

# Identifying Graduate Research Student Satisfaction



Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
*Monash University 2024*



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

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## Executive summary

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

The main findings as they relate to graduate research students enrolled in the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (Pharmacy) are summarised below:

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

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

The University's recommended meeting frequency was mostly met with 93% of full-time graduate researchers meeting with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 100% of part-time Pharmacy respondents met once a month or more frequently.

Supervisors were largely meeting the expectations and needs of their students. Having their research supported by skilled supervisors and receiving constructive feedback were the most important aspect of supervision according to Pharmacy respondents. Both these areas ranked relatively high for satisfaction.

Career pathway support (-16.33%) was the area where the gap between importance and satisfaction was widest.

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

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

The most common response as to the most satisfying aspect of their academic unit was other research students being supportive, while the most common dissatisfying aspects was in relation to being provided a student-specific space to use.

### **Confirmation process is largely satisfactory**

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

Receiving feedback was both the most and least useful aspect of the experience, according to Pharmacy respondents.

### **Professional Development opportunities**

Having Professional Development (PD) opportunities that focus on publishing skills, presentation skills and data analysis techniques was of the utmost importance to Pharmacy graduate researchers, while experiencing PD with students from other fields was the least important of the themes.

Respondents were most satisfied with PD on project/research management and research methodologies and least satisfied with entrepreneurial skills and career planning. The widest gaps between importance and satisfaction were recorded for data analysis techniques and mental health and wellbeing training.

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

### **Increase in number of graduate researchers working for the University with respondents largely satisfied they are paid appropriately**

The likelihood of a Pharmacy graduate researcher at Monash being given an opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university increased over the past three years. It was comfortably higher than across STEM at Monash.

The majority of Pharmacy respondents (91%) believed that they were paid appropriately for the work they did for the University.

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

The majority of Pharmacy graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 14% indicating that they experienced this feeling “often.”

One-quarter of Pharmacy graduate researchers had never experienced a delay in their research, while 14% indicated that they often experienced delays.

Preparing for milestones was the most common response for a delay in research among Pharmacy graduate research students –doubling since 2021 levels.

Pharmacy graduate researchers were as likely as their STEM colleagues to have considered leaving their degree.

The most common reasons for considering leaving were a lack of motivation, mental health and project issues.

The most common responses for continuing with their degree was personal interest.

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

International students were more likely to have engaged with the MGA; however, satisfaction with the Association was relatively consistent across the demographic groups.

## Introduction

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

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

This report provides data and findings specifically for respondents enrolled at in the Faculty of Pharmacy at Monash University. In Pharmacy, a total of 68 graduate research students participated in the survey (see *Appendix 1: Demographics*), which we estimate to be approximately 26% of enrolled graduate research students at the Faculty.

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

With the support of colleagues at student associations across Australia, this survey was offered to postgraduate students at nine other universities. Respondents from the University of Queensland, Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, Southern Cross University, University of Sydney, University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, Victoria University and Federation University are all represented in this survey. A total of 8 graduate research students in the field of pharmacy completed the survey across these universities.

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

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

## Limitations

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

### *Low turnout across pharmacy respondents at other universities*

Where possible, comparisons have been made with those studying in the field of pharmacy at other participating universities. Owing to a low response rate among this cohort, it is difficult to have a degree of confidence that these results are representative. They have been included, but should be approached with a degree of scepticism.

### *Positive-negative asymmetry (PNA) effect*

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

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

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

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



## Supervision

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

### Choice of supervisor

Did you choose your supervisor?	Pharmacy 2021	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Yes	96%	89%	89%	75%
No	5%	11%	11%	25%

The proportion of Pharmacy PhD candidates choosing their own supervisors dropped over the past 3 years.

However, the result in Pharmacy was on par with that recorded across STEM at Monash.

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

### Choice of topic

Did you choose your own topic?	Pharmacy 2021	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Yes	76%	63%	72%	75%
No	24%	37%	28%	25%

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

Pharmacy respondents were less likely than their STEM colleagues at Monash to be choosing their own topic.

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

## Contact with supervisors

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

How often do you meet with your supervisor?	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Weekly	55%	57%	75%
Fortnightly	37%	35%	13%
Once every 3 weeks	0%	4%	13%
Once a month	7%	3%	0%
Less than once a month	2%	2%	0%

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

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

Of full-time Pharmacy respondents, 93% met with their supervisor weekly or fortnightly, while 100% of part-time Pharmacy respondents met once a month or more frequently.

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

Comments included:

*"I know what to do in my project at this stage."*

*"They are very busy."*

*"I used to meet every week at the start of the candidature, then as the years progressed, since now I'm focusing on writing up the thesis, frequent meeting is not necessary. I still do communicate with them via email to get feedback on writing as needed."*

## Supervision: Importance and Satisfaction

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

The gap was calculated as below:

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

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

	Importance (1-7)	Satisfaction (1-7)	Gap (%)
Skilled supervisors	6.61	5.96	-9.83%
Constructive feedback	6.58	5.93	-9.88%
I am heard	6.46	5.73	-11.30%
Timely feedback	6.42	5.93	-7.63%
Access to supervisors	6.37	6.00	-5.81%
Support for work/life balance	6.35	5.59	-11.97%
Guide me through the degree	6.18	5.84	-5.50%
Encourage ownership	6.12	5.68	-7.19%
Act professionally	6.11	6.04	-1.15%
Mentor me	6.11	5.79	-5.24%
Help me network	6.11	5.20	-14.89%
Help me belong academically	6.07	5.46	-10.05%
Career pathway	6.00	5.02	-16.33%
Clear role delegation	5.81	5.63	-3.10%
I am a priority	5.67	5.52	-2.65%
Inform me of support services	5.44	5.02	-7.72%
	6.15	5.65	-8.14%

Having their research supported by skilled supervisors and receiving constructive feedback were the most important aspect of supervision according to Pharmacy respondents. These two areas ranked in the top four for satisfaction.

The widest gap between importance and satisfaction was recorded in relation to career pathway support.

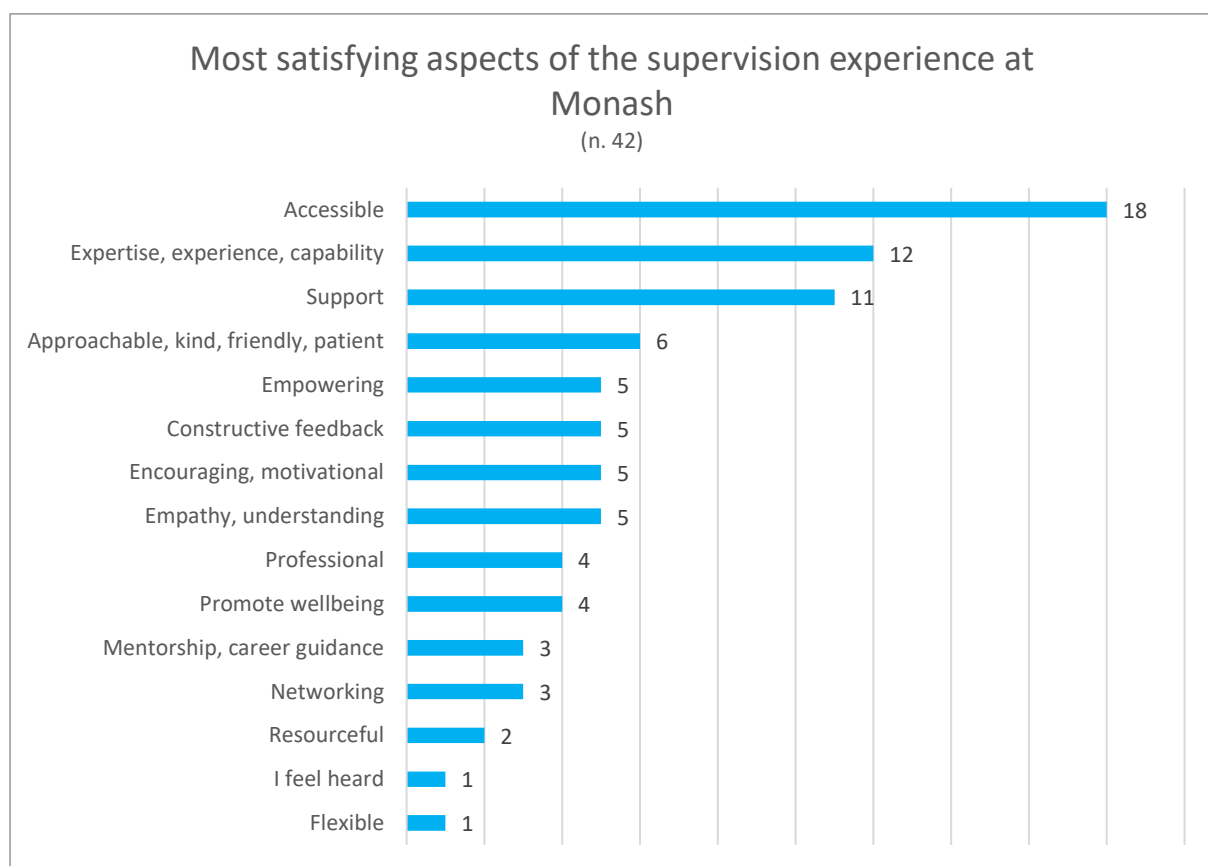
## The supervision experience

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

### Most satisfying aspects of supervision

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

Below is a summary of the responses from Pharmacy:



The primary theme to emerge from the responses related to the **accessibility** of their supervisors. Comments included:

*“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.”*

*“They hold expert knowledge and are always able to provide constructive feedback and advice.”*

*"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."*

*"My supervisors were always contactable and provided timely feedback. They also shared relevant literature/papers and recommended workshops and conferences I could attend and benefit from."*

Other interesting comments included:

*"I am guided through my adaptation in the early period of my PhD. They care very much about my personal study progress, not only on the project technical progress."*

*"My supervisors are very professional and have great ideas on my research."*

*"Working under very skilled and supporting supervisors is definitely satisfying. Also, supervisors who expect a high quality of work, and who support you to achieve this without spoon-feeding you."*

*"They are field leading experts who take the time to provide feedback on my progress and work. They are nice, if extremely busy people."*

*"My supervisors provide plenty of guidance, support and timely feedback to support me. They serve as mentors to me and continue to teach me how to be a good researcher. They provide me with an appropriate amount of independence but are easy to reach out to if I'm struggling."*

*"My supervisors have very kind personality and are very professional in their interactions with me. Also, they are highly knowledgeable and experienced in the field of my research, with strong connections in the academic and industrial network."*

*"My supervisor actively tries to quiz me and am concerned with how my studies are going. They make an effort to be helpful and constructive in criticism when I make errors which can be improved on."*

*"I have a lot of responsibility regarding the direction of my project. Most of the time they provide feedback in a timely manner."*

*"She supports my project, and allows me to take it into any direction I want. She encourages me to come up with my own ideas and run with it."*

*"Feeling completely comfortable to be able to talk to my supervisor about my work, mental health and career planning. She is great at being there to talk to about any worries I have."*

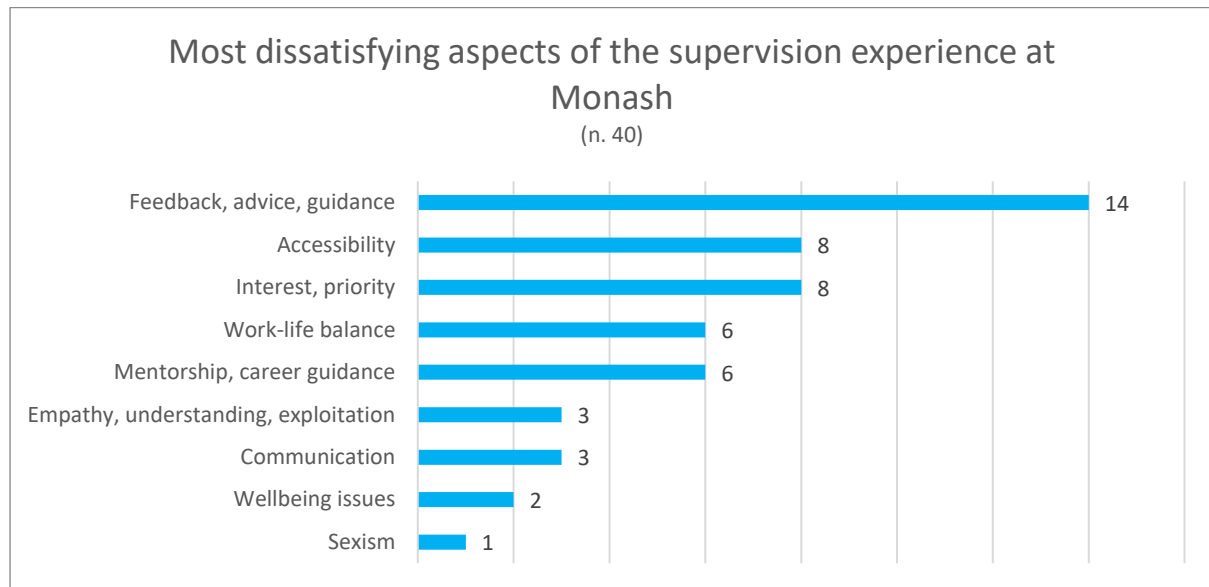
*"They make me feel heard, and encourage me to take breaks when situations beyond my control happen."*

*"They acknowledge the flexibility of scheduling wet lab work, and there's no obligation for me to adhere to a strict 9-5 timeframe. They maintain a professional boundary with me, ensuring there are no uncomfortable incidents or assaults."*

## Most dissatisfying aspects of supervision

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

Below is a summary of responses from Pharmacy:



The most common frustration with supervisors related to **feedback, advice and guidance.**

Comments included:

*“Sometimes I feel as though my supervisor forgets what stage I am at in my degree, and that I don’t have the 30+ years of experience they do, and that I need more assistance.”*

*“They 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.”*

*“They are extremely busy and supervise many students, so often don’t have time for individualised feedback which they delegate. The delegation is often poorly defined.”*

*“The feeling of getting lost sometimes, as they gradually let me to be independent.”*

Other interesting comments included:

*“A low work/life balance is often encouraged and completing PhD on time is often seen as solely a reflection of student effort and not a combination of clear supervision, access to resources and supportive environment. Varying level of priority from supervisors based on the time of year e.g. grant season. Minimal career guidance.”*

*“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.”*

*“Sometimes I feel my supervisor prioritises students in the lab, especially men over women.”*

*“Too busy to put students as priority.”*

*“My supervisors don't provide extra advice or resources regarding career development and networking. There's is not a balanced or proportionated involvement and time invested from the three of them.”*

*“Delayed feedback and miscommunication between them which causes extra work for me and due to the high volume of tasks they have, it makes difficult discussing things.”*

*“At times I've seen some students struggle to communicate with them, as they work on a high assumed level of knowledge. They are approachable, so one can directly ask them questions if problems arise, though they don't always seem this way to newer or shy students.”*

*“They have no idea what I'm doing, cannot provide any expertise on the subject matter.”*

*“The overbearing pressure of not doing enough work.”*

## Conflict with supervisor

Have you ever had a disagreement with a supervisor that was challenging to overcome?	Pharmacy 2017*	Pharmacy 2021*	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
No, I've never had a serious disagreement with a supervisor	(no) 83%	(no) 83%	81%	70%	33%
Yes, but it was only minor	(yes) 17%	(yes) 17%	15%	23%	17%
Yes, I have had a serious disagreement			4%	7%	50%

\*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 Pharmacy were less likely to have had a disagreement with a supervisor than their STEM colleagues.

## Type of conflict

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

Below is a selection of responses from Pharmacy:

*“Sometimes, I was excluded from the discussion that was with other professionals inside and outside group.”*

*“Expects high work output which can only be achieved working [more than] 8 hrs a day (plus part of our weekends). Nothing hostile.”*

*“My supervisor was reluctant to pay for materials needed for my project, but they were still expecting same results and advancement of the project. They eventually agreed to pay for the required materials.”*

*“Supervisor was frustrated that I was not progressing more quickly. I had to explain that I have a disability so I can't work as fast as other people.”*

*“It was the disagreement of a result data which I did the research review and elaborated the result according to the literature review. But the supervisor disagreed with the explanation and provided me another potential explanation. But this discussion is necessary which help me view the problem in different aspects.”*

*“In the absence of postdocs for my project, my supervisors expect me to assist honours students and provide complex compounds for multiple rotating PhD students from a different research theme.”*

*“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.”*

## 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”?	Pharmacy 2017*	Pharmacy 2021*	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Decided to do nothing	50%	17%	30%	7%	25%
Sorted it out directly with supervisor(s)	25%	67%	60%	72%	50%
Sought assistance from a friend/colleague	50%	0%	40%	43%	50%
Sought assistance from student association	13%	0%	0%	7%	25%
Sought assistance from my chair	NA	NA	0%	0%	25%
Sought assistance from grad. coordinator or head of school	13%	17%	0%	14%	75%
Other	NA	0%	30%	14%	0%

\* 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 Pharmacy who decided to do nothing increased from 2021 levels.



## Changing supervisors

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

### Considered changing supervisors

Have you thought about changing supervisors?	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Never	79%	75%	50%
Rarely	15%	17%	0%
Often	6%	6%	33%
All the time	0%	2%	17%

Pharmacy respondents were slightly less likely than those from across STEM faculties at Monash to have considered changing their supervisors.

### Supervisor changes

Have you ever changed supervisors?	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
No	87%	86%	83%
Yes, but it wasn't my choice	8%	7%	0%
Yes, my supervisor and I agreed to make a change	6%	5%	0%
Yes, I decided to change a supervisor(s) even though they did not want to be replaced	0%	1%	17%
Other	2%	4%	0%

Pharmacy respondents were as likely as those across STEM at Monash to have changed supervisors.

## Why students did not change supervisors

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

Comments of note from Pharmacy included:

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

*"I enjoy the work I do, the group I am in and in general my supervisor and I get along."*

*"After outweighing the pros and cons of staying with the same supervisor, I found ways to improve the disadvantages. Also, I am trying to make the most of the benefits of staying in the same group."*

*"I just started my journey as a new PhD and feel that the supervisors are supportive."*

*"I chose not to change supervisors despite concerns because I've invested significant effort into my work here and wish to retain ownership of my publications."*

*"Sunk cost fallacy."*

*"I like the current relationship and do not want to change and adapt to the new one."*

*"Stigma, and I enjoy my research topic and the lab I'm in."*

## Comments on the process of changing supervisors

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

The responses from Pharmacy included:

*"It was easy enough to do, I simply changed the percentage weighting (i.e. main/associate supervisor)."*

*"It was easy and straightforward. Not much to comment."*

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

## 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 Pharmacy 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%	2%	6%	8%	14%	33%	33%
I am treated in a respectful manner				10%	6%	37%	47%
I am encouraged by staff to socialise with other research students in my area	2%	6%	6%	12%	16%	27%	31%
I am informed about opportunities for tutoring/sessional work	4%		6%	6%	8%	37%	39%
My academic unit provides appropriate facilities for my field of research	4%			10%	14%	37%	35%
My academic unit provides a student-specific social area for me to use	10%	2%	6%	8%	24%	20%	31%
My academic unit organises regular seminars and guest speakers for research ..	4%		4%	4%	4%	31%	53%
Other research students in my academic unit are supportive		2%		4%	18%	31%	45%
I feel the policies, rules and regulations around doing research are there to sup..			2%	22%	20%	31%	25%
Provides an academically stimulating environment	2%	2%	4%	4%	16%	33%	39%
I can see myself having a career in a place like this	2%	4%	2%	10%	25%	25%	31%

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

Satisfaction was highest in relation to other research students being supportive (94%), while dissatisfaction was highest in relation to respondents being provided a student-specific social area to use (18%).

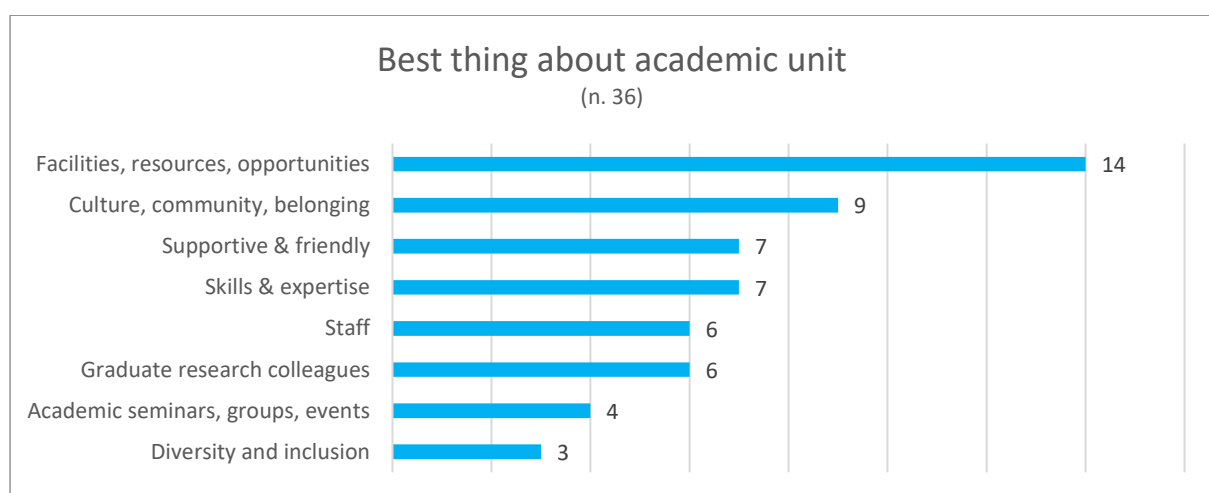
## Academic unit comments

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 Pharmacy graduate researchers are summarised below:



The most common response related to the **facilities, resources and opportunities** provided. These included:

*"It has world class facilities, including people and techniques."*

*"A very conducive place to learn and work. Complete and well-maintained facilities."*

*"Facilities are new, we got them this year."*

Other interesting comments included:

*"The culture among the PhD/honours students. Departmental funding of social events throughout the year."*

*"The diverse culture of research that is occurring always makes it interesting to hear about what is going on. It's also valuable to discuss ideas with people from various fields of research."*

*"Sense of inclusion. Quality of the work."*

*"The breadth of research and knowledge available to all students."*

*“Mostly supportive academic staff and high level of collaboration between labs if needed.”*

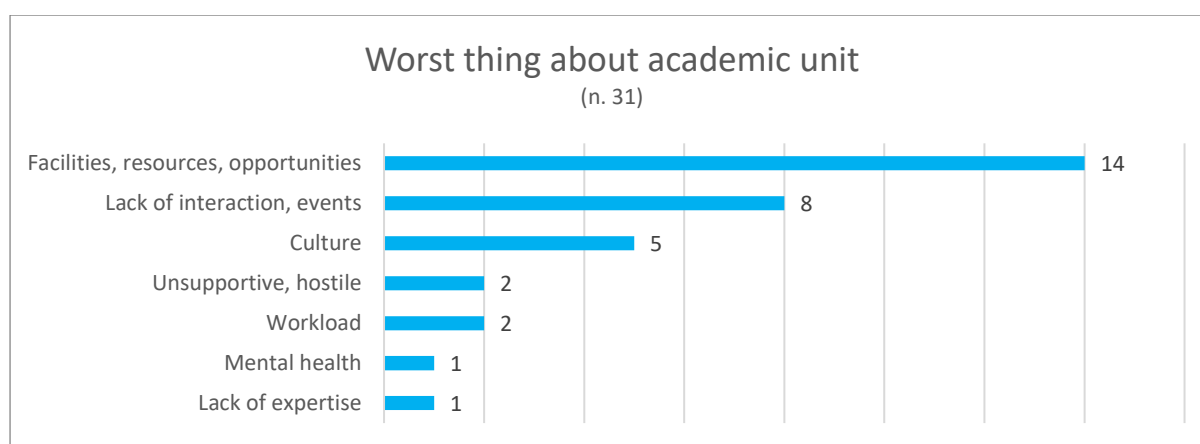
*“Comradery with other students and post-docs.”*

*“The close-knitted community of academic staff and research students. They help me to get a sense of belonging and grow as a researcher.”*

## Worst aspects of academic unit

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

The responses of Pharmacy graduate researchers are summarised below:



Interesting comments included:

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

*“There currently is no seminar specifically targeted for us yet but I know we are planning to start a monthly seminar series soon so once we start this, nothing much negative to say about our unit at all.”*

*“The hoops needed to jump through for accessing conference travel money and mandatory seminars.”*

*“The graduate only space is not very welcoming.”*

*“Lack of financial aid for PhD students.”*

*“Poor professional and academic development opportunities.”*

*“I see the contract for the postdocs is mostly 1 year based. I think it is a quite short period.”*

*“Whilst a sense of collectiveness exists within MedChem, it still feels like a “dog eat dog” kind of vibe.”*

*“Work pressure for post-doc scientists in light of difficulty obtaining grant (not really the units fault though).”*

*“Too many meetings.”*

*“It's difficult to melt into the candidature group due to language weakness.”*

*“Culture of overwork.”*

## Confirmation

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

Have you passed your confirmation?	Respondents
We don't have this requirement where I study	2 (4%)
No, I'm not at this stage yet	16 (31%)
No, I presented my research, but I need to make amendments	1 (2%)
Yes, I passed first time	30 (59%)
Yes, I passed, but after I needed to make amendments	2 (4%)

### 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 (27% extremely satisfied, 49% moderately satisfied, 18% slightly satisfied), while a small proportion indicated that they were dissatisfied (0% extremely dissatisfied, 0% moderately dissatisfied, 3% slightly dissatisfied).

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

The responses of Pharmacy graduate researchers are summarised below:

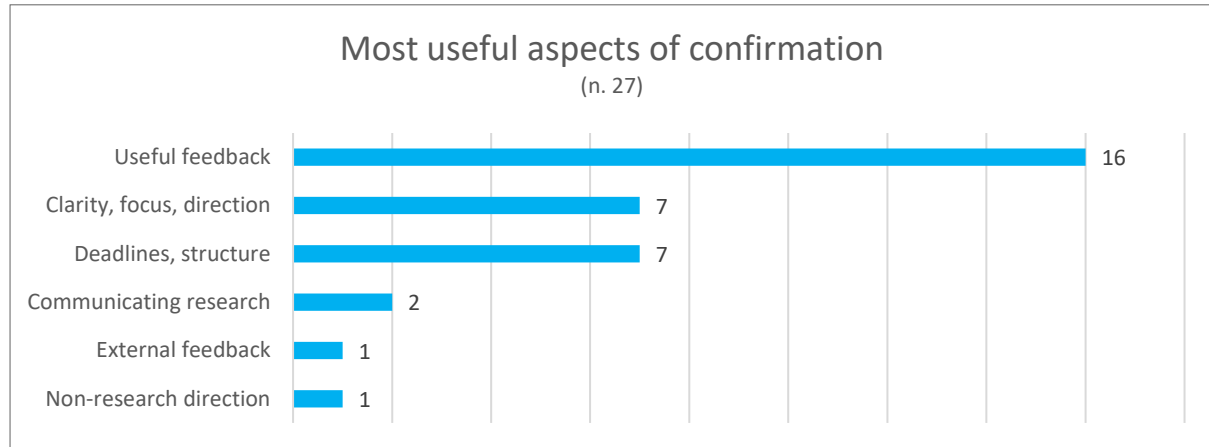
	Extremely Dissatisfied	Moderately Dissatisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Neutral	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
The expectations for my confirmation were clear	3%	3%	3%		9%	27%	55%
My supervisor(s) guided me through the confirmation process	3%		3%	3%	9%	27%	55%
The preparation required was a good use of my time	3%	3%	3%	3%	18%	18%	52%
I felt comfortable speaking openly with the panel	3%	3%		9%	18%	15%	52%
The behaviour and tone of the panel was professional			3%		3%	21%	73%
The panel provided useful feedback			3%		9%	24%	64%

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

## 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:

*"Getting both written and verbal feedback from panel members on my report and presentation was really useful. Also the questions they asked during the meeting made me think about how I could better address my research questions."*

*"Feedback from supervisors and panels on my report. Suggestions about the future directions are also useful."*

*"Good chance for early feedback on the viability of the project. Found my panel to be very helpful and friendly."*

Other interesting comments included:

*"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."*

*"It was most beneficial to put all my ideas onto paper and have a clear, written outline of what my plans are. It was also useful to receive input from people that were not familiar with my work."*

*"Very useful to discuss work with other scientists who aren't necessarily part of your field. Provides a feeling of inclusion in the academic realm for new students. Provides opportunities to present your work, and have it praised and critiqued."*

*"Help you to find a clear direction along PhD journey, give suggestions beyond the research work."*

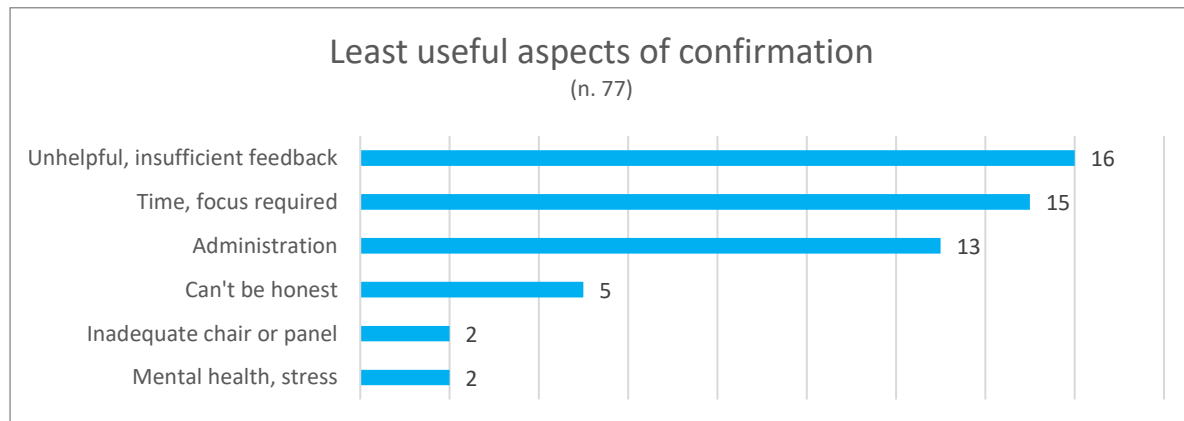
*"Gave a clear idea about what has been done, what needs to be done, and how it is to be approached."*



## Least useful aspects of confirmation

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

Below is a summary of their responses:



Interesting comments included:

*"The time taken to prepare that could have been doing towards things that will be more useful for my PhD overall."*

*"The presentation component saps more time than its usefulness in my opinion. Just presenting to the panel would have the same effect in my progress."*

*"Panel members did not understand certain aspects of the project and kept asking irrelevant questions as a result. Unnecessary emphasis was placed upon extremely minor errors that had to be amended afterwards."*

*"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."*

*"Milestones are extremely stressful and lot needs to be completed before starting your project."*

*"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."*

*"It was humiliating to fail my milestone and be required to retake it."*

*"The time required for preparing the report is quite tricky, especially with the amount of uncompleted works in the lab. But I do realise that it is an important phase to get used to work and write balance."*

*"Only seeing the panel once a year means that you don't build up much rapport. Would be good to get to know them better early on."*

*"The report...only me and my main supervisor read it."*

## 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?	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
No	10%	16%	0%
Yes, but it was optional	4%	21%	60%
Yes, it is mandatory	86%	63%	40%

Professional Development was mandatory for the majority of Pharmacy respondents. It was mandatory for 63% of respondents from STEM at Monash, but only 40% of those studying in the field of pharmacy at other universities.

## Professional Development: Importance and Satisfaction

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

Question	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap (%)
<i>Publishing skills and knowledge</i>	6.41	5.59	-12.79%
<i>Presenting findings e.g. conferences, meetings, seminars</i>	6.33	5.53	-12.64%
<i>Data analysis techniques</i>	6.25	5.46	-12.64%
<i>Project/research management</i>	6.22	5.62	-9.65%
<i>Research methodologies</i>	6.18	5.62	-9.06%
<i>Networking skills</i>	6.14	5.33	-13.19%
<i>Mental health and wellbeing</i>	6.12	4.95	-19.12%
<i>Career planning</i>	6.06	4.80	-20.79%
<i>Professional ethics</i>	6.02	5.52	-8.31%
<i>Industry exposure</i>	6.02	4.90	-18.60%
<i>Grant writing</i>	5.96	5.11	-14.26%
<i>Coursework relevant to my research</i>	5.88	5.29	-10.03%
<i>Entrepreneurial skills</i>	5.47	4.64	-15.17%
<i>PD with students from other fields</i>	5.06	5.13	1.38%
	6.01	5.25	-12.49%

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

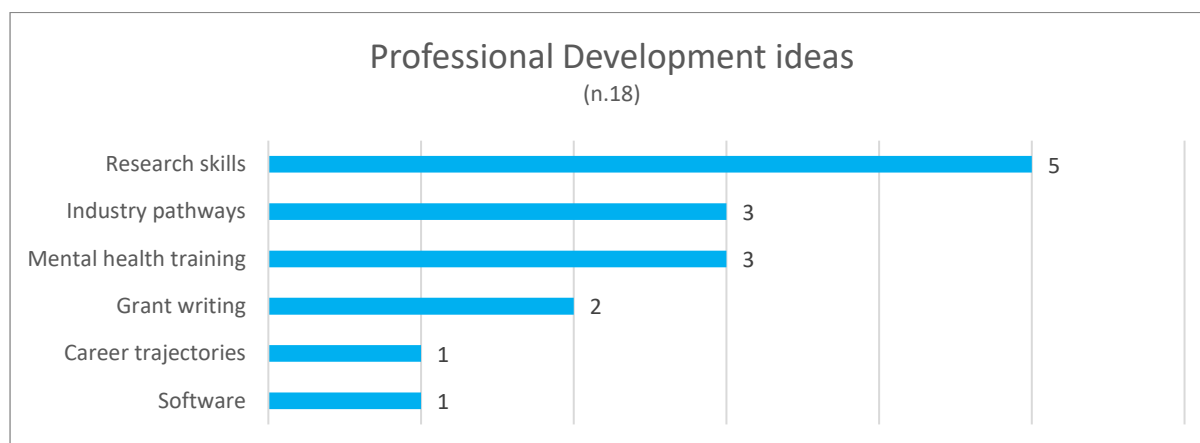
Respondents were most satisfied with PD on project/research management and research methodologies and least satisfied with entrepreneurial skills and career planning.

The widest gaps between importance and satisfaction was in relation to career planning and mental health and wellbeing.

## 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 Pharmacy graduate researchers.



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

*“Some PD programs currently being offered appear to be just scratching the surface, without going deep into the subject matter. It would be desirable to have fewer PD programs which encourage to dive deep into the relevant subject/skill.”*

*“More PD that relates to educational research (e.g. how to conduct interviews for research purpose, how to create a survey, how to present the data more impactfully - infographic).”*

*“The advanced peptide chemistry, NMR, and computational chemistry courses that were once offered are no longer available.”*

Other interesting comments included:

*“Industry exposure should be added into a compulsory section especially for the students who are interested, but currently situation is if the research work is too much, there's not an opportunity for students to pursue such experience or convince their supervisors to destitute some time on such industry work.”*

*“Chance to tour industry and get to know how they work - the work culture in industry is very different to academia.”*

*“Industry exposure, we don't have so many chances to experience the real industry world.”*

*“Better support in work/ life balance.”*

*“more mental health stuff.”*

*“More information around grant writing and how to find grants.”*

## 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?	Pharmacy 2021	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Yes	62%	69%	57%	25%
No	38%	31%	43%	75%

\*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 Pharmacy graduate researcher at Monash being given an opportunity to conduct paid work for the faculty or university increased over the past three years; however, a graduate researcher studying in STEM across Monash was more likely to have had the opportunity to conduct paid work at the University.

### Position at the University

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

What was your position at Monash?	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024
Fixed-term (one of the 450 fixed-term roles offered at Monash)	12%	13%
Casual	85%	82%
Other	3%	5%

The overwhelming majority of Pharmacy 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?	Pharmacy 2021	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Definitely not	<i>(no)</i>	3%	10%	0%
Probably not	13%	6%	15%	100%
Probably yes	<i>(yes)</i>	59%	50%	0%
Definitely yes	87%	32%	24%	0%

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

The majority of Pharmacy respondents believed that they were probably paid (59%) or definitely paid (32%) appropriately for the work they did for the University. This was a little higher than it was across STEM at Monash.

## Doubt, Delays and Drop Outs

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

### Imposter syndrome

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

Do you ever feel like you don't belong in your field of study...?	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Never	28%	33%	25%
Rarely	28%	24%	25%
Sometimes	31%	31%	0%
Often	14%	11%	50%

The majority of Pharmacy graduate researchers have, at some point, experienced imposter syndrome with 14% indicating that they experienced this feeling "often."

Imposter syndrome levels in Pharmacy were marginally higher than they were across STEM at Monash.

### Research delay

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

Have you experienced delays in the progress of your research?	Pharmacy 2017*	Pharmacy 2021*	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Never	(no) 63%	(no) 39%	25%	24%	0%
Rarely	(yes) 37%	(yes) 61%	27%	23%	25%
Sometimes			35%	39%	50%
Often			14%	14%	25%

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

One-quarter of Pharmacy graduate researchers (25%) 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	Pharmacy 2021	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Change of research project direction	29%	31%	30%	50%
Poor supervision	8%	6%	15%	0%
Lack of resources for my research	8%	33%	28%	25%
Preparing for hurdles/milestones	21%	42%	36%	25%
Unpleasant workplace/research environment	15%	8%	11%	0%
Lack of motivation	26%	31%	38%	25%
Procrastination	NA	39%	35%	25%
Health issues	26%	31%	28%	25%
Family responsibilities	32%	25%	25%	0%
Cost of living/financial concerns	21%	17%	32%	25%
Work commitments	8%	8%	14%	25%
Data collection issues	NA	22%	29%	0%
COVID-19	92%	17%	18%	0%
Other	13%	17%	13%	25%

Preparing for milestone was the most common cause of delay for Pharmacy graduate research students – doubling since 2021.

## Considered leaving

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

Have you ever considered leaving your course?	Pharmacy 2021*	Pharmacy 2024	Monash STEM 2024	Other Pharm 2024
Never	(no) 69%	67%	65%	25%
Rarely	(yes) 31%	19%	19%	50%
Sometimes		15%	14%	0%
Often		0%	3%	25%

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

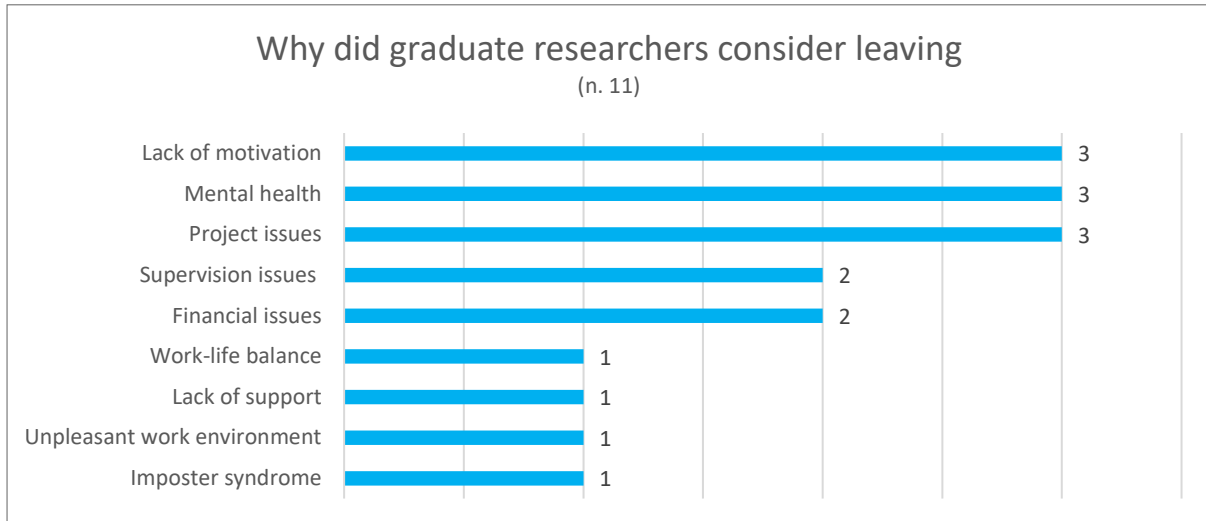
Pharmacy graduate researchers were roughly as likely as their colleague across STEM to have considered leaving their degree.



## Why leave

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

The responses of Pharmacy graduate researchers are summarised below:



Revealing comments included:

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

*"Bad day in the lab."*

*"I was struggling to maintain motivation due to living far away and mental health hurdles."*

*"Not getting along well with my supervisor and being frustrated by research setbacks and slow progress."*

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

*"I have had to extend my candidature and I am losing passion for my project."*

*"My mental health has always been a concern for me and sometimes I can have really bad spirals that I do not think I could get out of unless I left."*

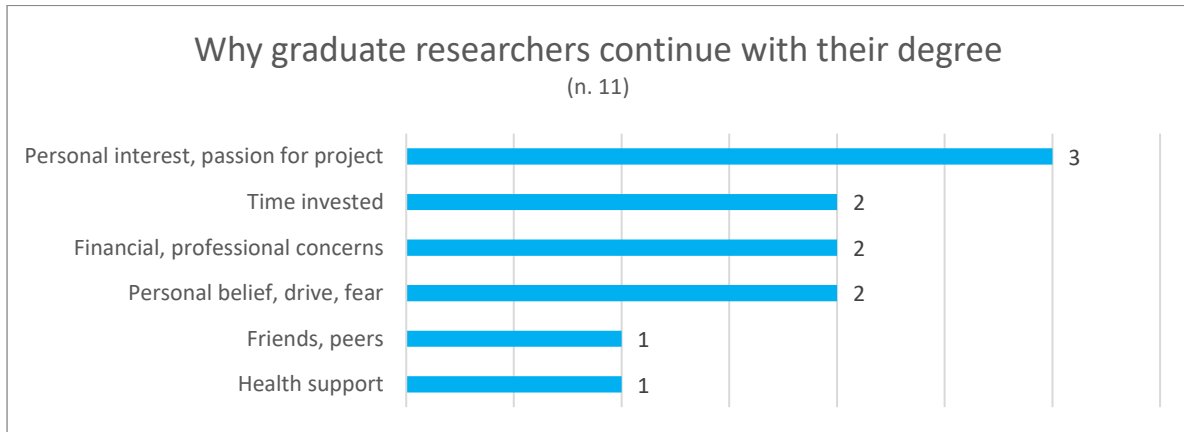
*"Feeling that enrolling in a PhD was not a well thought out decision in the first place, and feeling that I was not made for this path, after experiencing it."*

*"Is it worth the time spent on this degree?"*

## Why continue

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

The responses of Pharmacy graduate researchers are summarised below:



Interesting comments included:

*"I am committed and want to stick it out."*

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

*"A good night's sleep."*

*"I was not sure what else I would rather be doing, and know that the types of roles I want in the future will require a PhD minimum."*

*"Strong support from academic research group and peers."*

*"This would all be for nothing if I quit. I would have wasted four years of my life."*

*"I realise that I really enjoy doing the research I do and that I am just really stressed or upset that the work didn't go how I wanted to. So, I try to work through the emotions and then I want to stay."*

*"Well, I am still thinking about leaving sometimes. However, passing the confirmation had toned down that thought a little."*

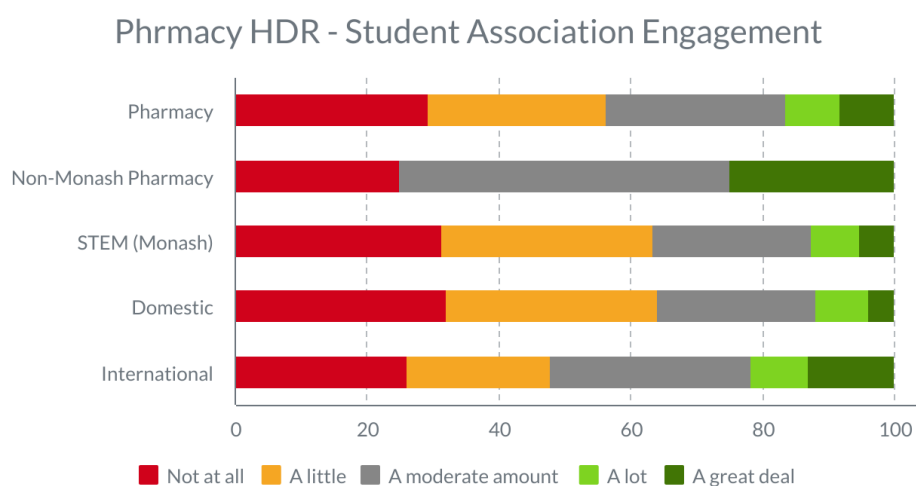
## Engagement and Satisfaction with the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

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

### 3.1 MGA engagement

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

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

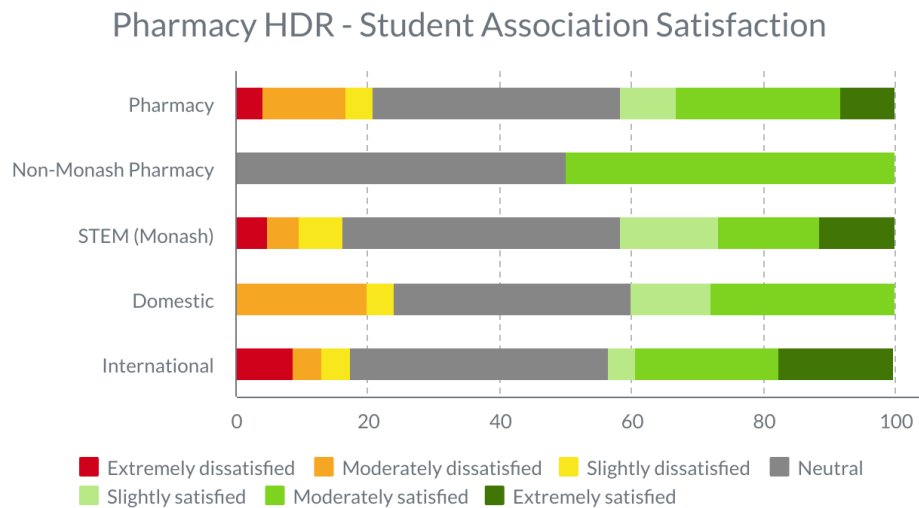


In Pharmacy, international students were more likely to have engaged with the MGA than were domestic students. This was true across the University.

### 3.2 MGA satisfaction

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

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

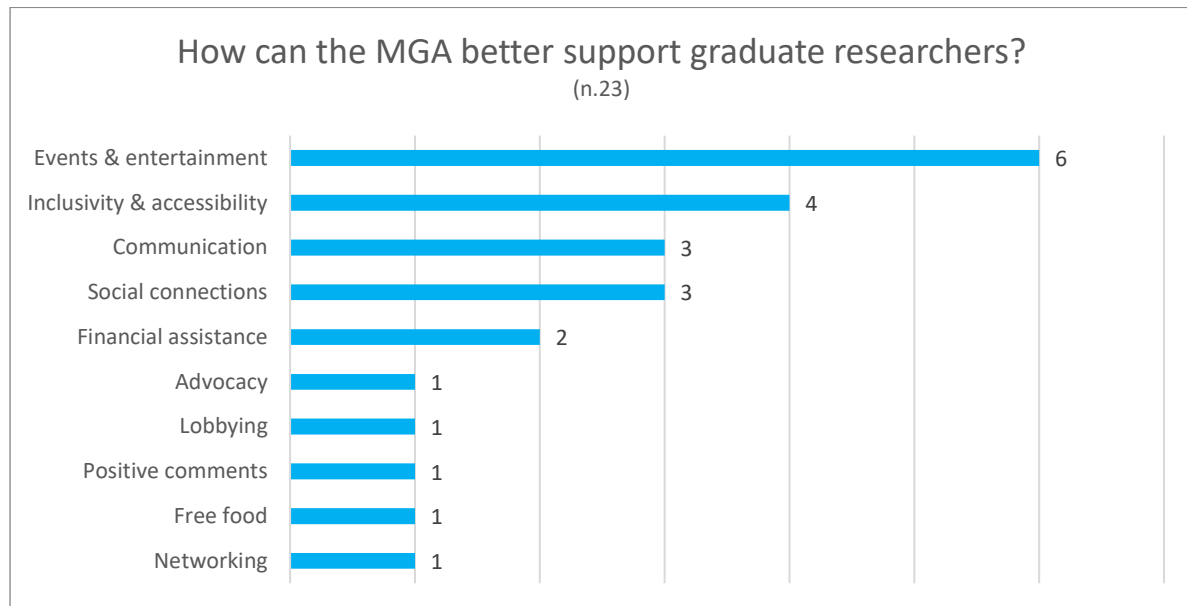


Pharmacy respondents were almost twice as likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with the MGA.

### 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:



Revealing comments included:

*"They always have events for Clayton students. I want to know any information via email."*

*"More social events to bring everyone closer :)"*

*"I'm honestly not sure what I want from them."*

*"Host more social events to engage students from all the research themes together."*

*"Better engagement at Parkville campus."*

*"More socialising opportunities with other TAs or even other PhD students from different themes would be good. Also increased funding for travel grants would be extremely helpful. Because of COVID-19, all of the conferences I attended were in held in Australia but I've already used up all my funding so now I need to pay out of pocket to attend international conferences. I heard in other themes, their theme matches the amount funded by Central & the faculty. It would be good if this can be done across all themes."*

*"Decrease amenity fee - don't feel like we gain a lot."*

*"Providing more spaces to engage with them."*

*"Be given more money to be able to actually run events that everyone can attend."*

*"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."*

## Conclusion

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

The key findings, as they relate to respondents from the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, are summarised below:

### Key findings

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

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

The two most important aspects of supervision to Pharmacy respondents were having skilled supervisors and receiving constructive feedback. These were also the two areas where respondents were relatively satisfied, indicating that in relation to supervision the Faculty is meeting the most important needs of their students.

#### **Drop in the percentage of candidates picking their own supervisors and topic**

The proportion of Pharmacy graduate researchers picking their own supervisors and/or topic dropped by 7% and 13% respectively.

The percentage of students in the Faculty picking their own supervisors was on par with STEM across Monash, but the percentage of students choosing their own topic was comfortably below it.

#### **A focus on the academic skillset, career planning and mental health literacy is desired from Professional Development**

Students in Pharmacy placed great importance on Professional Development themes that focused on developing their academic skillset with publishing, presenting and data analysis techniques occupying the first three places on their ranking. Satisfaction with what is being delivered in relation to these themes was comparatively low, which meant there was a relatively wide gap between importance and satisfaction. The widest gaps, however, were in relation to career planning and mental health.

#### **MGA engagement better among international students, but satisfaction levels consistent across demographic groups**

The MGA better engages with international graduate researchers, but satisfaction with the Association remained relatively consistent across the demographic groups.

## Recommendations

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

### *Improving academic skillset offerings and mental health support*

Improving students' access to seminars or Professional Development on publishing, presenting and data analysis techniques would be beneficial to the Pharmacy cohort. As would a renewed focus on mental health literacy.

### *Career planning to be incorporated into the PhD program*

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.

### *Reverse downward trend in candidates selecting their own supervisors and topic*

While the percentage of students choosing their own supervisor was still relatively healthy at 89%, it is a downward trend that warrants reversing given that various studies indicate a correlation between degree completion and choosing one's own supervisors.

### *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.

## Appendix 1: Demographics

<b>Academic Unit</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Centre for Medicine Use and Safety	9 (14%)
Drug Delivery, Disposition and Dynamics	18 (28%)
Drug Discovery Biology	12 (19%)
Medicinal Chemistry	18 (28%)
Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science Education	7 (11%)
Other	0 (0%)

<b>Campus</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
I do not regularly attend campus	2 (3%)
Clayton	3 (5%)
Caulfield	1 (2%)
Peninsula	0 (0%)
Parkville	59 (91%)
Malaysia	2 (3%)
Suzhou	0 (0%)
other	2 (3%)

<b>Domestic/International</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	36 (55%)
International student	29 (45%)

<b>Study load</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Full-time	67 (99%)
Part-time	1 (2%)
On leave from study	0 (0%)

<b>Study location</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Entirely on-campus	48 (74%)
Multi-modal	14 (22%)
Entirely off-campus	3 (5%)
Other	0 (0%)

<b>Time since last degree</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than 1 year	39 (60%)
1-5 years	21 (32%)
6-10 years	5 (8%)
11+ years	0 (0%)



<b>Course progress</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
First year	19 (29%)
Second year	14 (22%)
Third year and beyond	32 (49%)

<b>Study hours</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than 5	0 (0%)
6-10	5 (8%)
11-20	5 (8%)
21-30	7 (11%)
31-40	19 (29%)
Over 40 hours	29 (45%)

<b>English proficiency</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Fluent	43 (66%)
Advanced	17 (26%)
Intermediate	5 (8%)
Elementary	0 (0%)
Beginner	0 (0%)

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Woman	36 (55%)
Man	27 (42%)
Non-binary/gender diverse	0 (0%)
Prefer to self-describe	1 (2%)
Prefer not to say	1 (2%)

<b>LGBTIQA+</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	5 (8%)
No	56 (86%)
Prefer not to disclose	4 (6%)

<b>Indigenous (domestic students only)</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	0 (0%)
No	36 (100%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	3 (5%)
No	61 (94%)
Prefer not to disclose	1 (2%)

<b>Registered disability with DSS</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Yes	2 (67%)
No	1 (33%)

<b>Age</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
24 or under	16 (25%)
25-29	31 (48%)
30-39	17 (26%)
40 and over	1 (2%)

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Full-time	10 (15%)
Part-time	13 (20%)
Casual	25 (39%)
Unemployed and looking for work	8 (12%)
Not employed and not looking for work	15 (23%)

<b>Work hours</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Less than 5	12 (29%)
6-10	10 (24%)
11-20	13 (31%)
21-30	1 (2%)
31-40	3 (7%)
More than 40	3 (7%)