

# Identifying Graduate Research Student Satisfaction



Faculty of Business and Economics

*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 Business and Economics (BusEco) are summarised below:

### **BusEco graduate researchers are overwhelmingly positive in relation to their supervision experience**

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

The University's recommended meeting frequency was mostly met with 83% of full-time graduate researchers meeting with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 66% of part-time BusEco 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 BusEco graduate researchers, were receiving constructive feedback and having their supervisors act professionally. Meanwhile, supervisors encouraging ownership of respondents' research was what students were most satisfied with.

Constructive feedback (-9.78%) and mentoring (-6.48%) were the two areas where the gap between importance and satisfaction were widest.

### **Student satisfaction with their academic unit high**

Across the board, BusEco 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.

### **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 research methodologies was of the utmost importance to BusEco graduate researchers, while entrepreneurial skills was the least important.

Respondents were most satisfied with PD on mental health, while the widest gap between importance and satisfaction was in relation to data analysis techniques.

### **Marginal increase in number of graduate researchers working for the University, with most workers satisfied they are paid appropriately**

There was a slight rise of BusEco respondents reporting that they had worked for the University - up from 59% in 2021 to 61% in 2024. Of those who had worked for Monash, 71% were employed on a casual contract, while 29% had a fixed-term contract.

The majority of BusEco respondents (77%) believed that they were paid appropriately for the work they did for the University. This contrasts with respondents from across HASS at the University of whom 50% said they were not paid appropriately.

### **Doubts, delays and drop outs**

The majority of BusEco graduate researchers (64%) have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 11% indicating that they experienced this feeling "often."

One-quarter of BusEco graduate researchers (25%) had never experienced a delay in their research, while 11% indicated that they often experienced delays.

The proportion of respondents' selecting cost of living and/or financial concerns as a reason for considering leaving their degree more than doubled from 2021 levels.

BusEco graduate researchers were marginally less likely than their colleagues across HASS to have considered leaving their degree, but slightly more likely than those doing business and economics degrees at other universities.

The most common reasons for considering leaving were supervision issues.

The most common responses for continuing with their degree was personal interest or passion for the project.

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

International BusEco students were more engaged with the MGA than were their domestic colleagues.

BusEco students were more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with the MGA; however, levels of dissatisfaction were higher in the Faculty than was the case in other faculties.

## 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 BusEco at Monash University. In BusEco, a total of 40 graduate research students participated in the survey (see *Appendix 1: Demographics*), which we estimate to be approximately 15% 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 15 graduate research students in the field of business and economics 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.

### *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,<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 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.

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<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.



## Supervision

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

### Choice of supervisor

Did you choose your supervisor?	BusEco 2021	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Yes	72%	69%	65%	80%
No	28%	31%	35%	20%

There has been a minor drop since 2021 in BusEco PhD candidates choosing their own supervisors.

The result in BusEco is slightly ahead of that recorded across HASS at Monash; however, it was below that of students studying in the field of business and economics 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.<sup>3</sup>

### Choice of topic

Did you choose your own topic?	BusEco 2021	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Yes	88%	74%	86%	93%
No	12%	26%	14%	7%

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

Students choosing their own topic was far less likely in BusEco than it was across HASS at Monash and far likely than it was in the field of business and economics across other participating universities.

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<sup>3</sup> 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?	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Weekly	26%	15%	20%
Fortnightly	49%	47%	40%
Once every 3 weeks	3%	6%	20%
Once a month	9%	16%	20%
Less than once a month	14%	16%	0%

The majority of BusEco 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 BusEco respondents, 83% met with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 66% of part-time BusEco 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:

*"I don't have so many questions."*

*"I'm at the data collection stage of the research which requires less consultations."*

*"I prefer not to – there is no need, I am a self-directed researcher and writer."*

*"Primarily because I find meeting with my supervisors extremely demotivating. Also, I can work very effectively autonomously."*

## 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	6.24	5.63	-9.78%
Act professionally	5.97	5.94	-0.50%
Skilled supervisors	5.94	5.63	-5.22%
Guide me through the degree	5.88	5.56	-5.44%
Access to supervisors	5.85	5.91	1.03%
Timely feedback	5.79	5.78	-0.17%
Support for work/life balance	5.74	5.41	-5.75%
Mentor me	5.71	5.34	-6.48%
I am a priority	5.65	5.69	0.71%
I am heard	5.65	5.47	-3.19%
Help me belong academically	5.53	5.22	-5.61%
Help me network	5.53	5.31	-3.98%
Encourage ownership	5.50	6.00	9.09%
Inform me of support services	5.50	5.38	-2.18%
Clear role delegation	5.47	5.50	0.55%
Career pathway	5.41	5.38	-0.55%
	5.71	5.57	-2.34%

Receiving constructive feedback and having their supervisors act professionally were the most important aspect of supervision according to BusEco respondents.

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

The widest gaps between importance and satisfaction were recorded in relation to constructive feedback and mentoring.

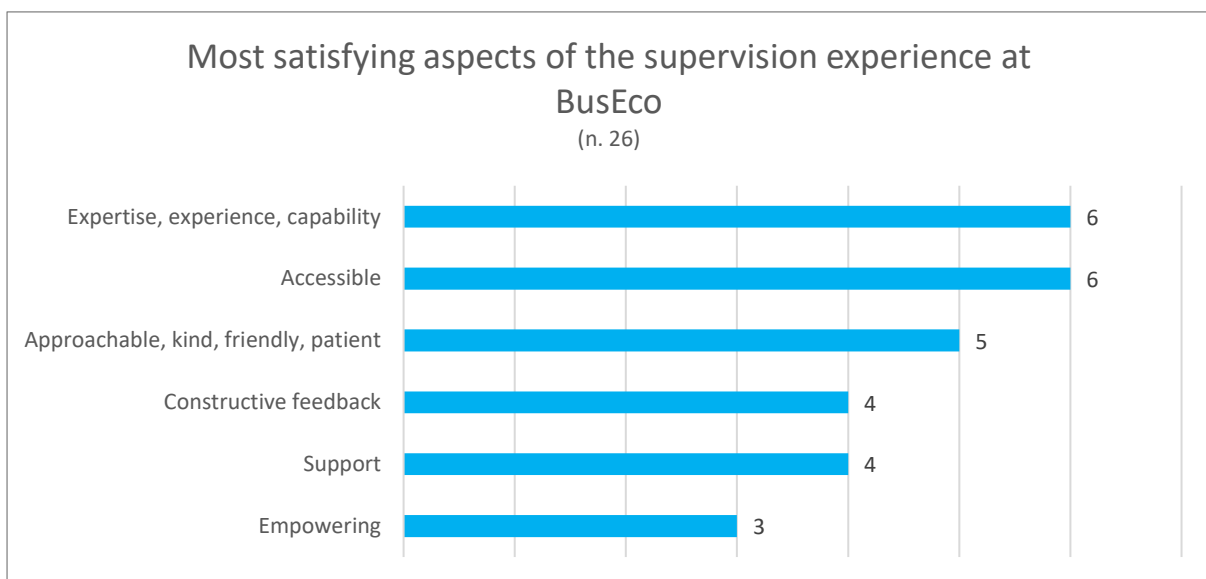
## The supervision experience

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 BusEco:



Some of the interesting comments included:

*“My supervisors have supported me through the toughest phase of my life. They not only supported me through my PhD but have been allies to me through my studies, career and life.”*

*“Fantastic people, supportive, respectful, encouraging. Having spent 10 years working in the corporate world I didn’t expect this level of support and encouragement.”*

*“My supervision is skilfully crafted by experienced supervisors. I am confident that my research project is steered towards a correct direction.”*

*“They provide constructive and timely feedback and they are always supportive.”*

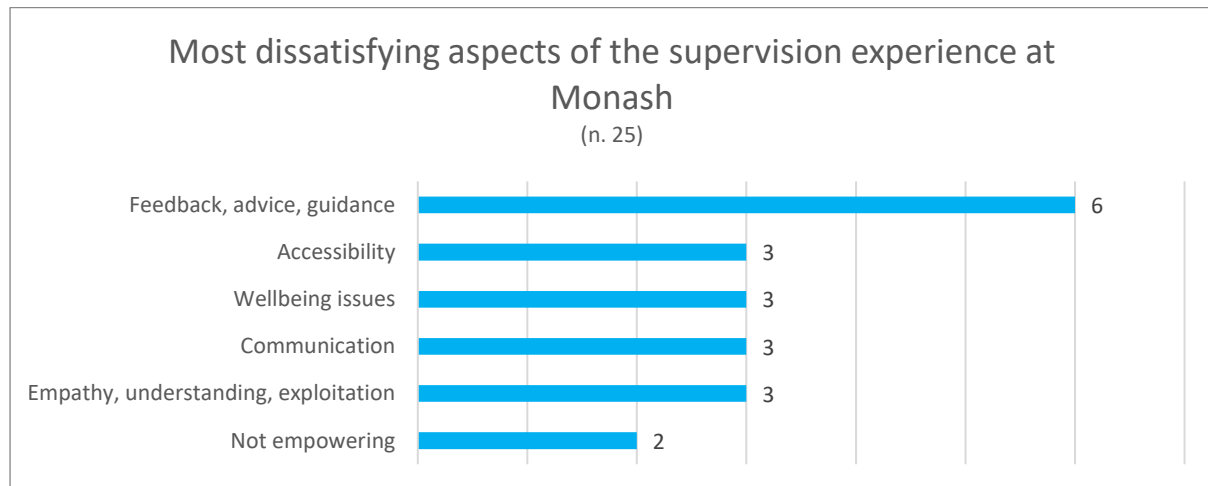
*“They provide timely, constructive feedback. They are kind, supportive and care about my academic and mental health. They make my PhD journey smooth.”*

*“Most satisfying about your supervision experience is receiving constructive feedback to improve my research. Also, guidance on career pathways.”*

## 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 BusEco:



Interesting comments included:

*“Overall it has been extremely disappointing. While my primary supervisor has been supportive, interactions with my secondary supervisor have been almost without fail extremely demotivating. During my first [earlier] years it would take me about a week to recover from supervisor meetings, they were so demotivating I could barely do any work. I had little idea what was expected from me at these meetings and in my thesis, my supervisors' guidance was contradictory and changed from meeting to meeting. I received incorrect advice about what was required for both my milestone reviews - my supervisors depended on memory of past reviews rather than check what were the current requirements. I have thought of quitting many times, and once nearly did.”*

*“Sometimes I feel unheard or put down right after the meetings but when I go over it again I understand my mistake or the way I shared a particular idea could have led to that confusion.”*

*“Managing workload distribution.”*

*“None. Perhaps a desire to work with them even more closely but of course they are busy with other students, teaching, doing their own research and writing”*

*“My supervisor only care about the outcomes and disregard the effort I put into my work. The supervisor always push me, use inappropriate language to judge my work and me, and show no regard for my mental and physical health, which places immense pressure on me.”*

*“Would be nicer if the students' personal circumstances are given a bit more consideration when deciding on the workload.”*

## Conflict with supervisor

Have you ever had a disagreement with a supervisor that was challenging to overcome?	BusEco 2017*	BusEco 2021*	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
No, I've never had a serious disagreement with a supervisor	(no) 5%	(no) 14%	68%	69%	75%
Yes, but it was only minor	(yes) 95%	(yes) 86%	23%	22%	17%
Yes, I have had a serious disagreement			10%	9%	8%

\*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 BusEco were as likely to have had a disagreement with a supervisor as their HASS colleague, but more likely than studying business and economics at another university.

## Type of conflict

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

Comments included:

*“At the beginning of my supervision, I did not know whether was the best way to communicate, and I had not been used to the relaxed working manner in Australia. After a few weeks, everything went in place and I was completely satisfied with the working customs.”*

*“My supervisor requires me to report my work and progress weekly, complete a short-written piece each week, and I am expected to finish at least four journal manuscripts before graduation. However, balancing this with other responsibilities such as RA and TA duties, along with my PhD thesis and additional publications, has proven challenging. Often, I cannot meet these requirements weekly or even fortnightly, which has added significant pressure over the past few years. I have discussed this with my supervisor, but the supervisor perceives my explanations as excuses and believe I am not working as hard as other PhD students. My supervisor also frequently blames me that I am not respecting or complying with the department and university rules, which mandate completing the supervisor's assigned tasks at least every two weeks, with no exceptions throughout the year. Additionally, our collaboration on papers last year required me to prioritise, write, and revise one particular paper countless times, in addition to my PhD manuscripts. I also feel that the supervisor is transferring his/her own publication or promotion pressures onto me. All this stuff has made my PhD journey extremely unhappy and exhausting, and I feel that my mental health has deteriorated in recent years.”*

*“I have a chronic medical condition and not in a good space emotionally (owing to certain problems in my personal life, which makes it challenging for me to put in, say, 10 hours each day. Perhaps it's difficult for others to understand this, even when I tell them of my circumstances.”*

*“One year before my progress review my secondary supervisor spent about an hour arguing with me about what I would do in the following year to prepare for the review. It caused me more stress than I can describe. I am an extremely experienced researcher and writer, and had proven this in my previous work and confirmation review, yet felt my supervisor was treating me like a recent graduate that had no motivation or experience. It turned out my supervisor had not read the requirements of my degree and I did not have to do what he spent an hour arguing I had to do. So he was very unprofessional in two ways - the patronising way he treated me and that he didn't bother to check the requirements before our meeting.”*

*“Most of the mismatched expectations stemmed from the change in supervision, where roles and responsibilities became unclear. Expected contributions did not match the supervisory load as well.”*

## 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”?	BusEco 2021*	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Decided to do nothing	29%	20%	12%	33%
Sorted it out directly with supervisor(s)	71%	60%	64%	67%
Sought assistance from a friend/colleague	0%	30%	24%	0%
Sought assistance from student association	0%	0%	5%	67%
Sought assistance from my chair	NA	10%	14%	0%
Sought assistance from grad. coordinator or head of school	0%	10%	14%	33%
Other	0%	10	17%	33%

\* 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 BusEco who directly respond to conflict by speaking with their supervisor decreased marginally, while BusEco respondents were more-likely to do nothing than their colleagues across HASS at Monash.

## Changing supervisors

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

### Considered changing supervisors

Have you thought about changing supervisors?	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Never	61%	69%	64%
Rarely	23%	16%	18%
Often	13%	9%	18%
All the time	3%	6%	0%

BusEco respondents were less likely than those from the HASS faculties at Monash to have considered changing their supervisors.

### Supervisor changes

Have you ever changed supervisors?	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
No	65%	69%	55%
Yes, but it wasn't my choice	23%	17%	27%
Yes, my supervisor and I agreed to make a change	7%	5%	9%
Yes, I decided to change a supervisor(s) even though they did not want to be replaced	3%	3%	9%
Other	7%	8%	0%

BusEco respondents were marginally more likely than those across HASS at Monash and less likely than business 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.

BusEco responses included:

*“They are supportive enough to advance my research.”*

*“No other suitable supervisor available and just the hassle of going through another change in supervision team.”*

*“Don't want to alienate supervisor and have worked out a way to have minimal interaction.”*

## Comments on the process of changing supervisors

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

BusEco responses included:

*“The most stressful process in PhD. It took about 7 months and I was without any active supervisor in this period of time. That made me crazy and sick.”*

*“I expect the advocating services of the MGA to be more responsive and timelier. Also, I expect the advocating services to be more individually case-based rather than just sending out all relevant material.”*

*“The process itself is seamless but the impact is large. My external supervisor is more aligned with my goals and aspirations.”*

## 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 BusEco 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	4%	7%	4%	11%	18%	14%	43%
I am treated in a respectful manner			7%	11%	18%	11%	54%
I am encouraged by staff to socialise with other research students in my area	4%	4%		18%	11%	18%	46%
I am informed about opportunities for tutoring/sessional work		4%		29%	14%	14%	39%
My academic unit provides appropriate facilities for my field of research	4%	4%	4%	7%	18%	14%	50%
My academic unit provides a student-specific social area for me to use	4%	4%	7%	7%	14%	18%	46%
My academic unit organises regular seminars and guest speakers for research...	4%	4%		11%	11%	25%	46%
Other research students in my academic unit are supportive	4%	4%	7%	7%	11%	21%	46%
I feel the policies, rules and regulations around doing research are there to sup...		7%		18%	14%	11%	50%
Provides an academically stimulating environment	7%			7%	21%	18%	46%
I can see myself having a career in a place like this	7%		4%	11%	21%	21%	36%

Across the board, BusEco 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 (83%).

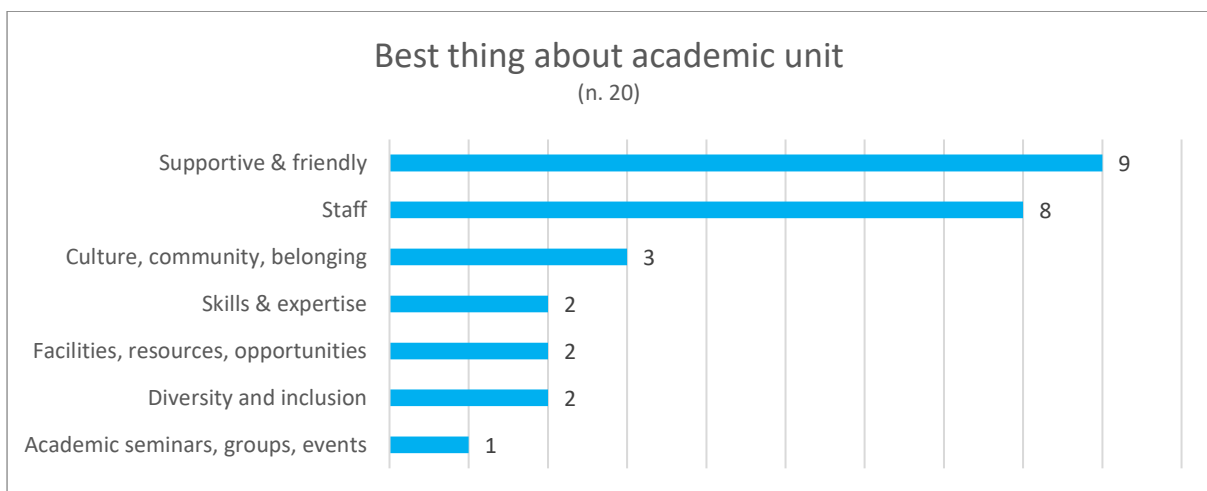
## Academic unit comments

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 BusEco graduate researchers are summarised below:



Revealing responses included:

*"All staff are kind. Organized a lot of workshops and seminars, which is a good thing for young PhD students."*

*"Everybody is extremely warm and welcoming. I love the coffee machine!"*

*"I love my cohort and my area of research."*

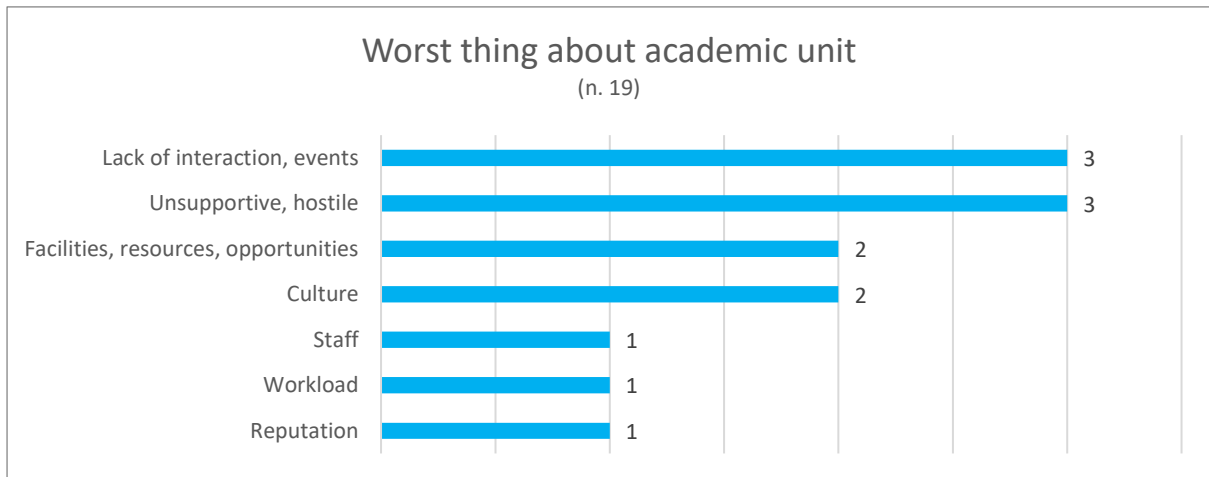
*"People are inclusive and open for talk. They are patient in listening and willing to provide guidance."*

*"The staff are friendly when I make the effort to engage."*

## Worst aspects of academic unit

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

The responses of BusEco graduate researchers are summarised below:



Interesting comments included:

*"Feedback can be harsh. Bureaucracy as well."*

*"It is less well-known internationally."*

*"Can be isolated between research streams sometimes."*

*"Politicking and favouritism."*

*"No clear path/induction."*

## 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 (7%)
No, I'm not at this stage yet	9 (29%)
No, I presented my research, but I need to make amendments	2 (7%)
Yes, I passed first time	18 (58%)
Yes, I passed, but after I needed to make amendments	0 (0%)

### 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 (28% extremely satisfied, 44% moderately satisfied, 6% slightly satisfied), while a small proportion indicated that they were dissatisfied (6% extremely dissatisfied, 6% moderately dissatisfied, 6% slightly dissatisfied).

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

The responses of BusEco 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	11%	6%		6%	11%	39%	28%
My supervisor(s) guided me through the confirmation process	11%	6%		6%	17%	17%	44%
The preparation required was a good use of my time		11%	11%	6%		39%	33%
I felt comfortable speaking openly with the panel		6%		11%	6%	33%	44%
The behaviour and tone of the panel was professional			6%	11%	17%	11%	56%
The panel provided useful feedback		6%	6%	6%	17%	22%	44%

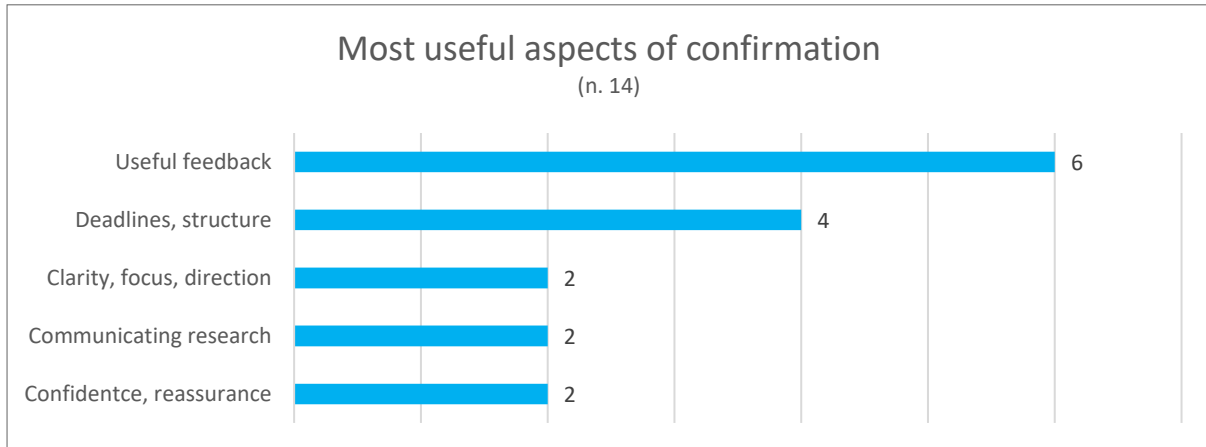
Respondents were predominantly satisfied with confirmation. In particular, BusEco graduate researchers were satisfied with the behaviour and tone of the panel.

The highest level of overall dissatisfaction (22%) 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:



Interesting comments included:

*"It made me confident to talk in front of a group of professional staff."*

*"It gave me valuable feedback that I have not previously thought of about my research."*

*"An opportunity to assess where I was up to and develop a timeline to complete."*

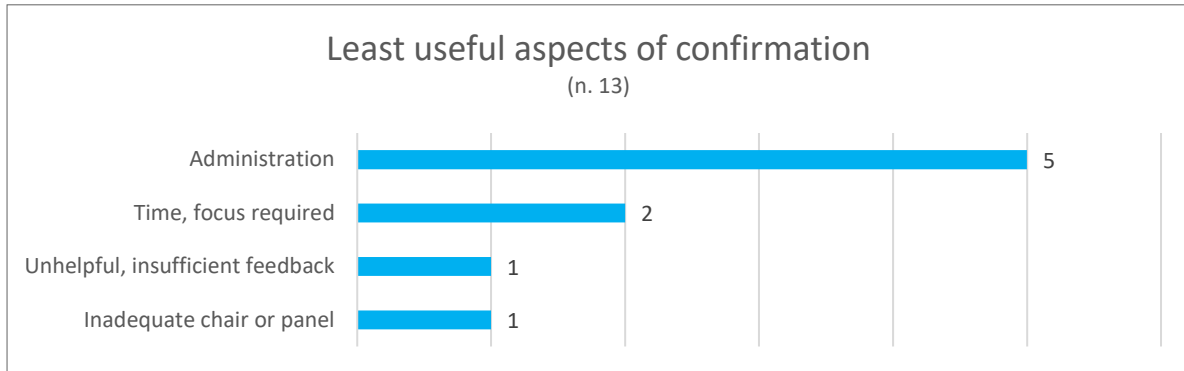
*"A great exercise to test my research project and receive feedback that helped me refine my research topic and question."*

*"Valuable feedback, great to have a deadline."*

## 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:



Interesting comments included:

*“Not being able to travel before confirmation. Otherwise nothing, it was a useful experience.”*

*“The time could have been longer to cover all the comments and suggestions provided by the panel and the audience.”*

*“The expectation of the confirmation could be clearer. Especially requiring the word count for the confirmation document is unreasonable. That means I need to prepare a separate document for it, which is time-consuming.”*

*“Lack of concrete information about what is expected.”*

*“I have opted for the thesis by published work route and the panel didn't seem very familiar with this approach. So, to a certain extent, they couldn't provide useful feedback in this area.”*

*“There was an obsession by my supervisors with me producing some writing which consumed an enormous amount of time and was pointless at such an early stage of my thesis. It took over a month to prepare, time that could have been much better spent researching for my thesis.”*

## 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?	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
No	28%	13%	10%
Yes, but it was optional	17%	11%	60%
Yes, it is mandatory	55%	76%	30%

Professional Development was mandatory for the majority of BusEco respondents. It was mandatory for 76% of respondents from HASS at Monash, but only 30% of those studying business and economics 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 (1-7)	Satisfaction (1-7)	Gap (%)
<i>Research methodologies</i>	6.21	5.53	-10.95%
<i>Presenting findings e.g. conferences, meetings, seminars</i>	5.93	5.59	-5.73%
<i>Data analysis techniques</i>	5.76	5.00	-13.19%
<i>Project/research management</i>	5.69	5.55	-2.46%
<i>Publishing skills and knowledge</i>	5.55	5.60	0.90%
<i>Professional ethics</i>	5.52	5.56	0.72%
<i>Coursework relevant to my research</i>	5.38	4.78	-11.15%
<i>Grant writing</i>	5.31	5.00	-5.84%
<i>Career planning</i>	5.31	5.32	0.19%
<i>Industry exposure</i>	5.28	5.05	-4.36%
<i>Networking skills</i>	5.17	5.00	-3.29%
<i>Mental health and wellbeing</i>	5.17	6.06	17.21%
<i>PD with students from other fields</i>	5.10	4.64	-9.02%
<i>Entrepreneurial skills</i>	4.93	5.32	7.91%
	5.45	5.29	-2.79%

Having Professional Development opportunities that focus on research methodologies was of the utmost importance to BusEco graduate researchers, while entrepreneurial skills was the least important of the themes.

Respondents were most satisfied with PD on mental health and wellbeing. The widest gap between importance and satisfaction was in relation to data analysis techniques.

## 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 are some of the responses of BusEco students:

*“A 1:1 service for each PhD student to assess PD needs and then to show where and how to fulfil these.”*

*“A workshop where experimentalist researchers get to come together and discuss their instruments prior to publication to their fellow experimentalist researchers so that all mistakes/feedback can be adjusted and incorporated prior to running an experiment.”*

*“Many of the above courses are not sufficiently included.”*

## 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?	BusEco 2021	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Yes	59%	61%	54%	30%
No	41%	39%	46%	70%

\*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 a BusEco graduate researcher at Monash being given an opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university increased marginally over the past three years.

Meanwhile, BusEco respondents were almost twice as likely as non-Monash students in the field to have been given the opportunity to work for 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?	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024
Fixed-term (one of the 450 fixed-term roles offered at Monash)	29%	21%
Casual	71%	71%
Other	0%	8%

The overwhelming majority of BusEco graduate researchers employed by the University were on (or had been on) casual contracts; however, there were a higher proportion of respondent from BusEco on fixed-term contracts than there were in HASS across the University.

## 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?	BusEco 2021	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Definitely not	<i>(no)</i>	12%	32%	0%
Probably not	13%	12%	18%	33%
Probably yes	<i>(yes)</i>	59%	29%	67%
Definitely yes	87%	18%	21%	0%

\*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 BusEco respondents (77%) believed that they were paid appropriately for the work they did for the University. More students in BusEco believed they were paid appropriately than in HASS across 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...?	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Never	36%	21%	50%
Rarely	36%	30%	30%
Sometimes	18%	28%	20%
Often	11%	21%	0%

The majority of BusEco graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 11% indicating that they experienced this feeling "often."

Imposter syndrome levels in BusEco were largely lower than those experienced across HASS at Monash.

### 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?	BusEco 2017*	BusEco 2021*	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Never	(no) 72%	(no) 48%	25%	21%	30%
Rarely	(yes) 28%	(yes) 52%	32%	30%	30%
Sometimes			32%	28%	30%
Often			11%	21%	10%

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

One-quarter of BusEco graduate researchers (25%) had never experienced a delay in their research, while 11% 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	BusEco 2021	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Change of research project direction	32%	29%	23%	43%
Poor supervision	11%	24%	15%	29%
Lack of resources for my research	7%	14%	11%	29%
Preparing for hurdles/milestones	21%	29%	30%	0%
Unpleasant workplace/research environment	7%	14%	9%	14%
Lack of motivation	32%	24%	31%	29%
Procrastination	NA	24%	29%	29%
Health issues	39%	29%	30%	29%
Family responsibilities	18%	10%	25%	29%
Cost of living/financial concerns	14%	29%	30%	43%
Work commitments	7%	19%	25%	29%
Data collection issues	NA	29%	17%	29%
COVID-19	86%	29%	21%	29%
Other	11%	14%	12%	0%

Cost of living and/or financial concerns was a factor in the delay of research progress for 29% of BusEco graduate research students – more than doubling since 2021 levels.

## Considered leaving

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

Have you ever considered leaving your course?	BusEco 2021*	BusEco 2024	Monash HASS 2024	Other BusEco 2024
Never	(no) 81%	61%	59%	70%
Rarely	(yes) 19%	11%	22%	10%
Sometimes		29%	13%	10%
Often		0%	6%	10%

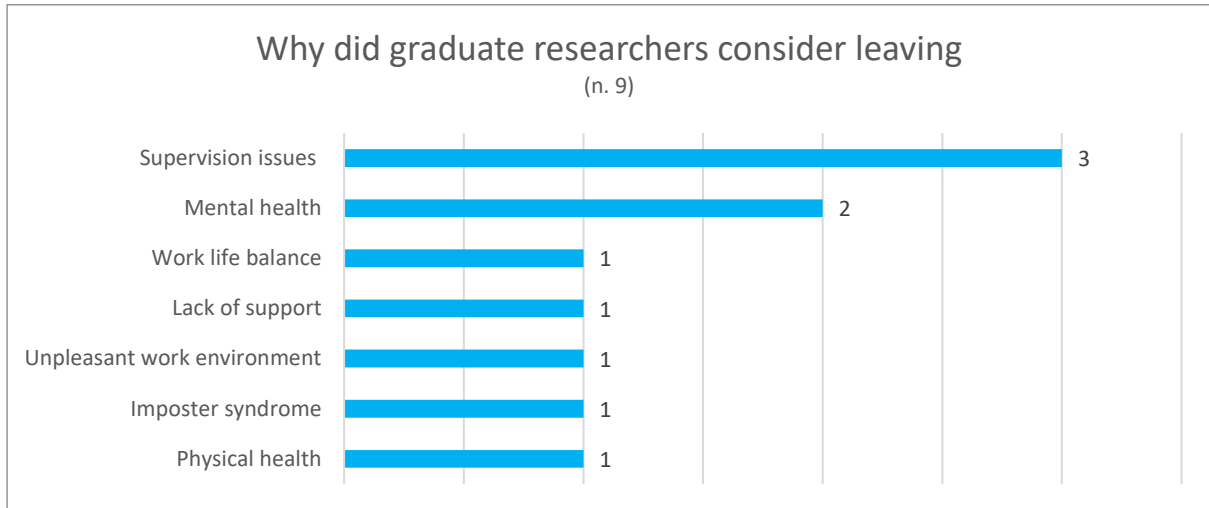
\*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a “yes” or “no” question.

BusEco graduate researchers were as likely as their colleagues across HASS to have considered leaving their degree.

## Why leave

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

The responses of BusEco graduate researchers are summarised below:



Comments included:

*“It just got too exhausting, so I thought about it ... but my love for research surpassed my depression.”*

*“With my previous supervision team, I can't see the way to improve and progress.”*

*“Extremely poor supervision - lack of consistency in expectations, very poor communication, never reading project plans sent to them (so I thought I was on track because I had no feedback to the contrary), etc.”*

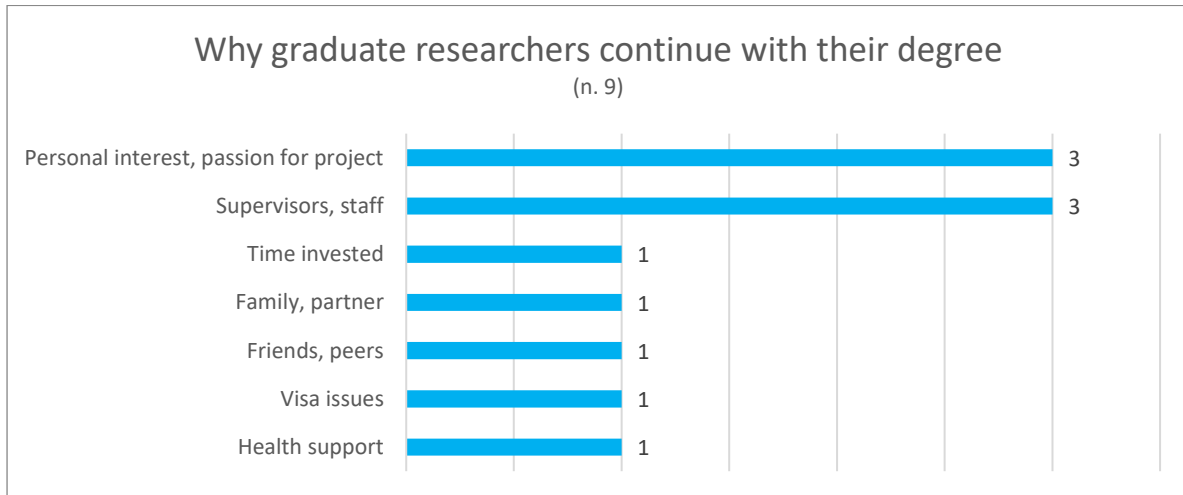
*“The academic unit doesn't seem transparent and fully supportive of their graduate research students.”*

*“I was too stressed and anxious about my ability. Lacked confidence and thought I was incapable of completing it.”*

## Why continue

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

The responses of BusEco graduate researchers are summarised below:



Comments included:

*"I love what I do too much and the hope that I will be able to do impactful research one day."*

*"My partner, program director, and visa issue."*

*"Since I changed the supervisors, everything is getting better. And I do notice I love research when I participate in other academic activities, e.g., seminars and workshops."*

*"Can't really give up midway."*

*"Support from supervisors and counselling."*

*"My passion for research, especially the research topic I have chosen."*

*"I was convinced by two friends, and I worked out ways to work around the poor supervision."*

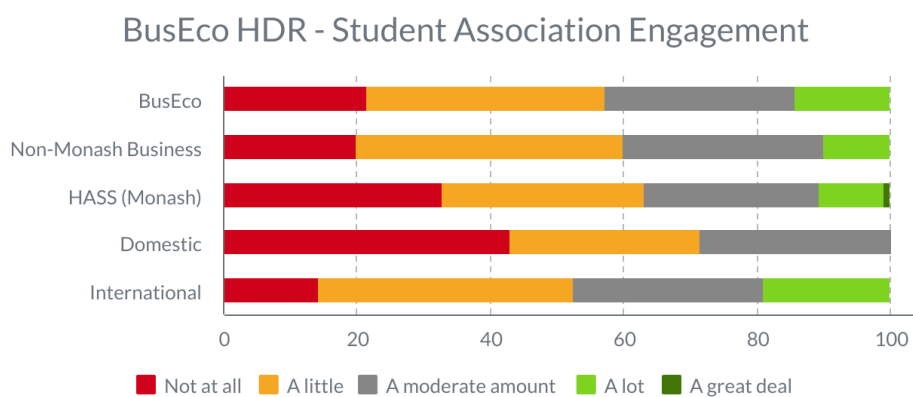
## Engagement and Satisfaction with the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

This section highlights the engagement levels that BusEco 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 BusEco responded:



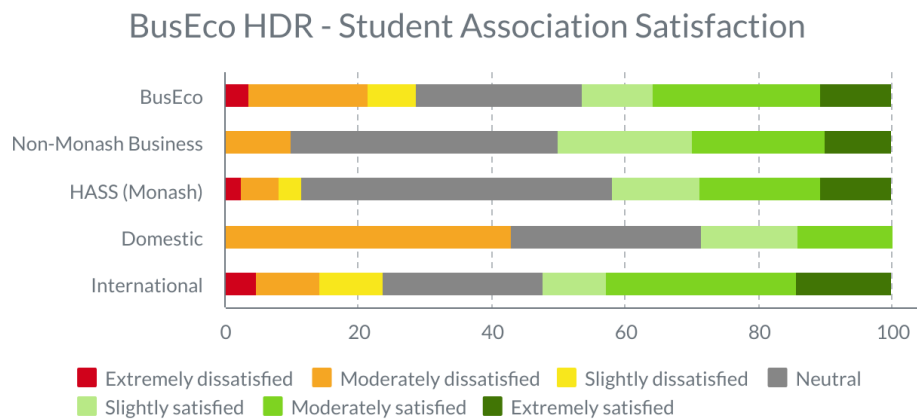
International students within the Faculty were more engaged with the MGA than were domestic students.



### 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 BusEco responded:



BusEco students were more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with the MGA; however, levels of dissatisfaction were higher in the Faculty than was the case in other faculties.

### 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 selection of responses:

*“Arrange more networking sessions.”*

*“By getting the university to pay casual staff better.”*

*“Maybe they make it clearer what their roles are.”*

*“More awareness and visibility about resources available to support us.”*

*“Proactively and individually approach the student to have personal conversation relating to university-related engagements.”*

*“Push to increase stipend.”*

*“The association can host more social events with fun activities, such as movies night, or sport games or even a readers community etc.”*

## Conclusion

The results of the MGA's *National Postgraduate Student Satisfaction Survey 2024* have provided valuable insights into what BusEco 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 Business and Economics, are summarised below:

### Key findings

#### **BusEco graduate researchers are largely satisfied with their supervision experience**

Across all sixteen metrics surveyed, satisfaction in relation to supervision was high. BusEco 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 they were most satisfied with how supervisors encouraged ownership of their own research.

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 BusEco placed great importance on Professional Development themes that focused on developing their academic skillset with research methodologies and data analysis techniques placing first and third, respectively, in a list of PD themes. 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 in these areas.

#### **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, while the higher than usual levels of dissatisfaction in BusEco with the MGA (compared to other faculties) is worthy of further exploration.

## 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 Business and Economics:

### *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.

### *Improving academic skillset offerings*

Improving students' access to seminars or Professional Development on research methodologies and data analysis techniques would be beneficial to the BusEco cohort.

### *The MGA to more actively engage with domestic students and address heightened levels of dissatisfaction within the BusEco cohort*

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

## Appendix 1: Demographics

<b>Academic Unit</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Accounting	7 (19%)
Banking and Finance	5 (14%)
Business Law and Taxation	3 (8%)
Centre for Global Business	1 (3%)
Centre for Health Economics	2 (5%)
Econometrics and Business Statistics	2 (5%)
Economics	7 (19%)
Management	6 (16%)
Marketing	4 (11%)

<b>Campus</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
I do not regularly attend campus	4 (11%)
Clayton	10 (26%)
Caulfield	26 (68%)
Peninsula	0 (0%)
Parkville	1 (3%)
Malaysia	2 (5%)
Suzhou	2 (5%)
other	0 (0%)

<b>Domestic/International</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	9 (24%)
International student	29 (76%)

<b>Study load</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Full-time	34 (85%)
Part-time	6 (15%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

<b>Study location</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Entirely on-campus	18 (47%)
Multi-modal	18 (47%)
Entirely off-campus	2 (5%)
Other	0 (0%)

<b>Time since last degree</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than 1 year	15 (40%)
1-5 years	17 (45%)
6-10 years	1 (3%)
11+ years	5 (13%)

<b>Course progress</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
First year	16 (42%)
Second year	7 (18%)
Third year and beyond	15 (40%)

<b>Study hours</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than 5	0 (0%)
6-10	3 (8%)
11-20	9 (24%)
21-30	10 (26%)
31-40	9 (24%)
Over 40 hours	7 (18%)

<b>English proficiency</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Fluent	19 (50%)
Advanced	7 (18%)
Intermediate	9 (24%)
Elementary	3 (8%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Woman	21 (55%)
Man	17 (45%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	0 (0%)
Prefer to self-describe	0 (0%)
Prefer not to say	0 (0%)

<b>LGBTIQA+</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	4 (11%)
No	32 (84%)
Prefer not to disclose	2 (5%)

<b>Indigenous (domestic students only)</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	0 (0%)
No	9 (100%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	2 (5%)
No	36 (95%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

<b>Registered disability with DSS</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	0 (0%)
No	2 (100%)

<b>Age</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
24 or under	10 (26%)
25-29	12 (32%)
30-39	10 (26%)
40 and over	6 (16%)

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Full-time	4 (11%)
Part-time	6 (16%)
Casual	11 (29%)
Unemployed and looking for work	7 (18%)
Not employed and not looking for work	10 (26%)

<b>Work hours</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than 5	9 (43%)
6-10	4 (19%)
11-20	3 (14%)
21-30	3 (14%)
31-40	2 (10%)
More than 40	0 (0%)