also, the possibilities that may be presented to me after finishing the PhD have been a motivator to finish."

"I came to Australia with my family. We did a lot of work to be able to be here."

"I do have love for what I do, I want to help make things better for victims. But also, I feel I have sunk so much time in, what would it all be for if I quit. I want to finish it."

Other interesting comments included:

"I want the doctorate badly enough as it's been a dream for a long time. I don't know how well transferring would go and it's all a bit of a mystery. I've decided to finish and just disengage with the university and find ways to get what I need on my own. Thankfully EdX exists - how sad is that, that I'm a PhD at a G08 university and I need to go on EdX to get the education I need to complete my program."

"I spoke to other academics (other than my supervisors) and my support system outside of uni."

"I changed supervisors, and I have a real passion for my project. I was at the end stage of the research so decided to finish it."

"Love of the research. Feeling supported by my supervisors. Viewing the process as long-term."

"I know that my Mum wanted me to do a PhD since I also want to do it for myself. In continuing my degree, I know I'm doing this for and with her, and hopefully to make her proud since this is also a great opportunity."

"For the sake of my family, who have supported me this far. Also, for my future. Additionally, as an international student, I've paid a significant amount of money, and I don't want to waste that investment."

"My husband's support (financially and emotionally), and my passion for my research project."

"I don't intend to let this beat me - and the fact that I see a regular group at ... translation encourages me to keep going. Thank goodness for zoom!"

"I have been working as an academic/lecturer in a university in my country and the degree would be so valuable for my career development. It will also help the university/faculty to have more PhD in the future."

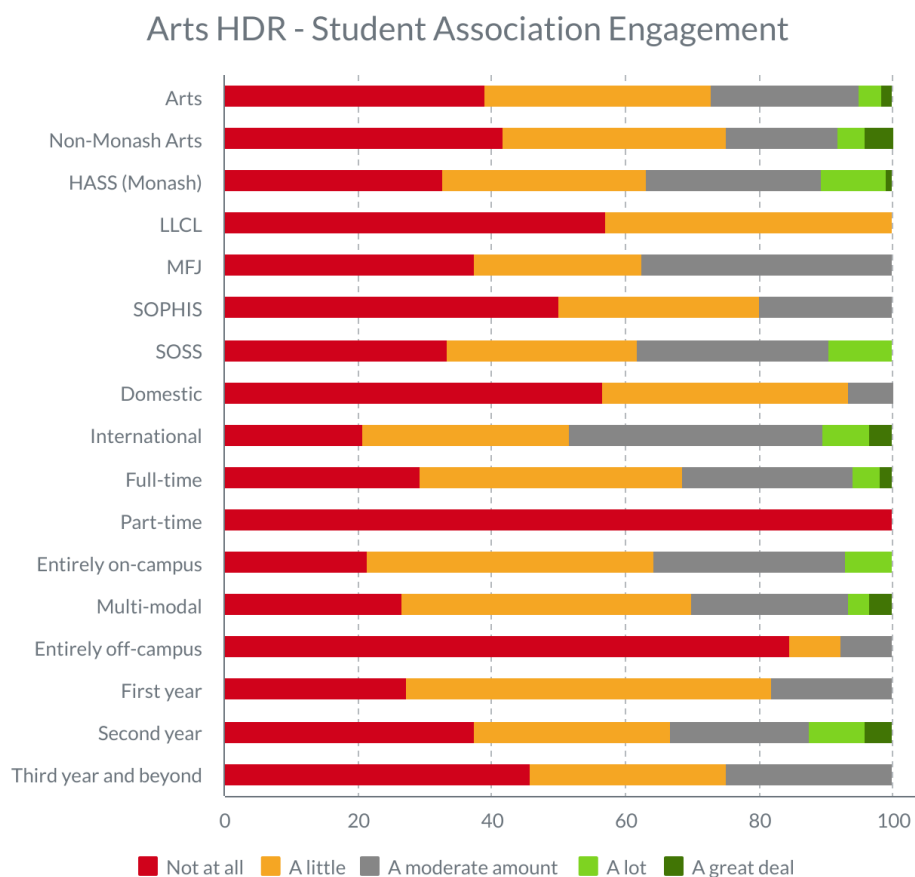
Engagement and Satisfaction with the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

This section highlights the engagement levels that Arts graduate research students have with their representative body - the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) – as well as their satisfaction with the MGA. It also includes respondents’ suggestions for how the MGA or equivalent student body could better support the university’s students.

3.1 MGA engagement

Participants were asked to respond to the question *how engaged do you feel with your student association or union or guild?*

Below is a summary of how key groups within Arts responded:



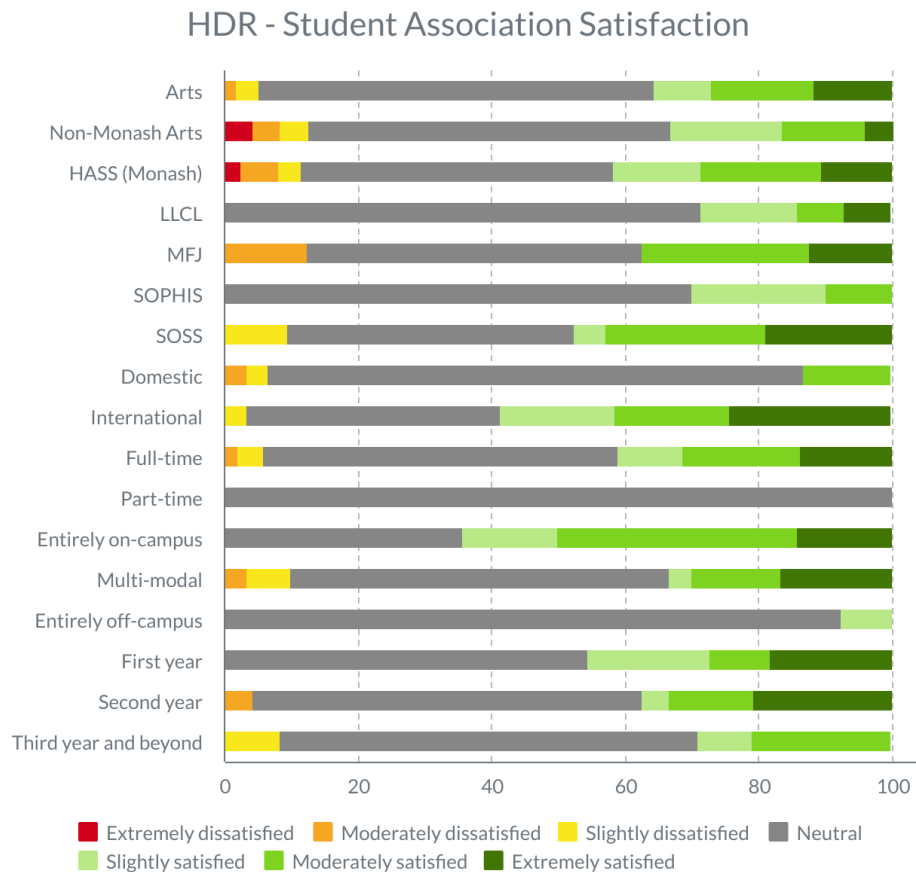
Part-time graduate researchers were the least likely to have engaged with the MGA – followed by students who study entirely off-campus.

International students were more engaged than domestic students.

3.2 MGA satisfaction

Participants were asked to respond to the question *how satisfied are you with your student association/union/guild?*

Below is a summary of how key groups within Arts responded:



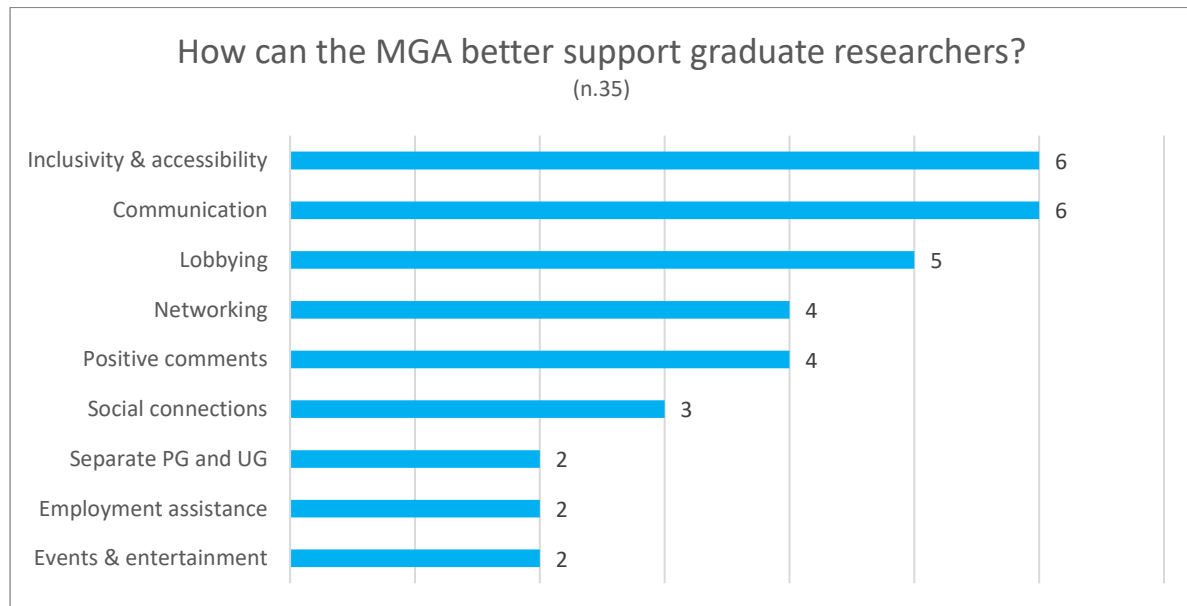
Arts students were most-likely to have a neutral opinion of the MGA; however, more were satisfied than dissatisfied.

Satisfaction seemingly decreased as students progressed through their course.

3.3 Suggestions for additional support

Participants were given the opportunity to respond to the question *how could your student association better support you?*

Below is a summary of responses:



The most frequent response from graduate researchers related to **inclusivity and accessibility**. These comments included:

“As a very mature student I don't think I really fit in with the student union.”

“Events that cater more to a young professional crowd - everything seems to be either for kids or for parents and, sorry, but a bit lame/boring.”

“I work from home as it's a 90-minute journey to Monash each way. So not much opportunity to interact.”

“More graduate activities, I feel out of place with the normal Monash activities being a graduate student and a tutor, because I worry about my students being there and it would be weird.”

The other most frequent response related to **improving communication**. Comments included:

“Better communication. A website that works. More pressure on the university to improve things for PhDs.”

“More resources to navigate cost of living/housing issues. More info/resource sharing between schools and depts about grants, conferences, opportunities.”

“Better awareness of the services they offer. Better advocacy on behalf of the students. There have been some negative changes to student policy that have really affected my experiences

and I have no knowledge of what, if anything, MGA does to try and push back against this stuff.”

Other interesting comments included:

“There needs to be better support for graduate students specifically. We are a different cohort with different needs and this needs to be acknowledged. I don’t really care about social events and would much rather stronger advocacy. As grad students we fall into the gap between student unions and the NTEU.”

“Advocate for better (or existent) pay for graduate students.”

“Make them open the library longer at weekends and evenings and outside term time. Literally the only thing research students need and they won’t do it.”

“The student association has effectively supported us by offering diverse activities such as free food events, yoga classes, and other benefits. To further enhance this support, expanding services to include more academic and professional development opportunities like tutoring, career workshops, and research collaborations would be beneficial.”

“The graduate student association is available and provides opportunities for networking and socialisation; I've participated little, but that's not the grad association's fault.”

“Not really sure but maybe a gathering among PhD to just chit chat and share or provide a mental health support group though I think we have the similar program. I'm not yet familiar with everything since I'm quite new.”

“Have more interpersonal engagements that may not be too focused on the PhD work since it can create competitiveness. The more human side of connections open up more dialogues about our personal experiences while doing a PhD.”

“Probably by having specific events for PhD students besides the postgrad and undergrad.”

“Assign a casual compulsory buddy program to immerse commencing PhD students with the work culture? But otherwise so far have been great!”

Conclusion

The results of the MGA's *National Postgraduate Student Satisfaction Survey 2024* have provided valuable insights into what Arts graduate research students value in regard to their educational experience, as well as how satisfied they are with the structure and delivery of their degrees.

The key findings, as they relate to respondents from the Faculty of Arts, are summarised below:

Key findings

Arts graduate researchers are largely satisfied with their supervision experience

Across all sixteen metrics surveyed, satisfaction in relation to supervision was high. Arts graduate researchers are predominantly satisfied with their supervision experience with supervisors largely meeting the expectations and needs of their students.

The most important aspect of supervision was receiving constructive feedback and this was also an area in which students were widely satisfied. Supervisors were also accessible with the majority of students reporting that their meeting frequency fell within the University's guidelines.

A focus on the academic skillset is desired from Professional Development

Students in Arts placed great importance on Professional Development themes that focused on developing their academic skillset with publishing, research methodologies, presenting and grant writing occupying the first four places on their ranking. Satisfaction with what is being delivered in relation to these themes was comparatively low, which meant there was a wide gap between importance and satisfaction.

Pay satisfaction is low in the Faculty of Arts

The majority of Arts respondents (55%) believed that they were definitely not paid appropriately for the work they did for the University and a further 21% indicated they were probably not paid appropriately. This contrasted sharply with respondents studying humanities at other universities of whom 0% said they were definitely not paid appropriately and 27% said they were probably not.

Although not as dramatic a contrast, the pay dissatisfaction in Arts was also higher than that recorded across HASS at Monash.

MGA engagement and satisfaction better among international students and those who attend campus

The MGA better engages with international graduate researchers than their domestic colleagues – both full-time and part-time, while the Association struggles to reach those who do not regularly attend campus.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the MGA's *National Postgraduate Student Satisfaction Survey 2024*, the MGA recommends the following actions be taken to improve the graduate research student experience in the Faculty of Arts:

Renewed effort to increase the percentage of students choosing their own supervisors

Where possible, an active effort to encourage and facilitate prospective graduate researchers to choose their own supervisor would be beneficial to overall student satisfaction, retention and completions.

Address pay dissatisfaction for graduate researchers employed by the University

Encourage the University to review casual and fixed-term contract positions made available to graduate researchers to ensure a higher proportion of pay satisfaction.

Tackle imposter syndrome in graduate research students

Consider seminars and workshops on imposter syndrome and resilience to raise awareness and provide coping mechanisms.

Encourage and foster peer support opportunities which can be a valuable platform for candidates to share experiences, offer mutual encouragement, and build a sense of community and which can help to alleviate feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome.

The MGA to more actively engage with domestic and off-campus students

Improve outreach with domestic and off-campus students by working with the faculties to interact with traditionally difficult to reach cohorts.

Appendix 1: Demographics

Academic Unit	Respondents
Arts and Social Sciences (Malaysia)	4 (6%)
Languages, Literature, Culture and Linguistics (LLCL)	15 (21%)
Media, Film and Journalism (MFJ)	14 (20%)
Philosophical, Historical and International Studies (SOPHIS)	13 (19%)
Sir Zelman Cowen Centre of Music	1 (1%)
Social Sciences (SOSS)	23 (33%)

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	11 (16%)
Clayton	47 (66%)
Caulfield	20 (28%)
Peninsula	0
Parkville	0
Malaysia	4 (6%)
Suzhou	1 (1%)
other	0 (0%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	35 (49%)
International student	37 (51%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	69 (86%)
Part-time	10 (13%)
On leave from study	1 (1%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	16 (22%)
Multi-modal	39 (54%)
Entirely off-campus	15 (21%)
Other	2 (3%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	20 (28%)
1-5 years	34 (47%)
6-10 years	14 (19%)
11+ years	4 (6%)

Course progress	Respondents
First year	18 (25%)
Second year	25 (35%)
Third year and beyond	29 (40%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	2 (3%)
6-10	5 (7%)
11-20	17 (24%)
21-30	23 (32%)
31-40	19 (26%)
Over 40 hours	6 (8%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	54 (75%)
Advanced	12 (17%)
Intermediate	6 (8%)
Elementary	0 (0%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	52 (72%)
Man	15 (21%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	1 (1%)
Prefer to self-describe	2 (3%)
Prefer not to say	2 (3%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	14 (19%)
No	50 (69%)
Prefer not to disclose	8 (11%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	0 (0%)
No	34 (97%)
Prefer not to disclose	1 (3%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	6 (8%)
No	61 (85%)
Prefer not to disclose	5 (7%)

Registered disability with DSS	Respondents
Yes	3 (50%)
No	3 (50%)

Age	Respondents
24 or under	7 (10%)
25-29	21 (29%)
30-39	31 (43%)
40 and over	13 (18%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	6 (8%)
Part-time	12 (17%)
Casual	24 (33%)
Unemployed and looking for work	15 (21%)
Not employed and not looking for work	19 (26%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	8 (21%)
6-10	14 (36%)
11-20	8 (21%)
21-30	5 (13%)
31-40	4 (10%)
More than 40	0 (%)