

**MONASH GRADUATE ASSOCIATION (MGA)**

**HDR SURVEY**

**MONASH ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE (MADA)**

**FACULTY REPORT 2019**



**mga** monash  
graduate  
association



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

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## (i) Executive Summary

In 2017, the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) conducted a survey of Monash Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students. The main findings from respondents from the graduate students of Monash Art, Design and Architecture (MADA) are summarised below.

The vast majority (over 80%) of HDR respondents in Monash Art, Design and Architecture indicated overall satisfaction with their supervision. Where problems were identified, this was generally due to supervisors being inaccessible and unsupportive.

Feedback regarding the confirmation process was generally positive. In spite of nervousness and an increased workload, it was largely deemed a valuable and worthwhile process.

The majority of graduate students felt that termination of candidature was not appropriate in the event of failing milestones. It was also raised that the milestone system needed to be more flexible to cater for fine arts where there may not be the required writing completed by the confirmation stage.

Respondents generally agreed with positive statements about their coursework experiences despite this causing either '*a great deal*', '*a lot*' or '*a moderate amount*' of stress in over 60% of cases. Relevancy and quality of units were two themes that emerged from those who were critical of their experiences.

The vast minority, (only 12%) of respondents felt that professional development units, as offered through *myDevelopment*, should be a compulsory part of a research degree. Where respondents had participated in the *myDevelopment* program, they cited problems such as lack of information and difficulty navigating the online system.

Improved supervision and access to relevant training/support services were identified as two of the most important things that Monash could do to help MADA graduate students complete on time.

The majority of respondents answered favourably when questioned about the values and culture operating within the Faculty. There was some concern around access to workshop/studio space and lockable storage. MADA students were less likely to have access to a phone, computer and desk than HDR students were in the wider University.

Over 75 % of respondents either '*strongly agreed*' or '*somewhat agreed*' that the amount of time they had to complete their research would allow them to produce a quality research project. Despite this 88% of respondents also indicated some degree of stress about finishing their degree on time.

Students cited 'family responsibilities' as the greatest source of stress. Assistance with overcoming procrastination was the most desired form of assistance for health and wellbeing support.

'Facilities/resources' was nominated by MADA students in both the top three best and top three worst aspects of being a Monash graduate research student.

## (ii) Introduction

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

A total of 668 responses were received. A preliminary report on the campus-wide quantitative data was published in March 2018 and is available from the MGA. Of the total number of responses received, 18 responses were from graduate research students enrolled in Monash Art, Design and Architecture (MADA), which equates to 13% of the total graduate research student population in that Faculty in that year.

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

In the quantitative analysis, some MADA graduate student responses were compared to responses from University-wide graduate students. In order to ensure anonymity of participants, responses were reported only where there were more than five responses. Not all respondents answered every question.

The qualitative component comprises sections where participants were invited to make general comments within broad subject areas and/or respond to open-ended questions. While there were eighteen such opportunities in the survey, graduate students from MADA responded to sixteen sections. Answers were analysed and clustered into common themes. Some responses included more than one theme in an individual response.

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

The Schools of Fine Art and Design were well represented but there were no responses from the remaining schools. Overall respondents were skewed towards on-campus, full-time, domestic HDR students in receipt of scholarships. Appendix 1 provides the demographics of respondents enrolled through Monash Art, Design and Architecture.

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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.

### (iii) Data

#### 1. Supervision

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

<b>Read the Code of Practice</b>	<b>MADA</b>	<b>University</b>
Yes	9 (50%)	386 (57.8%)
No, but I've heard about it	6 (33.3%)	169 (25.3%)
No, I didn't know it existed	3 (16.7%)	113 (16.9%)

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

<b>Aware of supervisor's responsibility</b>	<b>MADA</b>	<b>University</b>
Yes	15 (83.3%)	533 (79.8%)
No	1 (5.6%)	22 (3.3%)
Not sure	2 (11.1%)	113 (16.9%)

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

<b>Aware of own responsibilities</b>	<b>MADA</b>	<b>University</b>
Yes	17 (94.4%)	592 (88.6%)
No	0 (0%)	14 (2.1%)
Not sure	1 (5.6%)	62 (9.3%)

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

<b>Conflict or misunderstanding with your supervisor</b>	<b>MADA</b>	<b>University</b>
Yes	3 (16.7%)	108 (16.2%)
No	15 (83.3%)	560 (83.8%)

Fifty percent of the graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture reported having read the Code of Practice. This figure was slightly lower than University-wide responses. MADA respondents (although quite small in number) were more aware of their supervisors' and their own responsibilities compared with their University peers. The majority of respondents reported not having had any conflict or misunderstanding with their supervisors.

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

Two graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture said that they had experienced conflict with one or more of their supervisors and elaborated on the nature of that conflict.

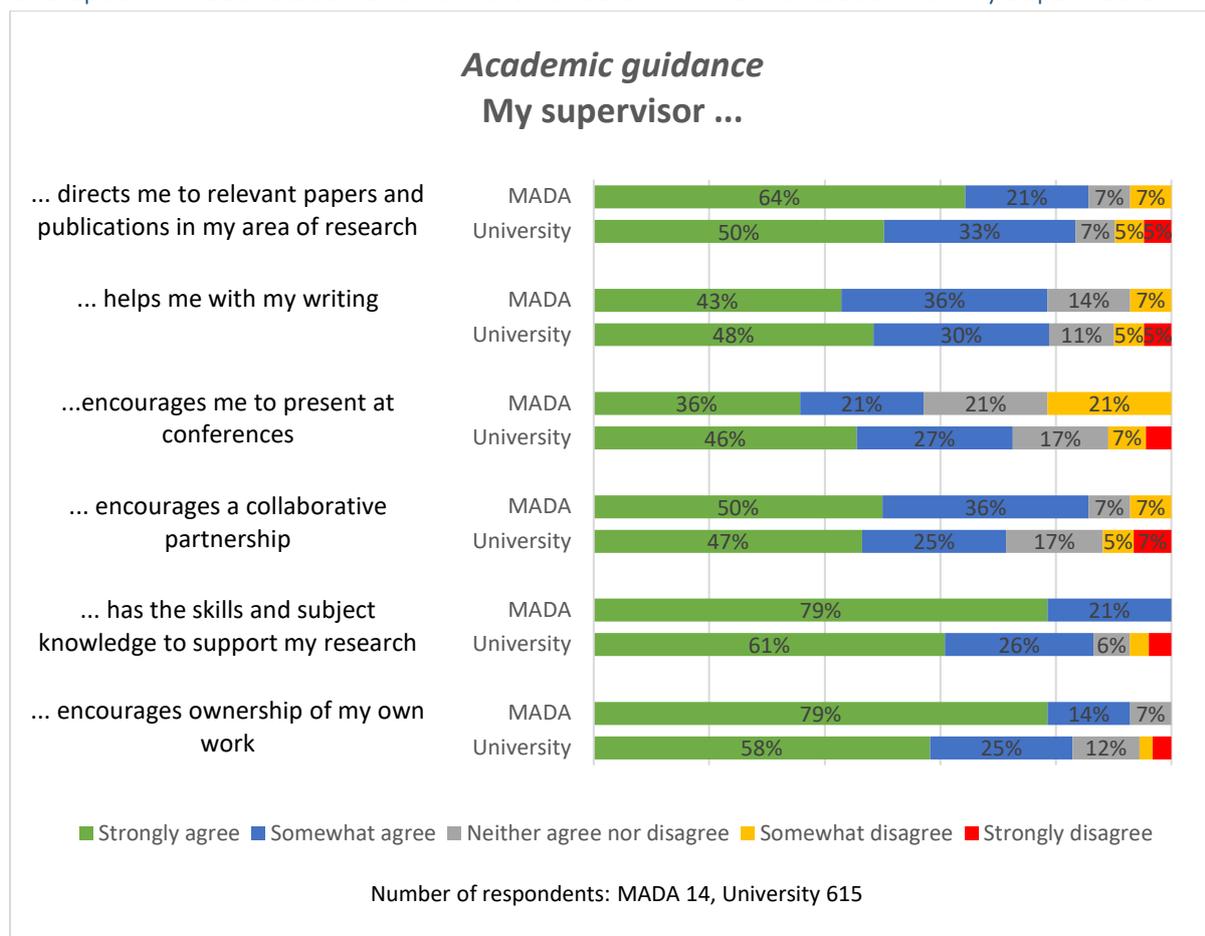
Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Unsupportive – poor quality guidance and feedback	2
Different and unrealistic expectations	1
Inappropriate behaviour – bullying/harassment/tone/intimidation	1
Inaccessible	1
Inexperience (supervisor)	1

One **notable comment** relating to the conflict and misunderstanding between one graduate student of MADA and their supervisor was:

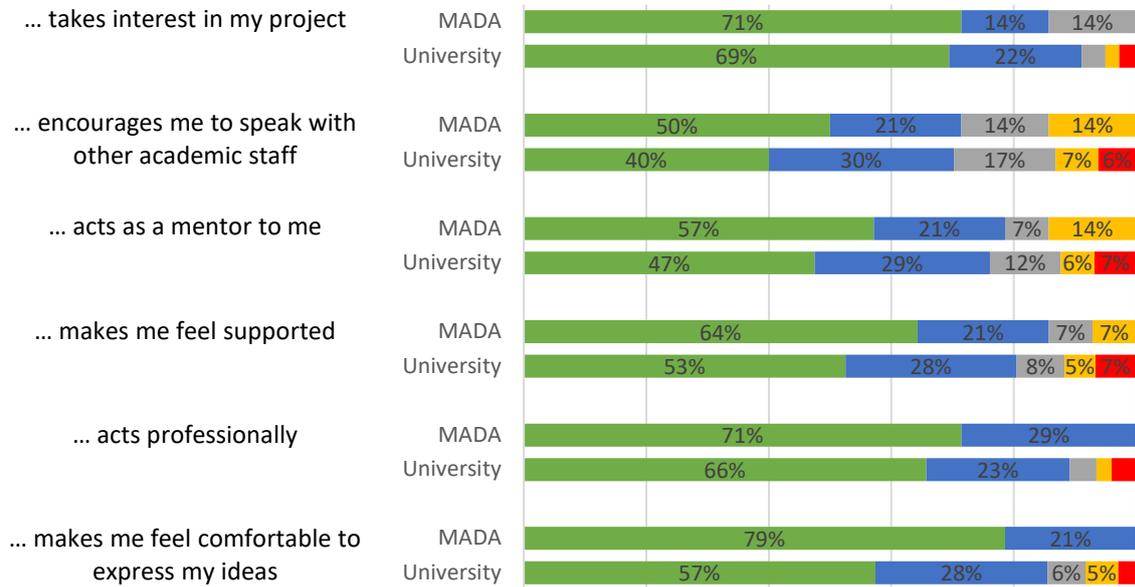
*“Not open conflict, but a difficult/unproductive relationship with one supervisor ... Their feedback was inconsistent, often harsh in tone to the point of sarcasm and/or intimidation ... Hyperbolic communication style and lacking in normal human sensitivities/empathy.”*

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



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

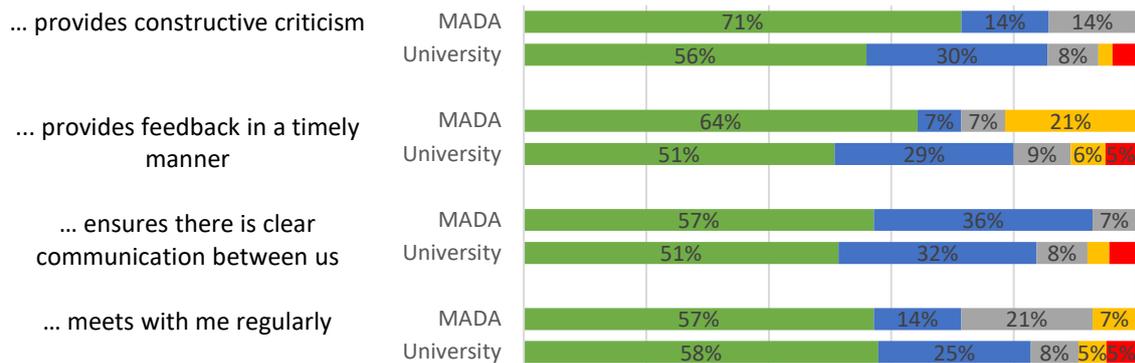
### Supportive role My supervisor ...



■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

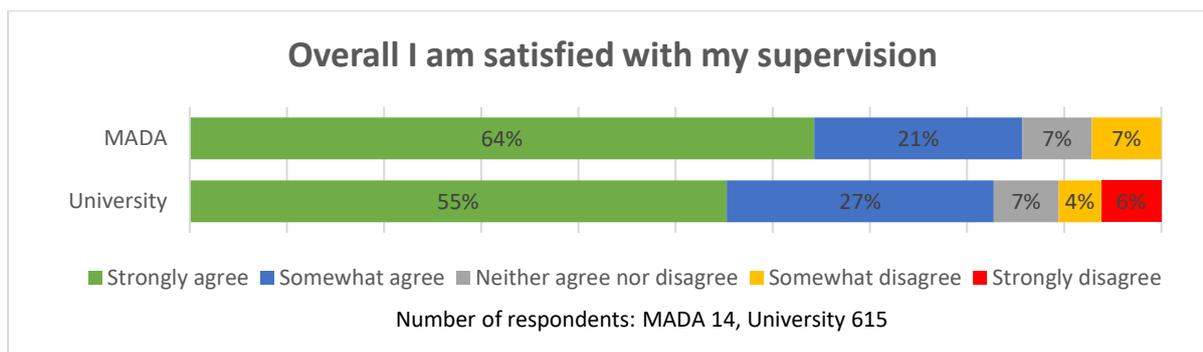
Number of respondents: MADA 14, University 615

### Appropriate feedback My supervisor ...



■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Number of respondents: MADA 14, University 615



In the majority of cases respondents indicated that they either ‘*strongly agree*’ or ‘*somewhat agree*’ that they were satisfied with their supervision in general. None of the respondents from MADA strongly disagreed with this comment.

### 1.7 Opportunity for comments regarding your supervision.

Eight graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Positive comments: 4    Negative comments: 3

General theme	Number of responses
Supportive/respectful/engaged/guidance/nurturing/encouraging	4
Inaccessibility	2
Incompetence/unsuitability and lacking appropriate skills/experience/knowledge	2
Time restraints and/or overworked (students and staff)	2
Communication and feedback – good and bad	1

Several students expressed that they were pleased with how **supportive, respectful, engaged, nurturing and encouraging** their supervisor/s had been and/or how they provided good **direction and guidance**. Some notable examples include:

*“Both my supervisors have been very supportive and I feel they put in a lot of work that is more than required.”*

*“[What] my supervisors lack in the skills and knowledge to support my research, they assist in pointing me in directions and to people who might be able to help.”*

On the other hand, a few respondents from MADA complained about how **inaccessible** their supervisors had been.

*“The amount of time my supervisor has for myself and all their students is a major concern. I would say that my main supervisor is lacking in the time needed to fulfil their support to their students.”*

*“The first 6 months of my candidature has been an extremely busy time for me personally and as such I have sought regular face to face meetings, but I have found that I have trouble getting a timely response by email.”*

**Other notable comments** from MADA graduate students, included:

*“I don’t think I would have been able to manage the challenge of post-graduate research without [my supervisor’s] help.”*

*“[My supervisor is] great, supportive [and] intelligent.”*

## 1.8 Summary

Research supervision has become a vital process in the success of postgraduate studies.<sup>4</sup> It plays a critical role in doctoral education, in particular, with links having been made between the quality of supervision and student progression and attrition rates.<sup>5</sup> Increased government emphasis on ‘timely completion’ has led to the introduction of a range of measures for monitoring and managing PhD candidature (see 2. *Milestones*),<sup>6</sup> given completion rates now have reputational and financial implications for universities in the competitive higher education environment.<sup>7</sup>

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

The overall satisfaction with supervision among respondents from MADA (85%) was higher than it was among all Monash graduate students (82%).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The expertise and knowledge of supervisors is instrumental to the successful completion of an HDR graduate student's thesis.**<sup>10</sup> Overall agreement with the statement '*my supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to support my research*' was higher in MADA (100%) than it was in the University (87%).

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

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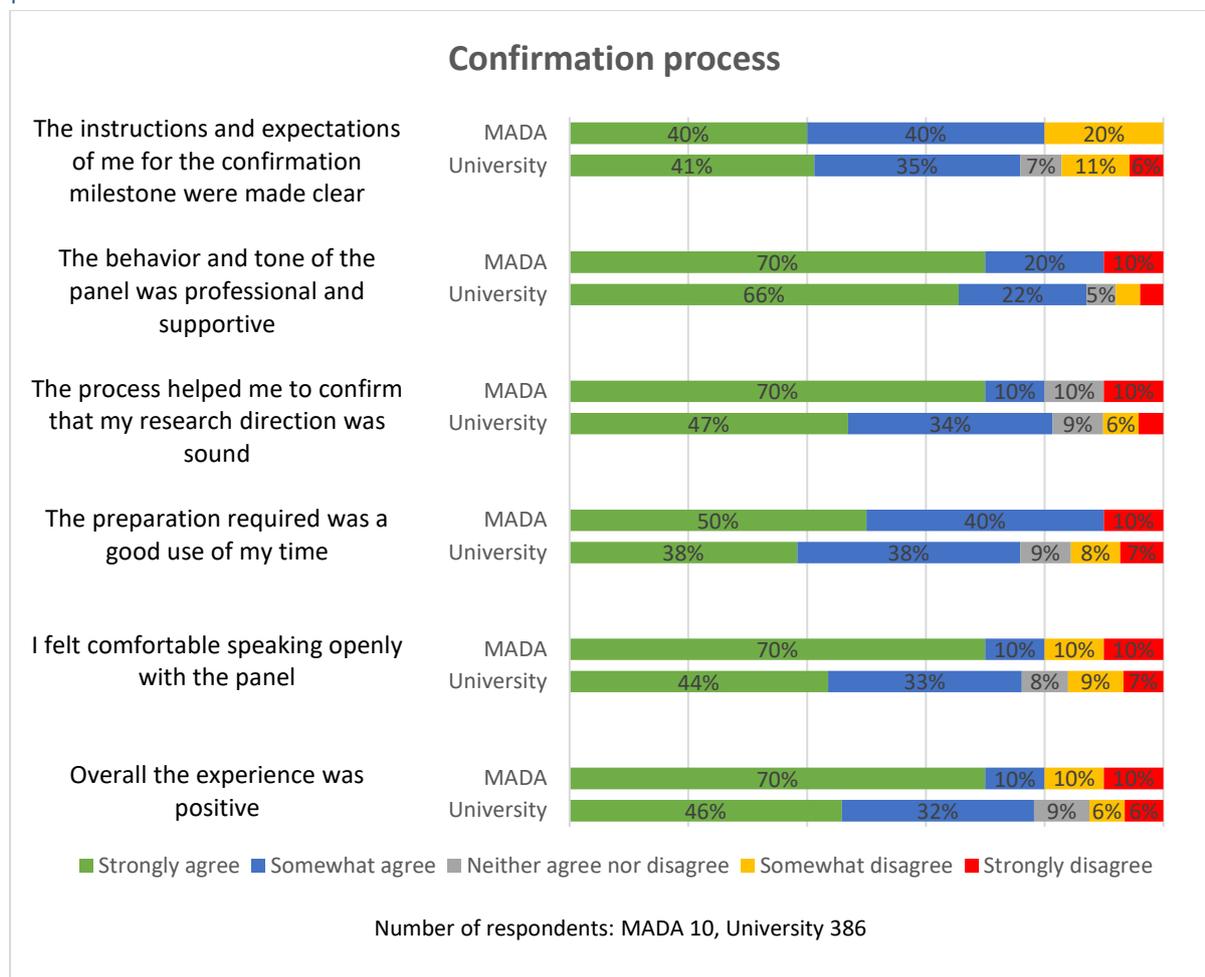
<sup>9</sup> Karen Hunter and Kay Devine, "Doctoral student's emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave academia," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 11 (2016): 40.

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

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

## 2. Milestones

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



Overall, graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture agreed with positive statements about their confirmation process.

2.2 Opportunity for comments about the confirmation process.

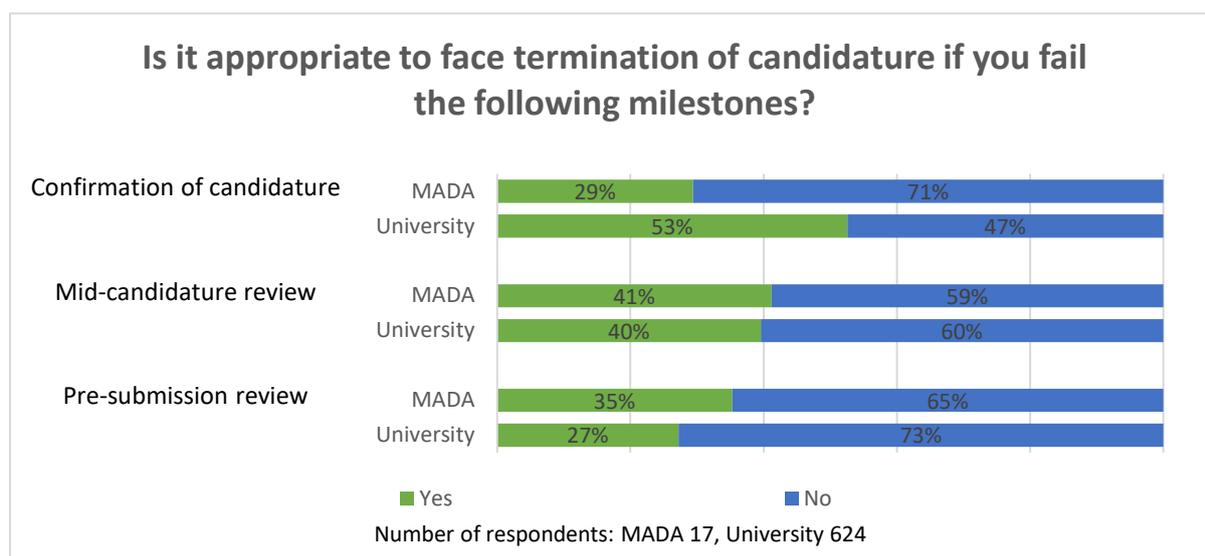
Only **two graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture** responded to this statement.

These comments, included:

*“I was incredibly nervous before the panel, but in fact it was an incredibly useful process and I felt like I was able to learn a lot from the feedback I received.”*

*“I really enjoyed the process. Although there is a lot of work required whilst completing compulsory modules. It was well worth the experience.”*

2.3 The mid-candidature and pre-submission milestones were originally introduced to identify problems and determine appropriate actions to address these. In 2014 all milestones were changed to "hurdles" and are now used as a way to terminate candidature when progress is unsatisfactory. Do you think it's appropriate to face termination of candidature if you fail any of the following milestones?



When asked about termination of candidature based on milestone performance, the majority of respondents did not agree with this practice at any milestone. This was particularly true at confirmation (71%). This is in contrast to the University-wide results, which show that as candidature progressed, respondents were more inclined to disagree with termination.

#### 2.4 Opportunity for comments about milestones.

Eight graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded directly to this statement, while a handful of students provided comments on the preceding questions relating specifically to confirmation, mid-candidature review and pre-submission.

The eight responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 6                      Positive comments: 1

General theme	Number of responses
General disagreement with termination at milestones	5
Rigid/inflexible system	2
Unclear requirements and bureaucratic/administrative issues	2
General agreement with termination at milestones	1
Termination at confirmation, but not at other milestones	1

Many MADA graduate students expressed **negative** opinions on the milestone requirements. Insightful comments, included:

*“There’s very little clarity about what’s expected at a milestone presentation. What’s expected? How much detail? What makes a good (or bad) presentation, and how does this relate to the research?”*

*“This is a very rigid system that does not account for the breadth of how artistic research actually happens. It is very hard to have writing that is ready to be reviewed in the first year of a Masters of Fine Arts.”*

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

*“I feel that a student, if they fail any hurdle, should be given a second or even third chance.”*

*“I think there should always be support offered to encourage a student to complete their research.”*

**Other notable comments** from MADA graduate students relating to the milestones, included:

*“There has to be some point where not meeting standards leads to termination. So long as there is ample feedback and opportunity to make amendments.”*

*“I think it is perfectly acceptable to terminate candidature up until the mid-candidature review but, if you pass that, I think the pre-submission review should be geared towards supporting you in getting the project over the line [and] not a possible failure.”*

*“I was nervous before the [confirmation] panel, but in fact it was an incredibly useful process and I felt like I was able to learn a lot from the feedback I received.”*

## 2.5 Summary

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

MADA graduate students tended to agree with positive statements regarding their confirmation milestone. In regards to the confirmation process, 80% of those responding agreed that ‘*overall the experience was positive.*’

In 2014, the mid-candidature and pre-submission milestones were changed to “hurdles” and are now used as a way to terminate candidature when progress is unsatisfactory. MADA graduate students tended to disagree that it was appropriate to face termination for failing a milestone (see 2.3).

Given milestones can be quite stressful (41% of MADA graduate students experienced an uncomfortable level of stress because of milestones – see section 7.1), clear guidance on the requirements and expectations are essential to supporting students through the process. While clear guidance and communication have been found to be essential to timely completion, with their

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Kiley, “Reflections on change in doctoral education,” 85.

perceived absence shown to be fundamental in causing delays,<sup>13</sup> clear guidance and communication may also limit stress. The prevalence of comments highlighting uncertainty or inconsistencies in the milestone processes, within this context, can be considered cause for concern.

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

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

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

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

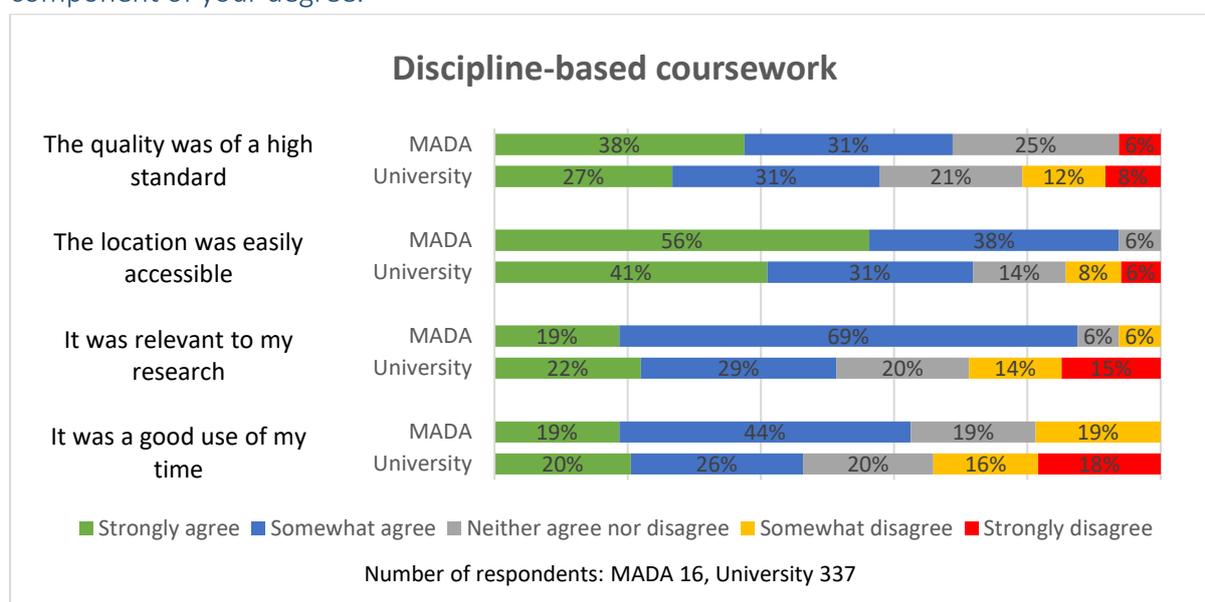
### 3. Coursework

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

Research degrees improved by compulsory coursework units?	MADA	University
Yes	10 (58.8%)	236 (37.9%)
No	1 (5.9%)	178 (28.6%)
Not sure	6 (35.3%)	209 (33.5%)

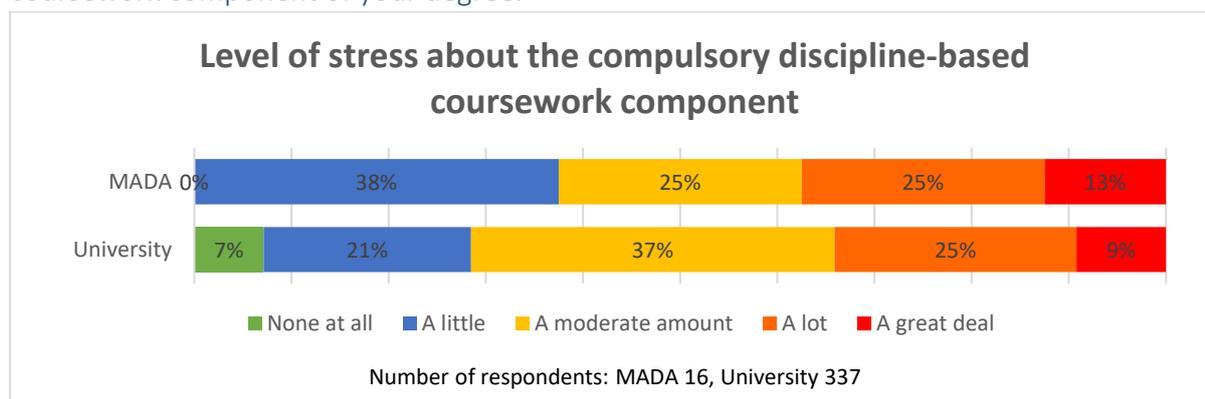
Fifty-nine percent of respondents from MADA believed that research degrees were improved by the inclusion of compulsory discipline-based coursework units.

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



Graduate students from MADA tended to agree with positive statements regarding the relevance, accessibility and quality of their coursework units more so than University-wide respondents.

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



Thirty-eight percent of faculty respondents indicated ‘a great deal’ or ‘a lot’ of stress regarding discipline-based coursework, which was relatively consistent with University-wide sentiment (34%).

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

Eight students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 4

Positive comments: 3

General theme	Number of responses
Inconsistent quality (unit/course)	2
Insufficient feedback (assessment)	2
Networking – relationships and support	2
Administrative issues/inconsistencies/solutions	1
Irrelevant or discipline-specific	1
Time-consuming/waste of time/misdirected energy	1

Half of the graduate student respondents from Monash Art, Design and Architecture held **negative opinions on coursework** in their degrees. Some notable objections are included below:

*“Overall, they were poorly run and often irrelevant.”*

*“Although helpful the distinction between coursework and research was difficult to maintain and wasted a lot of my time ultimately, also the critical feedback concerning the coursework did not maintain a distinction between research and the course objectives which rendered much of the feedback as unhelpful.”*

On the other hand, several of the students had something **positive** to say about their experiences with coursework.

*“Tutors have been great and guest lectures have been really fantastic.”*

*“The most beneficial part of the coursework has been developing a network and support system within Monash and having a regular structure to the week.”*

**Other notable comments** relating to discipline-based coursework in MADA, included:

*“I would prefer to be able to audit subjects that are relevant and to work in small groups all focussed around completing milestone requirements.”*

*“The structure could have been a little more tighter and aptly designed to be relevant to both mid-year and start of year enrolments.”*

### 3.5 Summary

While there is general support for greater structure within graduate research studies, and there is evidence to suggest that receiving training in rigorous academic writing or any other research skill correlates with successful completion,<sup>16</sup> the concept of coursework has received a mixed reception in Australia.<sup>17</sup>

MADA graduate students were no different in this regard with respondents split over its usefulness. Only 63% of MADA graduate students agreed with the statement that discipline-based coursework was ‘a good use of my time.’

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

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

## 4. Professional Development

Compulsory development units are not a requirement of Monash Art, Design and Architecture; however, MADA graduate students still provided responses to these questions.

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

Should professional development be compulsory?	MADA	University
Yes	2 (11.8%)	157 (25.4%)
No	8 (47.1%)	283 (45.9%)
Not sure	7 (41.2%)	177 (28.7%)

Only 12% of respondents from MADA felt that professional development units should be a compulsory part of a research degree.

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

Three graduate students from MADA gave their opinions on the prospect of professional development being included in their research degrees.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 2                      Positive comments: 1

General theme	Number of responses
Administrative issues/inconsistencies/unit availability	2

**Notable comments** relating to compulsory professional development units in MADA, included:

*"I completed some online units, but it was extremely unclear about how and when they needed to be completed ... It seemed like I had to enrol myself and also mark them 'complete' manually, and the instruction were extremely confusing."*

*"I think there are some great units on offer, but they should be completely optional."*

4.3 Summary

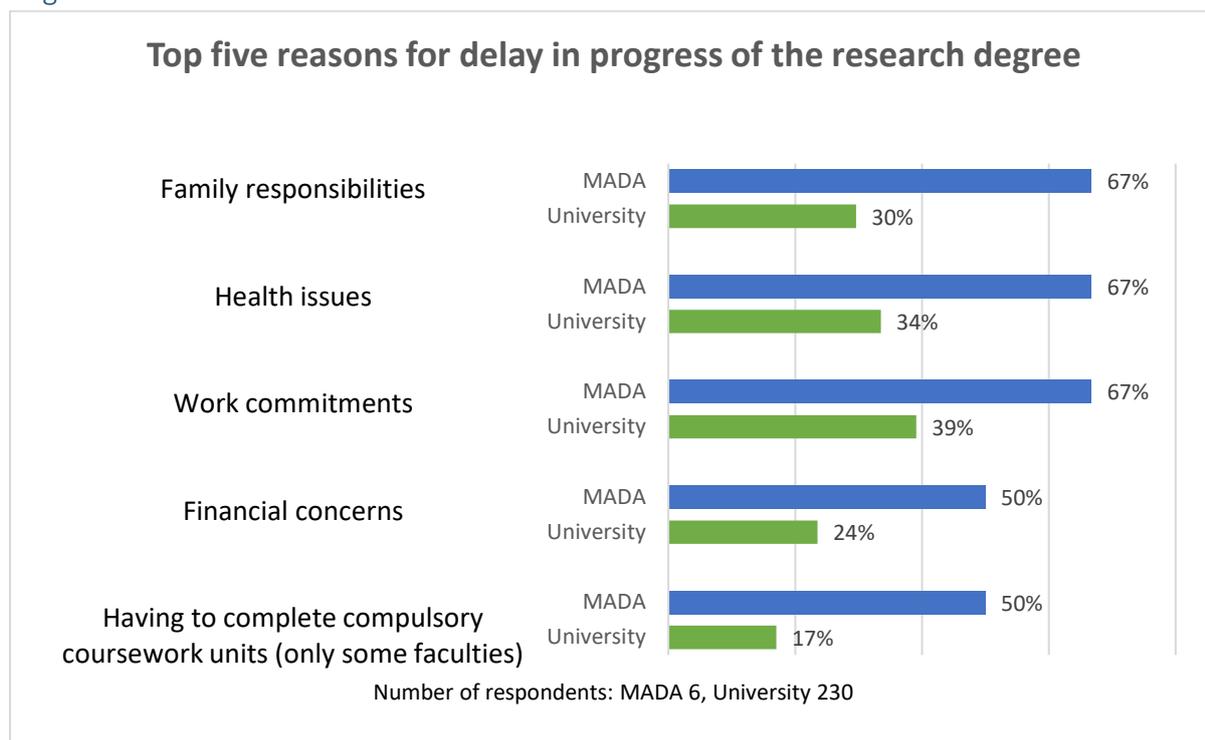
Compulsory professional development units are not a requirement of MADA, which meant that few graduate students from the Faculty provided detailed responses to these questions; however, with only 2 of 17 respondents stating that they thought these units should be compulsory, it is reasonable to suggest that the majority of MADA respondents were happy the units were not compulsory.

## 5. Progress delays and discontinuation

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

Has your research degree progress been delayed?	MADA	University
Yes	6 (35.3%)	231 (37.8%)
No	11 (64.7%)	380 (62.2%)

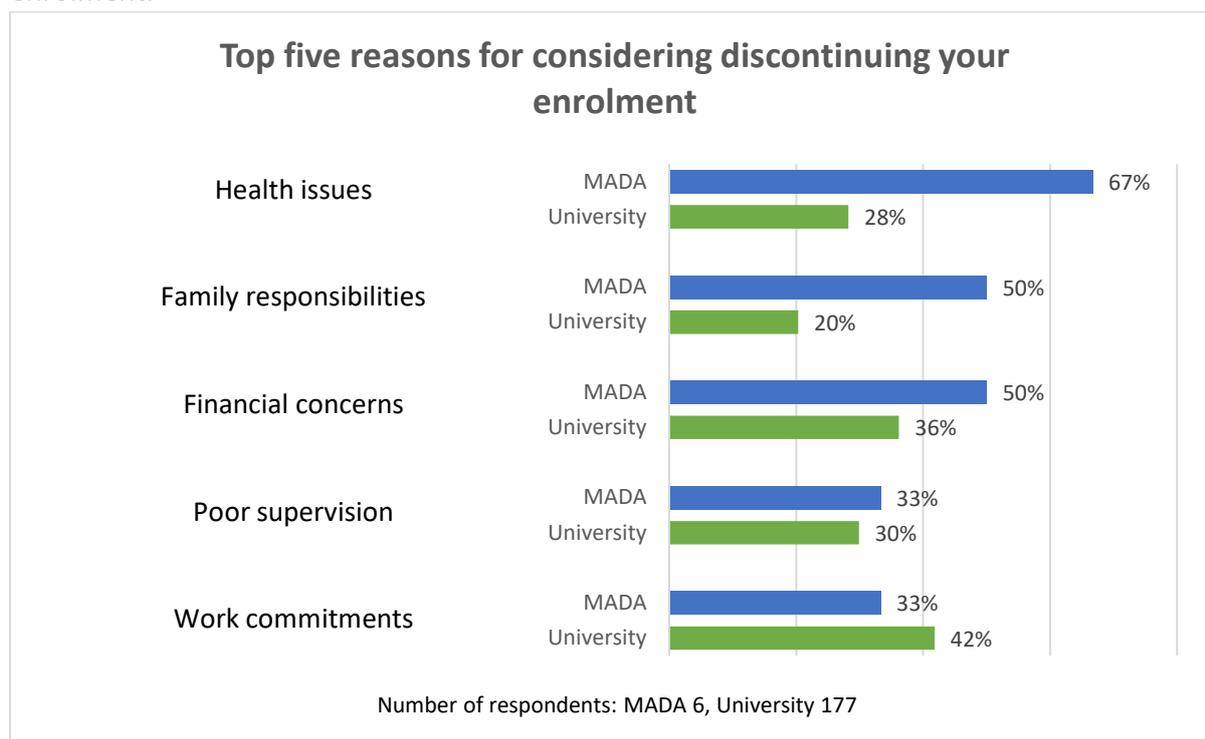
### 5.2 Please select all relevant reasons regarding the delay in progress of your research degree.



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

Have you considered discontinuing your enrolment?	MADA	University
Yes	6 (35.3%)	179 (29.3%)
No	11 (64.7%)	431 (70.7%)

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



5.5 What made you decide to continue with your degree?

Five graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Personal characteristics – commitment/determination/passion/fear/stubbornness	2
Personal development	1
Still uncertain	1
Support from university staff/services	1

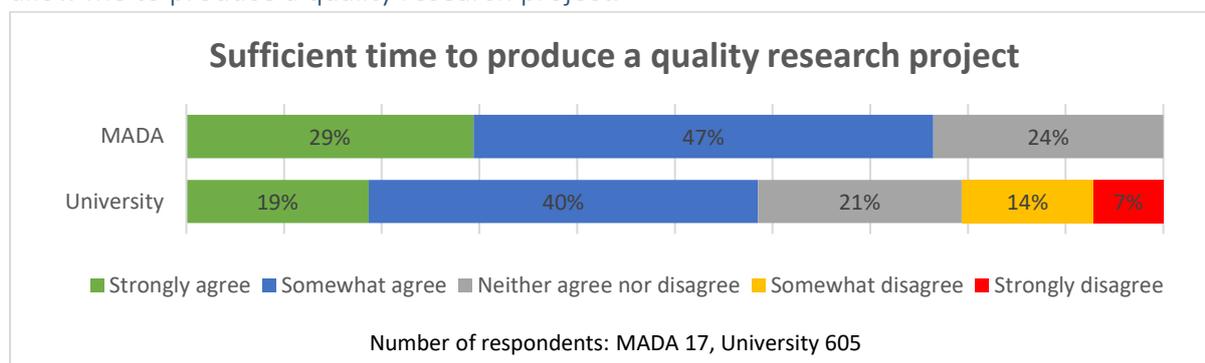
**Notable comments** from MADA graduate students regarding why they decided to continue in their degrees, included:

*“It’s something I’ve committed to – [I] would like to see it through.”*

*“I want to develop the ability to communicate my research. That is why I enrolled in this degree – though I do find it difficult.”*

*“I received counselling through the Monash health service and that helped me get through [a difficult time in my personal life] ... Also, my supervisor was very encouraging and persuaded me that I was able to continue.”*

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



Seventy-six percent of MADA respondents indicated that they agreed that despite the pressures of additional work, they would still have the amount of time they needed to complete their research degrees. This was significantly more than their University peers (59%).

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

Ten students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Supervision	3
Access to training/support services	2
Facilities/labs/equipment/software	2
Administration – guidelines/information/communication/ availability	1
Ethics approvals	1
Funding – scholarship/other financial aid	1
Offices and workspaces	1
Reducing bureaucratic requirements	1
Research environment – networking/mentoring/support groups	1
Time/time management	1

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

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

The most frequent area highlighted by MADA graduate students was **supervision**. Interesting comments, included:

*“More structured supervisor/candidate relationship.”*

*“More access to afterhours supervisor meetings.”*

MADA graduate students also discussed how they wanted greater **access to training and support services**.

*“Access to digital resources ... lectures and presentations.”*

*“Workshops to help with writing.”*

Likewise, the University providing better **access to specific facilities** was also discussed on multiple occasions. Comments, included:

*“Provide better access to the workshop facilities, which [has] impeded my progress significantly – they have been closed or not operational for a large part of my candidature due to renovations at Caulfield.”*

*“More access to the workshops and machines for qualified machinists.”*

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

*“More support for ethics approvals – example templates online.”*

*“Not [to] crush students with bureaucracy.”*

*“I have been supplied with a dedicated workspace, which has not been supplied to all post-graduate students.”*

*“Have a sample timetable of proposed deadlines for inexperienced students.”*

## 5.8 Opportunity for comments regarding your general progress.

Three students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this statement.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 2

Positive comments: 2

General theme	Number of responses
Access to resources	1
Career development and advice	1
Financial issues	1
Health	1
Poor supervision	1

Comments from MADA graduate students, included:

*“My research is back on track. The main issue for me has been financial and health related. I don’t feel there is much room to move with the way the degree/coursework/milestones operate, but it has turned out ok.”*

*“I feel very supported but would like a clearer path into employment with Monash at the commencement of my PhD.”*

## 5.9 Summary

More than one-third of MADA respondents (35.3%) had experienced a delay in their research degree, while the same number had considered discontinuing their enrolment.

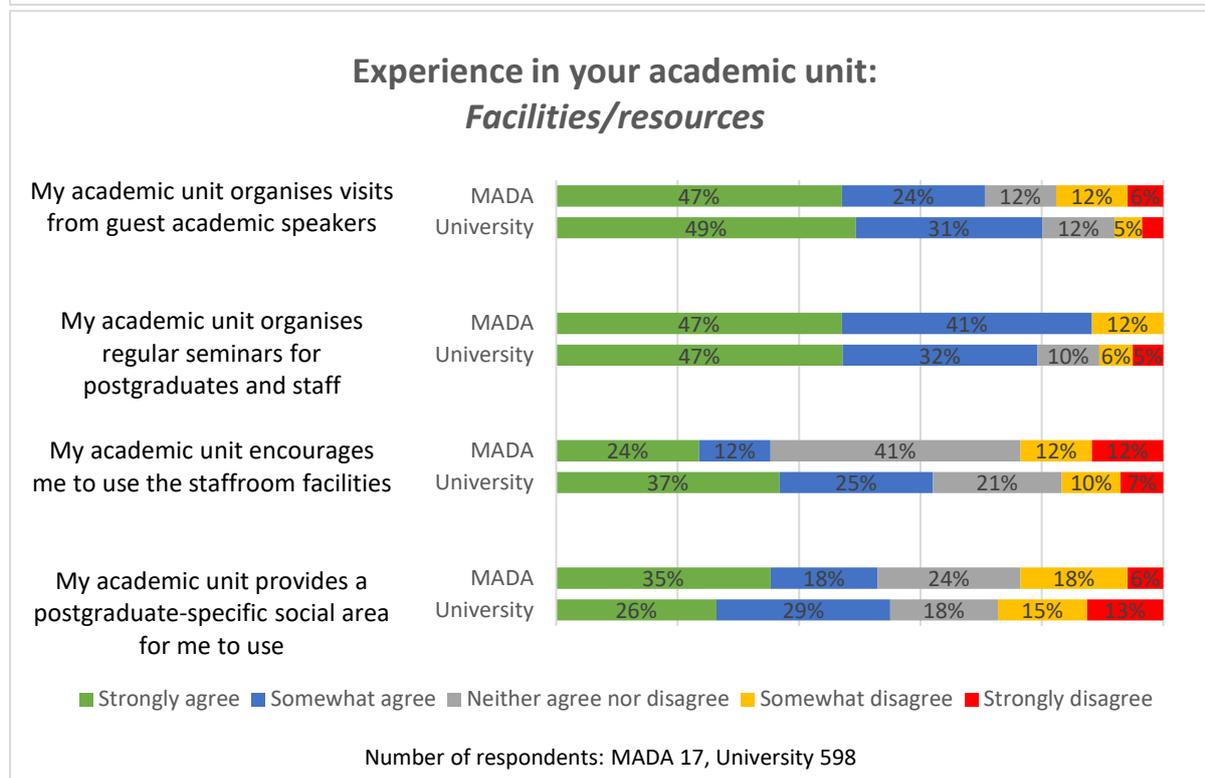
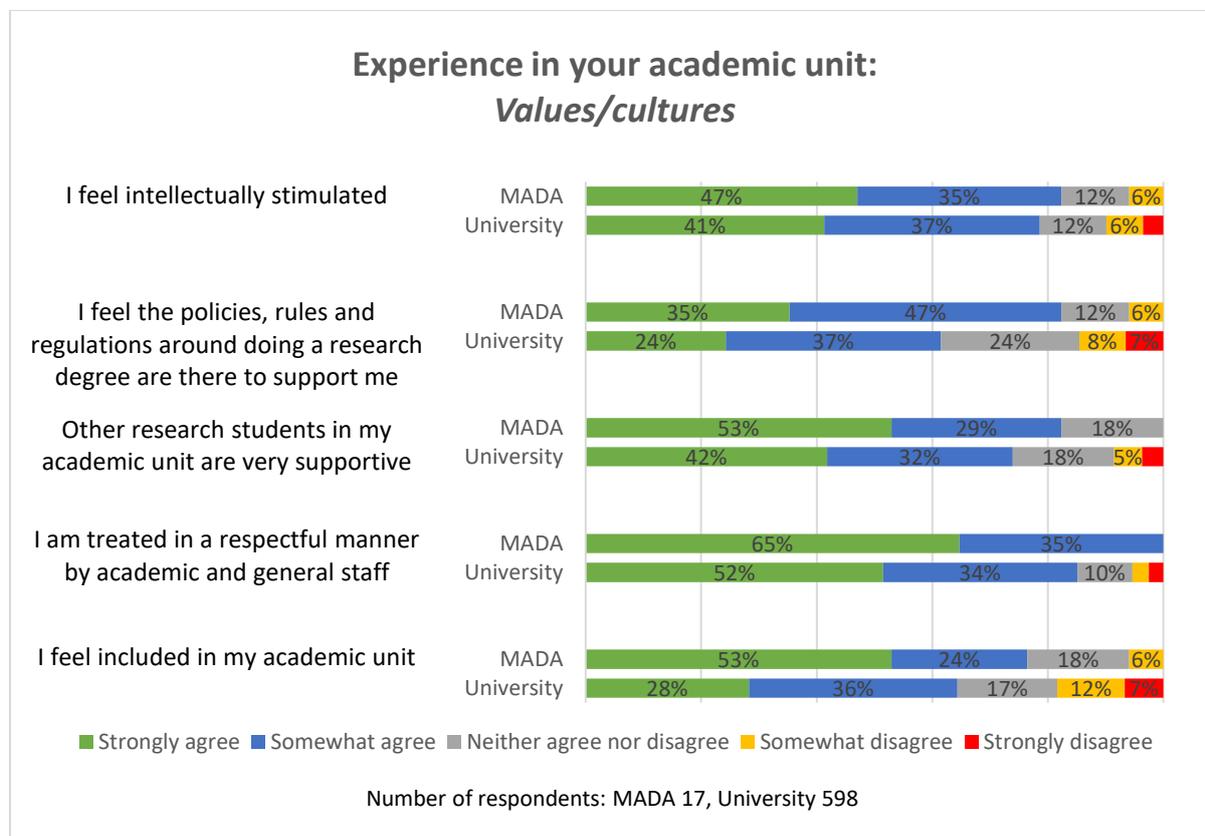
Though it was not directly tracked in this survey, it is interesting to note that there is evidence of a correlation between choosing one’s own supervisor and good and timely progress.<sup>18</sup> Presumably this is because prospective students have taken time to consider who is best placed to support their research, in terms of availability, subject knowledge, personality and so on. The data explored in *1. Supervision* supports the premise that those who had good working relationships with their supervisors were more satisfied and less likely to experience delays and think about discontinuing their degrees.

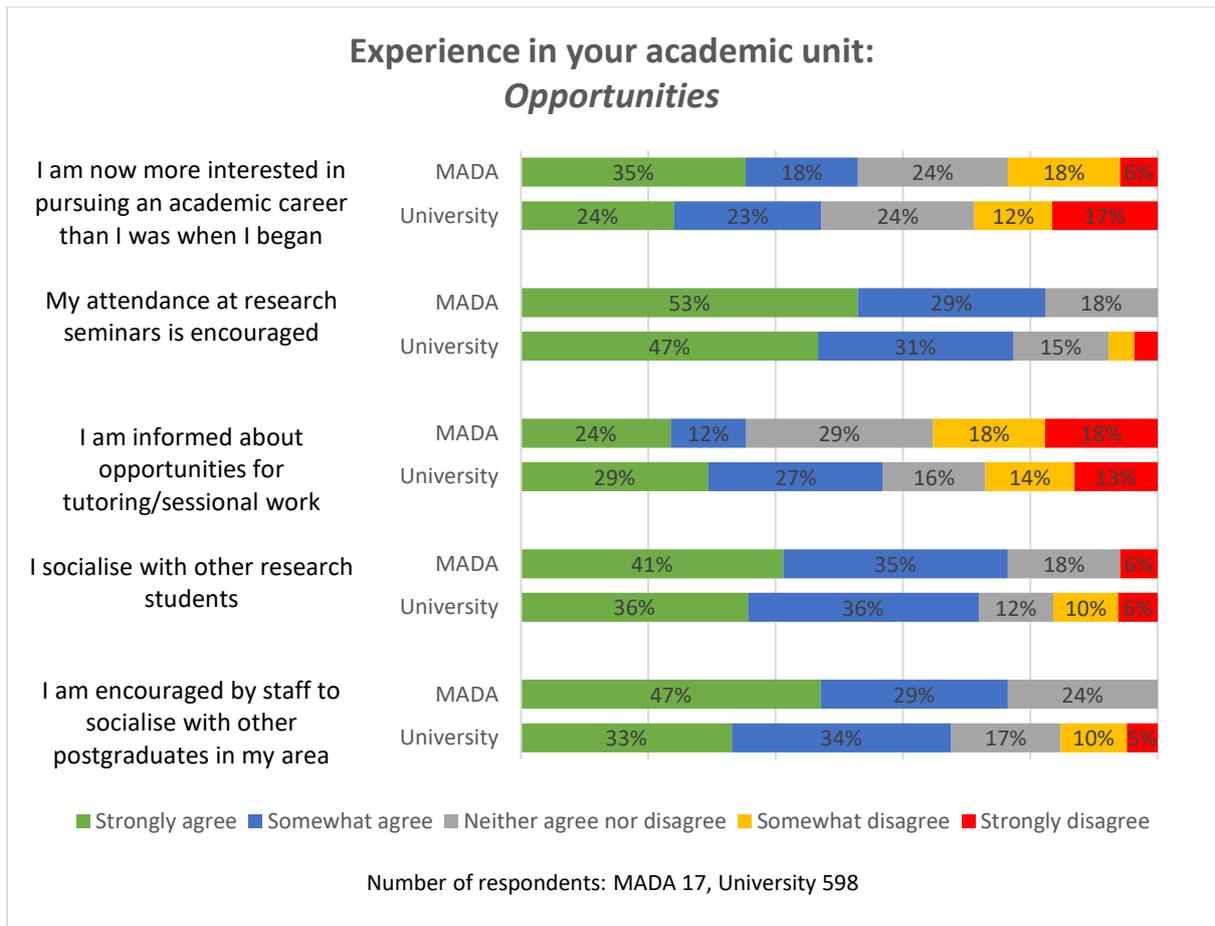
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<sup>18</sup> Glenice Ives and Glenn Rowley, “Supervisor selection or allocation and continuity of supervision,” 535.

## 6. School culture and facilities

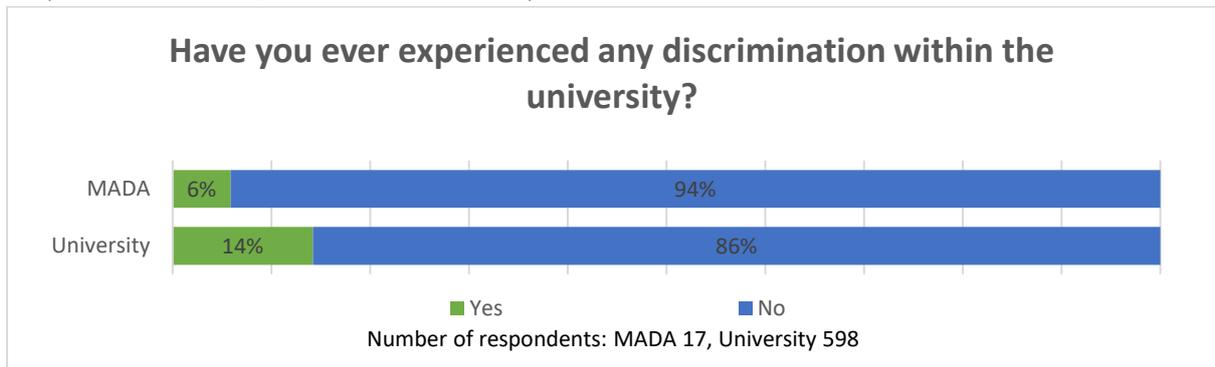
6.1 Please rate the following statements in relation to your specific experience in your academic unit:





Tables 1, 2 and 3 above show that the majority of students answered favourably in relation to the values/culture, facilities/resources and opportunities within the Faculty. The areas where respondents were least likely to ‘strongly agree’ or ‘somewhat agree,’ include access to staffroom facilities and opportunities for tutoring/sessional work.

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



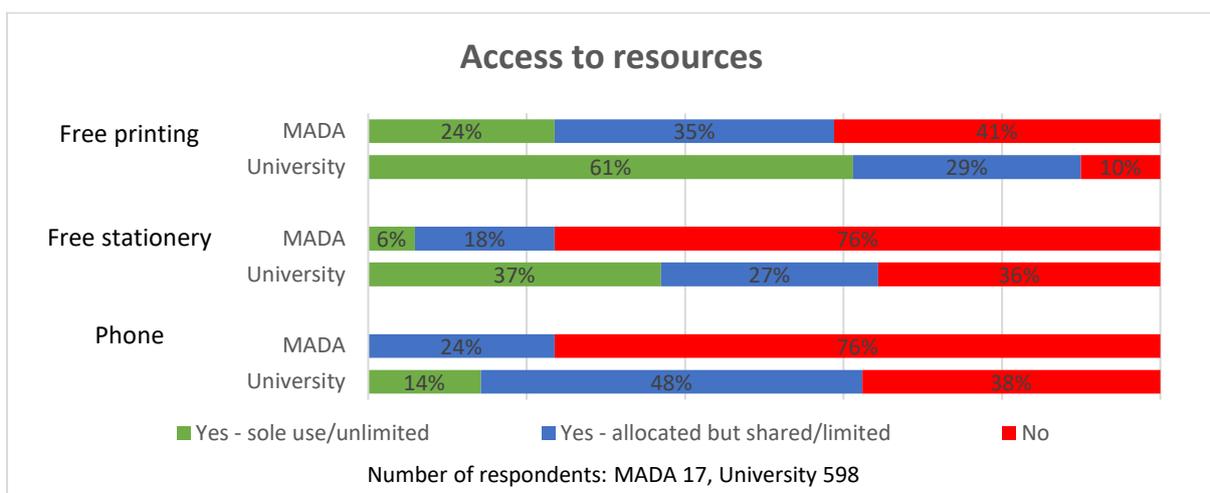
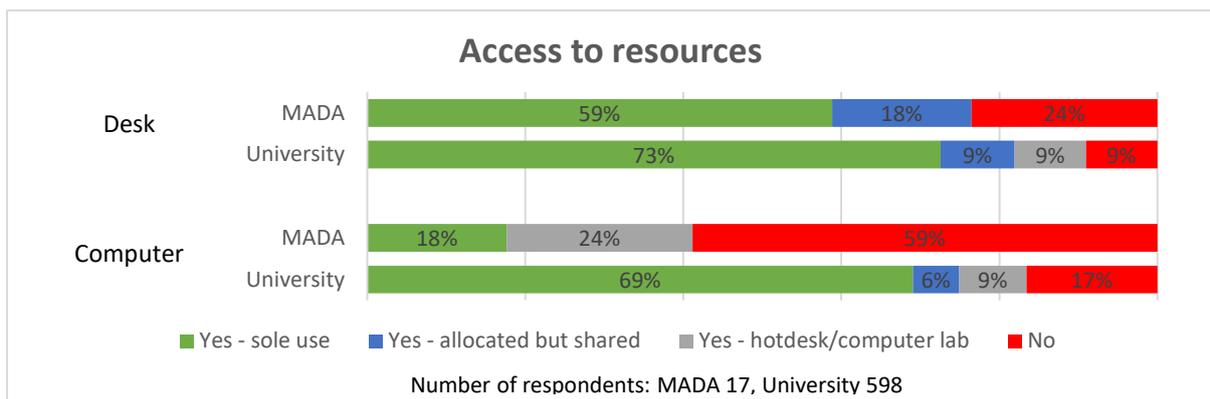
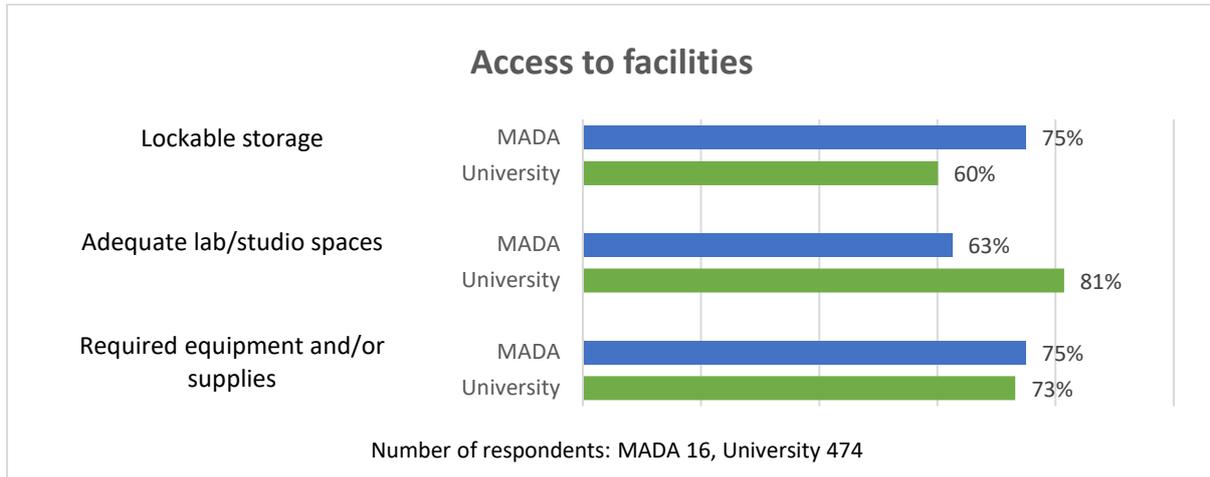
#### 6.3 Opportunity for comments regarding the way in which you are treated.

Only **one graduate student from Monash Art, Design and Architecture** responded to this statement.

This comment, included:

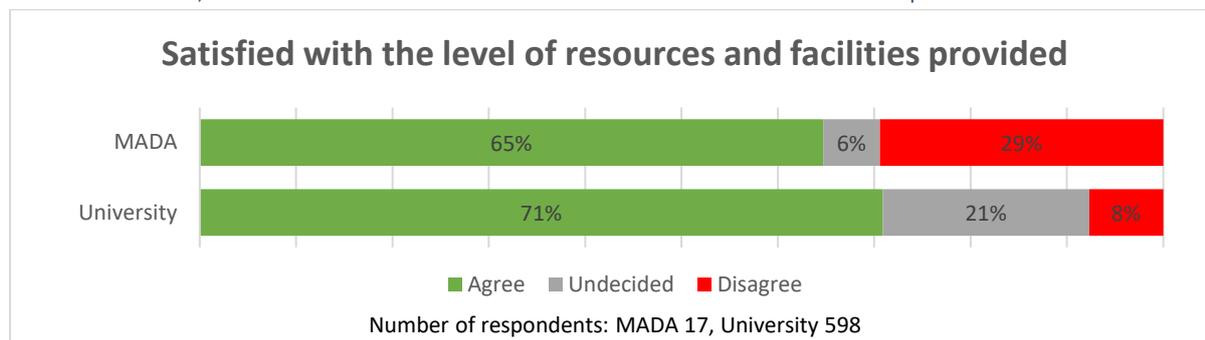
*“Lecturers are very understanding of my health and family issues – any issues are systemic and not on a lecturer/class level.”*

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



Respondents from Monash Art, Design and Architecture indicated that they had less access to facilities including: phones; free stationery; free printing; computers and desks than respondents from the University-wide population.

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



MADA graduate students were slightly less-satisfied with the level of resources and facilities provided to them than their University counterparts.

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

Seven graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this question. Their responses can be categorised as follows:

Negative comments: 4

Positive comments: 1

General theme	Number of responses
Workshop/lab/studio	4
Private office	2
Construction issues	1
Faculty-specific HDR office	1
Lockers and storage space	1
Personal desk	1
Printer	1
Stationary	1

Four graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture reflected negatively on the adequacy of the facilities they receive at Monash University, compared to one graduate student who reflected positively.

Regarding facilities that would help support MADA graduate students complete their degrees, there were a range of suggestions made. The primary suggestion involved improving **workshops, labs and studios**.

*“The Design Department should have a dedicated room for PhD students to socialise, work, and have equipment like a 3D printer or laser cutter.”*

*“It would be great to have real individual studios, but I understand we are lucky to have [shared] studios.”*

Similarly, having a **private office** was another suggestion. Memorable comments, included:

*“I have been given great use of a desk and facilities, but feel [that] not all students get the same space provided.”*

**Other interesting comments**, included:

*“I think there should be an opportunity for all students at Monash to have access to storage space (if they don’t have an opportunity to get a studio or desk); this is essential for art students, who are making objects and needing to use and store materials.”*

## 6.7 Summary

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

The absence of a sense of belonging in the research/faculty/scholarly community has been identified as a key cause of stress in postgraduate studies,<sup>19</sup> with PhD students who find themselves well-integrated in their research environments experiencing less stress and burnout.”<sup>20</sup> This was reflected in the MGA HDR survey with those agreeing with the statement *‘I feel included in my academic unit’* being less likely to associate an uncomfortable level of stress with all of the stress-related statements in 7. *Stress*.

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

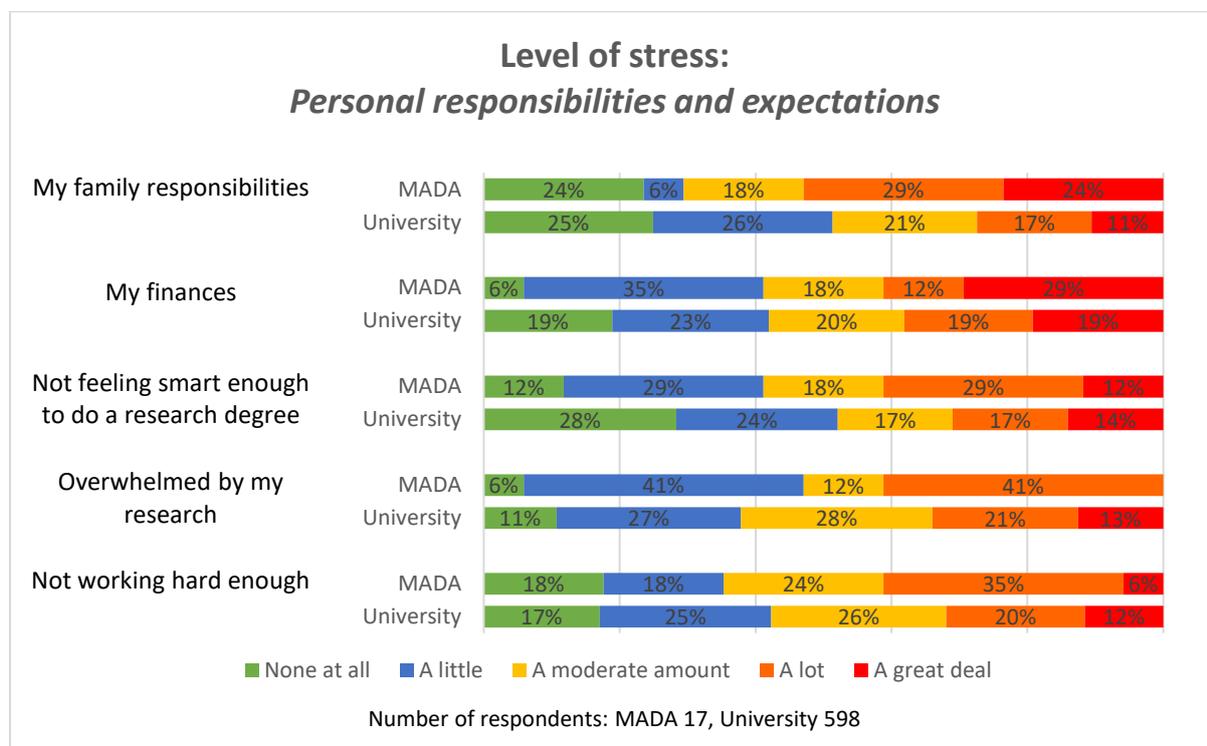
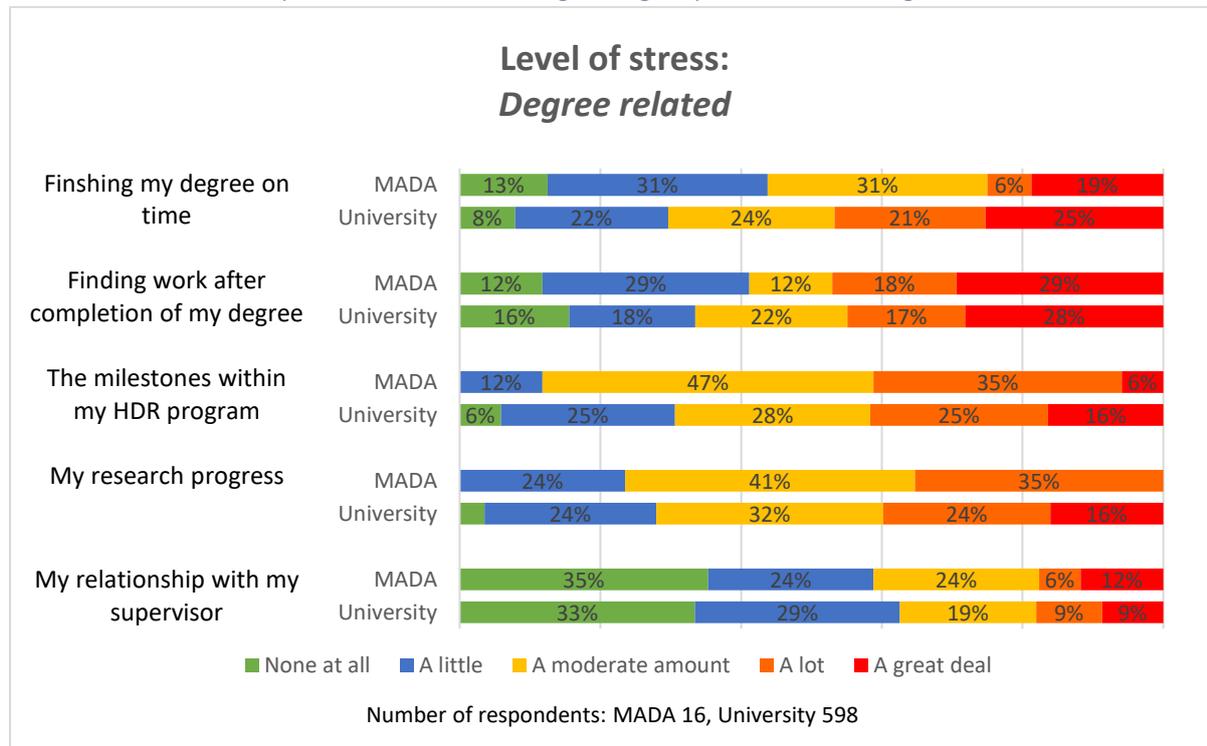
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<sup>19</sup> Jon Cornwall, Elizabeth C. Mayland, Jacques van der Meer, Rachel A. Spronken-Smith, Charles Tustin and Phil Blyth, “Stressors in early-stage doctoral students,” *Studies in Continuing Education* 41, no. 3 (2019): 367.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Jesper Herrmann and Gitte Wichmann-Hansen, “Validation of the quality in PhD processes questionnaire,” *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 8, no. 2 (2017): 192.

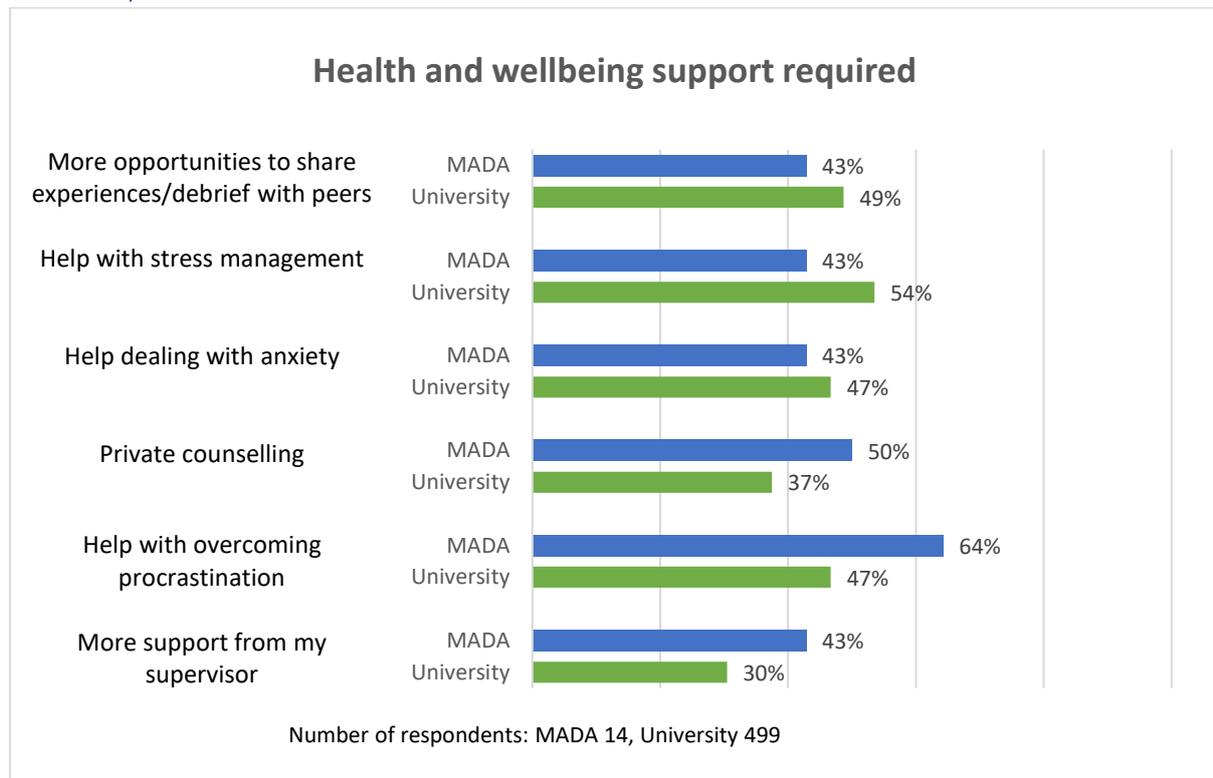
## 7. Stress and wellbeing

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



For MADA respondents, an uncomfortable level of stress (*a lot or a great deal*) was associated most with *'my family responsibilities'* followed by *'finding work after the completion of my degree'*. Respondents from the University-wide data indicated that their greatest source of stress was *'finishing my degree on time'* followed by *'finding work after the completion of my degree'*.

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



Many MADA respondents indicated that they would like assistance with overcoming procrastination, while private counselling also received several mentions.

## 7.3 Opportunity for comments regarding health and wellbeing.

Only **two graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture** responded to this statement.

These comments, included:

*“I have accessed these types of support from the University.”*

*“More sessions on mindfulness.”*

## 7.4 Summary

In relation to their degrees, MADA respondents were most-stressed about finding work after the completion of their degree and least-stressed about their relationship with their supervisor, while in relation to their personal responsibilities and expectations, they were most-stressed about their family responsibilities and least-stressed about being overwhelmed by their research.

*‘Help overcoming procrastination’* was identified as the support that MADA respondents most wanted to receive from the University.

Doctoral candidate attrition has been linked to feelings of social isolation that can stem from confusion about program expectations and a lack of meaningful communication with peers and faculty/University staff.<sup>21</sup> Peers (such as fellow graduate students or postdoctoral researchers) can be crucial as, for example, they can be a source of emotional, social and intellectual support which can replace or complement supervisory guidance.<sup>22</sup>

PhD candidates isolating themselves is one of the most important factors in determining delay.<sup>23</sup> Peer interaction has been found to be related to persistence (with HDR degrees), insofar as degree completers are more likely to be involved with their academic peers than those who drop out.<sup>24</sup> Peer support initiatives are also useful in creating a positive research community and facilitating a sense of belonging,<sup>25</sup> so increasing the opportunities for graduate students to socialise with each other should also result in a greater rate of retention. As such, the results of the MGA HDR survey suggest that **MADA graduate students could certainly benefit from an increase in social support and wellbeing services.**

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<sup>21</sup> Dharmananda Jairam and David H. Kahl, Jr., "Navigating the doctoral experience," 312.

<sup>22</sup> Lilia Mantai and Robyn Dowling, "Supporting the PhD journey: insights from acknowledgements," *International Journal for Research Development* 6, no. 2 (2015): 106-07.

<sup>23</sup> Rens van de Schoot et al., "What took them so long?" 3.

<sup>24</sup> Carolyn Richert Bair and Jennifer Grant Haworth, "Doctoral student attrition and persistence," 491.

<sup>25</sup> Jon Cornwall et al., "Stressors in early-stage doctoral students," 367.

## 8. Overall comments

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

Thirteen graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Research – intellectual stimulation and development	4
Facilities/services/resources	3
Financial support/funding	3
Student peers and colleagues	3
Monash academics/faculties/staff	1
Monash reputation	1
Supervisors	1
Supportive environment and culture	1

The best aspect of Monash University that was most frequently referenced by MADA graduate students was **research and intellectual stimulation and development**. Comments, included:

*“The opportunity to undertake a significant self-directed research project.”*

*“Intellectual stimulation.”*

There were a few MADA graduate students who were particularly pleased with the **facilities, services and/or resources** provided to them as students of the University. Relative comments covered a range of areas, including: 24-hour access, space, studios and work stations.

**Other notable comments**, included:

*“The staff are a great support.”*

*“Friendly, supportive network.”*

*“Support to pursue research/art, and peer interaction.”*

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

Ten graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Course length and workload	3
Facilities/services/resources	3
Campus issues	1
Financial issues	1
Lack of support/value	1
Location	1
Staff	1
Unclear requirements	1

One of the primary complaints from MADA graduate students related to the **course length** being too short and the **workload** too high. Memorable comments, included:

*“It feels like I do not have enough time to fully take advantage of all the opportunities we are offered.”*

*“There are many things to do but not enough time.”*

Likewise, MADA respondents took issue with the **facilities, services and resources** offered to them by the University.

*“No late night or overnight studio access without significant notice.”*

*“The fact [that] the workshops are so unreliable and now are not even set up with the same equipment ... [and] the fact that the studio access is behind a locked door that isn’t reliably opened by security during the hours we are allowed to work.”*

**Other notable comments**, included:

*“Unsure what is required or expected.”*

*“Everything is expensive.”*

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

Ten graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this question.

Their responses can be categorised as follows:

General theme	Number of responses
Facilities/services/resources	5
Career opportunities/development	2
Health and wellbeing support	2
Course length and time	1
Myki discount	1
Professional development	1
Supervisors	1
Training	1

The primary suggestion that MADA graduate students made related to improving the **facilities, services and/or resources** provided to them as students of the University. Relative comments covered a range of areas, including: swipe card access, workshops, computers, editing suites, labs and more spaces.

**Other notable comments**, included:

*“Direct links to career progression within Monash.”*

*“More free facilities and [a] myki discount.”*

*“Less pressure to complete on time.”*

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

Three graduate students from Monash Art, Design and Architecture responded to this question.

Their comments, included:

*“The APA probably should have increased by now.”*

*“Students should have a template of standards/goals/examples to work ... to. Too much is online and is difficult to navigate.”*

*“Being an undergrad [alumnus], it has been great returning to continue at Monash as a PhD candidate.”*

## 8.5 Summary

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

The intellectual stimulation and development associated with conducting one’s own research ranked highest in *‘the best aspects of being a Monash research postgraduate’* responses, while *‘course length and workload’* ranked as the worst aspects of being a Monash research graduate student.

When it came to the question *‘How can the research postgraduate experience be improved?’* the primary suggestion from Monash Arts graduate students related to improving facilities.

#### (iv) MGA Recommendations

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

**Supervision:**

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

**Milestones:**

2. *That graduate students are provided clear and consistent information regarding milestone requirements.*
3. *That milestones are tailored for MADA graduates to accommodate the way in which their courses are structured.*

**Stress and wellbeing:**

4. *That existing counselling services and CCD health and wellbeing programs are promoted to graduate students.*

**School culture and facilities:**

5. *That graduate students have improved access to a desk, studio space and storage space, as well as phones, stationery, printing and computers.*
6. *That the Faculty improve opportunities for social and academic interaction, networking and discussions among graduate students.*
7. *That graduate students are offered seminars or workshops relating to 'preventing procrastination,' 'dealing with anxiety' and 'help with stress management.' They should also consider offering additional career seminars.*

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(vi) Appendix 1

Demographics of respondents from Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture

<b>Faculty (Schools)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Design	8	44.4%
Fine Art	10	55.6%

<b>Mode of attendance</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Internal (on-campus)	17	94.4%
External (off-campus)	1	5.6 %

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Domestic student	15	83.3%
International student	3	17.7%

<b>Attendance type</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Full-time	16	88.9%
Part-time	2	11.1%

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	10	55.6%
Male	8	44.4%

<b>Enrolled Program</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
PhD	10	55.6%
Master by research	7	38.9%
Other	1	5.6%

<b>Scholarship</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Receives scholarship	13	72.2%
No scholarship	5	27.8%