

POSTGRADUATE STUDENT FEEDBACK 2021

Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences



Survey conducted in December 2021 by FMHS-PGSA

INTRODUCTION

Postgraduate students comprise at least one-quarter of the student population at the University of Auckland (UoA)¹, however the lived-experiences of this constituent are largely unreported. UoA has a duty of care to students and staff as required by the New Zealand government^{2,3}. Postgraduate students are often engaged as both students and staff members; however the university lacks a clear and regular mechanism for garnering feedback from this population. Although the university agrees that student feedback is important, UoA describes zero options for feedback from postgraduate research students beyond doctoral exit surveys. A lack of student voice is particularly stark in the case of research masters and honours students, who do not appear to have any means of providing feedback on their experiences. Although UoA states its commitment to postgraduate students, it is near impossible to reconcile if the support offered by the university is meeting the needs of current postgraduate students.

Postgraduate study has long been regarded as an academically challenging and mentally taxing pursuit, however research suggests that a state of 'ill-being' is becoming the norm for students in higher education⁴. Data collected from graduate students around the world, including Belgium⁵, France⁶, Australia^{4,7}, the UK⁸ and the US, have led to the claim of a 'graduate student mental health crisis'⁹. In the UK, 40% of doctoral students reported symptoms of depression, emotional concerns, and heightened stress⁸. Similar statistics are reported by a study of 2279 graduate students based predominantly in the US; 41% reported moderate to severe anxiety and 39% reported moderate to severe depression⁹. Despite these alarming statistics, the University of Auckland has not made any obvious effort to evaluate the wellbeing of its own graduate student population. Even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, both a mental and physical health challenge for many, graduate students have not been asked to report on their needs and experiences.

The needs of graduate students are complex. Graduate students balance the requirements of their research often alongside teaching commitments and possibly coursework too. The low rate of pay for graduate students often requires them to take on additional paid work in the face of financial insecurity. Graduate students deal with social isolation, caregiving requirements, and intense competition to find post-doctoral job opportunities^{10,11}. The stress experienced by graduate students may be exacerbated by difficult supervisor-student relations where there is little opportunity for change or improvement. The benefit of changing to a new supervisor may be surmounted by the huge cost to the student; a new supervisor could entail an entirely new project, additional years of research with no scholarship funding, a move to a new institution, city, or country. These stressors are intensified for often underrepresented and/or marginalised students including Māori and people of colour¹², women^{13,14}, first-generation students^{15,16}, individuals with disabilities¹⁷ and/or those who identify as LGBTQI+^{18,19}.

Despite a challenging workload and inevitable personal responsibilities, graduate students are unlikely to

seek help^{10,20}. Financial insecurity, lack of time, lack of awareness, insufficient numbers of counselling and culturally competent staff, and fears of damage to their academic career are common obstacles to help-seeking^{21,22}. Conversely, protective factors for graduate students include diffusion of the power imbalance between students and supervisors, programmes developed to reduce stigma, social isolation, and encouragement of help-seeking behaviour¹⁰. Supportive mentorship by supervisors is another key protective factor^{23,24}.

The University of Auckland does not appear to collect any feedback from graduate students during their programmes of study. The current state of the graduate student cohort is therefore unknown; the needs of graduate students at UoA appear to be ignored. This survey provides a starting point for much-needed acquisition of feedback from graduate students. Graduate students (including postgraduate diploma, honours, masters, and doctoral) within the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences were asked to complete a student experience survey in December 2021. This survey is not intended to encapsulate the entirety of graduate student needs, however, we hope the survey will shed light on several areas of strength and improvement for FMHS graduate programmes at UoA. Moreover, the survey provides an example of an easy way to hear the voices of graduate students who wish to share their experiences.

METHOD

Research design and questionnaire

This report presents analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from a questionnaire sent to FMHS postgraduate students in December of 2021. The aim of the questionnaire was to gain understanding of the broad FMHS postgraduate experience, with the objective of exploration rather than explanation.

The questionnaire was based on the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) used by several institutions in the UK. Questions were amended slightly to better reflect the setting of the University of Auckland. A section comprising 14 questions was added to explore the impact of Covid-19 and a section comprising 4 questions was added to investigate the effectiveness of FMHS-PGSA. The questionnaire comprised 58 questions in total with 11 sections: demographic; overall satisfaction; supervision; resources; research culture; progress, assessment, and research skills; responsibilities; support; FMHS-PGSA; professional development; and impact of Covid-19 lockdown. Most of the questions were answerable using a 5-point Likert scale from '1=Strongly Disagree' to '5=Strongly Agree'. The end of each section offered an optional text box for further comments where participants were able to elaborate on their answers.

Data collection and analysis

The invitation for participation was sent three times to the email list for postgraduate students in FMHS ('MD_FMHS Graduate Students'). Invitations were sent on December 1, December 8, and December 20, with instructions to complete the survey before the closing date on December 24. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. There was no compensation nor reward for completion of the survey. Responses were collected from FMHS students enrolled in a postgraduate diploma, honours, masters, or doctoral programme during the entirety or portion of 2021.

All participants (n=111) were included in the analyses. Descriptive analyses were completed to gather information on the demographics of participants. Participants were then divided into seven 'schools' to conduct further analysis. Descriptive analyses of the Likert-scale responses were performed to obtain the average response (from 1 to 5), standard deviation, and the percentage agree versus disagree.

RESULTS

Participants

Completed surveys were collected from n=111 students. There were no partial responses submitted. The key demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Key demographics of FMHS postgraduate feedback survey participants.

Demographic	Participants (n=111)
<i>Programme of study</i>	
PhD	94 (85%)
1 st year	26
2 nd year	18
3 rd year	34
4 th year+	16
Masters	11 (10%)
Honours	6 (5%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	78 (70%)

Male	24 (22%)
Non-binary	1 (1%)
Other	1 (1%)
Prefer not to say	6 (5%)
<i>International student</i>	13 (12%)
<i>Equity group member</i>	15 (14%)
<i>School</i>	
Liggins Institute	6 (5%)
School of Pharmacy (SOP)	14 (13%)
School of Population Health (SOPH)	14 (13%)
School of Medical Sciences (SOMS)	44 (40%)
School of Medicine (SOM)	25 (23%)
School of Nursing	4 (4%)
Other FMHS	3 (3%)
MPD	1 (1%)
TKHM	1 (1%)
School of Vision Sciences	1 (1%)

Overall Satisfaction

More than one-third of students considered leaving their programme of study in 2021. The most often cited reasons for considering leaving were mental health and financial difficulties. The challenges of remote working and a feeling of disconnect from fellow students were also frequently selected as reasons. Of all participants, nearly one-quarter reported mental health difficulties in 2021.

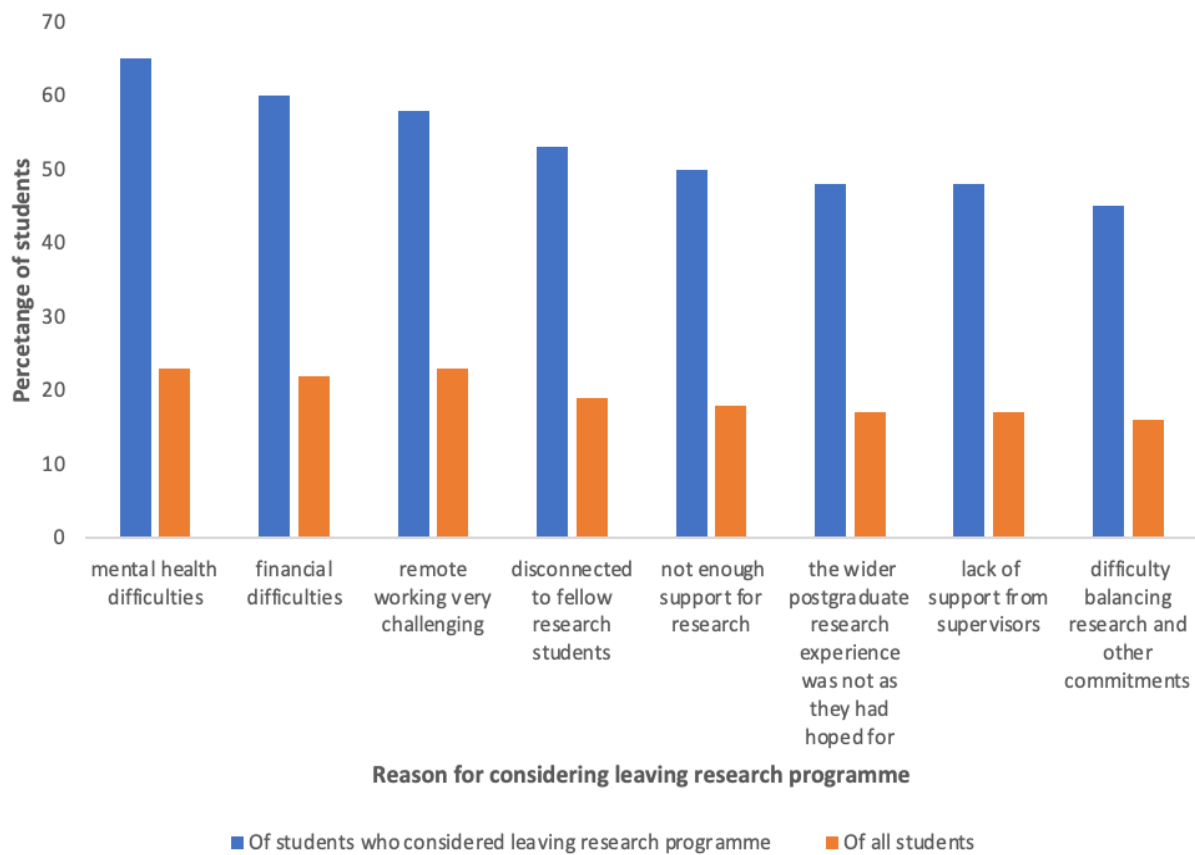


Figure 1. The most frequently cited reasons for research programme dissatisfaction in 2021.

76% of all students reported overall satisfaction with their postgraduate experience in 2021. Students in the Liggins Institute, SOPH, SON, and Other FMHS reported 100% satisfaction. Students in SMS, SOP, and SOM reported lower satisfaction at 72%, 73%, and 76% respectively.

Table 2. Overall satisfaction with postgraduate experience in 2021.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SoN	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
I was satisfied with my postgraduate experience.	100% 3.7±1.0	100% 3.7±0.6	100% 3.4±1.3	100% 4.0±0	73% 3.4±1.2	72% 3.4±1.0	76% 3.4±1.1	76% 3.4±1.0
Did you consider leaving your research programme this year?	40% Yes	33% Yes	36% Yes	50% Yes	36% Yes	37% Yes	33% Yes	36% Yes

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

Supervision

Most students (86%) were satisfied with their supervision in 2021. Of students in the SOPH, however, only 58% felt that their supervisors came prepared to supervisory meetings, and 54% believed supervisors helped students to identify their training and development needs as a researcher.

Half of students in the SON know who their departmental graduate advisor/head of department is. 61% of students feel comfortable approaching their DGA/HOD if they are having issues with supervision.

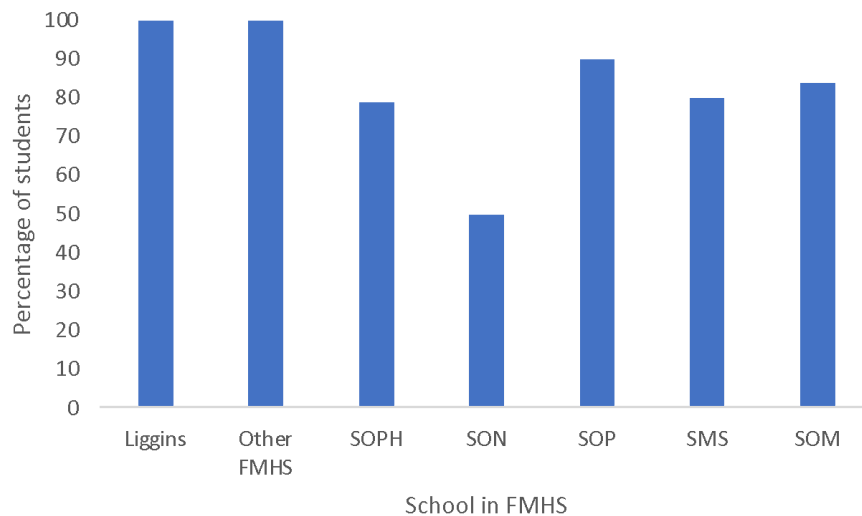


Figure 2. Percentage of students by school who know the name of their DGA/HOD.

Resources

Support for using IT and access to resources was variable between schools. The lowest level of accessibility and support was often in the SOPH, where half of students said support for using IT and accessing resources met their needs and 36% of students said support for academic skills met their needs.

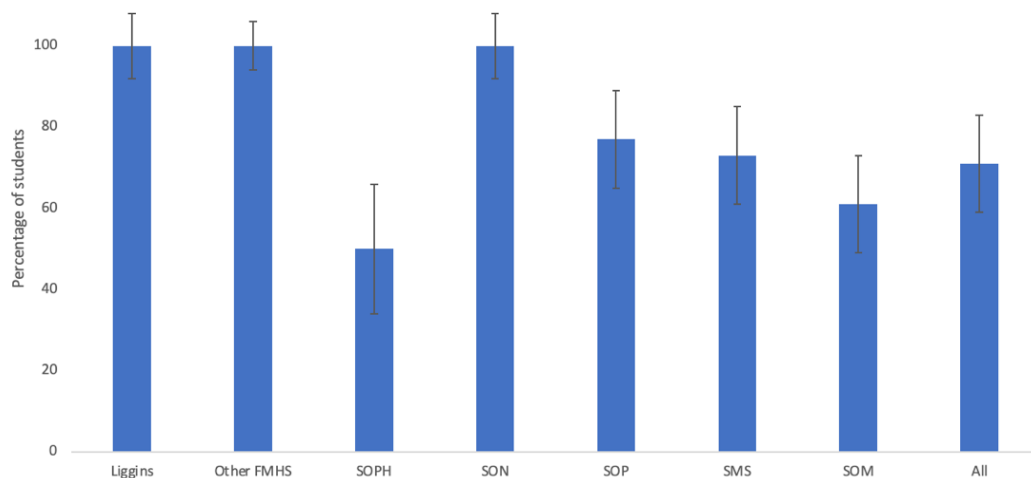


Figure 3. Percentages of students, according to school, who agreed that the support for using IT and accessing resources meets their needs. Error bars represent standard error.

While most students had a suitable working space when on campus, SOPH was the exception with only 50% considering their on-campus working space suitable. Comments from students indicated that IT support was very slow and noisy, open-office environments negatively impacted progress. Part-time, honours, and Masters students were particularly frustrated by the unavailability of desks for them.

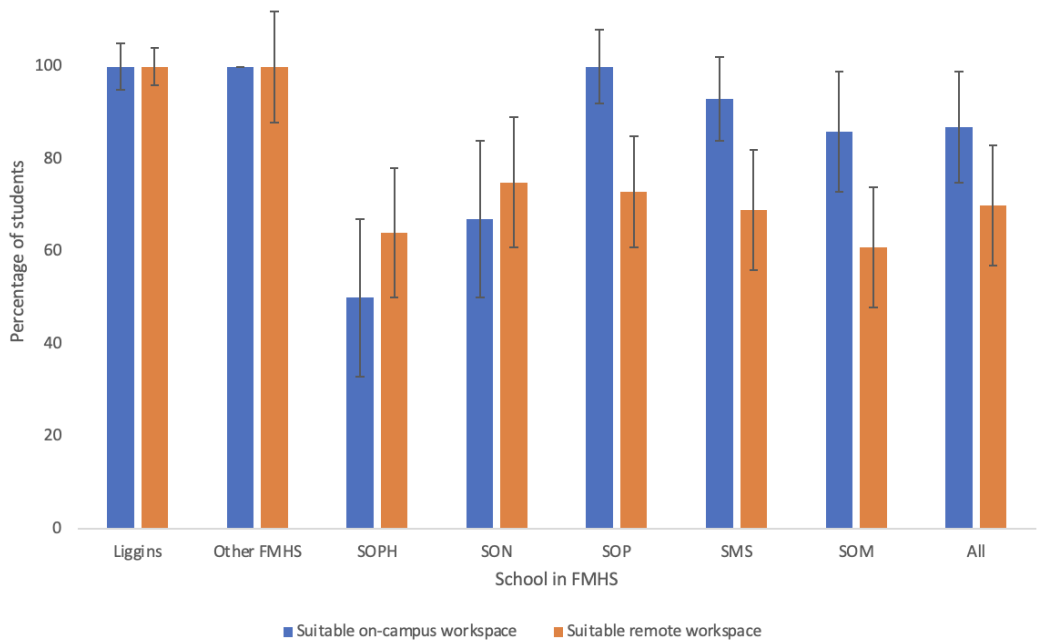


Figure 4. Percentage of students, according to school, who have a suitable working space on-campus versus remotely. Error bars represent standard error.

Research Culture

A feeling of disconnection with fellow students was notable across all schools, but particularly in the SON and Other FMHS where zero students felt connected to each other. Students appreciated efforts from individuals and student groups to initiate social events, but a lack of leadership from staff was disappointing.

43% of students in SOPH felt supported by their lab group, and 40% felt supported by their department. 0% of students in SON felt supported by their department, compared to 100% in Liggins and Other FMHS. Students commented on a ‘toxic’ environment where it is commonplace for PhD students to go through breakdowns. A few students commented on the excellent encouragement of work-life balance from supervisors and staff, while others felt that these words were meaningless due to a lack of role modelling from staff and the high expectations placed on students that made them feel obliged to work

long hours.

Table 3. Student feelings of support by department and lab group.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SON	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
I feel supported by my department.	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 3.3±0.6	40% 2.8±1.4	0% 2.5±1	75% 3.4±1.5	64% 3.4±1.2	75% 3.9±1.2	67% 3.5±1.3
My lab group is supportive of maintaining a healthy work/life balance.	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 4±1	71% 3.2±1.2	0% 2.8±0.5	60% 3.4±1.3	76% 3.7±1.3	100% 4±0.9	80% 3.6±1.2
My department is supportive of maintaining a healthy work/life balance.	100% 4.5±0.5	100% 4.7±0.6	80% 3.4±1.2	50% 2.8±1.3	70% 3.4±1.5	78% 3.6±1.2	78% 3.8±1.2	79% 3.6±1.2

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

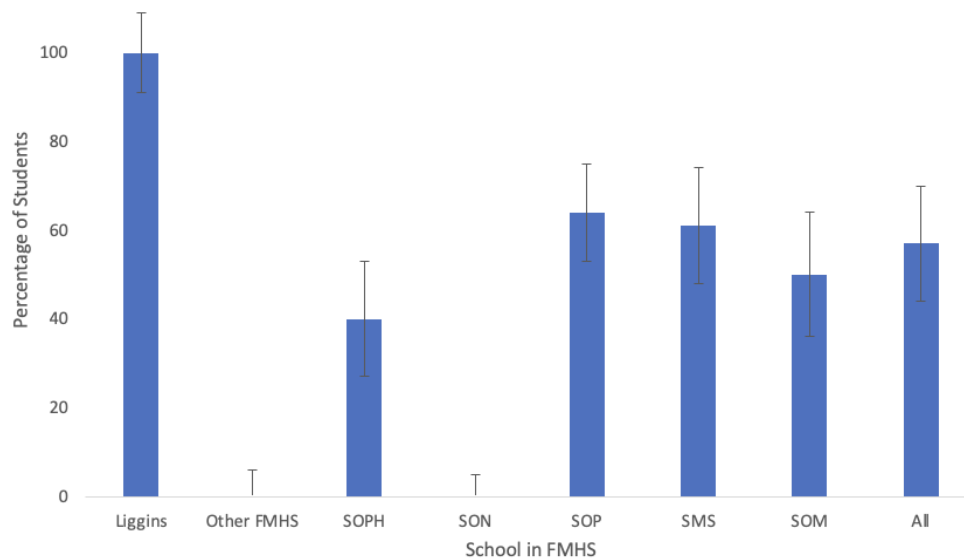


Figure 5. Percentage of students, according to school, who feel connected to their fellow research students. Error bars represent standard error.

Progress, Assessment, and Research Skills

Less than half of students in SOP and SMS are confident that they will complete their research within the expected timescale. Students commented that Covid-19 and personal circumstances such as family ill-health had severely disrupted their progress, with no clear pathway forward to negotiate a more realistic timescale.

Table 4. Student feelings of confidence to complete research programme and to be creative.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SON	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme this year.	50% 3.2±1. 2	100% 4.3±0.6	67% 3.4±1	100% 4±0.8	70% 3.4±1. 2	56% 3.1±1. 3	76% 3.7±1. 1	67% 3.4±1. 2
I am confident that I will complete my research programme within the expected timescale.	67% 3.2±1. 7	100% 3.7±0.6	58% 3.1±1. 4	100% 3.8±0. 5	45% 3±1.2	44% 2.8±1. 6	65% 3.4±1. 2	55% 3.1±1. 4

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

Responsibilities

The majority of students did not agree that the university valued and responded to feedback from research students. Comments from students indicated anger and frustration, particularly at the university's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to the dismissal of the PhD stipend petition. Students commented that the university 'does not care about research students' and that the university cared only about making money.

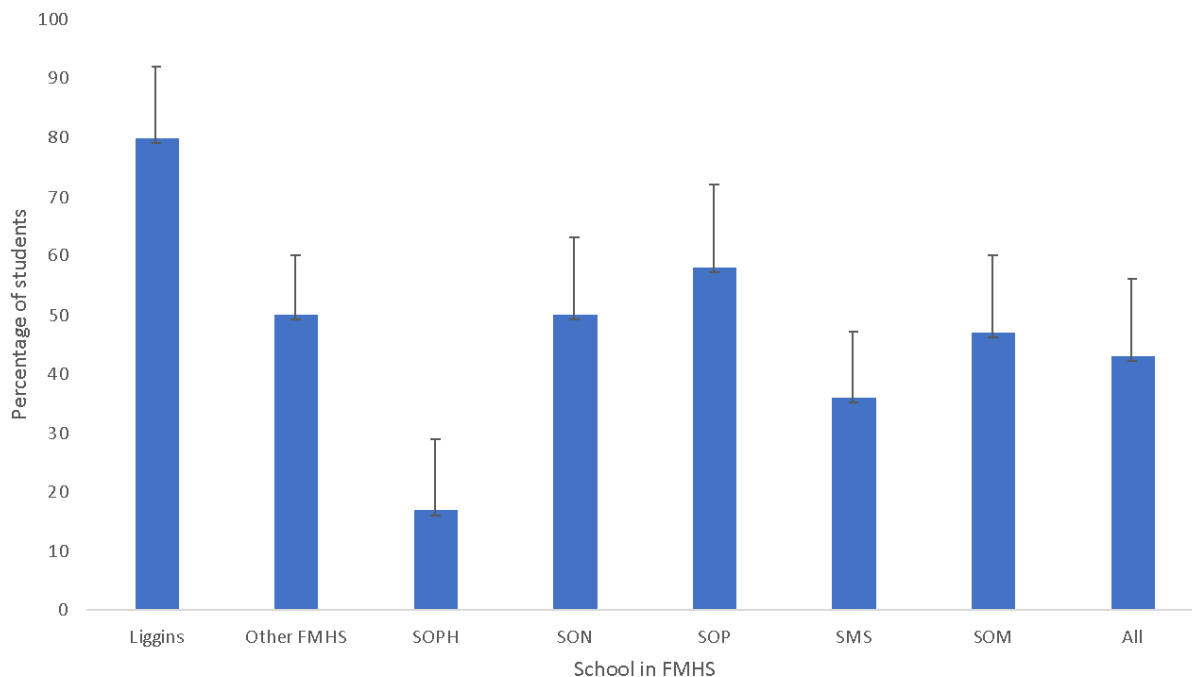


Figure 6. Percentage of students, according to school, who feel the university (as an institution) values and responds to feedback from research students. Error bars represent standard error.

Students in SMS felt particularly unhappy with the university's work to ensure the quality of their

academic experience during the Covid-19 experience. Students commented that consideration of research students in the pandemic response plan has been lacking.

Table 4. Student feelings on effort of institution and systems of support for research issues.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SON	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
My institution has worked to ensure the quality of my academic experience during the Covid-19 pandemic.	80% 3.7±1	100% 4±0	30% 2.4±1. 2	67% 3±1. 4	58% 3.2±1. 4	18% 2.4±1. 1	45% 2.8±1. 3	41% 2.8±1. 3
Other than my supervisor(s), I know who to approach if I am concerned about any aspect of my research	80% 4±1.3	67% 3.3±2.1	42% 2.6±1. 4	25% 2±1. 4	58% 3.4±1. 3	39% 2.8±1. 4	33% 2.7±1	45% 2.9±1. 3

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

Most students agreed that they understand their responsibilities as a research student and the responsibilities of their supervisors. The lowest scores were again in SOPH where two-thirds of students understood their responsibilities and those of their supervisors. Despite reasonable scores, there were several comments from students indicating that although individual staff make an effort, the system in general is failing. The responsibilities of PhD students and supervisors are unclear at times, and supervisors are not held accountable for action (or inaction) in supervisory relationships. Students said that they feel ‘ignored’ and that ‘our voices are not heard’.

Support

The majority of students felt the support for academic skills met their needs except in the SOPH, where only 45% agreed the academic support was sufficient. Students were less agreeable that the support for health and wellbeing meets their needs, particularly in Other FMHS where zero students felt the health and wellbeing support was adequate.

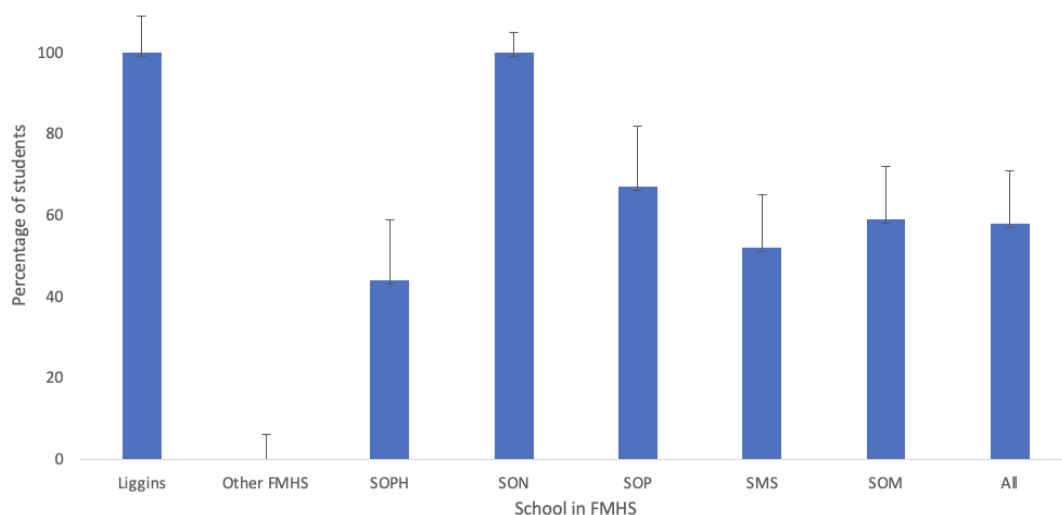


Figure 6. Percentage of students, according to school, who agree that the health and wellbeing support meets their needs. Error bars represent standard error.

Most students did not feel they had received the support they needed from the university in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, but a majority agreed that communications had been appropriate and clear. Students commented that the fees-free extension was a good start, but ultimately inadequate as without a stipend, students have no way to financially support themselves during the extension.

Table 5. Student feelings of support from institution during Covid-19 pandemic.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SON	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
I have received the support I need from my institution in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.	83% 4±1.1	100% 3.7±0.6	36% 2.5±1.2	100% 4±0.8	62% 3.3±1.6	37% 2.7±1.2	41% 2.8±1.4	49% 2.9±1.3
Communications from my institution in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic were appropriate and clear.	80% 3.8±1.2	100% 4.7±0.6	83% 3.9±1	100% 4.5±0.6	82% 3.8±1.3	42% 2.8±1.3	58% 3.1±1.4	64% 3.3±1.4

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

FMHS-PGSA

Students in Liggins and SON felt connected to and supported by FMHS-PGSA, but other schools felt considerably less support. Comments from students indicate confusion about email lists and the role of FMHS-PGSA versus graduate student representatives. Students from SOPH indicated they would like more support from FMHS-PGSA.

A wider sense of belonging was lacking (below 50% agreement) for students in Other FMHS, SOPH, SON, and SMS.

Table 6. Student feelings of connection to FMHS-PGSA and wider research community.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SON	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
I felt connected to my Postgraduate Students' Association	100% 3.7±0.8	0% 1.7±0.6	33% 2.3±1.3	100% 3.3±0.5	73% 3.6±1.3	48% 3±1	65% 3.4±1.3	55% 3.1±1.2
I felt supported by my Postgraduate Students' Association	100% 4.2±0.8	0% 2±1	42% 2.5±1.3	100% 3.5±0.6	60% 3.4±1.2	67% 3.3±0.9	82% 3.6±1.1	66% 3.3±1.1
I feel a sense of belonging to my wider research community (e.g. PGSA, department, school, faculty)	100% 3.3±0.5	0% 2±1	27% 2.4±1.2	0% 2.5±0.6	60% 3.3±1.3	41% 2.8±1.2	60% 3.3±1.5	46% 2.9±1.3

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

Impact of Covid-19 Lockdown

Nearly 100% of students agreed that the Covid-19 lockdown in 2021 impacted their ability to completed work. 62% of students felt the effects of lockdown on their research project was much greater than the actual duration of lockdown. Two-fifths of students felt they could complete their research programme within the expected timescale. Less than one-fifth of doctoral students felt financially able to continue their PhD beyond 3.5 years.

Table 7. Doctoral student feedback on ability to complete research programme.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SON	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
A 6-month fees free waiver will adequately allow me to complete my PhD (despite the lack of stipend offered for this time).	75% 3.8±1.3	67% 3.3±2.1	25% 2.4±1.4	67% 3.3±1	55% 3±1.7	24% 2.4±1.3	63% 3.1±1.5	44% 2.8±1.4
The ability to extend beyond 4 years (48 months) will adequately allow me to complete my PhD.	67% 3.4±1.7	100% 4±1	100% 4.2±1	50% 3±1.6	75% 3.8±1.4	88% 4±1.1	85% 4±1.1	85% 3.9±1.2
If or when I reach beyond 3.5 years, I will be financially able to continue with my studies despite receiving no stipend payments.	0% 2.4±0.9	33% 2.7±2.1	14% 2±1.2	0% 1.7±1.2	17% 2±1.5	14% 1.7±1.1	29% 2.3±1.3	18% 2.0±1.2

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

Table 8. Masters student feedback on ability to complete research programme.

Question	Liggins	Other FMHS	SOPH	SON	SOP	SMS	SOM	All
For Masters Students: A 2-month fees free waiver will adequately allow me to complete my work.	N/A	N/A	100% 3.8±1	N/A	0% 2.5±0.8	60% 3±1.2	75% 3.3±1.2	62% 3.1±1.1

Note: Percentages denote agree-disagree ratio; summary numbers denote mean ± standard deviation.

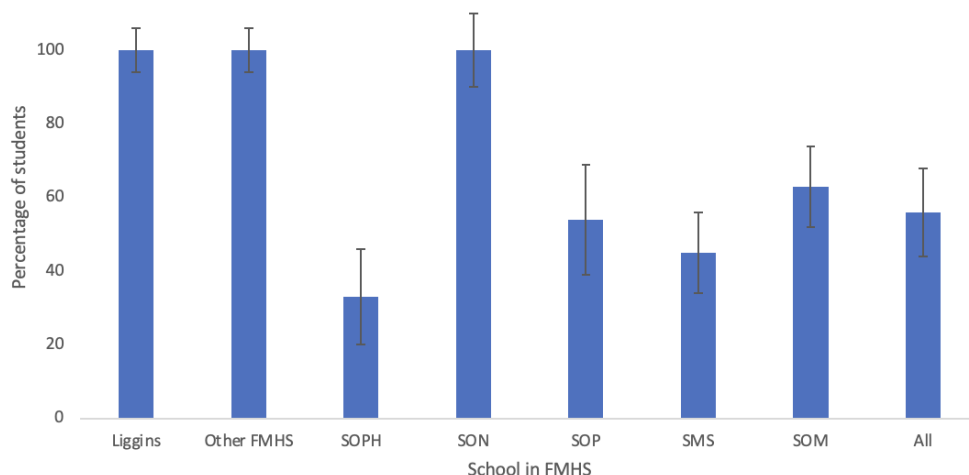


Figure 7. Percentage of students, according to school, who have felt supported by the university (supervisors, faculty staff, support staff) during the Covid-19 lockdown. Error bars represent standard error.

Two-thirds of students felt the information surrounding permission to reenter the university to conduct research was communicated clearly. 64% of students felt they had been negatively financially impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown, and 35% of students said their loss of income was directly related to university employment. 9% of students felt they were financially supported by the university. Students commented that the Covid-19 fee waiver is not adequate financial support.

Comments from students largely focused on the inequity of postgraduate study at UoA. Students note that family plays a major role (emotionally and financially) in supporting postgraduate students, and those without such supports are unlikely to undertake postgraduate study and/or finish their programme.

Several comments from students indicate bitter disappointment in the university's decision to dismiss the PhD stipend argument. Students feel undervalued, unsupported, and frustrated by the university's unwillingness to pay students above minimum wage. *'It's great to talk about mental health and 'we're here for you, check in on your friends' but what we really need is support to live.'*

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

University and Faculty

We have composed a list of recommendations for the university, and goals for improvement of FMHS-PGSA, based on the results of the survey.

A substantial proportion of students struggled with mental health, financial difficulties, and a feeling of disconnection with fellow students. These were key reasons identified by the one-third of students who considered leaving their research programme. We recommend **an increase to the University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship stipend**. As of March 2022, the stipend equates to only \$13.84 per hour. This is not sufficient to support an individual living in Auckland in 2022. The stipend should be increased to at least \$37,254 per annum, on par with the New Zealand minimum wage designed to account for inflation. An increased stipend would relieve financial stress and enable students to reduce their outside paid work commitments. This time could then be put towards counselling sessions and developing connections with fellow students. Financial strain is consistently linked to poor mental health outcomes^{25,26}. Given the high prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptomatology among doctoral students, relief of financial stress should be of utmost priority.

Health and wellbeing support was found to be lacking for postgraduate students. We recommend **an increase in the availability of counselling sessions, including availability of culturally competent counsellors**²⁷. The university website states that counselling is in high demand. It is important that students under mental health stress are able to access counselling within a reasonable time frame. Furthermore, culturally competent psychotherapy is vital to meet the needs of the diversity of students at the university. In line with the university's commitment to tangata whenua outlined in *Taumata Teitei*, counselling services should offer culturally sensitive approaches that are appropriate and effective for the Māori community^{28,29}. Given the financial strain borne by postgraduate students, we also recommend that the counselling system moves away from a referral based operation to one where counsellors work with students across multiple sessions³⁰.

The majority of postgraduate students feel the university does not value their feedback. We recommend **the development of a formalised method for postgraduate student feedback**. There is currently no systematic method for research focused students to provide feedback to the university. It is crucial that the university listens to the voices of postgraduate students in order to meet their requisite duty of care and to fulfill the strategic initiatives outlined in *Taumata Teitei* including student centricity and collaboration. Feedback should be gathered in a confidential manner by an independent third party. The university should provide a verbal and written response to the feedback obtained.

A large proportion of students reported that they did not feel supported by the university nor by the FMHS-PGSA. A major issue identified by students in the comments is lack of email communication due to a failure in process where students were not added to the appropriate mailing lists. **The process of adding postgraduate students to the appropriate mailing lists needs to be streamlined and clarified for staff and relevant student associations including FMHS-PGSA**. Furthermore, **email communications from and to staff should directly address postgraduate students, particularly in relation to Covid-19 protocols**. Messages that directly address postgraduate students provide clarity for those who often fall in a blurry area between student and staff member. It is important that postgraduate students always have a clear understanding of their role and abilities.

The majority of doctoral students surveyed have been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, such that they are unable to finish within 3.5 years of their start date but simultaneously cannot afford to continue doctoral study beyond this period. We recommend that **the length of the doctoral scholarship stipend is extended to four years to account for Covid-19 interruptions and delays**. The university has offered a six month fee-waiver to students affected by Covid-19 lockdowns, however the fee-waiver alone is inadequate without any financial support for students through the duration of the waiver.

Postgraduate students in the Schools of Population Health and Nursing gave poorer scores in most

sections of the survey. We recommend that **the needs of postgraduate students in SOPH and SON are assessed further** by an independent party. Access to IT and basic resources including seating and suitable work areas were lacking for students in SOPH and should be remedied as soon as practicable. A difficult work culture in SOPH was noted and should be investigated thoroughly, as should the dearth of support felt by students in SON.

Finally, we recommend actions to **diffuse the power imbalance between staff and postgraduate students**. The differences in age, income, and educational status create an inherent power structure that leaves students susceptible to bullying, harassment, and discrimination³¹. Characteristics including gender and ethnicity may increase the power differential. Collaboration with students is a strategy outlined in *Taumata Teitei*; this strategy should consider the difficulties in honest staff-student communication due to the structural power dynamic. Student-staff partnership in which all participants are engaged in a collaborative process serves to benefit both parties^{32,33}. In these partnerships an impartial third party is vital, and staff must be explicit about their intentions for the partnership³⁴. Further efforts to diffuse the power asymmetry may include shared events between staff and postgraduate students, programmes focused on supportive supervisor-student relationships, and regular acknowledgements of both staff and student contributions to the university.

FMHS-PGSA

A slight majority of students felt connected to the FMHS-PGSA. To improve their support of students, FMHS-PGSA has drafted several goals for 2022. These goals are listed in their entirety on the FMHS-PGSA website. Most notably, FMHS-PGSA is determined to resolve the faculty mailing list issues so that **all FMHS postgraduates are notified of FMHS-PGSA in a timely manner (within one month) following enrolment**. The resolution of inconsistent mailing list exclusions will ensure that postgraduate students are aware of social and academic events, as well as available peer support. FMHS-PGSA will also **replace their website** so that important information including upcoming events, useful staff contacts (including DGAs), and grant information is easily accessible.

Postgraduate students indicated that they did not feel their feedback was valued by the university. **FMHS-PGSA will continue to survey the postgraduate students annually** to ensure that there is a mechanism of garnering postgraduate student feedback regularly. The 2022 survey will include questions focused on equity, discrimination, and cultural competency. The results of the survey will contribute a small part to the overarching mission of FMHS-PGSA: **support and advocacy for FMHS postgraduate students**.

CONCLUSION

This is the first student-led survey of FMHS postgraduate students to our knowledge. The survey is inevitably limited by self-selection bias and sample size, however with no alternative feedback mechanism on offer for postgraduate students, the opportunity to collectively voice concerns is of value. A major strength of the survey is that it was facilitated by students. As noted earlier, the power differential that exists between staff and students can make honest communication challenging. Student facilitators may be better able to extract truthful responses. Further strengths are the anonymity of the survey and that all surveys were filled to completion.

This survey indicates that postgraduate students have a variety of needs that are not currently being met by the university. Mental health and financial difficulties, lack of access to IT services and resources, and a felt lack of support from the institution are among these unmet needs. We advise the university to consider seriously our recommendations and use these as a basis on which to make concerted efforts to support postgraduate students. If the university is committed to postgraduate students as advertised on their website, then these efforts should be made obvious and occur sooner rather than later.

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APPENDIX

Question	Liggins (6)	Other FMHS (3)	SOPH (14)	SoN (4)	SOP (14)	SMS (44)	SOM (25)	All
I was satisfied with my postgraduate experience.	100% 3.7±1.0	100% 3.7±0.6	100% 3.4±1.3	100% 4.0±0	73% 3.4±1.2	72% 3.4±1.0	76% 3.4±1.1	76% 3.4±1.0
Did you consider leaving your research programme this year?	40% Yes	33% Yes	36% Yes	50% Yes	36% Yes	37% Yes	33% Yes	36% Yes
I was satisfied with my supervision.	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 4.7±0.6	77% 3.8±1.5	100% 5±0	79% 4.1±1.5	78% 3.8±1.2	100% 4.5±0.8	86% 4.1±1.2
My supervisor(s) help me to identify my training and development needs as a researcher.	100% 4±0.9	100% 4.3±0.6	54% 3.1±1.5	100% 4.3±0.5	82% 3.9±1.5	68% 3.6±1.5	90% 4.2±1	76% 3.8±1.3
My supervisor(s) provide feedback that helps me direct my research activities.	83% 4.2±1.2	100% 4.7±0.6	75% 3.7±1.3	100% 5±0	85% 4.1±1.4	82% 4±1.4	91% 4.4±1	85% 4.1±1.2
My supervisor(s) have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 5±0	92% 4.1±1.2	100% 5±0	83% 4.1±1.3	90% 4.3±1	100% 4.7±0.5	93% 4.4±1.0
I have regular contact with my supervisor(s), appropriate for my needs	100% 4.7±0.5	100% 4.7±0.6	77% 3.8±1.3	100% 5±0	86% 4.4±1.1	89% 4.2±1.1	96% 4.4±0.8	90% 4.3±1.0
My supervisor(s) clearly communicate their expectations	100% 4.3±0.5	100% 4.3±1.2	70% 3.6±1.3	100% 4.8±0	70% 3.6±1	80% 3.8±1.3	95% 4.4±0.9	84% 4.0±1

				5	5			2
My supervisor(s) have reasonable expectations	100% 4.5±0.5	100% 4.7±0.6	91% 4.1±1.2	100% 5±0	83% 3.9±1.3	79% 3.9±1.3	95% 4.3±0.9	88% 4.1±1.1
My supervisor(s) come prepared to my supervisory meetings.	100% 4.2±0.8	100% 5±0	58% 3.4±1.4	100% 4.8±0.5	85% 4.1±1.4	88% 4.1±1.2	90% 4.3±1	86% 4.1±1.2
I feel comfortable talking with my supervisor(s) about problems in my research	83% 4±1.1	100% 4.3±1.2	79% 4±1.4	100% 4.8±0.5	79% 4.1±1.4	85% 4±1.2	90% 4.3±1	85% 4.1±1.2
I know who my Departmental Graduate Advisor / Head of Department is. See this link: https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/fmhs/current-students/doctoral-students/contact.html	100% yes	100% Yes	79%	50%	90%	80%	84%	
I feel comfortable approaching the DGA/HOD if I am having issues with my supervision.	67% 3.5±1.2	100% 4±1	42% 2.6±1.7	67% 3.3±1	73% 3.5±1.6	62% 3.2±1.4	58% 3.5±1.5	61% 3.3±1.4
Overall, my supervisors are effective supervisors.	100% 4.5±0.8	100% 4.7±0.6	77% 3.9±1.4	100% 5±0	85% 4.1±1.4	84% 4±1.1	95% 4.4±0.9	88% 4.1±1.1
The support for using IT and accessing resources meets my needs.	100% 3.8±0.8	100% 4.3±0.6	50% 2.8±1.6	100% 4±0.8	77% 3.9±1.2	73% 3.5±1.2	61% 3.2±1.2	71% 3.4±1.2
The support for academic skills meets my needs.	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 4.3±0.6	36% 2.7±1.4	100% 4.3±0.5	92% 4.3±0.9	79% 3.5±1	79% 3.7±1.1	79% 3.6±1.1
There is appropriate access to online library resources	100% 4.7±0.5	100% 5±0	85% 4.1±1.3	75% 3.8±1.3	92% 4.1±0.9	92% 4.1±0.9	100% 4.6±0.7	93% 4.2±0.9
There is appropriate access to IT resources and facilities when I am on campus	83% 4±1.1	100% 5±0	50% 3.1±1.5	100% 3.8±1	82% 3.8±1.1	87% 3.9±1	91% 4.1±1	84% 3.8±1.1

I have access to the specialist resources necessary for my research when I am studying remotely	83% 3.8±1.5	100% 3.7±1.2	70% 3.2±1.2	67% 3.3±1	75% 3.8±1.2	67% 3.3±1.4	65% 3.4±1.3	70% 3.4±1.3
I have a suitable working space when I am on campus	100% 4.5±0.5	100% 5±0	50% 2.9±1.7	67% 3.3±1.7	100% 4.4±0.8	93% 4.3±0.9	86% 4.1±1.3	87% 4.1±1.2
I have a suitable working space when I am studying remotely	100% 4.2±0.4	100% 4.3±1.2	64% 3.5±1.4	75% 4±1.4	73% 3.6±1.2	69% 3.4±1.3	61% 3.3±1.3	70% 3.5±1.3
There is appropriate access to physical library resources and facilities	100% 4.5±0.5	100% 5±0	85% 4.1±1.3	100% 4.3±1	92% 4.2±1	92% 3.8±1	95% 4±1	93% 4.0±1.0
I feel connected to my fellow research students.	100% 4±0.9	0% 2.7±0.6	40% 2.5±1.3	0% 2.8±0.5	64% 3.4±1.1	61% 3.2±1.3	50% 3.2±1.4	57% 3.1±1.3
I feel supported by my lab group.	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 3.7±1.2	43% 2.7±1.3	NA	70% 3.4±1.4	78% 3.8±1.3	94% 4.1±1.1	79% 3.7±1.3
I feel supported by my department.	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 3.3±0.6	40% 2.8±1.4	0% 2.5±1	75% 3.4±1.5	64% 3.4±1.2	75% 3.9±1.2	67% 3.5±1.3
My lab group is supportive of maintaining a healthy work/life balance.	100% 4.3±0.8	100% 4±1	71% 3.2±1.2	0% 2.8±0.5	60% 3.4±1.3	76% 3.7±1.3	100% 4±0.9	80% 3.6±1.2
My department is supportive of maintaining a healthy work/life balance.	100% 4.5±0.5	100% 4.7±0.6	80% 3.4±1.2	50% 2.8±1.3	70% 3.4±1.5	78% 3.6±1.2	78% 3.8±1.2	79% 3.6±1.2
My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme this year.	50% 3.2±1.2	100% 4.3±0.6	67% 3.4±1	100% 4±0.8	70% 3.4±1.2	56% 3.1±1.3	76% 3.7±1.1	67% 3.4±1.2
I am confident that I will complete my research programme within the	67%	100%	58%	100%	45%	44%	65%	55%

expected timescale.	3.2±1.7	3.7±0.6	3.1±1.4	3.8±0.5	3±1.2	2.8±1.6	3.4±1.2	3.1±1.4
My skills in applying research methodologies, tools, and techniques have developed during my programme this year.	100% 4.2±0.8	100% 5±0	67% 3.3±1.5	75% 3.8±1.3	80% 3.6±1	83% 3.8±1.2	100% 4.4±0.6	86% 3.9±1.1
My institution values and responds to feedback from research students.	80% 3.8±1.2	50% 3±1	17% 1.9±1.2	50% 2.8±1.3	58% 3.1±1.4	36% 2.7±1.1	47% 2.8±1.3	43% 2.7±1.3
My institution has worked to ensure the quality of my academic experience during the Covid-19 pandemic.	80% 3.7±1	100% 4±0	30% 2.4±1.2	67% 3±1.4	58% 3.2±1.4	18% 2.4±1.1	45% 2.8±1.3	41% 2.8±1.3
Other than my supervisor(s), I know who to approach if I am concerned about any aspect of my research	80% 4±1.3	67% 3.3±2.1	42% 2.6±1.4	25% 2±1.4	58% 3.4±1.3	39% 2.8±1.4	33% 2.7±1	45% 2.9±1.3
I understand my responsibilities as a research student	100% 4.7±0.5	100% 5±0	67% 3.3±1.1	75% 3.5±1	100% 4.1±0.8	92% 4.1±0.9	95% 4.1±0.9	91% 4.0±0.9
I am aware of my supervisors' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student	100% 4.3±0.5	100% 4.7±0.6	67% 3.2±1.3	75% 3.8±1.3	85% 3.9±1	89% 3.9±1	95% 4±0.9	88% 3.9±1.0
The support for academic skills meets my needs.	100% 4.2±1	100% 4±0	45% 2.9±1.5	100% 3.8±0.5	91% 3.9±0.9	74% 3.5±1	82% 3.6±1	78% 3.6±1.1
The support for my health and wellbeing meets my needs.	100% 4±0.9	0% 2.7±0.6	44% 2.9±1.5	100% 3.3±0.5	67% 3.4±1.5	52% 3±1.3	59% 3.1±1.3	58% 3.1±1.3
I have received the support I need from my institution in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.	83% 4±1.1	100% 3.7±0.6	36% 2.5±1.2	100% 4±0.8	62% 3.3±1.6	37% 2.7±1.2	41% 2.8±1.4	49% 2.9±1.3
Communications from my institution in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic were appropriate and clear.	80% 3.8±1.2	100% 4.7±0.6	83% 3.9±1	100% 4.5±0	82% 3.8±1	42% 2.8±1.3	58% 3.1±1.4	64% 3.3±1

				6	3			4
I felt connected to my Postgraduate Students' Association	100%	0%	33%	100%	73%	48%	65%	55%
	3.7±0.8	1.7±0.6	2.3±1.3	3.3±0.5	3.6±1.3	3±1	3.4±1.3	3.1±1.2
I felt supported by my Postgraduate Students' Association	100%	0%	42%	100%	60%	67%	82%	66%
	4.2±0.8	2±1	2.5±1.3	3.5±0.6	3.4±1.2	3.3±0.9	3.6±1.1	3.3±1.1
I feel a sense of belonging to my wider research community (e.g. PGSA, department, school, faculty)	100%	0%	27%	0%	60%	41%	60%	46%
	3.3±0.5	2±1	2.4±1.2	2.5±0.6	3.3±1.3	2.8±1.2	3.3±1.5	2.9±1.3
The COVID-19 lockdown has impacted by ability to complete my work.	100%	100%	100%	100%	73%	100%	100%	97%
	4±1.1	5±0	4.4±0.8	4±1.2	3.9±1.3	4.5±0.7	4.7±0.6	4.4±0.9
The number of days I have been unable to conduct research due to lockdown roughly EQUATES to the number of days my research project has been delayed.	33%	100%	89%	0%	40%	57%	55%	57%
	2.8±1.3	4.3±0.6	3.6±1	2.8±0.5	2.9±1.5	3.2±1.4	3.1±1.4	3.2±1.3
The number of days that my research project has been delayed is much GREATER than the number of days I have been unable to conduct research due to the lockdown. E.g. The follow-on effects of needing to restart long-term protocols, shipping delays, sacrificed animals, cancelled long-term experiments, missed data points, etc. have unduly impacted by research project.	33%	100%	50%	50%	29%	73%	71%	62%
	2.8±1.3	4.3±0.6	3.1±1.2	3±1.6	2.2±1.4	3.7±1.4	3.7±1.5	3.4±1.5
My research project has NOT been impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown.	20%	0%	8%	75%	23%	5%	8%	12%
	2.2±1.6	1±0	1.9±0.9	3.5±1.7	2.1±1.4	1.4±0.7	1.4±0.9	1.7±1.1
I will be able to complete my research programme within the normal ~3.5 years (for Doctoral), 1 year (for Masters), or two semesters (for Honours).	67%	0%	33%	0%	43%	38%	40%	40%
	3.7±1.8	2.7±0.6	2.6±1.3	2.5±1	2.7±1.5	2.6±1.5	2.6±1.4	2.7±1.4
For Doctoral Students: A 6-month fees free waiver will adequately allow me to complete my PhD (despite the lack of stipend offered for this time).	75%	67%	25%	67%	55%	24%	63%	44%
	3.8±1.3	3.3±2.1	2.4±1.4	3.3±1	3±1.7	2.4±1.3	3.1±1.5	2.8±1.4
For Doctoral Students: The ability to extend beyond 4 years (48 months) will adequately allow me to complete my PhD.	67%	100%	100%	50%	75%	88%	85%	85%
	3.4±1.7	4±1	4.2±1	3±1.6	3.8±1.	4±1.1	4±1.1	3.9±1.

					4			2
For Masters Students: A 2-month fees free waiver will adequately allow me to complete my work.	N/A	N/A	100% 3.8±1	N/A	0% 2.5±0.8	60% 3±1.2	75% 3.3±1.2	62% 3.1±1.1
For Doctoral students: If or when I reach beyond 3.5 years, I will be financially able to continue with my studies despite receiving no stipend payments.	0% 2.4±0.9	33% 2.7±2.1	14% 2±1.2	0% 1.7±1.2	17% 2±1.5	14% 1.7±1.1	29% 2.3±1.3	18% 2.0±1.2
I have felt supported by the university during the COVID-19 lockdown ("university" for this question includes supervisor(s), departmental staff, student support staff, etc.).	100% 4±0.6	100% 3.7±0.6	33% 2.5±1.3	100% 3.8±1	54% 3.1±1.5	45% 2.9±1.1	63% 3.2±1.1	56% 3.1±1.2
Information and criteria surrounding the permission to re-enter the university to conduct research has been clearly communicated to me.	83% 4.2±1.2	100% 3.7±0.6	83% 3.7±1.1	67% 3.3±1	67% 3.3±1.3	61% 3.1±1.3	61% 3.1±1.2	68% 3.3±1.3
I have been negatively financially impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown.	40% 2.5±1.8	50% 3±2	54% 3.4±1.7	50% 3.3±1.3	60% 3.4±1.3	70% 3.5±1.4	72% 3.6±1.3	64% 3.4±1.4
I have been negatively financially impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown, AND the university was directly involved in this negative financial impact. (e.g. you were due to perform teaching duties, paid research duties, or administrative duties for the university, but because of the lockdown, had reduced hours).	17% 1.7±1.2	0% 1.3±0.6	33% 2.5±1.5	50% 2.8±1.3	18% 2.3±1.2	46% 2.9±1.6	38% 2.8±1.2	35% 2.6±1.4
I have felt financially supported by the university. (e.g. hardship fund, opportunity to work more hours to meet financial hardship).	50% 3.2±1	0% 2±1	8% 1.6±1	0% 2.3±1	13% 2.3±1	8% 2.2±1.1	7% 2.2±0.9	9% 2.2±1.1