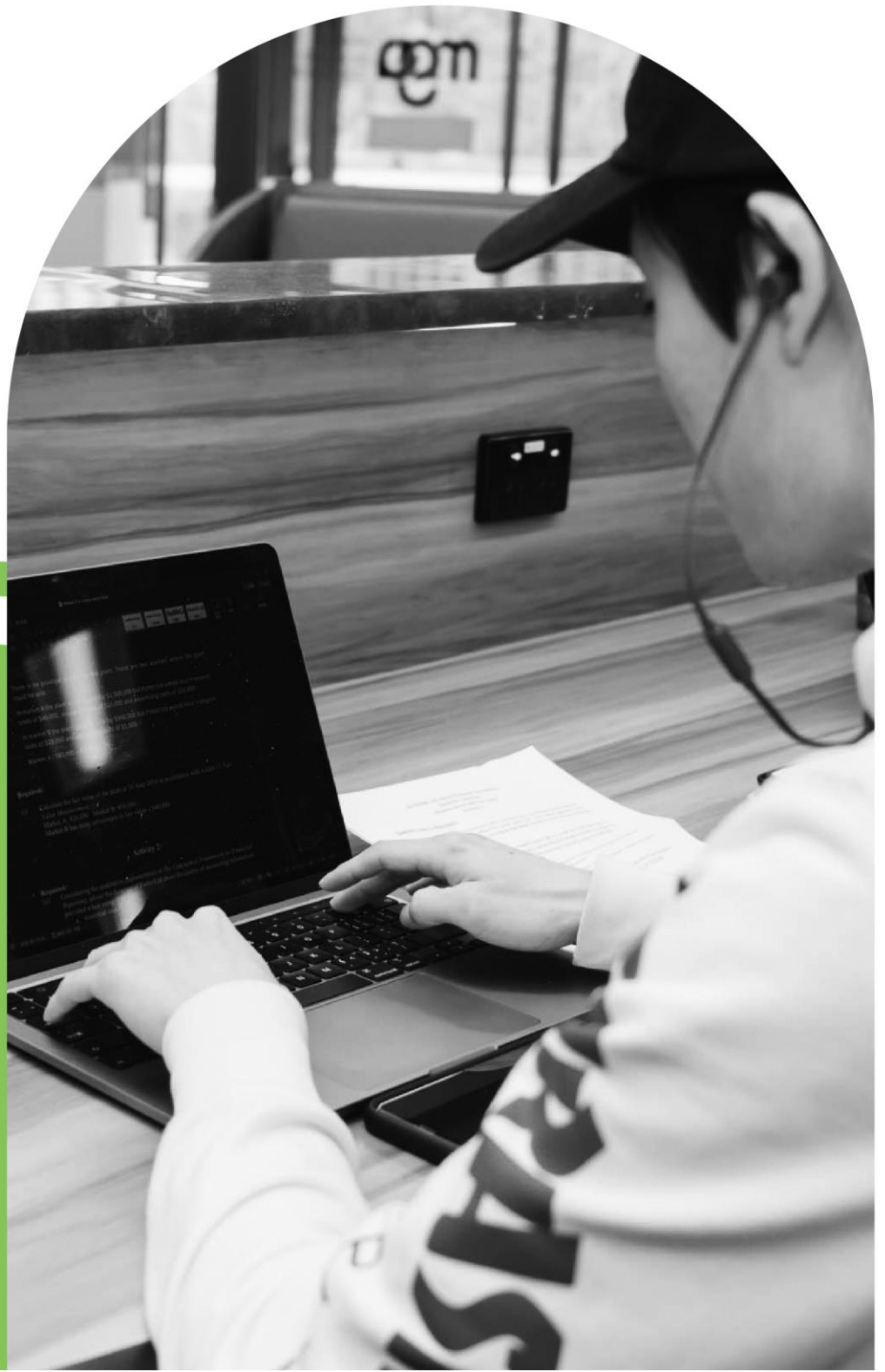


Identifying Graduate Research Student Satisfaction



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.

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

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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 at Monash are summarised below:

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

The sentiment of Monash respondents in relation to supervision were overwhelmingly positive.

The University's recommended meeting frequency was largely met with 88% of full-time graduate researchers meeting with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 90% of part-time Monash respondents met once a month or more frequently.

Monash supervisors were largely meeting the expectations and needs of their students. The most important aspect of supervision, according to Monash graduate researchers, was having skilled supervisors. Of the sixteen aspects surveyed, this was the area in which students were most satisfied.

Help with networking and career pathway planning were the two areas where the gap between importance and satisfaction were widest.

Student satisfaction with their academic unit high

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

The most common response as to the most satisfying aspect of their academic unit was the supportive and friendly atmosphere, while the most common dissatisfying aspect was facilities, resources and opportunities.

Confirmation process is largely satisfactory

Respondents were widely satisfied with 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 Monash 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 industry exposure also had the widest gap between importance and satisfaction. Career planning and grant writing were two 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

There was a slight rise of Monash respondents reporting that they had worked for the University - up from 52% in 2021 to 56% in 2024. Of those who had worked for Monash, 79% were employed on a casual contract, while 15% had a fixed-term contract.

The likelihood of a graduate researcher at Monash being given an opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university was on par with the likelihood at other universities.

The majority of respondents at both Monash University (69%) and the other universities (71%) believed, to some degree, that they were paid appropriately for the work they conducted. However, respondents from Monash were twice as likely as non-Monash respondents to believe they were definitely not paid appropriately.

Doubts, delays and drop outs

The majority of Monash graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 13% indicating that they experienced this feeling “often.”

Just under one-quarter of Monash graduate researchers (24%) had never experienced a delay in their research, while 14% indicated that they often experienced delays.

A lack of motivation was the most common response for a delay – followed by preparing for a milestone and procrastination. Meanwhile, cost of living and/or financial concerns were a factor in one-third of research delays at Monash.

Monash graduate researchers were less likely than those from other universities to have considered leaving their degree; however, 37% had considered dropping out at some point.

The most common reasons for considering leaving were mental health, financial issues and a lack of motivation. 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 do not regularly attend 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 Monash University. At Monash, a total of 699 Monash 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 University.

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 233 graduate research students across these universities completed the survey.

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 53% of total graduate research enrolments at Monash University in 2024. In this survey, international students accounted for 61% of total responses at Monash. 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.

Furthermore, when comparing Monash and Non-Monash results, the demographic make-up of respondents varied. For instance, international students made up 61% of Monash respondents, while they made up only 51% of Non-Monash respondents.

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?	Monash 2021	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Yes	87%	84%	85%
No	13%	16%	15%

The percentage of Monash graduate researchers choosing their own supervisors has decreased marginally since this question was last asked in 2021.

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

Although this survey does not track degree completions, respondents were asked to indicate if they had considered leaving their course (see *Doubts, delays and drop outs – Considered leaving*). Of those Monash respondents who had not chosen their own supervisor, 44% considered leaving at some point compared to 35% of those who had chosen their own supervisor.

Choice of topic

Did you choose your own topic?	Monash 2021	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Yes	76%	75%	80%
No	24%	25%	20%

In 2024, the percentage of Monash graduate researchers choosing their own research topic remained similar to 2021 levels.

Almost half (44%) of those who did not pick their own supervisor, also did not pick their own topic.

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?	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Weekly	47%	35%
Fortnightly	37%	37%
Once every 3 weeks	4%	11%
Once a month	6%	9%
Less than once a month	5%	8%

Almost half of Monash graduate research respondents met with their supervisors on a weekly basis, while a further 37% met fortnightly.

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 Monash respondents, 88% met with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 90% of part-time Monash 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?***

The majority of Monash respondents indicated that more frequent meetings were not required. Comments included:

"As this is my last year, I am finalising my thesis. Hence, I meet with my supervisors if I have finished with the editing."

"I mainly meet my supervisors when I have specific queries or when I need to discuss my chapters. I feel stressed if I have to meet more regularly without any work to show or discuss."

Some respondents noted that it was difficult to arrange a time with their supervisors. These included:

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

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

Other interesting comments included:

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

"They are available very quickly over email and most of my issues are resolved that way."

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 Monash 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 (%)
Skilled supervisors	6.52	6.18	-5.21%
Constructive feedback	6.47	6.08	-6.03%
I am heard	6.32	5.90	-6.65%
Access to supervisors	6.31	6.01	-4.75%
Timely feedback	6.31	5.99	-5.07%
Support for work/life balance	6.25	5.91	-5.44%
Guide me through the degree	6.17	5.80	-6.00%
Mentor me	6.16	5.76	-6.49%
Act professionally	6.14	6.18	+0.65%
Help me belong academically	6.08	5.61	-7.73%
Encourage ownership	5.99	6.01	+0.33%
Help me network	5.94	5.43	-8.59%
Career pathway	5.93	5.34	-9.95%
I am a priority	5.80	5.71	-1.55%
Clear role delegation	5.80	5.66	-2.41%
Inform me of support services	5.52	5.40	-2.17%
	6.11	5.81	-4.82%

Having their research supported by skilled supervisors was the most important aspect of supervision according to Monash respondents – followed by receiving feedback that was constructive in nature.

Alongside supervisors acting professionally, having skilled supervisors was also the aspect that Monash graduate researchers were most satisfied with.

The widest gaps between importance and satisfaction were recorded for career pathways and help me network.

Meanwhile, Monash respondents who had not chosen their own supervisor were less satisfied than those who had across every metric of supervision. They also had wider gap scores with an average gap score (-8.62%) over twice as wide as for those who had chosen their own supervisor (-4.13%).

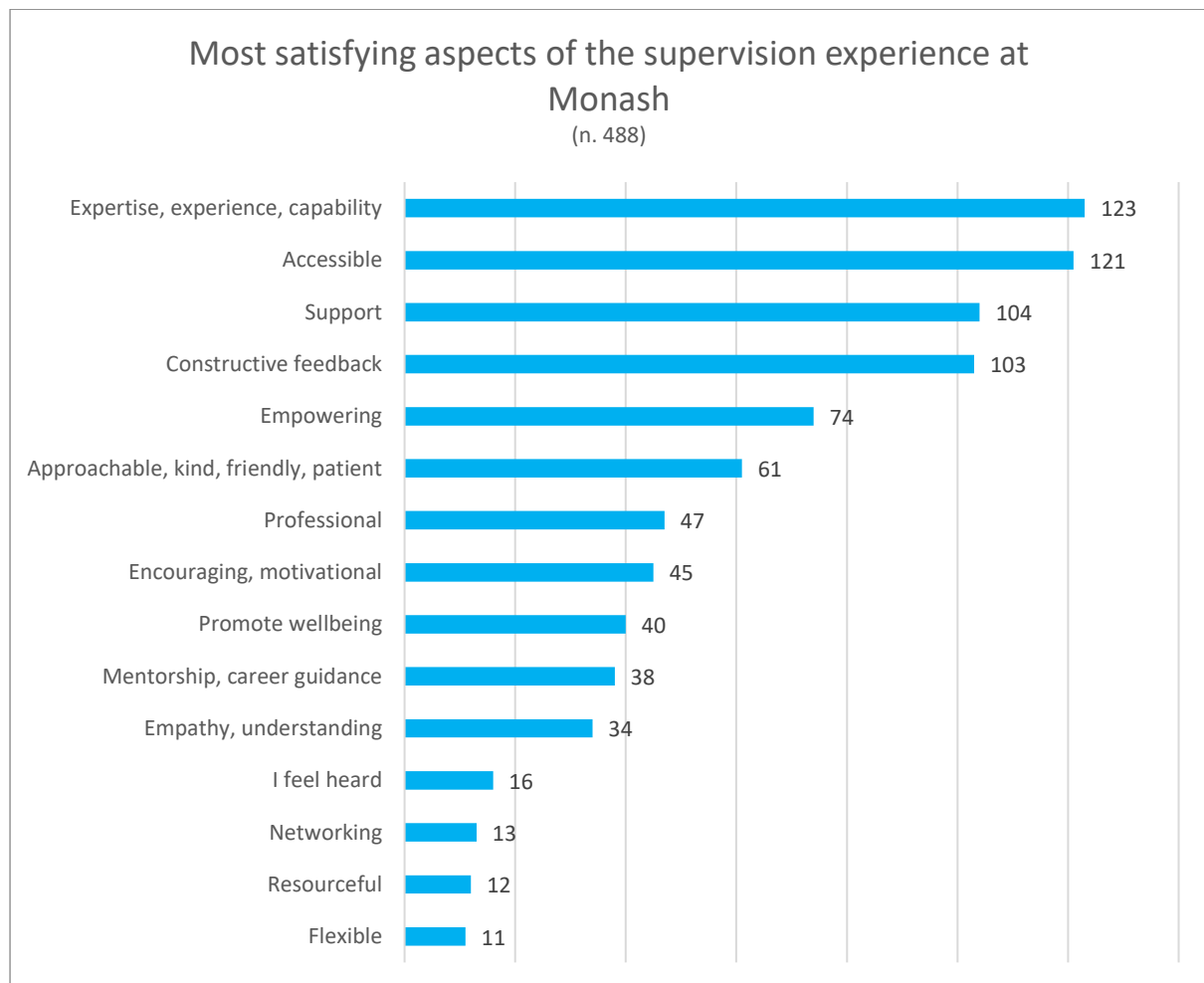
The supervision experience

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 Monash 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 their responses:



The primary theme to emerge from the responses related to the **expertise, experience and capability** of Monash supervisors. Comments included:

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“I am most satisfied by the training methods used by my supervisor, he is able to help me understand the content in a very kind way and I feel extra capable due to his support.”

“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.”

The second most frequent theme to emerge was in relation to the **accessibility of supervisors**. Comments included:

“Their timely response and constructive feedbacks. I am really appreciative of how they communicate with me in a supporting and encouraging manners, it helps me a lot to boost my self-confidence and my study process.”

“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 always available and willing to have a chat/extra meeting aside from our routine ones when I need it and drops by my office/lab to check in.”

“My main supervisor is always available just an email away whenever I needed her support and helps me feel like I belong and values my perspectives.”

“My supervisors are always available and give good feedback. They listen to my concerns and do their best to accommodate them.”

“I feel as though my supervisors are always willing to dedicate time to discussing ideas and talking with me. They are also very open to me bringing new ideas to my research which I appreciate.”

Other interesting comments included:

"The previous questions are difficult to answer about both supervisors together as I have one supervisor that is fantastic and another that has made my PhD experience extremely difficult. One of my supervisors has listened to what I want to do and how I want to structure both my learning and the way I approach my work. Being listened to in this way has been incredibly helpful."

"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 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."

"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 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."

"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."

"My supervisor holds timely meetings, gives me constructive feedback on my work, helps me shape my research work, motivated me to do better, pushes me to engage in other activities too and explore the city to maintain my work-life balance."

"I am treated as my own researcher, allowed to make decisions on my research direction."

"My supervisors work together very well and include me as a professional equal in discussions about my research, research opportunities (with other academics, conferences etc) and listen to and respect what I have to say/contribute to all discussions."

"Daily personalised mentorship and deep project awareness/care. Offering ideas to fix problems and outsourcing to other academics if necessary."

"He motivates me to excel in my field. He has exposed me to various industrial projects, which is crucial for my growth as a PhD student. Lastly, he has provided me with all the resources I need for my work."

"Flexibility and understanding when things come up unexpectedly."

"The flexibility and autonomy I get with my work hours and methods, as well as where I want my research to go. I feel very supported in the fact that I can pursue what I want to, and be able to have positive conversations about what will work best for me and my supervisors in achieving my objectives."

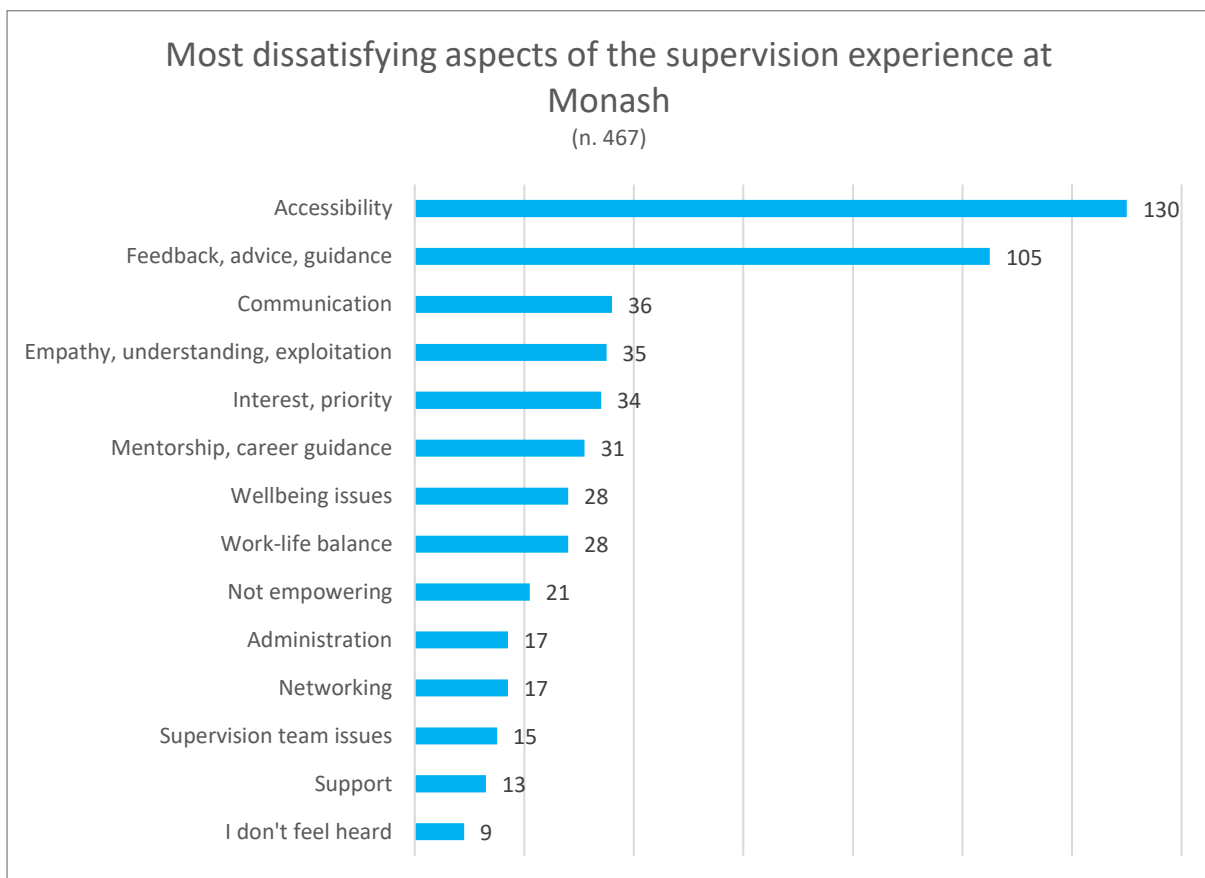
"I've been truly inspired by those who embody a research-life balance, not just preaching it but living it out in their own lives. Their example has been instrumental in helping me strive

for balance, especially after experiencing the demanding workload during my master's degree a decade ago, where spending over 40 hours a week in the lab still felt insufficient.”

Most dissatisfying aspects of supervision

In order to gain insight into what traits Monash 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 their responses:



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.”

“They are very busy people and hard to reach at times. Emails go unanswered most of the time and I have to wait till our next supervision meeting to discuss often urgent matters.”

“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.”

“My supervisor is often too busy with teaching and administrative tasks to be able to assist me in the lab and with analytical procedures/development/data collection. This is not the fault of my supervisor, but it does have an impact on my research.”

“Supervisors are often forced to juggle far too many things and therefore spread themselves thin. This then makes it hard to organise times to catch up.”

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

Comments included:

“I have been surprised at how little concrete guidance I have been provided with at the beginning of my PhD journey. I don't really feel connected to the wider university structure and have looked outside of Monash for some critical guidance and orientation. I wonder if I have fallen through the cracks a little.”

“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 dissatisfied with his understanding of the milestones and how much he knows about the PhD process at Monash. It is not a part of his training to know this.”

“The lack of practical guidance on how to use university systems to get things done. And zero introductions to other academics. It's a good thing I'm happy to go and introduce myself and ask questions because otherwise it wouldn't happen.”

“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.”

Other interesting comments included:

“Supervisor expects me to work on campus constantly which I think is a bit much because everyone has their own way to work. Some can work constantly but some needs breaks and change of environment.”

“No support from my supervisor, instead he has been pulling me down. Pitching 2 students against each other by giving them same topic in the same field area. No regard for other person's feelings and mental health.”

“I don't feel like I receive adequate scientific training from my supervisors, as they are mostly not interested in my project and all meetings are via zoom, which I find is not a medium that encourages robust scientific discussion.”

“With a diverse supervisor panel comes a plethora of knowledge, but also disagreements and differences of priority. This is very hard to navigate and also not knowing which supervisor to trust/required to follow.”

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

“Miscommunications happen which sometimes means I don't get the support I need. This is further amplified by my recent [health] diagnosis, which I am struggling to manage in the "one-shoe-fits-all" structure of the learning requirements of a PhD. I am also occasionally discouraged from branching out to co-supervisors so as to not bother them until we are more ready to present data. This means I occasionally don't hear valuable insights and ideas, or get adequate assistance, until much later.”

“I am a bit scared of my main supervisor so I am not as honest with him as I would like to be. I don't feel mentored by my supervisors. I don't feel comfortable bringing problems to them.”

“Unable to understand the parameters of my disability and inflexible to my needs.”

“Because my supervisors are skilled and competent, they are very busy, meaning feedback, when it occurs, is not timely.”

“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.”

“The supervisor I have most interactions with, they are lazy, unorganised, rude, hierarchical, and just generally pretty useless to me.”

“Conflicting information from multiple supervisors and senior researchers - i.e., too many cooks in the kitchen.”

“They don't have the exact expertise in what I'm doing. which was initially hard. But it was my decision to do this knowing that it's a new expertise and still they provided me with the resources to overcome this.”

“I feel I have become a burden to my supervisors, because my ethics process has not been smooth. This is not my fault.”

“I do not get as much say in my project design as I would like.”

“I think this part comes down to how the University expects supervisors to operate. When they are being paid to teach classes, work on their own research, and continue with editorial roles, rewriting curriculum etc, the candidates fall to the bottom of the list. This is what it is because they only have so much capacity... but I've sat through multiple holidays, curriculum crunches that my supervisory team has had in the last few years.”

“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.”

Conflict with supervisor

Have you ever had a disagreement with a supervisor that was challenging to overcome?	Monash 2017*	Monash 2021*	Monash 2024	Other 2024
No, I've never had a serious disagreement with a supervisor	(no) 84%	(no) 83%	70%	64%
Yes, but it was only minor			22%	29%
Yes, I have had a serious disagreement	(yes) 16%	(yes) 17%	8%	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."

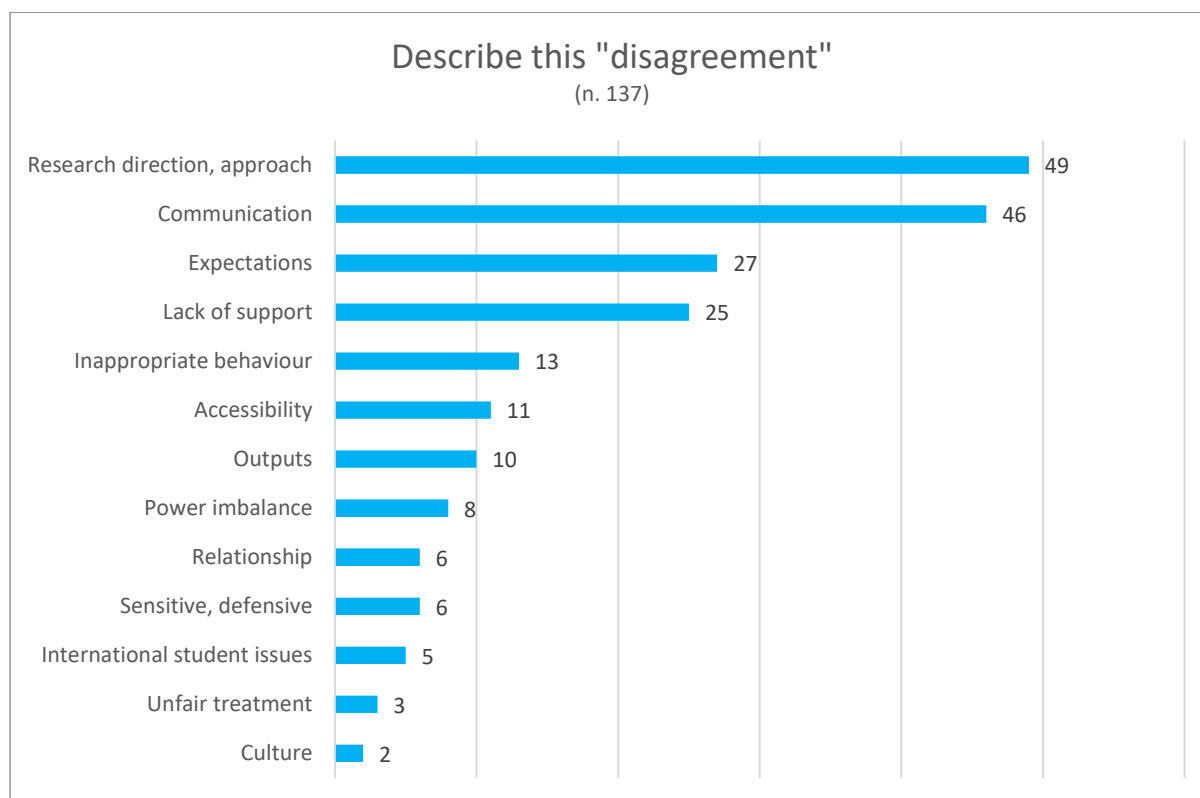
Respondents from Monash were less likely to have had a serious disagreement with a supervisor than respondents from other universities.

Across the Monash faculties, students from Pharmacy (81%) and Education (80%) were least likely to have had a serious disagreement with a supervisor, while students from Science (36%) and IT (33%) were most likely to have a disagreement of some form.

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 Monash 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.”

“I'm facing a disagreement with my supervisors regarding the research direction. While I'm keen on pursuing option A and diving straight into it, they advocate for a more comprehensive approach, urging me to delve deeper into research literature and explore a broader spectrum of ideas rather than getting fixated on one.”

“In the field area, we were planning to go to an area which was highly dangerous and highly unsafe to go there to collect samples. I let him know that and he started talking to me in third person tone.”

“There were disagreements over the direction of my project. It was more a disagreement that last weeks between my supervisors so I felt very stuck in the middle and like I had to make a decision who was right.”

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

“I approached my supervisor to tell them I didn't appreciate the manner in which I received feedback (not constructive and often aggressive) and I was met with a similar response (not constructive and aggressive). The other supervisors in the room had said I approached the situation politically correct and in the right manner, but it was still not responded with any professionalism.”

“One supervisor was very hard on his criticism on my first draft, especially on my English mistakes (which were not too bad) he [said] it was unfortunate that I didn't have English as a first language.”

“I had a miscommunication issue with my supervisor which made them annoyed. I was actually doing what they had asked of me, so we were able to resolve the issue. We since changed how we meet, communicate and structure project planning which has helped avoid any other issues.”

“Unclear expectations around communication and attendance requirements, given flexibility but discouraged from taking time off when unwell or required. Now 'over-communicate' to compensate.”

Other interesting comments included:

“I often have disagreements with my supervisor, but I try to remain quiet about it as being an international student I have many things at stake and my supervisor is my primary source of recommendation everywhere. Throughout my PhD journey, I have realised that my supervisor cannot take criticism or any kind of disagreement. He always expects things his way without understanding the challenges we may face as students.”

“Supervisor interpreted mid candidature milestone feedback as ‘your student is lazy/ not trying hard enough’ despite persisting with a challenging project during COVID-19. Led to months of disagreements, and culminated into a meeting with the lab head during which [they] berated me via Zoom for 30+ minutes leading to significant emotional distress. Lab head called after the fact and made lite of the situation, stating ‘it was needed to let them get it out of there system’, and implied it was not an accurate depiction of my skills or ability as a student (i.e., allowed it to happen to make the supervisor feel better).”

“This was a breakdown of communications, with the expectations made of me extremely unclear. In two consecutive one-on-one meetings I was challenged to answer on the spot a series of fundamental biology questions, but because I struggled to interpret the meaning and intent behind the questions and did not know exactly the answer they were looking for, I could not answer, nor was I coached towards learning the correct response. Coming back for the second meeting having now researched the questions to be more prepared, we tried again, but I went in the wrong direction with my research thinking it was right and again couldn't answer in the way expected of me. This scenario greatly distressed and shamed me.”

“Two disagreements. One because I wanted to move part-time for a combination of 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.”

“I expressed my expectation to balance my life and work. However, it was not supported and I was questioned. The main supervisor even refused to further communicate when I professionally approached to them. I had to change my original plan and work overtime to meet the main supervisor's expectations which definitely negatively influenced my wellbeing... I had and have to speak and behave very carefully in a way the main supervisor likes and expects.”

“One student got to use supplies because their work was considered more important, and I had to stop all experiments. supplies came in the next day anyway and it was all for no reason. it really inconvenienced me and I lost a whole week of work.”

“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.”

“Panel expressed that I was being over supervised, which resulted in one of my supervisors retiring.”

“Serious life circumstances getting in the way of being able to properly prioritise my PhD. Although he was understanding, there was still some underlying tension about projects falling behind etc.”

“I felt unsupported in the resources that were available to me in order to complete a research task that was allocated to me, and as a result was falling behind on the expected schedule. I had then felt like there was a lack of communication and support regarding the expectations placed on me.”

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”?	Monash 2017*	Monash 2021*	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Decided to do nothing	45%	41%	18%	12%
Sorted it out directly with supervisor(s)	31%	47%	61%	58%
Sought assistance from a friend/colleague	30%	37%	28%	32%
Sought assistance from the MGA	13%	14%	3%	11%
Sought assistance from my chair	NA	7%	10%	11%
Sought assistance from grad. coordinator or head of school	21%	33%	14%	25%
Other	NA	18%	18%	11%

* 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 Monash 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; however, students from Monash were more likely to do nothing than respondents from other universities.

The number of Monash respondents seeking support from the MGA, a friend or colleague and/or from a graduate coordinator/head of school decreased between 2021 and 2024.

Changing supervisors

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

Considered changing supervisors

Have you thought about changing supervisors?	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Never	74%	65%
Rarely	17%	24%
Often	7%	8%
All the time	3%	4%

Monash respondents were less likely than those from other universities to have considered changing their supervisors.

Within Monash, respondents from Engineering (81%) and Education (80%) were least likely to have considered changing supervisors, while 39% of respondents from BusEco and 32% of respondents from Arts had at some point considered changing supervisors.

Supervisor changes

Have you ever changed supervisors?	Monash 2024	Other 2024
No	80%	76%
Yes, but it wasn't my choice	9%	9%
Yes, my supervisor and I agreed to make a change	5%	10%
Yes, I decided to change a supervisor(s) even though they did not want to be replaced	1%	2%
Other	5%	3%

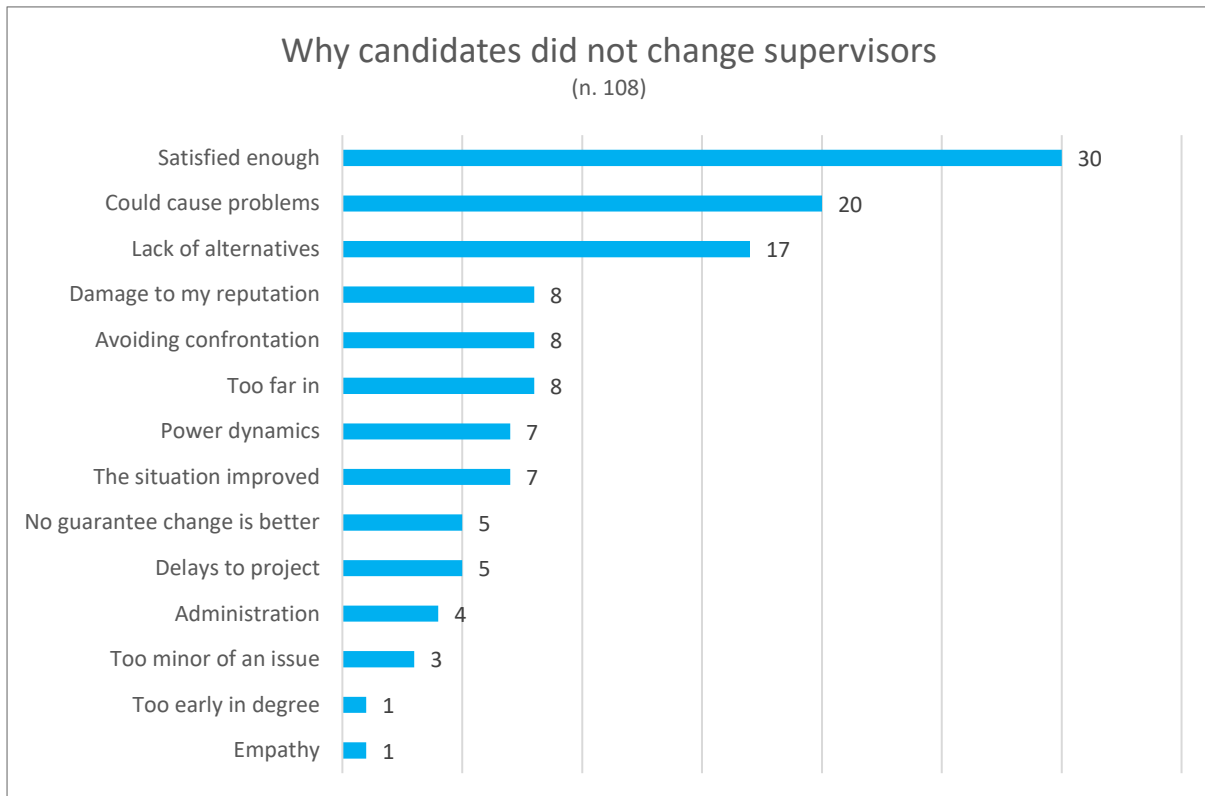
Monash respondents were slightly less likely than those from other universities to have changed supervisors.

Within Monash, respondents from Science (93%) and Engineering (89%) were least likely to have changed supervisors, while 35% of BusEco respondents and 31% of both MADA and Arts respondents had changed supervisors at least once.

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.

The responses of Monash respondents are summarised below:



The most common reason given for why Monash students did not change supervisors was that they were **satisfied enough** with who they had. Comments included:

“The ones I have are adequate - we get along well and they mostly provide the guidance I need with a little prompting.”

“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.”

“No disagreement has ever been big enough to warrant any drastic action.”

“Supervisors were not that bad after all.”

“Despite some limitations, like occasional busy schedules and lack of access to all resources, I haven't changed supervisors because of the value I get from the existing relationship. It can be challenging to find a good fit, and I appreciate the mentorship I'm already receiving.”

Another common response given was that changing supervisors could cause the student problems. Comments included:

"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."

"Power dynamics and worry about negative consequences - I've thought 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."

"I would've had to change my topic and I didn't want to burn bridges with someone who has a lot of authority in our research area."

"Office politics. My supervisors are good friends and tied financially through funding, so dropping one of them wouldn't have been well received."

"Sour the relationship is the biggest fear. I also do not want to be seen as an unfriendly, unruly student by other people in the department. It is difficult to find alternative supervisors whose expertise align with your PhD projects."

"The cost of opportunity is huge."

Other interesting comments included:

"My main supervisor is friends with my secondary supervisor (who would be the one I would change)."

"I confronted my supervisor about his lack of communication, poor time management, and unrealistic expectations and it resolved the issue."

"My supervisor is arguably most suited to my project so it doesn't make logical sense to swap."

"Seems like it would be a pain, not sure who I would switch to anyway. Some vague sense of loyalty too I guess."

"Fear of awkwardness as I work in close proximity with all my current supervisors, i.e. share a tea room."

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

"I am already in my final year, so no matter what it is I just wanna finish my project and get my PhD done."

"Sunk cost fallacy, fear of repercussion."

"Supervisor started to engage more in my research and give constructive feedback."

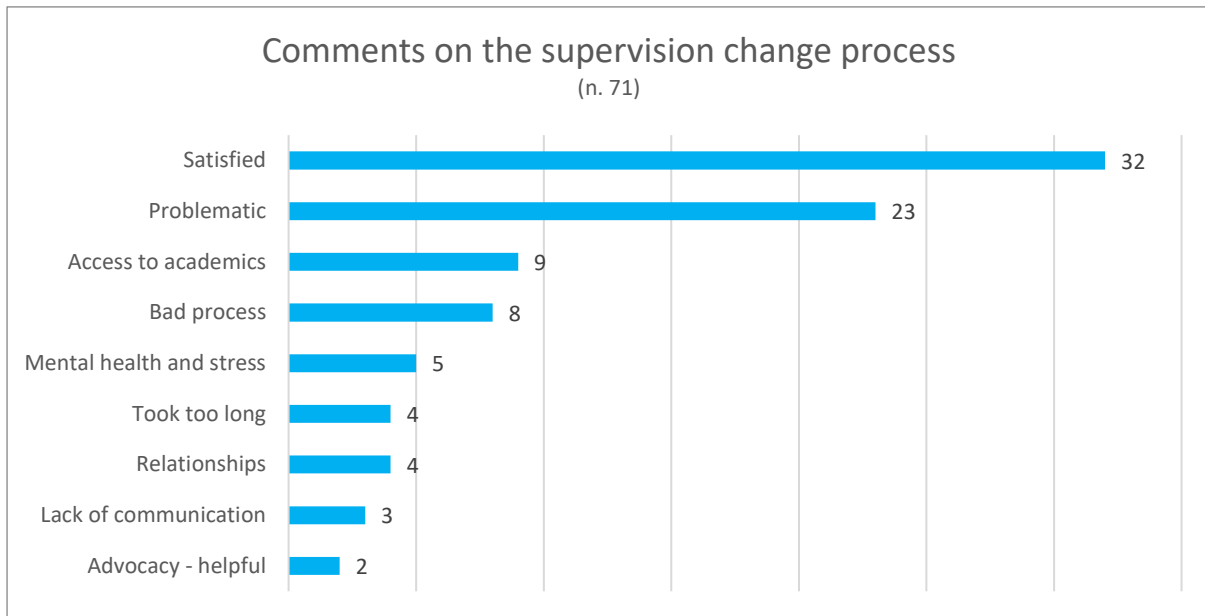
"Not worth the effort to take on a new project, especially when could face the same issues with a new supervisor."

"Better the devil you know."

Comments on the process of changing supervisors

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

The responses of Monash respondents are summarised below:



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

"Monash was incredibly supportive and found the right environment for me."

"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."

"The change was made so I can have more better co-supervisors, who are exactly experts in my research topic."

Several students highlighted that the process was **problematic** in some form. Comments included:

"The process is troublesome and has a huge negative impact on students as it can reduce accessibility to the supervisor and the academic system at Monash does not have support for supervision changes in terms of mental health check-ins."

"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."

"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.”

“I am currently in the middle of this and it has been tricky. I didn't want my second supervisor to leave but with her change in role she was not able to provide me with support and the change was mutually agreeable. I have had to wait a LONG TIME for my third supervisor to agree to come on board.”

“I had no idea I could even go to my chair to voice concerns. But now that I know that, I still think that I would be hesitant due to the possible fallout. The process of changing supervisors was relatively simple but my primary supervisor basically made all the decisions about that and just told me what to write in the form.”

Other interesting comments included:

“It was smooth on the administrative side. The supervisor had a choice of harsh words to say to me when informed of my decision.”

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

“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.”

“My new co-supervisor is pretty hands off and I feel like I made a poor choice going with them.”

“Identifying new, appropriate supervisors is hard.”

“It was not easy to navigate the intranet to find the right form, and consult the right person.”

“A lot of information was required to add a new supervisor to my team, seemed a bit excessive.”

“It was very disruptive to find another supervisor, and while I understand these things happen, it was during a stressful time of my candidature, and I do think that there should've been an understanding of adjusting timelines for hand-ins that took this into account. I felt unsupported by [the faculty] at the time.”

“Faculty made me put in an application with their chosen supervisors. I didn't feel heard or consulted in the process.”

“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.”

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 Monash 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%	4%	6%	9%	15%	32%	30%
I am treated in a respectful manner	1%	1%	2%	8%	11%	28%	49%
I am encouraged by staff to socialise with other research students in my area	2%	4%	4%	11%	14%	29%	34%
I am informed about opportunities for tutoring/sessional work	5%	4%	6%	14%	13%	27%	30%
My academic unit provides appropriate facilities for my field of research	2%	3%	4%	11%	14%	32%	33%
My academic unit provides a student-specific social area for me to use	6%	3%	6%	13%	15%	29%	29%
My academic unit organises regular seminars and guest speakers for research students and staff	3%	2%	3%	7%	14%	30%	42%
Other research students in my academic unit are supportive	1%	2%	3%	10%	13%	31%	41%
I feel the policies, rules and regulations around doing research are there to support me	3%	3%	4%	15%	14%	31%	29%
Provides an academically stimulating environment	3%	3%	5%	9%	17%	31%	33%
I can see myself having a career in a place like this	7%	5%	5%	12%	15%	27%	29%

Across the board, Monash 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 (88%), while dissatisfaction was highest in relation to respondents feeling like they could have a career in a place like this (17%).

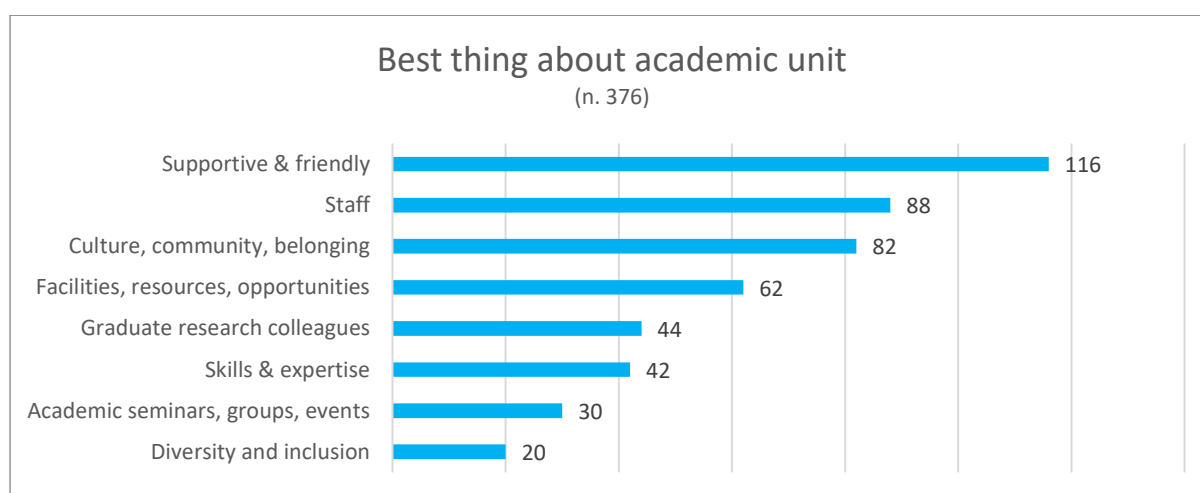
Academic unit comments

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 Monash graduate researchers are summarised below:



The most common response related to **supportive and friendly atmosphere**. These included:

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

"Friendly, interesting, supportive staff with excellent academic credentials."

"They always show their kindness at a meeting or a water cooler. Small kindness and tolerance of those who do not speak English well is critical for newcomers' wellbeing."

"Supportive, friendly staff who only want the best for me and my career."

"Supportive and welcoming unit."

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

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."

"They send information to PhD students about grant, scholarship, academic sessions etc."

"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."

"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."

"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."

"The vibrant and supportive community, where students and faculty alike are encouraged to collaborate, innovate."

"The community and encouragement. We are all treated like equals and everyone is very kind, supportive and cordial."

"Regular wellbeing sessions and communications via e-mail."

"Lab members are very nice and help me a lot at the beginning of my PhD study when my English was not well."

"Very supportive, people are always eager to help, collaboration is very much welcomed."

"Fellow PhD students are supportive and great, love the flexibility to work from home."

"Our faculty cares about us and always reply emails in time."

"It is composed of academic researchers and clinician-researchers alike, providing a diverse translational perspective from bench to practice."

"Appreciate the events and all the students and the diversity of their research. Really great people."

"There are a lot of very experienced and qualified researchers in the unit."

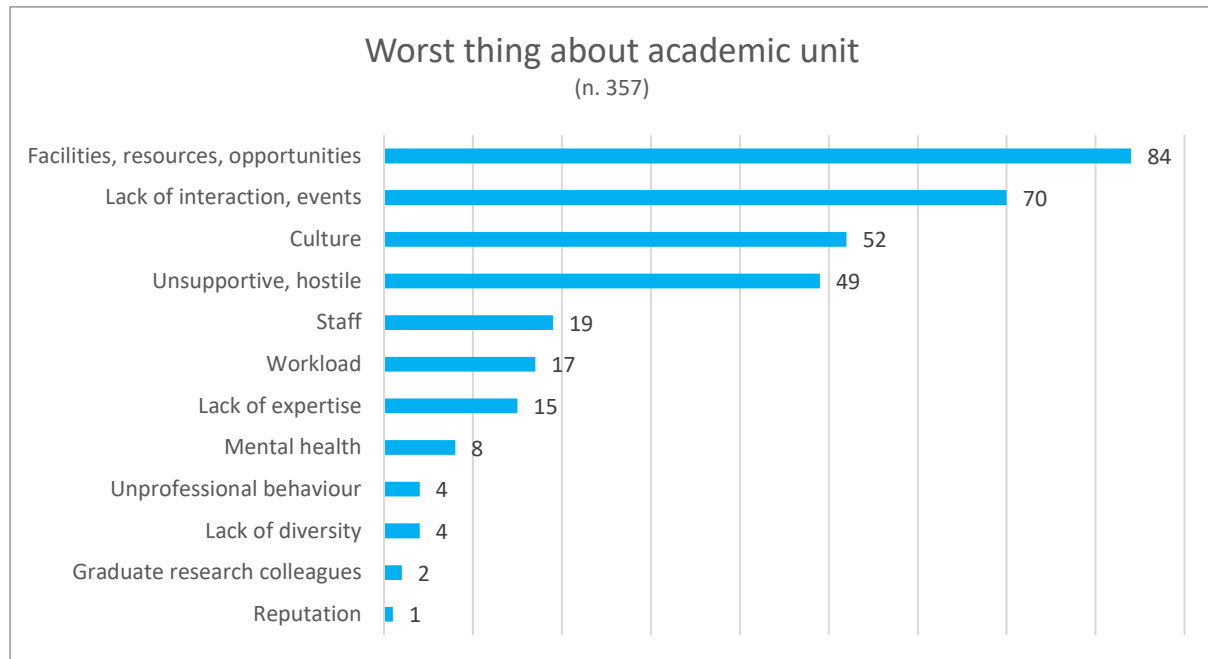
"My academic units provide dedicated desk for the first-year students. A dedicated working space is necessary for the PhD student."

"The ability to drive research and ask and answer meaningful questions. The free-rain to ask these questions with the helpful and insightful support of supervisors."

Worst aspects of academic unit

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

The responses of Monash graduate researchers are summarised below:



The most common grievance Monash graduate researchers had with their academic unit related to the **facilities, resources and opportunities** provided. These included:

“The lack of funding to support conference travel.”

“One of the drawbacks of my academic unit is the disparity in facilities compared to those provided to students in other faculties ... These students appear to have access to more modern and better-equipped facilities, which can sometimes make our environment feel less supportive and hinder our academic performance. This inconsistency can impact the overall student experience and satisfaction within our unit.”

“Rooms for PhD students are not that convenient as it is located in the middle of the building and have no direct views/windows to outside. I feel like being trapped and isolated when stay in the rooms. As the rooms are shared among other PhD students, we need to find another private room if we have an on-line meeting with supervisors. Unfortunately, the private room is not available in the building. We had one in the past, but now it is gone because the school allocates the room for their new academic staffs.”

“Our academic unit has not provided sufficient opportunities to network with other HDR students from the same field of interest. While I appreciate their effort, they could initiate more activities that are intentional in nature. The PhD Hub ... lacks space for HDR students to work comfortably - “hot desk” system is clearly not working and would better be replaced by allotting specific desks for each HDR student.”

“Poor professional and academic development opportunities.”

“Hot desks for PhD, PhD office not suitable for productivity (e.g., too many students in a room, no windows).”

Other interesting comments included:

“There is no feeling of inclusivity between the HDRs and the academic staff in my department. There is lack of communication, research and teaching opportunities.”

“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.”

“The men. The lack of females in positions of leadership and the lack of voice women have.”

“I personally do not like the faculty's hub environment, as it is more like an environment for socialise but not very supportive for study and research.”

“Many departmental seminars are irrelevant to my field, but attendance is compulsory.”

“It promotes academics that have been known for bullying or excluding students. Very toxic environment. Honestly, the politics of the faculty... and Monash in general discouraged me from ever pursuing an academic career here.”

“The unit lacks a strong admin team, which makes getting anything done very difficult.”

“Few other PhD parents, most are undergrad and do not understand time constraints.”

“As a person who wasn't a part of the academic unit previous to the PhD, it has been hard to make friends in the academic unit. However admittedly this is entirely my own doing: I am barely 2 months into the PhD, and am VERY shy, to the point where I don't want to attend a social event without a friend I can talk to and rely on being there, but as I am yet to have this, I just don't go at all at the moment. There's been plenty of opportunity, but it's been hard to take any of them given my personal circumstances of not really knowing anyone.”

“Being a research institute, it can be quite different to a university environment, particularly in giving students a space (physically and metaphorically) to feel they have to themselves. We are integrated into staff meetings and spaces which is great for learning, but sometimes uncomfortable with the power imbalance to speak up or feel entirely comfortable.”

“I am isolated and feel lost without being able to teach, feeling like I am completely alone.”

“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, ... 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.”

“Being paid below a living wage for full time research work that benefits the faculty and the university.”

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

“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.”

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	32 (4%)
No, I'm not at this stage yet	256 (32%)
No, I presented my research, but I need to make amendments	19 (2%)
Yes, I passed first time	464 (58%)
Yes, I passed, but after I needed to make amendments	24 (3%)

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 (36% extremely satisfied, 38% moderately satisfied, 12% slightly satisfied), while a small proportion indicated that they were dissatisfied (3% extremely dissatisfied, 2% 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 Monash 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%	3%	4%	10%	35%	43%
My supervisor(s) guided me through the confirmation process	2%	2%	2%	9%	12%	27%	46%
The preparation required was a good use of my time	3%	5%	4%	6%	15%	27%	41%
I felt comfortable speaking openly with the panel	1%	3%	4%	9%	10%	26%	47%
The behaviour and tone of the panel was professional	1%	1%	1%	5%	5%	22%	66%
The panel provided useful feedback	1%	2%	3%	5%	11%	28%	50%

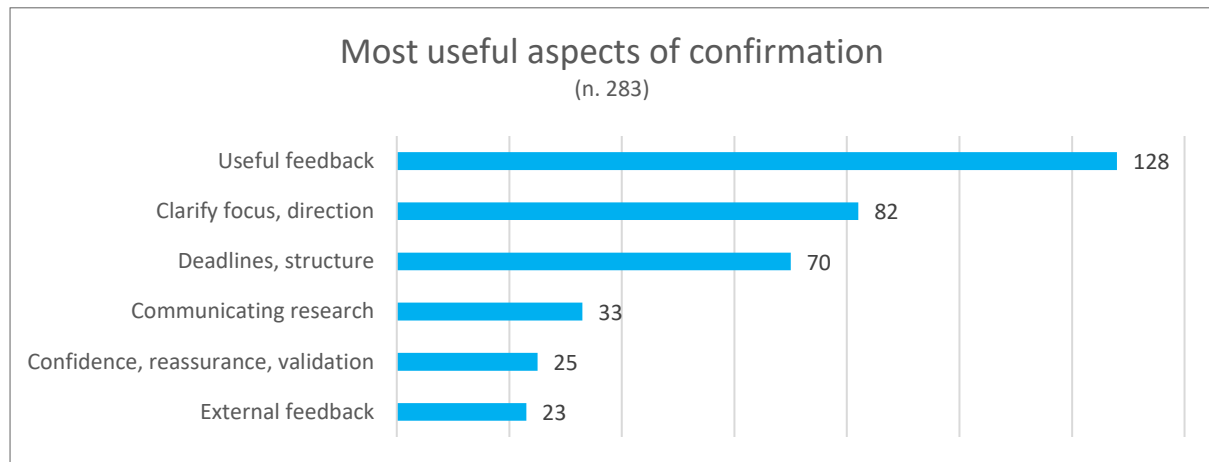
Respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with confirmation. In particular, Monash graduate researchers were satisfied with the behaviour and tone of the panel.

The highest level of overall dissatisfaction (12%) 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:

"The opportunity for feedback was great. The process helps you work out a plan for the future of the thesis."

"The feedback provided from the panel was helpful."

"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."

"It helped me get a better idea of what is expected of me about my research. It paved a clear path about the possible ways the research could take and forewarn me about the possible rabbit holes that I should be aware of, well before."

"The feedbacks that I got wasn't totally fair but they helped me to think differently about my research."

Other interesting comments included:

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

"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 is an opportunity to get external feedback on your research topic, but also on you as a developing academic. It also introduces you to communicating with other academics, which is obviously a valuable skill."

“Writing my report 'forced' me to engage actively with my field. This enabled me to better understand my project and thus make greater progress moving forward.”

“Reassurance outside of my supervisory team that my progress is satisfactory and I’m not going too slow despite being told I was in comparison to other students. I appreciated the validation of the complexity of completing a systematic review independently and it was okay to not have published within the year. It was also useful to consolidate my findings and plan.”

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

“The opportunity to collate my first year of research in an official presentation, the experience of writing up my results and public speaking, receiving feedback from the audience and panel.”

“The confirmation milestone was a good use of my time and I developed a very good understanding of my research which I was able to communicate very effectively during the milestone.”

“Good to practice presenting research, and writing about it. The process of doing both helps shape and understand my project better, looking at what I've done and what could be done next. This includes gaps in my knowledge and skill base that need addressing.”

“Feeling reassured that I'm on the right track with my PhD. Gaining experience giving a longer oral presentation in a slightly more formal setting.”

“It was useful to find out whether I was on track with my research from people who do not follow it regularly. I also got some good advice regarding upcoming experiments that I did not have experience with.”

“It was assuring to know I was on track to submit on time and my project is taking a good direction.”

“Having feedback from panel members. I think they are more realistic and have a lower expectation about student's research than the supervisors.”

“Getting my research area/questions validated by researchers external to my supervision team.”

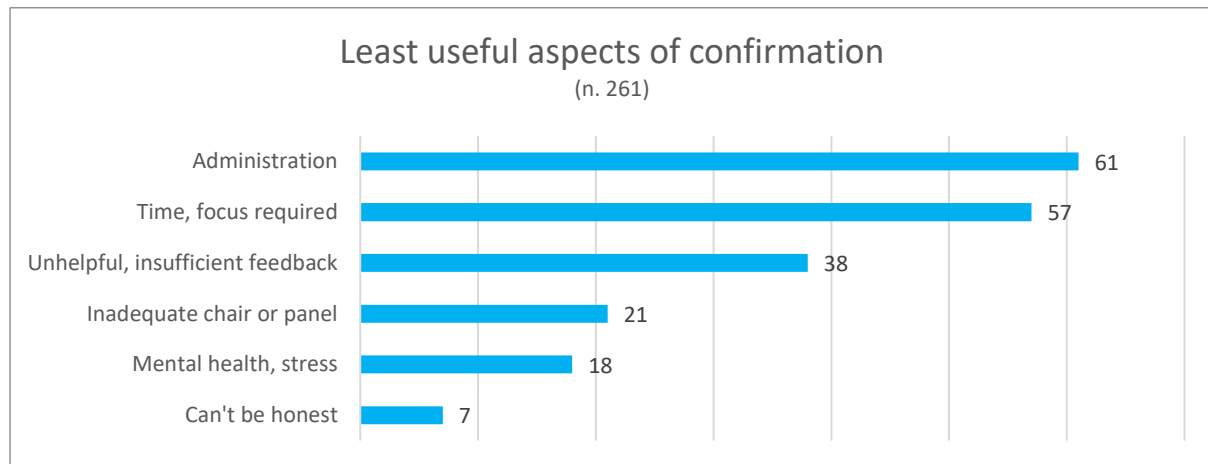
“Knowing that the panel is there to help me and my project and not to examine or criticise me.”

“Help you define a clear direction along PhD journey and give suggestions beyond the research work.”

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 Monash 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:

"I found the documentation process slightly difficult because the system compiles all the documents into one big document, which was not in a helpful order and not the order in which I had uploaded it."

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

"Finding any university guidelines or helpful templates or anything was really challenging. Resources need to be set out better for students to access."

"I think an in-person format might have made me feel more at ease."

"The amount of paperwork required took a significant amount of time to prepare. Since my confirmation, I have already modified my project direction which makes some of my preparation for confirmation redundant now."

"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:

"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."

"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."

"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."

"Starting the research proposal before confirmation so would have been very difficult to make changes after my confirmation if the panel recommended changes. Luckily it was fine however I did make note of this at the time. The research proposal should be reviewed by the panel prior to starting data collection."

"It is quite time consuming to compare the report, but honestly worthwhile still to do."

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

"I find that confirmation lacks the rigor that a traditional thesis defence has. Because I am a highly-motivated scientist, I find the preparations for milestones to be a waste of time that could be better spent on research/writing papers. I believe that if a PhD student needs to have their hand held through their entire PhD, then they are not worthy of receiving a doctorate. I would much rather just have one large thesis defence at the end of my PhD than multiple yearly milestones."

"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."

"Asking about relationships between you and your supervisors. Students do not feel safe to talk about this in the confirmation."

"That the chairperson assumed that I wasn't experiencing any trouble with my supervisor. This made it difficult to flag that I was in fact experiencing tension with my supervisor."

"Throughout the milestone process it has been evident that the panel members are involved in a lot of student panels. This can give the impression that they are ticking a box, not reading your report or not providing strong advice about your project."

"I really don't think there is anything not useful about confirmations. I find the progress and final milestones much more redundant though - I think both of them could be internal events that happen without an external audience."

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?	Monash 2024	Other 2024
No	15%	31%
Yes, but it was optional	19%	43%
Yes, it is mandatory	66%	20%

Professional Development was mandatory for two-thirds of Monash respondents, while it was mandatory for one-fifth of respondents from a university other than Monash.

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>Publishing skills and knowledge</i>	6.13	5.13	-16.31%
<i>Presenting findings e.g. conferences, meetings, seminars</i>	6.09	5.12	-15.93%
<i>Research methodologies</i>	6.03	5.18	-14.10%
<i>Data analysis techniques</i>	6.00	5.03	-16.17%
<i>Project/research management</i>	5.93	5.22	-11.97%
<i>Career planning</i>	5.82	4.62	-20.62%
<i>Grant writing</i>	5.79	4.69	-19.00%
<i>Mental health and wellbeing</i>	5.73	5.09	-11.17%
<i>Industry exposure</i>	5.70	4.47	-21.58%
<i>Networking skills</i>	5.69	4.86	-14.59%
<i>Professional ethics</i>	5.66	5.24	-7.42%
<i>Coursework relevant to my research</i>	5.65	4.70	-16.81%
<i>Entrepreneurial skills</i>	5.07	4.51	-11.05%
<i>PD with students from other fields</i>	4.91	4.83	-1.63%
	5.73	4.91	-14.17%

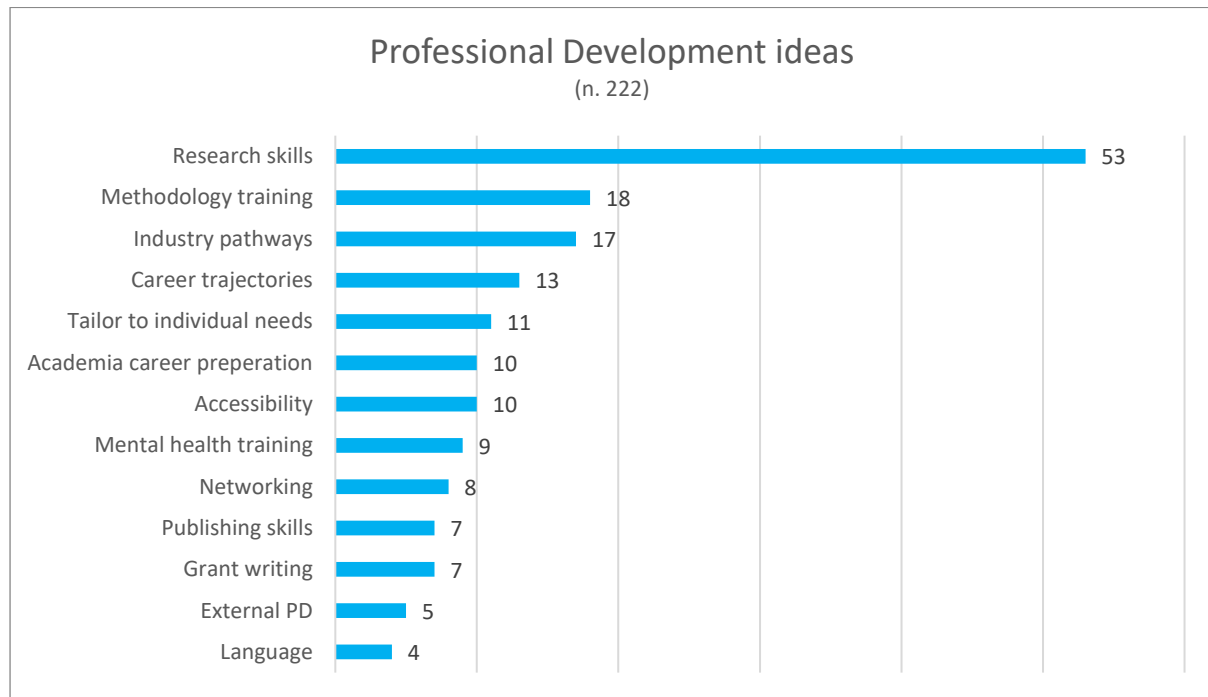
Having Professional Development opportunities that focus on publishing skills was of the utmost importance to Monash graduate researchers, while experiencing PD with students from other fields was the least important of the themes.

Respondents were most satisfied with PD on professional ethics and least satisfied with industry exposure, while industry exposure also had the widest gap between importance and satisfaction. Career planning and grant writing were two other areas where the gap was wide.

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 Monash 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 ... 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.”

“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 [this] 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.”

“Allowing TA teaching hours to be included. I learnt more about communicating, content etc. from teaching than I did in any of the online modules which are a waste of time.”

“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 from my experience they do little to provide you with the tools to succeed. It's either sink or swim.”

“Actual qualifications with a certificate.”

“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.”

“PD related to industry or career development is usually unavailable in our faculty ... but I do think it is important.”

“Professional internships to be included. I also did the mental health first aid training from Monash, and was very disappointed to find out it does not count towards MyDevelopment hours, even though it provides such high value to me, my peers and the school.”

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

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

“How to make portfolio as an academia and to shape career journey as an academic.”

“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).”

“A lot of the PDs are seasonal, hence, they might not be as timely or relevant. They are also held virtually which limit the interaction among HDR students.”

“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’.”

“Writing structures, writing for publications, career and job planning after graduation, how to find a job (specific in each field).”

“English study for international students whose mother language is not English.”

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?	Monash 2021*	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Yes	52%	56%	57%
No	48%	44%	43%

*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 graduate researcher at Monash being given an opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university was on par with the likelihood at other universities.

Position at the University

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

What was your position at Monash?	Monash 2024
Fixed-term (one of the 450 fixed-term roles offered at Monash)	15%
Casual	79%
Other	6%

The overwhelming majority of Monash 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?	Monash 2021*	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Definitely not	<i>(no)</i>	15%	7%
Probably not	26%	16%	22%
Probably yes	<i>(yes)</i>	46%	49%
Definitely yes	74%	23%	22%

*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 respondents at both Monash University (69%) and the other universities (71%) believed, to some degree, that they were paid appropriately for the work they conducted. However, respondents from Monash were twice as likely as non-Monash respondents to believe they were definitely not paid appropriately.

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...?	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Never	31%	24%
Rarely	26%	26%
Sometimes	30%	38%
Often	13%	12%

The majority of Monash graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 13% indicating that they experienced this feeling "often."

There was a Pearson correlation coefficient value of 0.43 between imposter syndrome and considering leaving, indicating a moderate positive correlation.

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?	Monash 2017*	Monash 2021*	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Never	(no) 62%	(no) 42%	24%	13%
Rarely	(yes) 38%	(yes) 58%	23%	26%
Sometimes			40%	44%
Often			14%	18%

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

Just under one-quarter of Monash graduate researchers (24%) had never experienced a delay in their research, while 14% 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	Monash 2021	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Change of research project direction	28%	30%	29%
Poor supervision	16%	16%	13%
Lack of resources for my research	15%	25%	22%
Preparing for hurdles/milestones	18%	37%	22%
Unpleasant workplace/research environment	9%	11%	8%
Lack of motivation	36%	39%	28%
Procrastination	NA	35%	27%
Health issues	28%	30%	28%
Family responsibilities	25%	26%	25%
Cost of living/financial concerns	19%	34%	36%
Work commitments	11%	18%	26%
Data collection issues	NA	27%	25%
COVID-19	91%	20%	23%
Other	16%	13%	8%

A lack of motivation was the most common response for a delay in research among Monash graduate students – followed by preparing for milestones and procrastination.

Cost of living and/or financial concerns was a factor in one-third of research delays at Monash.

Considered leaving

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

Have you ever considered leaving your course?	Monash 2021*	Monash 2024	Other 2024
Never	(no) 70%	63%	49%
Rarely	(yes) 30%	20%	23%
Sometimes		14%	23%
Often		3%	5%

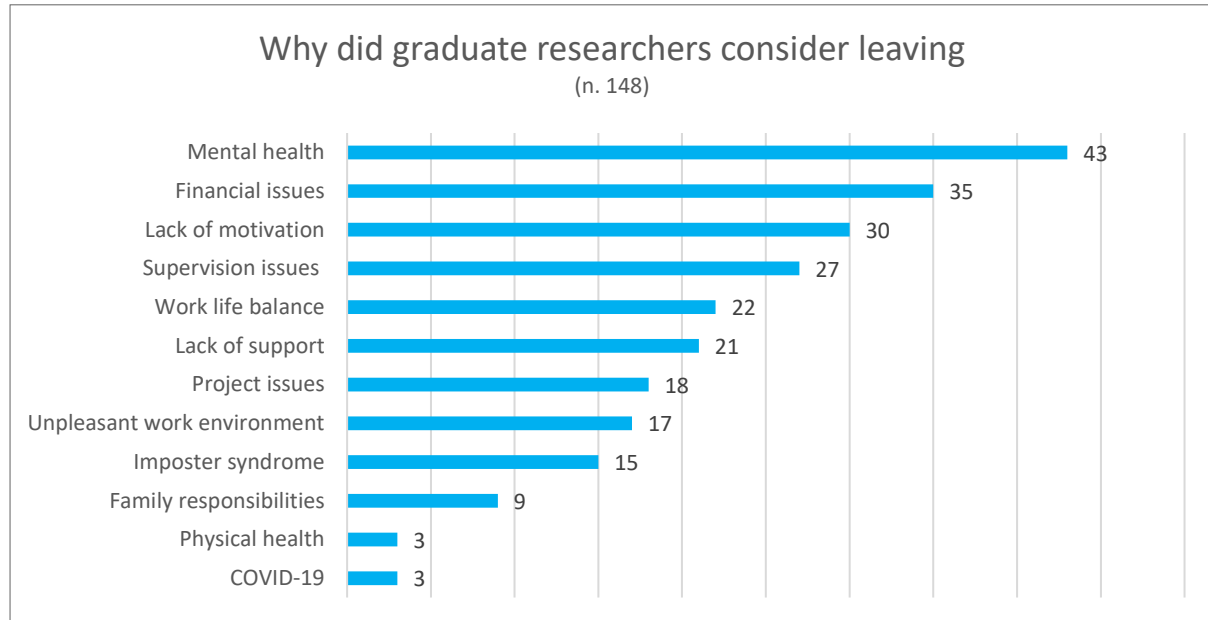
*Please note that in 2017 and 2021 this was a “yes” or “no” question.

Monash graduate researchers were less likely than those from 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 Monash graduate researchers are summarised below:



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

“Feeling very isolated and that affected/affects my mental health.”

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

“The lifestyle of a researcher is all consuming, and the only way to succeed within my unit seems to be to commit your life to just research (and be at least slightly psychotic).”

“My supervisors created a toxic work environment and I did not feel supported in my degree. It has been an isolating process, and it has significantly impacted my mental health.”

“A lot of homework needs to be done, all piled up in the same time period. It requires me to write a lot of professional reports and papers. For a person who is not good at English, I have to adapt to the new environment and finish all the learning tasks before the deadline. I often stay up late to write papers, which causes great pressure, and seriously lacks sleep and affects my health.”

“I sometimes struggle with imposter syndrome and anxiety to the degree that it is paralyzing and I want to quit.”

Financial concerns were also a common response. These included:

"It's hard and there are other opportunities that I could take which could potential yield higher rewards than this."

"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."

"Extremely low pay combined with a high-pressure academic environment where you need to be making progress at all point."

"The social environment at the school, mostly the low PhD stipend and the ever rising cost of living crisis, I can barely pay the rent and groceries, and have to fear being evicted every year due to the housing standards in Australia."

"it is very financially challenging to complete a PhD without a scholarship, I have tried a couple of times to get this not been successful. In order to stay in the program I need to keep working, balancing this feels like a constant pull in two directions and is very financially straining. I often have to delay PhD deadlines to keep up with my work, and stay employed. wish there was more support offered to manage this."

"I am struggling financially with the increasing living standards in Melbourne, but my stipend hasn't been adjusted appropriately to the inflation."

Other interesting comments include:

"There are points where I get incredibly overwhelmed and not convinced I can ever finish my thesis. I also feel like my research does not contribute anything to the field."

"Sometimes it just felt overwhelming and like I was destined to fail. I couldn't see the end of the tunnel, and wondered if it would be better to cut my losses."

"I had a period of difficult supervision and felt that I might not be cut out for doing a PhD."

"[My supervisors] offer no guidance on publication despite my looming deadline for three manuscripts. Their collaboration skills are subpar. They frequently pressure me to work overtime on tasks unrelated to my research, including weekend synthesis work for their collaborators."

"It was too much to cope as a part-time student with a full-time job. This was before I switched to being a full-time student."

"I considered leaving my degree due to challenges balancing academic demands with personal and professional responsibilities. The workload and stress at times felt overwhelming, and I questioned whether the degree was aligning with my career aspirations. However, with support from mentors and a renewed focus on my long-term goals, I ultimately decided to persevere and continue pursuing my degree."

"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."

“It's just such a big project and takes soooo long! At various points I have thought it would be best to cut my losses and stop.”

“Because of non-rewarding nature of degree. After putting all this effort in, I need to put additional significant efforts for job hunt. Which makes having this degree redundant. Moreover, I feel like I am solving research problem which is only relevant to me. Moreover, I am not learning anything new.”

“Working environment was not making me happy - I considered moving to a different field and starting again.”

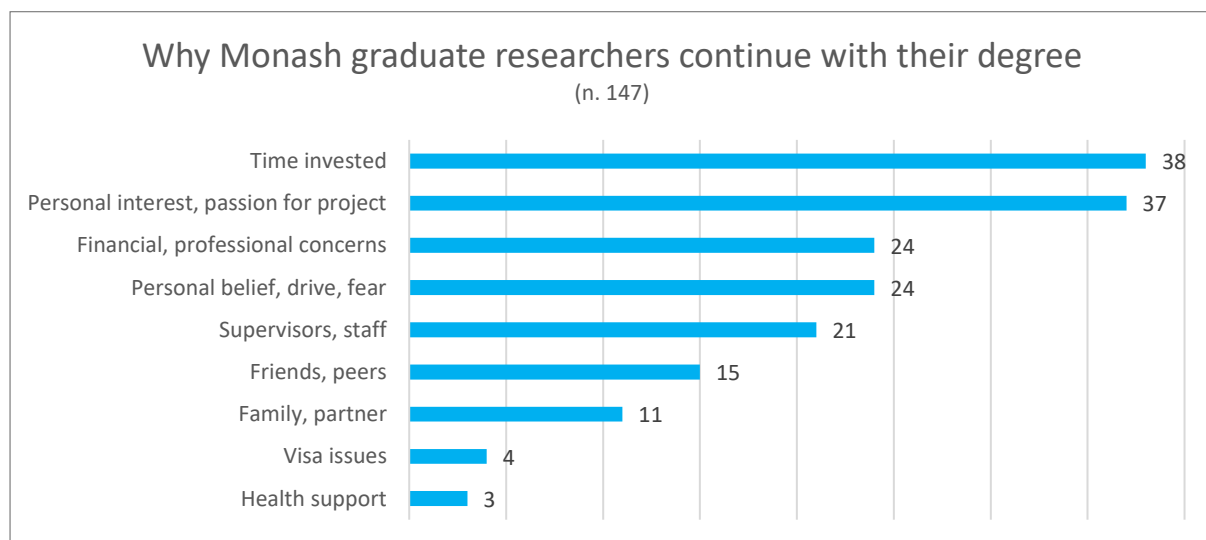
“Unsatisfied with doing a PhD, the career outcomes and financial burden. I've felt many times I would have just been better to have gone into the work force and worked my way up without having wasted time and finances to have completed a PhD. Also, the impact it's had on my mental health due to the stress and toxic work culture.”

“COVID-19 significantly delayed my PhD project. I felt incredibly unsupported by the university. We were only given a 3-month extension for project and scholarship which was nowhere near enough time. In total, my PhD has been delayed by 12 months. I was unable to collect data during extended lockdowns throughout Victoria.”

Why continue

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

The responses of Monash 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 have started so that I think it's better to continue.”

"Already halfway through, might as well finish it out as it doesn't hurt to have a PhD."

"Sunk cost fallacy."

"I'd already made it this far and it would be a waste to quit. My supervisor is also not concerned about my progress and has repeatedly said they would tell me if that ever changed."

Personal interest or having a passion for their project was another frequent response theme. These included:

"It is an area that I am very passionate about and I consider this to be an amazing opportunity to contribute to the field."

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

"I believe in the research I'm trying to complete, and my own abilities to be a great teacher and communicator."

"Remembering why I started in the first place, and research "wins" along the year."

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."

"Speaking to other students and listening to online (non-Monash) resources (e.g., YouTube) speaking about doing a PhD made me realise this was not an uncommon reaction during times of stress."

"The value I expect to have after I finish especially for finding a good job."

"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 considered continuing my degree because of the valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth it offered. Completing my degree would enhance my career prospects and allow me to pursue my passion in the field. Additionally, I was motivated by the support of mentors and peers who encouraged me to persevere through challenges and stay committed to my academic journey."

"Self-motivation. I do not want to be a failure."

"I am afraid of being judged by my peers and supervisors if I took a break from my PhD."

“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.”

“Positive feedback from associate supervisor, friends and family. Moreover, given that I am already more than half-way through the course, I want to see it through to the end.”

“Support from supervisors and counselling.”

“Support from supervisors and family.”

“The support of people around me and knowing that this is what I want. I have kept going with PhD.”

“For the most part I enjoy learning, doing my research, and getting to talk to other researchers/HDR students. I also like the flexibility to mostly work to my own schedule.”

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

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

“I didn't want to look back and regret not completing my degree. I've also made a family here and dropping out would result in my deportation.”

“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.”

“A good night's sleep.”

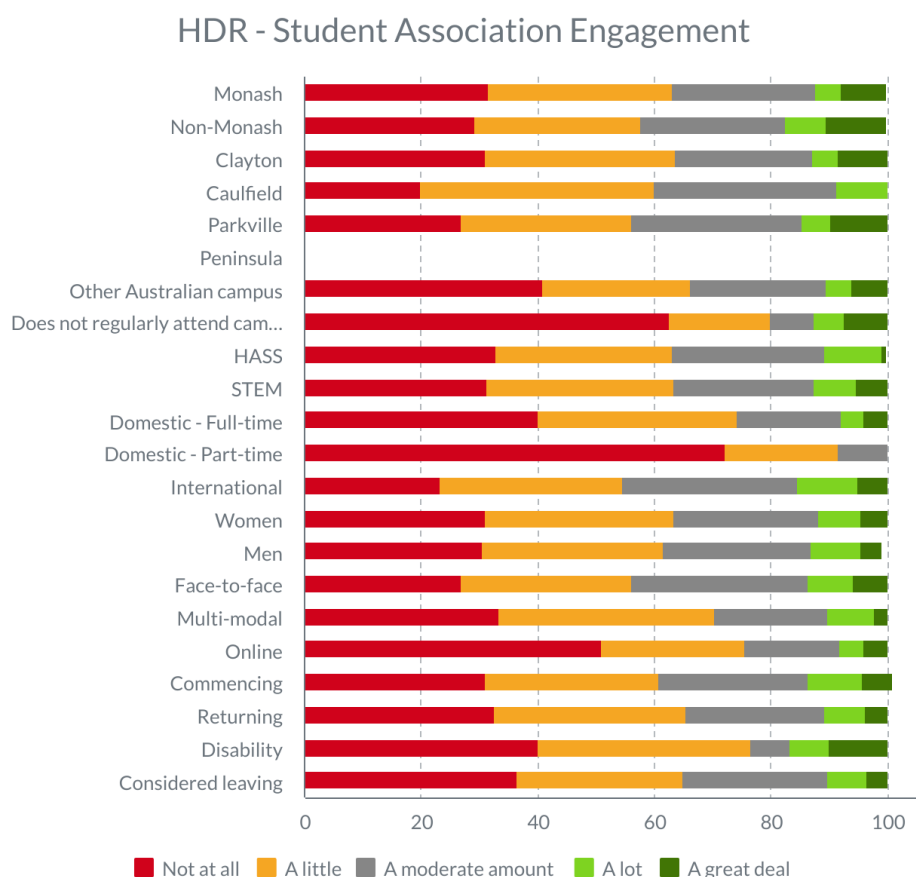
Engagement and Satisfaction with the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

This section highlights the engagement levels that Monash 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 responded:



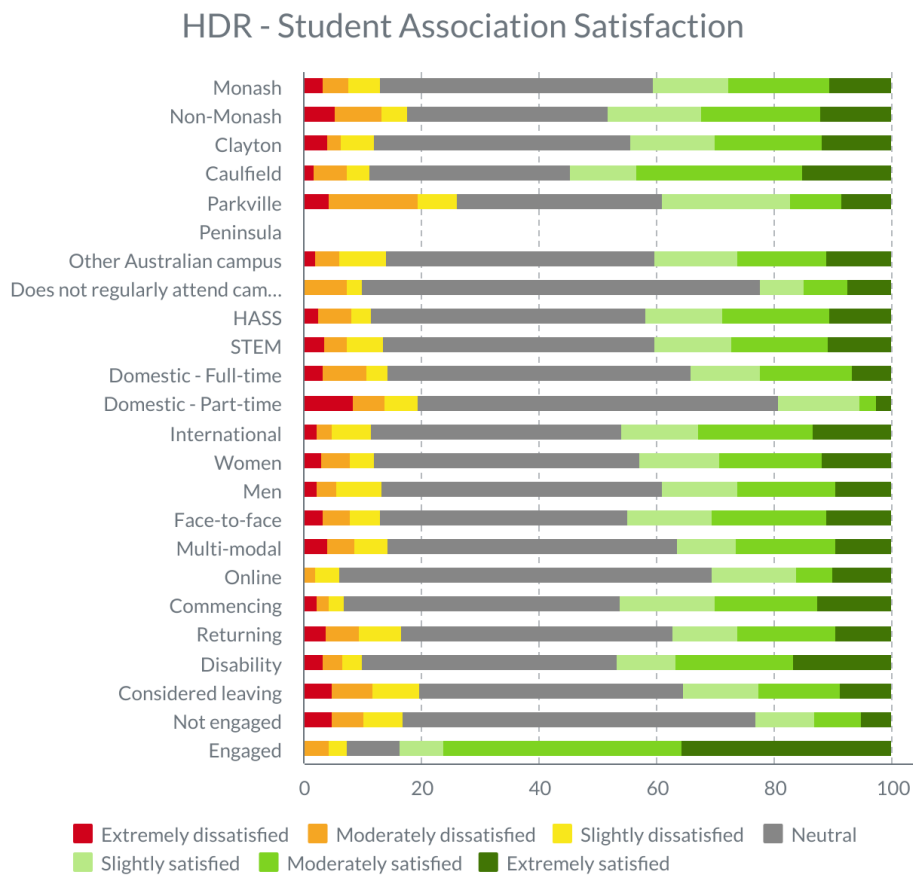
Domestic part-time graduate researchers were the most likely to have not engaged with their student association – followed by students who do not regularly attend campus.

Students with a disability were most likely to have engaged a great deal.

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 responded:



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

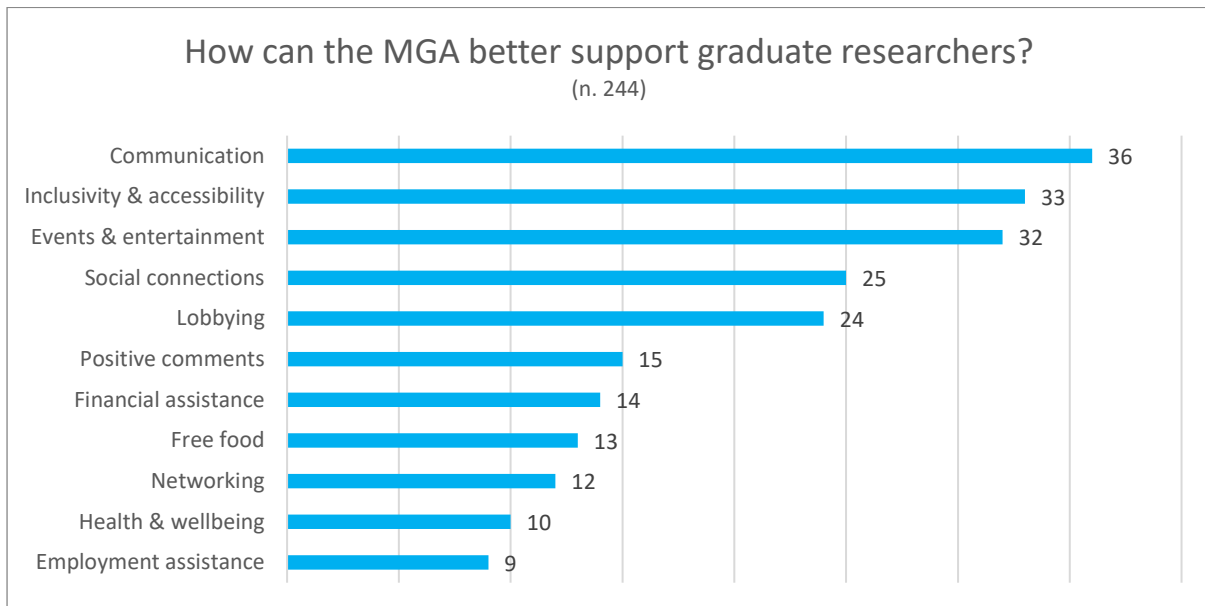
In regard to the MGA, dissatisfaction was highest amongst Parkville respondents, students who had considered leaving their course and domestic part-time students.

Over four in every five students who had engaged with the MGA were satisfied with the Association.

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 **improving communication**. These comments included:

“Posting more things on social media like Facebook or Instagram so that people know what events are happening.”

“Reaching out to students at department level. Because our department do not have a representative, it is difficult to keep updated with everything.”

“They can provide feedback form so that students who are not able to attend meetings can also share their thoughts.”

“They seem like they’re there for crisis management. Not against that, that’s a good thing, but they’re not reaching us where we are.”

Other interesting comments included:

“Organise more events after work (for example after 6 pm).”

“It’s very difficult for students not at main campuses - there’s limited opportunities for interaction without the facilities provided to students at the large campuses. All student association events are at the cafe/bar away from the offices which makes them less convenient to attend.”

“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.”

“I feel like there should be more clubs or meetups for postgraduate students.”

“While they already have activities in place which are much appreciated, MGA could provide more opportunities for social welfare activities. The current level to maintain a decent living situation is very high that social welfare grants and activities are dire especially for international students.”

“I have no ties to them and they have no idea who I am, dating back to when I first started. Now I feel any sudden introduction would be jarring. This could be rectified a little by giving the student association a stronger role to play in integrating new students socially, especially those who may be working in a more isolated lab than the rest of the cohort.”

“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.”

“I feel the student association tries hard to make their points to Monash, but I don't feel the higher ups really care much.”

“I think they do a great job but I find the Indigenous students support through William Cooper is much more engaging and supportive.”

“Provide more financial support or fight for higher stipend. Let's be honest PhD students barely make enough to live, yet we work harder than most people with other jobs.”

“In a more realistic sense, I would prefer if the association can provide some support for livelihood (free food, vouchers etc.), rather than those social/ recreational events and outdoor trip they are doing.”

“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.”

“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.”

“Fighting for actually employment status, because we work and get poorly paid but still considered just students.”

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

“Arrange more exposure to local industries or work opportunities. Maybe also, have a meeting with international students early on giving suggestions on topics like accommodation, managing expenses etc.”

Conclusion

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

Key findings

Monash graduate researchers are overwhelmingly satisfied with their supervision experience

Across all sixteen metrics surveyed, satisfaction in relation to supervision was overwhelming. Monash 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 having skilled supervisors and this was also the area in which students were most satisfied. Supervisors were also accessible with the overwhelming majority of students reporting that their meeting frequency fell within the University's guidelines.

Satisfaction was lower among those who had not chosen their own supervisor. Monash respondents who had not chosen their own supervisor were less satisfied than those who had across every metric of supervision. They also recorded wider gaps between importance and satisfaction with an average gap score (-8.62%), which was over twice as wide as for those who had chosen their own supervisor (-4.13%).

The gap between importance and satisfaction in Professional Development is wide

Although Professional Development was, on average, of less importance to Monash graduate researchers than supervision, the satisfaction scores across the fourteen PD areas surveyed were noticeably lower. As such the gap between importance and satisfaction in relation to PD was substantially wider than it was for supervision.

The gap was widest in relation to industry exposure (-21.58%), career planning (-20.62%) and grant writing (-19.00%).

Imposter syndrome is common among graduate researchers and linked to consideration of leaving degree

When it comes to imposter syndrome, 69% of Monash graduate researchers indicated they had experienced it at some point during their degree.

There was a Pearson correlation coefficient score of 0.43 between imposter syndrome and considering leaving, which indicates a moderate positive correlation. Indeed, when students who had considered leaving were given the chance to outline why, imposter syndrome featured in 10% of cases.

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.

Of the students who indicated they were at least “a little” or more engaged with the MGA, over four-fifths were satisfied with the Association.

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 at Monash University:

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.

Career planning to be incorporated into the PhD

Building an initial career planning session, as well as annual reviews, with a professional career counsellor who is experienced working with PhD students, into the requirements of candidature would serve to address the gap in students' expectations, improve satisfaction and potentially lead to improved outcomes for research degree graduates.

Please note, career planning sessions may not be relevant to certain candidates e.g. mature-aged students. As such, a self-exclusion or "opt-out" mechanism must be built in to any new systems.

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

Faculty	Respondents
Art, Design and Architecture	15 (2%)
Arts	80 (11%)
Business and Economics	40 (6%)
Education	25 (4%)
Engineering	101 (14%)
Information Technology	54 (8%)
Law	8 (1%)
Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences	187 (27%)
Pharmacy	68 (10%)
Science	105 (15%)
MSDI	5 (1%)
MUARC	6 (1%)
other	6 (1%)

Campus	Respondents
I do not regularly attend campus	49 (7%)
Clayton	377 (56%)
Caulfield	72 (11%)
Peninsula	11 (2%)
Parkville	62 (9%)
Malaysia	24 (4%)
Alfred Hospital	55 (8%)
Box Hill Hospital	2 (0%)
Hudson Institute of Medical Research	27 (4%)
Notting Hill	9 (1%)
Law Chambers	2 (0%)
Suzhou	38 (6%)
other	33 (5%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	264 (39%)
International student	414 (61%)

Study load	Respondents
Full-time	646 (92%)
Part-time	51 (7%)
On leave from study	3 (0%)

Study location	Respondents
Entirely on-campus	342 (50%)
Multi-modal	257 (38%)
Entirely off-campus	67 (10%)
Other	12 (2%)

Time since last degree	Respondents
Less than 1 year	255 (38%)
1-5 years	328 (48%)
6-10 years	71 (11%)
11+ years	24 (4%)

Course progress	Respondents
First year	255 (38%)
Second year	169 (35%)
Third year and beyond	254 (38%)

Study hours	Respondents
Less than 5	11 (2%)
6-10	43 (6%)
11-20	82 (12%)
21-30	128 (19%)
31-40	205 (30%)
Over 40 hours	209 (31%)

English proficiency	Respondents
Fluent	397 (59%)
Advanced	160 (24%)
Intermediate	107 (16%)
Elementary	14 (2%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

Gender	Respondents
Woman	408 (60%)
Man	240 (35%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	11 (2%)
Prefer to self-describe	3 (0%)
Prefer not to say	16 (2%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	82 (12%)
No	541 (80%)
Prefer not to disclose	55 (8%)

Indigenous (domestic students only)	Respondents
Yes	1 (0%)
No	255 (97%)
Prefer not to disclose	8 (3%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	37 (6%)
No	623 (92%)
Prefer not to disclose	18 (3%)

Registered disability with DSS	Respondents
Yes	16 (43%)
No	21 (57%)

Age	Respondents
24 or under	102 (15%)
25-29	277 (41%)
30-39	239 (35%)
40 and over	58 (9%)

Employment status	Respondents
Full-time	78 (12%)
Part-time	110 (16%)
Casual	213 (32%)
Unemployed and looking for work	117 (17%)
Not employed and not looking for work	181 (27%)

Work hours	Respondents
Less than 5	97 (25%)
6-10	125 (33%)
11-20	89 (23%)
21-30	26 (7%)
31-40	33 (9%)
More than 40	14 (4%)