Uni Student Wellbeing Survey Summary Report 2024

June 2025

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Uni Student Wellbeing

Australian Government

Australian Research Council

This research was supported (partially or fully) by the Australian Government through the ARC's Discovery Projects funding scheme (project DP230102453). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or the ARC.

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Uni Student Wellbeing

Summary of findings

The Uni Student Wellbeing Survey, administered at 11 Australian universities in Year 1 (2023-2024) of this three-year project, investigated the wellbeing and associated academic experiences of undergraduate students. This report contains key findings from eight universities with sufficient response rates (i.e., >1%). From a total of 10,048 undergraduate students who participated in the Survey at these eight institutions, 7,725 provided a complete response and were included in the analyses.

Characteristics and circumstances of students (weighted statistics)

- 34.5% were aged ≥25
- 59.8% identified as a Woman or female
- 11.1% were overseas/International enrolments
- 14.9% reported that English is not their native or preferred language
- 17.6% identified as LGBTIQA+
- 12.7% reporting having a disability, with 66.7% of those having notified their university about it
- 63.8% agreed that their financial situation is a significant source of stress
- 38.0% agreed that they find it hard to imagine and plan for the future, given world events
- 32.0% agreed that they often worry about safety, food or housing

Levels of mental health and wellbeing

The Survey investigates both high levels of psychological distress and low levels of psychological wellbeing as distinct 'mental health difficulties' that university students may experience. Among all students, 28.0% reported High distress, as measured by Kessler et al.'s (2002) Kessler-6 (K6) Scale, while 30.2% reported Low wellbeing, as measured by Diener et al.'s (2009) Flourishing Scale (FS). Overall, 42.8% were experiencing mental health or wellbeing (MHWB) difficulties, with 15.4% experiencing both High distress AND Low wellbeing – we refer to the latter group as experiencing Poor mental health and wellbeing (Poor MHWB). Conversely, 57.2% of students did not report MHWB difficulties:

- 35.2% were Moderately well, with moderate distress and moderate wellbeing
- 22.0% were Thriving, with low distress and high wellbeing

> *15.4% of students were experiencing both High distress* and *Low wellbeing – or 'Poor' mental health and wellbeing*

Support for students experiencing mental health and wellbeing difficulties

Results estimate the size of the 'treatment gap' for students experiencing Poor MHWB: 54.4% of students with Poor MHWB were not receiving treatment or therapy from a health professional, although they would likely benefit from such individualised support.

There are opportunities to improve mental health and wellbeing information and support for all students, especially to address the support-needs of students experiencing Poor MHWB. Among students in the latter group, around one in three (34.4%) agreed that they have as much information about mental health and wellbeing as they need, while around two in five (42.7%) agreed that they have access to support services at university that they would trust.

Academic trajectories of students reporting MHWB difficulties

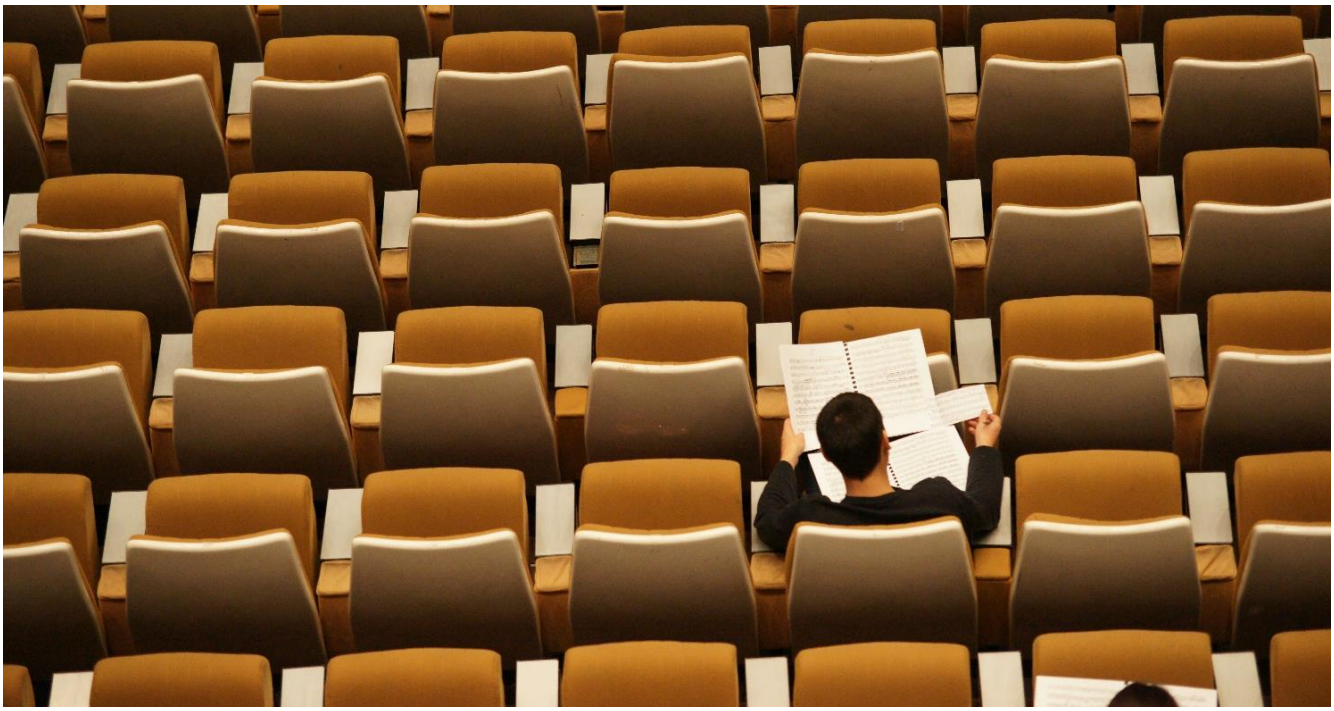
Students experiencing MHWB difficulties are at greater risk of academic attrition (non-completion of their course or 'dropping out' of university) and poorer academic attainment (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018; Naylor et al., 2018). Among students experiencing Poor MHWB:

- 53.4% were confident they would be able to finish their course, compared to 80.3% of students in the overall sample.
- 43.4% had thought seriously about leaving or dropping out of university, compared to 20.9% of students in the overall sample.
- 58.0% agreed that they have doubts about whether the degree they are studying is worth the time, money and effort, compared to 34.6% of students in the overall sample.
- 49.6% rated the quality of their overall university experience so far as 'Poor' or 'Fair', compared to 26.1% of students in the overall sample.

Academic experiences of students reporting MHWB difficulties

Compared to students in the overall sample, students with Poor MHWB reported higher levels of *Academic stress* and poorer evaluations of each of the remaining six academic experiences:

- *Course value*
- *Academic self-efficacy*
- *Teacher support*
- *Peer engagement*
- *Sense of belonging at university*
- *University climate*



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1. About the survey

Research context

The Uni Student Wellbeing Survey is designed to equip Australian higher education providers with robust and timely insights into the psychological wellbeing and associated academic experiences of their undergraduate students. This report is based on a data analysis plan and reporting template developed by Associate Professor Wendy Larcombe, who led the design of the survey instrument. The Survey forms part of a larger research project exploring ways to improve university students' mental health being led by Professor Chi Baik at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne (https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/research-projects/the-student-experience/unistudentwellbeing).

The research has been funded by an Australian Research Council grant.

Survey purpose and design

The Survey aims to build an evidence-base to inform universities' policy, programming and resourcing decisions related to student mental health and wellbeing. Participating institutions receive a customised report of key findings about the specific needs and experiences of students with varying levels of psychological distress and wellbeing. In addition to these institutional benefits, participation in the project contributes to national and international research investigating university environmental 'settings' that best support the mental health and wellbeing of young people from diverse backgrounds.

In this report, 'mental health and wellbeing' are understood as multi-dimensional: the Survey uses reliable and validated measures to investigate students' psychological and subjective wellbeing, as well as levels of psychological distress, anxiety and depressive symptoms.

The Survey also investigates seven common academic experiences that play an important role in supporting (or impeding) university students' psychological health and wellbeing (see Larcombe et al., 2022):

- *Academic stress*
- *Course value*
- *Academic self-efficacy*
- *Teacher support*
- *Peer engagement*
- *Sense of belonging at university*
- *University climate*

We refer to these experiences as dimensions of, or necessary conditions for, 'academic wellbeing' – that component of students' overall psychological, social and emotional health that we believe universities have a unique responsibility to manage.

In researching academic wellbeing, we focus on aspects of student experiences that universities can modify – through policy initiatives, curriculum design, teaching and learning practices and resourcing decisions. We also focus on experiences that are common to all university students so that institutional actions to improve these experiences are likely to have the widest possible reach.

This report

Based on students' responses from eight diverse Australian institutions, this report presents key findings on:

- Students' levels of psychological distress and wellbeing.
- Supports available for students.
- Associated academic experiences and trajectories.

The results are shown for each institution individually as well as for the combined sample. Institutions are anonymised and referred to as Institutions A-H.

2. Characteristics of university participants

Participation

The Uni Student Wellbeing Survey, administered at 11 Australian universities in Year 1 (between October 2023 – July 2024), asked undergraduate students to rate dimensions of their mental health, wellbeing and academic experiences. The Survey also elicited information about students' life responsibilities, socio-demographic backgrounds, undergraduate experiences and study challenges.

Table 1 shows the eight participating institutions included in this Year 1 report (i.e. those with response rates >1%). These institutions are characterised by size and, where possible without risking identification, their location (i.e. regional or metropolitan). The sample comprises five medium-sized, two small, and one large university, with a higher representation of regional institutions compared to metropolitan ones. All states and territories are represented, except Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The sample includes universities from the Regional University Network (RUN) and Innovative Research Universities (IRU).

The Survey was conducted in all participating institutions between April and July 2024, except for B and H which were surveyed in October 2023 as part of a pilot study. Response rates among the eight institutions included in this report ranged from 3.3% to 17.2%, with an overall response rate of 13.0% (see Table 1). A total of 10,048 undergraduate students were considered for this report, with 7,725 providing a complete response.[1] The findings in this report are based on the responses of these 7,725 students.

[1] A response is considered 'complete' if more than 75% or three-quarters of questions are answered, including at least five of the six Kessler-6 items, seven of the eight Flourishing Scale items (see Section 3) and demographic items required for sample weighting. Responses from three universities were excluded from this report due to very low response rates (i.e. <1%).

Table 1. Participating institutions and response rates

Institution	A	B*	C	D	E	F	G	H*	Overall
Institution Type	Medium regional	Small	Medium regional	Medium regional	Small	Medium regional	Medium regional	Large Metro	
Survey Observations	2,625	131	2,104	1,055	925	1,230	662	1,316	10,048
Complete Cases	2,091	84	1,644	864	688	1,039	398	917	7,725
Survey Response Rate (%)	17.2	15.8	14.0	13.4	9.6	9.1	4.1	3.3	13.0
Complete Case Response Rate (%)	13.7	10.1	10.9	10.9	7.1	7.7	2.5	2.3	10.3

Note: * These institutions were surveyed in 2023.

Students' characteristics and circumstances

Students in the overall sample are diverse in their characteristics and report significant stressors. Some key highlights include: 63.8% of students stated that their financial situation is a major source of stress; almost a third (32.0%) often worry about safety, food or housing; and 38.0% found it hard to plan ahead, given world events. In addition to their studies, 41.2% of students work at least 20 hours per week in paid employment, and 32.4% need to care directly for a family member at least 5 hours per week. Many students therefore face significant challenges balancing their university life with financial pressures and personal commitments. Full details of students' personal characteristics and life circumstances are reported in Tables A1-A4 in Appendix A.

Demographic characteristics

- The (weighted) analysis samples included:
  - 34.5% who were aged ≥ 25.
  - 59.8% who identified as a Woman or female.
  - 11.1% who were overseas/international enrolments.
- Other characteristics:
  - 14.9% reported that English is not their native or preferred language.
  - 17.6% identified as LGBTIQA+.
  - 12.7% reported having a disability, among which 66.7% had notified their university about it.

Housing, finances and security

- 48.4% were living with parents or family members.
- 34.1% were receiving a government support payment.
- 63.8% agreed that their financial situation is a significant source of stress.
- 32.0% agreed that they often worry about safety, food or housing.
- 38.0% agreed that, given world events, they find it hard to imagine and plan for the future.

Weekly hours spent working or undertaking caring responsibilities

- 41.2% spent 20+ hours per week in paid employment.
- 32.2% spent 5+ hours per week caring for one or more family members.

Enrolment and study

- 73.3% were enrolled full-time.
- 44.5% were studying primarily or entirely face-to-face, whereas 27.3% were studying primarily or entirely online.
- 34.5% were in the first year of their course.

3. Students' mental health and wellbeing

Levels of psychological distress and wellbeing

Good mental health is more than the absence of mental ill-health; positive wellbeing is also essential for a person to reach their potential and thrive (WHO, 2022). Recognizing this, the Uni Student Wellbeing Survey examines both the positive and negative dimensions of mental health and wellbeing using reliable and validated measures of psychological distress and psychological wellbeing.[2]

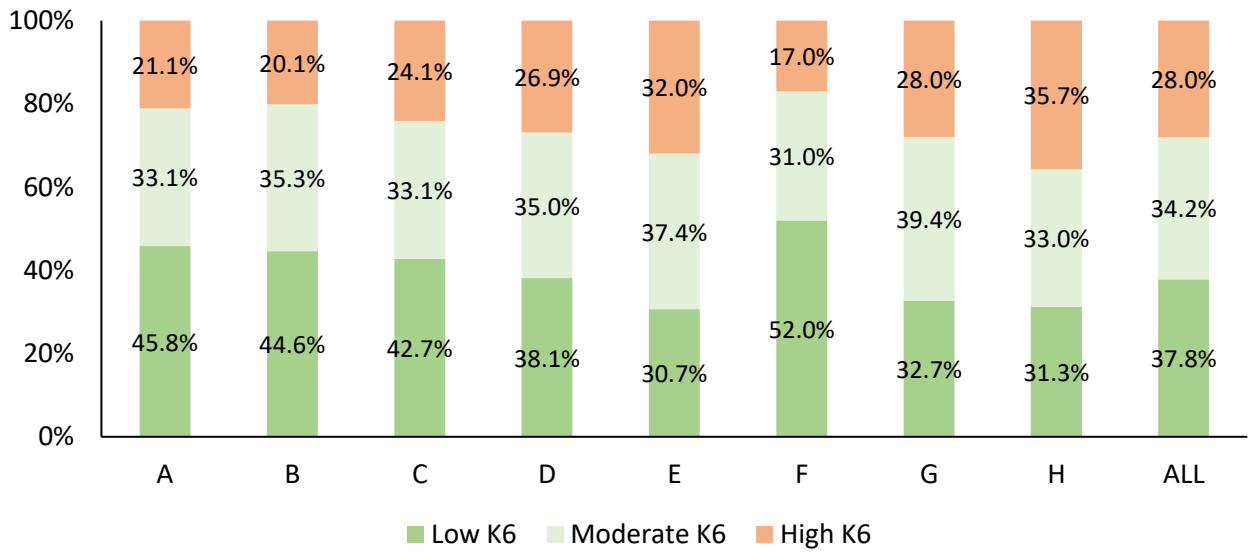
Psychological Distress is measured by Kessler et al.'s (2002) Kessler-6 (K6), which assesses the presence and severity of symptoms associated with negative emotional states such as low mood, stress, anxiety and depression.

Psychological Wellbeing is measured by Diener et al.'s (2009) Flourishing scale (FS), which assesses the presence of positive emotions, positive functioning and social wellbeing, including optimism, self-esteem, sense of purpose and positive relationships.

Figures 1 and 2, respectively, report the proportion of students in each psychological distress category (based on the K6) and psychological wellbeing category (based on the FS), by institution and for the overall sample. Approximately two in seven students experienced High distress, with the highest prevalence among students in Institution E (32.0%) and Institution H (35.7%). In contrast, more than half (52.0%) of students in Institution F were in the Low distress category.

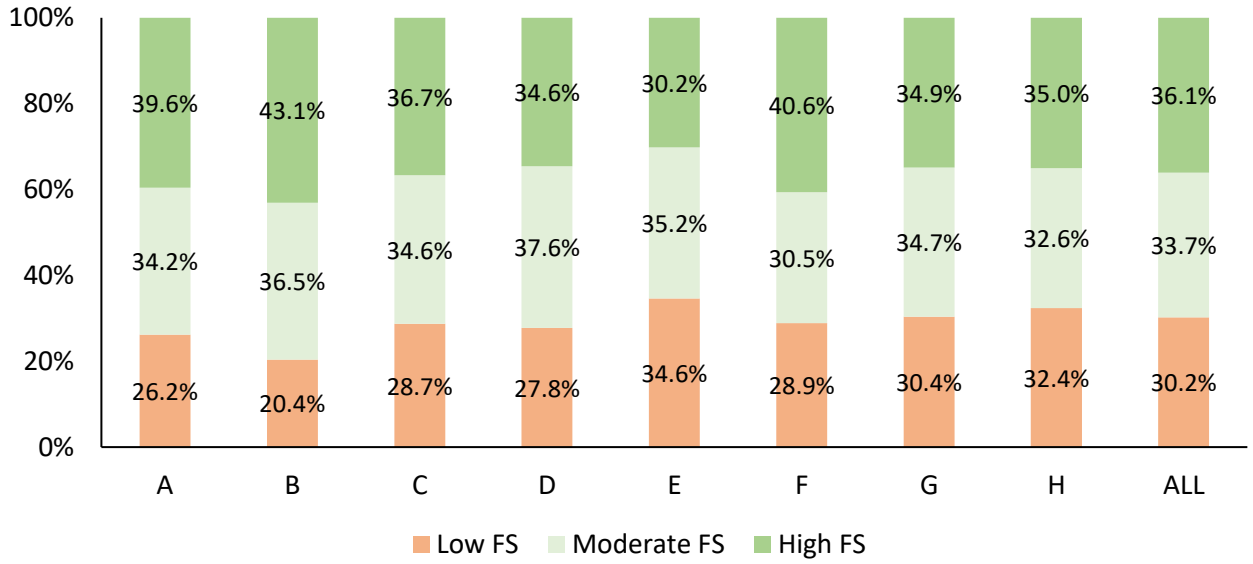
In terms of psychological wellbeing (Figure 2), just over one third of students were classified as having High wellbeing, and the prevalence of this classification was spread relatively evenly across institutions. Institution B (43.1%) had the highest proportion of students with High wellbeing, followed Institution F (40.6%).

Figure 1. Psychological distress (K6) response categories, by institution and overall sample



[2] The instruments used in our survey to assess psychological distress and wellbeing afford a 'point-in-time' snapshot of these important dimensions of an individual's mental health. A person's levels of psychological distress and wellbeing will fluctuate over time in response to many factors, including stressors such as exams. For this reason, the survey administration is timed to avoid exam and other high assessment periods which could be expected to temporarily elevate students' levels of psychological distress.

Figure 2. Psychological wellbeing (FS) response categories, by institution and overall sample



Consistent with the dual continua model of mental health (Huppert & Whittington, 2003; Keyes, 2002; 2007),[3] we investigate both high levels of psychological distress and low levels of psychological wellbeing as distinct 'mental health difficulties' that university students may experience. Although the mechanisms differ, both high levels of psychological distress and low levels of psychological wellbeing are expected to negatively impact university students' daily lives and relationships, impairing their ability to focus, plan and study productively, with consequent adverse impacts on academic progress and attainment (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018; Orygen, 2017).

Figure 3 categorises students into distinct groups based on varying levels of psychological distress and psychological wellbeing.[4] Note that, by construction, the category proportions of psychological distress and wellbeing match those reported in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 3 shows that, overall, 42.8% of students experienced at least some mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) difficulties:

- 12.6% reported **High distress only**
- 14.8% reported **Low wellbeing only**
- 15.4% reported both *High distress* **and** *Low wellbeing* – we refer to this group as experiencing Poor mental health and wellbeing (**Poor MHWB**).

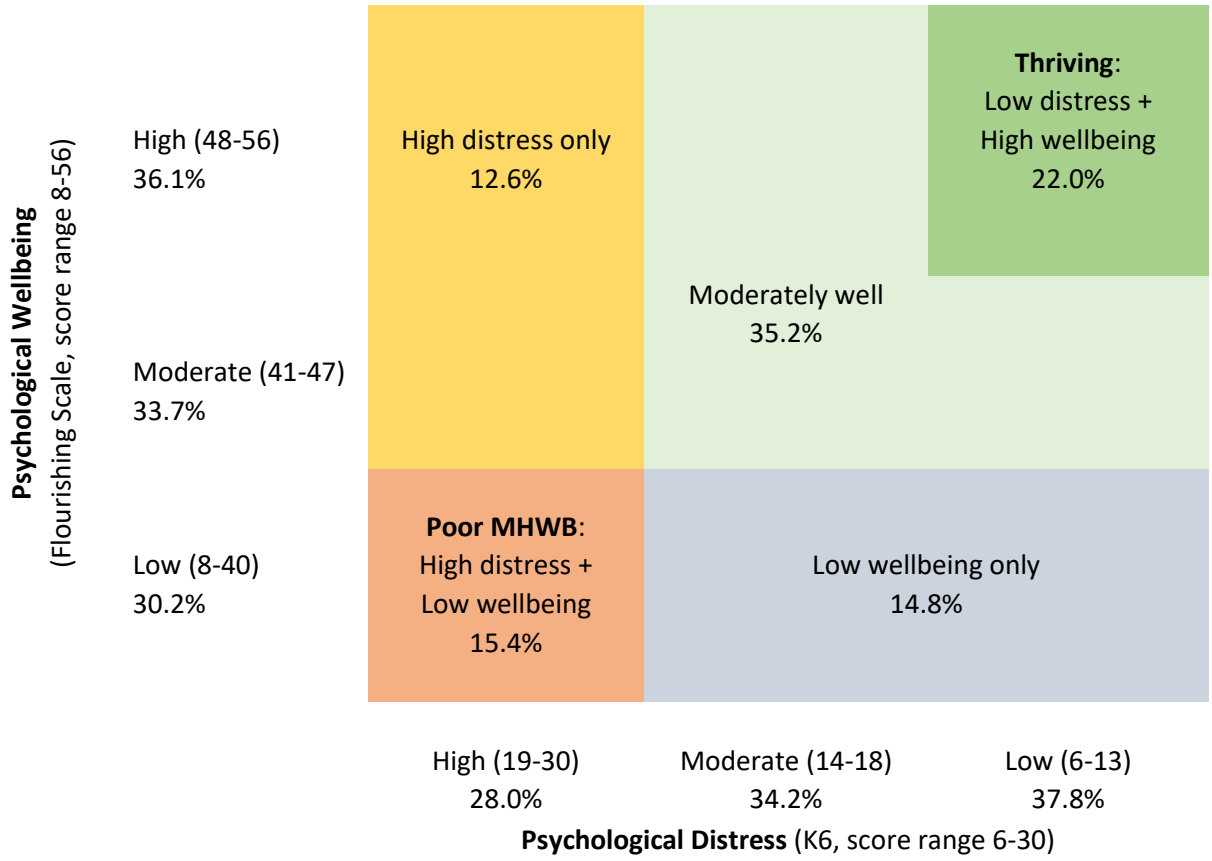
Of the 57.2% of students who did not report MHWB difficulties:

- 35.2% of students were classified as **Moderately well**
- 22.0% were **Thriving** – that is, they reported Low distress *and* High wellbeing.

[3] According to the dual continua model of mental health (Keyes, 2002; 2007), mental ill-health and positive wellbeing are semi-autonomous. Thus, the absence of mental ill-health is not the same as the presence of positive wellbeing and vice versa. For example, people may report high positive wellbeing while experiencing negative emotional states, such as anxiety or stress. Similarly, people may lack resources for flourishing, and so experience de-motivation, apathy and numbness, without reporting mental ill-health (Keyes, 2007).

[4] Symptom severity labels for the K6 were applied in accordance with established cut-offs (ABS, 2012; Mission Australia, 2023): Low (6-13), Moderate (14-18), and High (19-30). For the FS, the label 'High wellbeing' was applied using the established cut-point of greater than or equal to 48 (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018). Low (8-40) and Moderate (41-47) wellbeing categories were created following analysis of descriptive and correlational statistics.

Figure 3. Classifications of students' psychological distress and wellbeing[5]

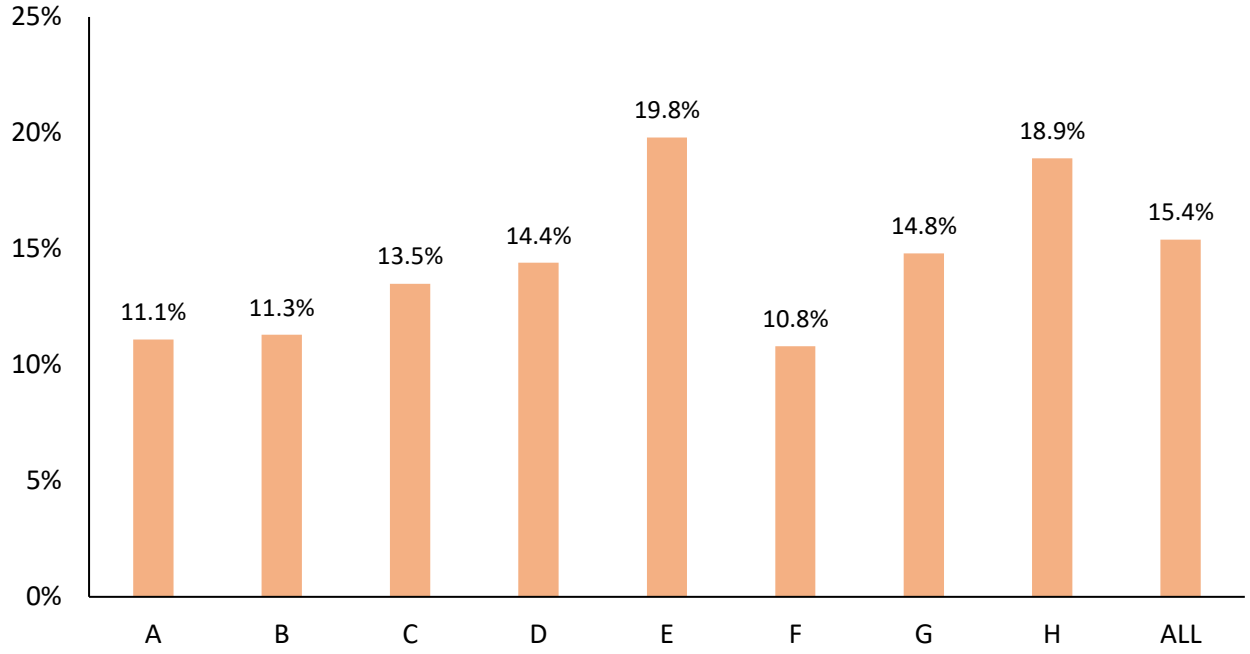


Students' self-ratings of mental health and wellbeing

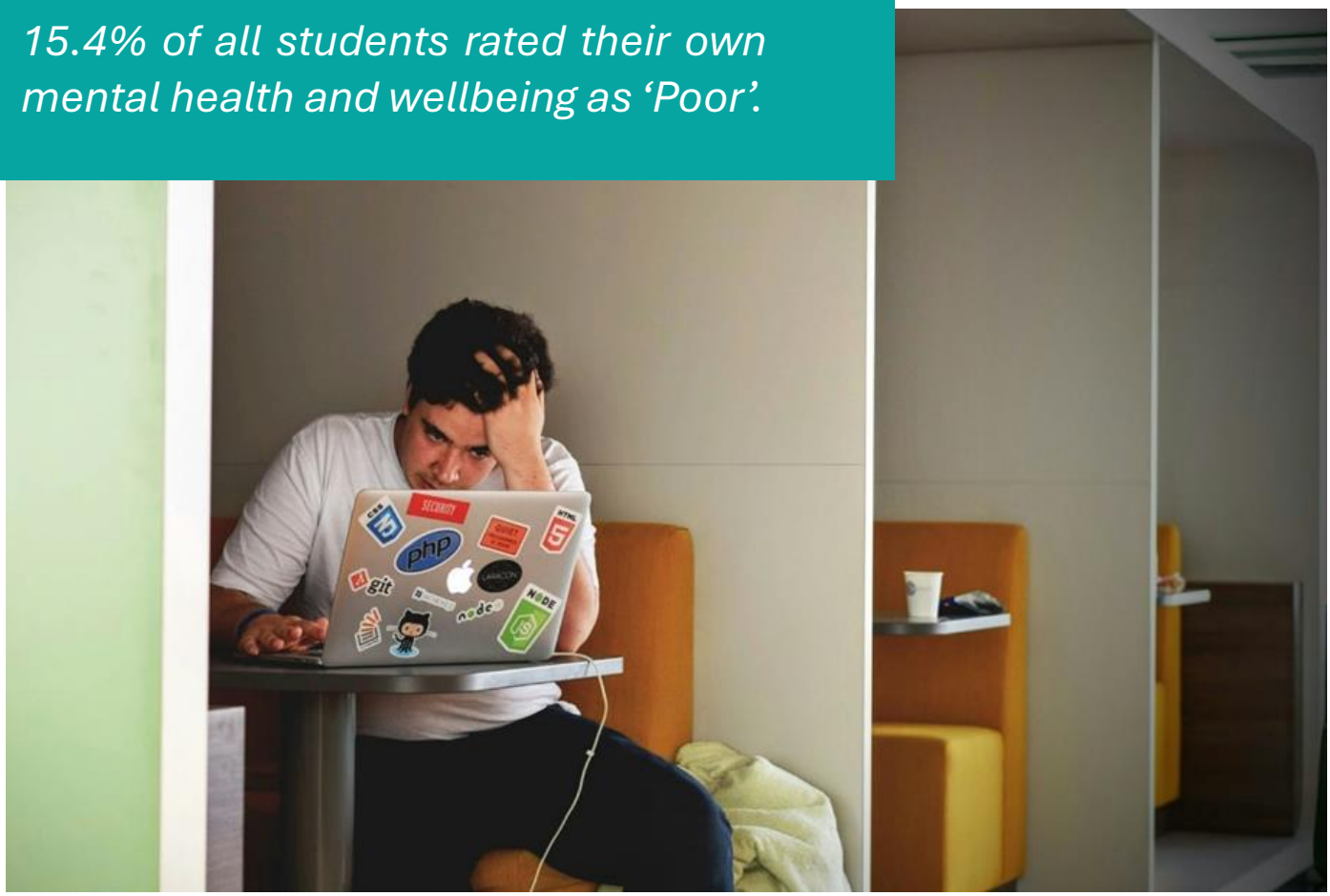
The Survey asked students how they would rate their current overall MHWB. Figure 4 shows, for all students and by institution, the proportion of students who rated their MHWB as 'Poor'. There are some large differences between universities, with Institution F having the lowest proportion of students (10.8%) rating their MHWB as 'Poor' whereas Institutions E (19.8%) and H (18.9%) had the highest proportions of students with 'Poor' ratings. Notably, 15.4% of all students were classified in the Poor MHWB category based on the K6 and FS scores (Figure 1) and the same proportion also rated their overall MHWB as 'Poor'. This strongly suggests that this single self-report item could serve as a brief practical tool for universities to identify students who may require additional support for their MHWB.

[5] This typology of mental health and wellbeing is based on research and theorisation by Keyes (2002; 2007).

Figure 4. Percentage of students who selected 'Poor' for the item 'How would you rate your overall mental health and wellbeing currently?', by institution and for the overall sample



15.4% of all students rated their own mental health and wellbeing as 'Poor'.



4. Support for students experiencing MHWB difficulties

A 'treatment gap'?

Awareness and availability of effective mental health resources and services are crucial in mitigating the impact of mental health challenges. It is essential that these resources are tailored to meet the specific needs of students across varying levels of mental health and wellbeing (MHWB). For example, while students reporting Low wellbeing only may benefit from group- or app-based mental health support, students experiencing High distress (with or without Low wellbeing) may need personalised support, therapy or treatment from a health professional to effectively manage their mental health.

The Survey asked students whether they are currently receiving treatment or therapy for a mental health issue from a health professional. Table 2 reports responses to this question. Overall, 22.8% responded 'Yes', 73.7% responded 'No' and 3.5% preferred not to answer. The proportion of students who reported receiving mental health-related treatment or therapy ranged from 17.7% (Institution G) to 28.4% (Institution F). Table 3 shows those responses only for students with Poor MHWB. The results highlight that 54.4% of students experiencing Poor MHWB reported not receiving treatment or therapy. This proportion is as high as 61.2% among students in Institution D. These results suggest a significant treatment gap, as more than half of all students likely needing professional support are not receiving it.

Table 2. Responses to the item 'Are you currently receiving treatment or therapy for a mental health issue', by institution and overall

Institution	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**ALL**	
Total Observations	**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
Yes	24.8	24.4	26.9	22.1	25.4	28.4	17.7	19.9	1,757.9	22.8
No	71.9	71.7	70.2	75.8	71.0	68.4	79.6	75.5	5,691.6	73.7
Prefer not to say	3.3	3.9	2.8	2.2	3.7	3.2	2.7	4.4	269.2	3.5

Table 3. Students with Poor MHWB: Response to the item 'Are you currently receiving treatment or therapy for a mental health issue', by institution and overall

Institution	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**ALL**	
Total Observations	**234**	**9**	**215**	**125**	**146**	**116**	**57**	**174**	**1076**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
Yes	43.4	78.0	38.0	35.0	45.4	49.7	33.3	33.8	408.1	37.9
No	53.8	9.4	55.5	61.2	49.5	45.6	55.4	56.5	585.4	54.4
Prefer not to say	2.8	12.5	6.5	3.8	5.1	4.7	11.3	8.7	77.8	7.2

More than half (54.4%) of students experiencing Poor MHWB were not currently receiving treatment or therapy from a health professional.

How to improve mental health and wellbeing support?

Four items in the Survey assessed students' awareness of specific forms of mental health and wellbeing support provided by their university (information, services, personal support and academic support). A fifth item gauged whether students perceived their university to be generally supportive of their wellbeing as a student.

The statements related to each item, and the proportion of students agreeing (i.e., selecting 'agree' or 'strongly agree') with each statement, are presented in Table 4. The results indicate that there is significant scope for universities to enhance support and information regarding available services. Just over half (52.6%) of all students agreed that they receive as much information about wellbeing and mental health as they need, and 77.6% agreed that they are aware of available academic support initiatives. Overall, 64.0% of students agree that their university supports their general wellbeing as a student, although agreement with this statement is notably lower (55.9%) among students in Institution H.

Table 4. Agreement with university support items, by institution and overall

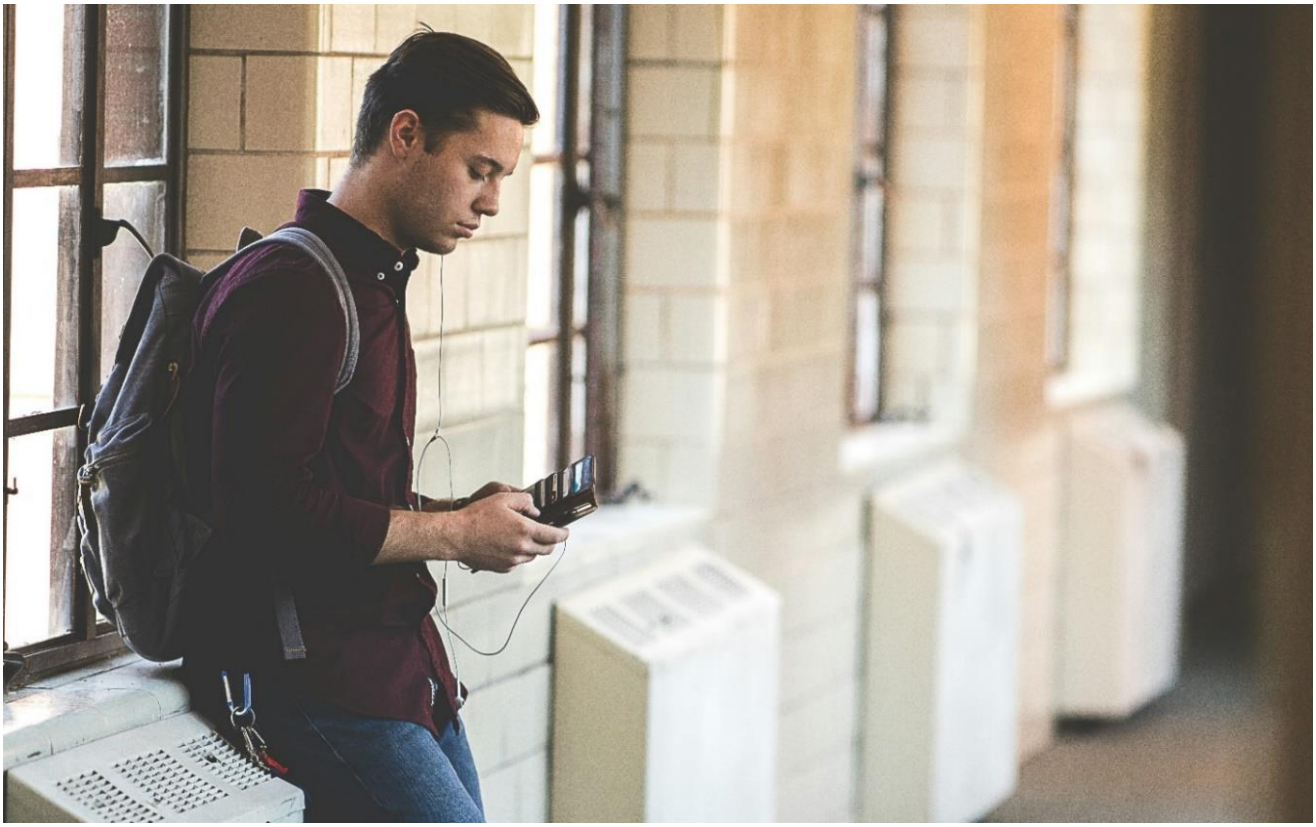
Institution	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**ALL**	
Total Observations	**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
At university, I receive as much information about wellbeing and mental health as I need	51.5	56.6	62.9	46.3	48.5	52.8	59.1	48.4	4,060.4	52.6
At university, I have access to student support services (on campus or online) that I would trust	62.3	69.6	67.5	59.5	60.7	56.8	70.1	57.2	4,743.4	61.4
At university, I have at least one person (staff or student) who I can turn to for support	51.9	90.1	64.1	74.9	65.6	51.8	72.2	58.1	4,724.3	61.2
At university, I know that academic support is available if I need it	82.0	85.1	84.4	75.9	75.1	81.1	81.1	71.5	5,997.1	77.6
In general, I feel that this university supports my wellbeing as a student	65.7	77.4	72.1	62.2	60.5	67.0	74.5	55.9	4,947.8	64

Viewing rates of agreement with university support items among students with Poor MHWB (Table 5) reveals a vastly different picture. For all statements, students with Poor MHWB are much more likely to report lower agreement as compared to the overall sample. Just over a third (34.4%) agree that they receive the required information about health and wellbeing, 42.7% feel they have access to student support services they would trust, and 42.4% have at least one person they can turn to for support. Notably, only 42.8% agree that their university supports their general student wellbeing, with especially low agreement with this statement among students in Institution D (37.6%) and Institution H (32.2%).

Less than half (42.7%) of the students with Poor MHWB agreed that they have access to student support services that they would trust.

Table 5. Students with Poor MHWB: Agreement with university support items, by institution and overall

Institution	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations	**234**	**9**	**215**	**125**	**146**	**116**	**57**	**174**	**1076**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
At university, I receive as much information about wellbeing and mental health as I need	34.1	46.7	46.6	40.5	35.1	39.7	37.6	27.7	369.7	34.4
At university, I have access to student support services (on campus or online) that I would trust	50.6	56.1	44.9	50.7	41.3	42.9	52.1	36.2	459.6	42.7
At university, I have at least one person (staff or student) who I can turn to for support	36.9	90.6	38.1	52.7	48.3	31.9	51.2	40.4	455.8	42.4
At university, I know that academic support is available if I need it	73.4	78.0	71.3	69.3	64.0	59.8	63.8	53.9	662.7	61.6
In general, I feel that this university supports my wellbeing as a student	52.2	56.1	51.6	37.6	46.7	49.8	56.1	32.2	460.7	42.8



5. Academic trajectories of students reporting MHWB difficulties

Students who report experiencing MHWB difficulties – that is, those in the High distress only, Low wellbeing only or Poor MHWB categories – are at higher risk of academic attrition (non-completion of their course or 'dropping out' of university) and poorer academic attainment (see Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018; Naylor et al., 2018). Such students also report lower satisfaction with their courses and university experiences than students who are not experiencing MHWB difficulties.[6]

Persistence/attrition

Table 6 reports that 80.3% of all students were confident that they would be able to complete their course. In contrast, 20.9% of students have seriously considered dropping out or leaving university. These results change substantially when considering only the responses of students experiencing Poor MHWB (Table 7). Among this group of students, just over half (53.4%) expressed confidence in their ability to complete their course and 43.3% have considered leaving or dropping out of university. Across all institutions, confidence in course completion and thoughts of leaving university are substantially lower and higher, respectively, among students in Poor MHWB than in the overall sample. These findings suggest that better mental health and wellbeing are strongly associated with academic persistence and confidence.

Table 6. Agreement with completion/attrition items, by institution and overall

Institution	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**ALL**	
Total Observations	**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
I am confident that I will be able to finish my course	85.1	75.9	83.8	81.7	79.2	85.4	80.6	75.1	6,201.0	80.3
I have thought seriously about leaving uni or dropping out this year	19.8	20.1	20.4	19.7	21.7	17.6	17.1	24.3	1,613.2	20.9

Table 7. Students with Poor MHWB: Agreement with completion/attrition items, by institution and overall

Institution	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**ALL**	
Total Observations	**234**	**9**	**215**	**125**	**146**	**116**	**57**	**174**	**1076**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
I am confident that I will be able to finish my course	68.2	43.6	57.0	58.2	54.9	63.5	62.3	43.0	574.3	53.4
I have thought seriously about leaving uni or dropping out this year	30.8	62.7	46.3	45.0	47.7	37.3	36.0	47.6	467.0	43.4

Students who agreed that they had thought seriously about leaving uni or dropping out were subsequently asked to state what factors had prompted these thoughts: 1,473 students provided open-text responses, which were analysed and thematically coded (see Table 8 for a description of these themes). Tables 9 and 10 report the reasons students provided for considering leaving or dropping out of university for the entire sample and among students with Poor MHWB, respectively.

[6] We understand the relationship between students' academic persistence, attainment and satisfaction on one hand and MHWB on the other hand to be bi-directional. Thus, although MHWB difficulties can impair students' academic engagement, performance and progress, perceived threats to academic achievement (attainment or completion) as well as doubts about course choices and quality can in turn undermine students' MHWB.

Table 8. Students' reasons for considering leaving or dropping out of uni

What factors made you think seriously about leaving or dropping out of uni this year?
Situational stressors, including difficulty managing multiple commitments; financial pressures; and difficult personal circumstances.
Health and wellbeing, including stress or mental health difficulties.
Motivation, engagement and sense of purpose, including loss or lack of motivation, interest and engagement with the course.
Course experiences and satisfaction, including assessment stress and heavy workload; the course being more difficult, or performance lower, than expected; lack of academic support; and course satisfaction.
University environment, administration and support, including poor experiences with support services.
Reasons not fitting under the categories listed above

As shown in Table 9, students in the overall sample identified *situational stressors* as the most prevalent issue, with half (50.0%) citing challenges balancing multiple commitments, financial pressures, and other personal difficulties. In addition, 45.3% of all students cited *course experiences and satisfaction* as a factor in considering leaving university, including issues such as assessment stress and heavy workload, lack of academic support, and the course difficulty or performance not aligning with their expectations.

Table 9. Analysis of students' reasons for thinking seriously about leaving or dropping out of university, by institution and overall

Institutions	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**ALL**	
Unique Respondents	**400**	**16**	**314**	**161**	**148**	**174**	**62**	**198**	**1473**	
	%	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Situational stressors	53.0	37.5	55.7	40.4	41.2	62.6	58.1	36.9	737	50.0
Health and wellbeing	18.5	31.3	23.6	13.7	21.6	14.4	16.1	27.8	297	20.2
Motivation, engagement and sense of purpose	16.5	18.8	17.2	18.6	17.6	19.0	19.4	21.2	266	18.1
Course experiences and satisfaction	42.5	43.8	44.6	57.8	54.7	35.6	33.9	47.5	668	45.3
University environment, administration and support	8.3	37.5	9.2	12.4	14.2	6.3	8.1	15.2	155	10.5
Reasons not fitting under the categories listed above	0.3	0.0	2.5	2.5	1.4	1.1	1.6	3.0	24	1.6
Unclear reason	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.9	0.7	1.1	0.0	0.5	14	1.0

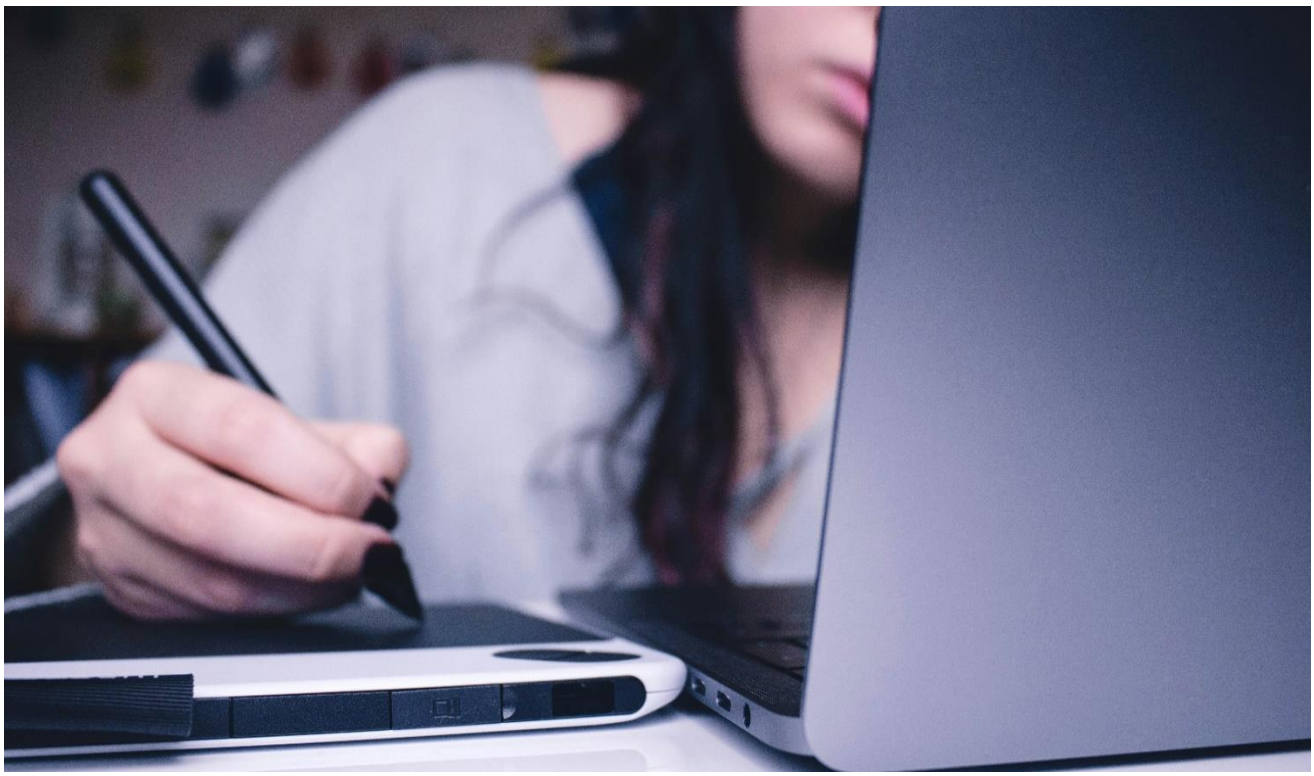
Note: Column totals do not add up to 100 because students could provide multiple reasons.

For students with Poor MWHB (Table 10), the proportions across most themes are very similar to those in the overall sample. The largest difference is in terms of *health and wellbeing*, with 29.0% of students in poor MHWB (compared to 20.2% of students in the total sample) citing stress and mental health difficulties as reasons for considering dropping out. Furthermore, 19.7% of students highlighted *motivation, engagement and sense of purpose*, including factors such as lack of motivation or interest. Together, these findings strongly suggest that students face a multifaceted set of challenges that can impact their decision to persist in higher education.

Table 10. Students with poor MHWB: Analysis of reasons for thinking seriously about leaving or dropping out of university, by institution and overall

Institutions	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Unique Respondents	71	6	94	52	67	40	21	76	427	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
Situational stressors	60.6	33.3	56.4	44.2	47.8	75.0	57.1	28.9	217	50.8
Health and wellbeing	26.8	50.0	34.0	21.2	28.4	12.5	33.3	36.8	124	29.0
Motivation, engagement and sense of purpose	15.5	16.7	17.0	23.1	19.4	27.5	19.0	21.1	84	19.7
Course experiences and satisfaction	40.8	50.0	41.5	57.7	49.3	40.0	23.8	52.6	195	45.7
University environment, administration and support	8.5	50.0	5.3	13.5	13.4	2.5	14.3	21.1	50	11.7
Reasons not fitting under the categories listed above	0.0	0.0	5.3	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	7	1.6
Unclear reason	1.4	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.3	4	0.9

Note: Column totals do not add up to 100 because students could provide multiple reasons.



Course and uni satisfaction overall

Students' responses to questions related to their courses and university satisfaction are reported in Table 11 (overall sample) and Table 12 (students in Poor MHWB). Significant proportions of students reported negative perceptions about their courses and university experiences. For example, 34.6% of all students had doubts about whether the degree they were studying is *worth the time, money and effort*, and over a quarter (26.1%) rated their quality of their university experience as either 'poor' or 'fair'.

Dissatisfaction was much higher among students in Poor MHWB. Notably, 58.0% had doubts about whether their degree is worth the time, money and effort, and a further 20.7% are not satisfied with the

quality of their course. Moreover, 21.7% of students would not choose their current course again, and almost half (49.6%) rated the quality of their university experience as 'poor' or 'fair'.

These findings suggest a strong relationship between students' mental health and wellbeing and their satisfaction with their course and university experience, and perceptions of their degree's value. These negative perceptions are substantially higher among students experiencing Poor MHWB.

Table 11. Negative ratings of course and university satisfaction, by institution and overall

Institution	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations	**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course (*Disagree)	8.8	3.9	7.6	10.5	11.8	6.5	4.6	10.7	676.3	8.8
I have doubts about whether the degree I am studying is worth the time, money and effort (*Agree)	28.1	21.1	32.9	34.6	42.2	26.7	36	38.4	2670.8	34.6
If I could start my time at university again, I would not choose my current course (*Agree)	10.2	7.7	9.7	11.1	14.6	9.0	12.0	19.0	1048.3	13.6
How would you rate the quality of your university experience so far? (*Poor or Fair)	21.1	14.5	21.2	25.4	34.1	17.3	24.3	32.1	2013.6	26.1

Table 12. Students with Poor MHWB: Negative ratings of course and university satisfaction, by institution and overall

Institution	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations	**234**	**9**	**215**	**125**	**146**	**116**	**57**	**174**	**1076**	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course (*Disagree)	13.5	22.0	11.7	21.8	20.6	11.2	15.2	28.2	222.2	20.7
I have doubts about whether the degree I am studying is worth the time, money and effort (*Agree)	45.8	59.2	61.1	66.8	66.0	53.8	69.1	53.8	624.0	58.0
If I could start my time at university again, I would not choose my current course (*Agree)	14.7	24.7	15.2	21.2	21.4	15.7	25.6	25.2	233.7	21.7
How would you rate the quality of your university experience so far? (*Poor or Fair)	35.0	43.9	37.9	50.0	61.5	30.5	47.8	57.5	533.4	49.6

Almost three in five (58.0%) students with Poor MHWB reported having doubts about whether the degree they are studying is worth the time, money and effort.

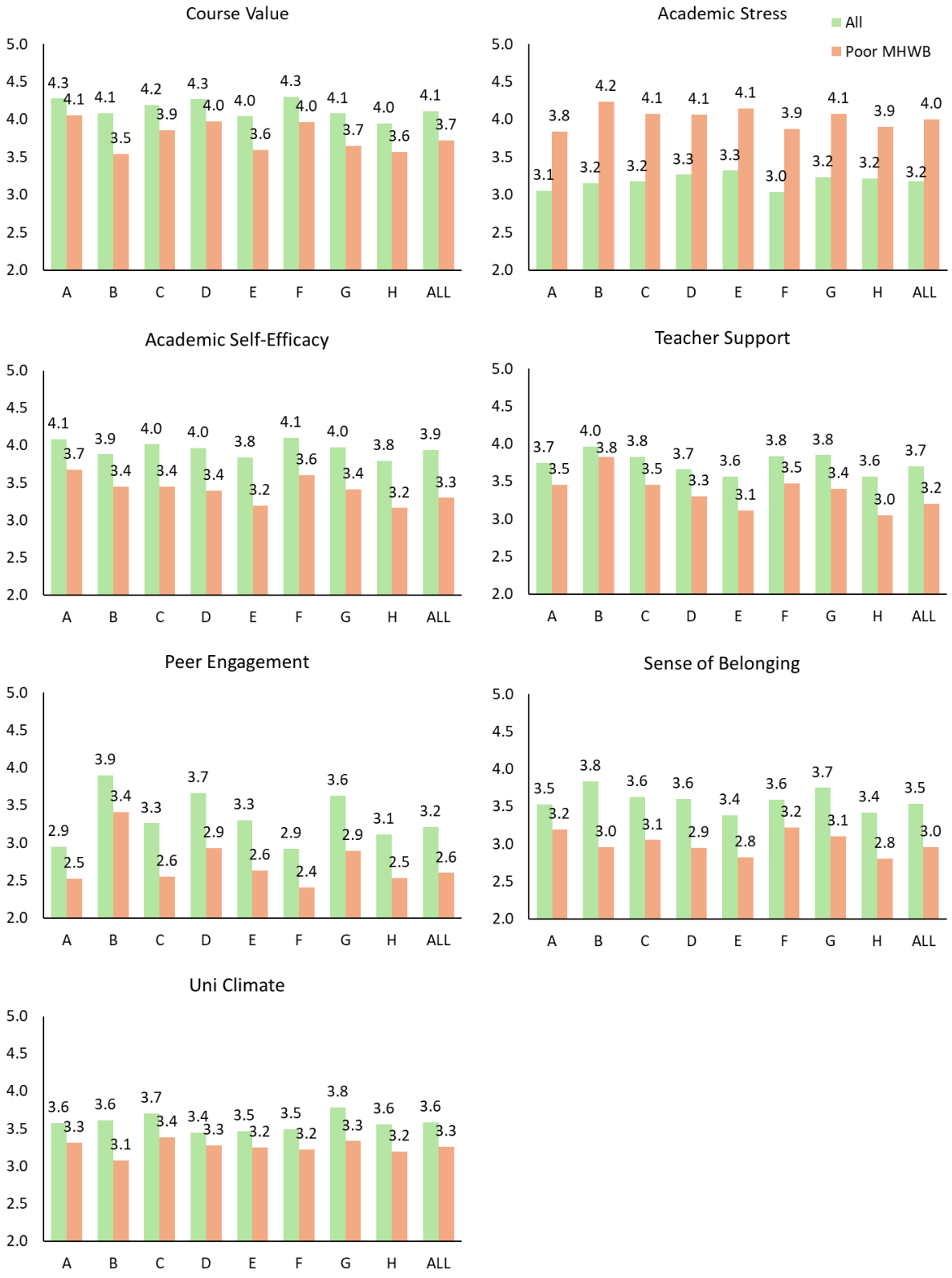
6. Academic experiences of students

We examined the different academic experiences of the overall sample of students, and those with Poor MHWB. The Survey measured five course-related experiences (*academic stress*, *course value*, *academic self-sufficiency*, *teacher support*, and *peer engagement*) and two university-level experiences (*sense of belonging* and *university climate*) using multi-item scales (see Appendix B, Table B1). *Academic stress* was evaluated as a negative experience, (representing a psychological stressor), whereas the other six scales were framed positively (psychological resources).

Figure 5 reports the mean scores (possible score range 1-5, observed score range 2.4 to 4.5) on each of these scales for students experiencing Poor MHWB and for the overall sample. Key findings include:

- Among the positive experiences, *peer engagement* had the lowest mean score (3.2) for all students, followed by *sense of belonging at university* (3.5).
- Students experiencing Poor MHWB report the highest mean score for *academic stress* (4.0) and the lowest mean score for *peer engagement* (2.6).
- For all academic experiences, and within each institution, students in Poor MHWB report worse mean scores as compared to the overall sample.
- Differences in mean scores between the overall group and students with Poor MHWB are especially large in relation to *academic stress*.

Figure 5. Mean academic experience scores, by institution, for the overall sample and students with Poor MHWB



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the students who took the time to participate in the Survey. We also thank our international project partners, Professor Daniel Eisenberg and Dr Nicola Byrom, for their valuable insights and contributions to the project. We acknowledge and greatly appreciate the advice and support of our Expert Advisory Group members, Professor Alison Calear, George Habib, Professor Eóin Killackey, Professor Patrick McGorry, Vikki Ryall, Professor Richard Ryan, Professor Dan Woodman, and the late Professor Felicia Huppert who provided valuable advice on our project design. In addition, we would like to thank our Student Reference Group members for their insights and feedback. They include Heidee Austic, Amelia Cotsanis, Riley Jones, Manisha Kulasinghe, Liam McLaren, Bailey Riley, Tess Robb, Isaac Soloman, John Sopar, and Harrison Zheng. Finally, we thank staff who assisted with administration of the Survey at each of the participating institutions. All images included in this report are copyright free and were sourced from Unsplash (unsplash.com). We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the photographers: Annie Spratt, David Kennedy, Eliott Reyna, Füm, Josefa Ndiaz, Philippe Bout and Tim Gouw.

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Appendix A: Participant details

Table A1. Students' demographic characteristics, by institution and overall

Institution		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations		**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
		%	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Age	<=20	25.4	40.3	39.8	34.8	46.5	10.2	53.4	33.3	2,650.3	34.3
	21-24	16.3	38.1	25.3	39.7	34	19.8	34.4	39.3	2,406.0	31.1
	>=25	58.3	21.5	34.9	25.4	19.6	69.9	12.2	27.4	2,668.8	34.5
Gender descriptor	Women, female	58.9	66.4	68.5	64.6	54.1	67.2	56.7	55.7	4,618.4	59.8
	Man, male	39.4	32.6	29.4	33.6	42	29.9	42.1	41.7	2,927.8	37.9
	Non-binary, other term	1.8	1.1	2.1	1.7	3.9	2.9	1.2	2.6	178.7	2.3
International student	Yes	6	6.9	11.4	9.5	16.2	3.1	27.4	8.2	855.3	11.1
Identify as LGBTIQA+	Yes	14.2	4.6	18.8	14.7	25	18.5	17.3	17.2	1,358.5	17.6
	Missing	0.6	0	0.9	0.2	2.5	0.7	1.8	0.2	61.7	0.8
Identify as Indigenous	Yes	4.7	1.1	4.6	5.7	3.3	5.1	2.1	3.4	298.9	3.9
	Missing	0.7	0	0.9	0.2	2.3	0.5	1.9	0	56.7	0.7
English is native or preferred language	No	11.1	5.7	12.6	10.3	16.2	6.3	22.8	17.9	1,150.8	14.9
	Missing	0.4	0	0.8	0.2	2.2	0.5	2	0	53.4	0.7
Have a disability	Yes	12.2	12.7	15.1	11.3	11.8	17	11.3	11.4	978.8	12.7
	Missing	3.3	0	3.5	2.3	4.4	3.1	3.4	0.4	180.9	2.3
*Disability notified to university**	Yes	71.3	NA	79.5	77.3	73.7	75.9	66.7	NA	695.0	66.7
	Missing	0	NA	0.4	1	0	0	0	NA	118.0	11.3
First in family to attend university	Yes	42.2	22.6	38.5	29.6	25.2	40.2	34.6	38.5	2,848.4	36.9
	Missing	0.5	0	0.8	0.3	2.3	0.5	1.9	0	53.3	0.7
Receiving government payment	Yes	30.2	41.4	33.1	38.6	25.2	34	28	39.8	2,637.2	34.1
	Missing	0.5	0	0.8	0.3	2.1	0.7	1.8	0.2	58.6	0.8
Living situation	Uni residential college or apartment	4.8	46.3	4.5	15.2	14.4	8.8	15.3	3	602.8	7.8
	With parent/s or family members	33.8	34.2	51.6	32.5	50.2	21.8	43.5	67.5	3,740.1	48.4
	Sharing with friends / flatmates	8.5	5.3	12.9	26.4	12.6	8.2	24.4	5.4	902.6	11.7
	Living alone	8.4	3.2	6.3	7.3	5.7	12.1	6.6	7.4	592.7	7.7

Institution		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations		**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	%
	With domestic partner	38.6	7.4	18.2	16.1	12.3	41.7	5.7	12.6	1,496.9	19.4
	Other	5.5	3.5	5.6	2.5	2.8	7	2.6	2.9	309.7	4
	Missing	0.5	0	0.8	0.2	2.1	0.4	1.9	1.1	80.2	1
Country of Birth	Australia	78.1	74	73.2	73.4	66.7	84.7	66	68.7	5,577.1	72.2
	Other	21.5	26	26.1	26.2	31.1	14.7	32.2	31.3	2,094.5	27.1
	Missing	0.4	0	0.8	0.5	2.2	0.6	1.9	0	53.4	0.7
From a regional background	Yes	40	34.7	24.3	54.4	21.7	54.7	31.2	11.8	2,209.8	28.6
	Missing	6.6	6.9	12.1	9.6	17.9	3.6	27.6	8.8	900.0	11.7

Note: *This question was only asked in the 2024 surveys. The percentage reported for 'Disability notified to university' is based on the number of respondents who reported that they have a disability. NA = Not asked.

Table A2. Students' situational stressors, by institution and overall

Institution		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations		**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
Survey item	**Answers**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
My financial situation is a significant source of stress	Agree	64.2	60.8	64.5	66.1	62.7	65.0	67.4	61.3	4927.4	63.8
I often worry about safety, food or housing	Agree	32.3	29.7	30.6	34.8	32.3	30.4	35.1	31.0	2468.9	32.0
Given world events, I find it hard to imagine and plan for the future	Agree	29.9	26.5	37.1	33.7	42.7	29.6	43.6	42.2	2937.5	38.0
My English language skills are strong enough for me to understand the course material [Disagree or Neither disagree nor agree = Stressor]	Does not agree	3.7	11.7	4.0	3.0	4.6	2.7	4.0	9.5	437.4	5.7

Table A3. Students' life-loads, by institution and overall

Institution		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations		**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**7725**	
Survey item	**Answers**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
On average, how many hours per week do you usually spend working in paid employment?	0 - 4 hrs	20.6	35.4	25.0	34.4	22.0	25.4	32.7	26.6	2047.5	26.5
	5 - 19 hrs	20.4	39.9	31.9	39.0	37.8	18.4	37.9	31.6	2359.6	30.5
	20+ hrs	57.9	24.7	41.7	26.1	37.7	54.6	26.3	40.1	3182.3	41.2
	Missing	1.1	0.0	1.4	0.5	2.5	1.6	3.1	1.7	135.6	1.8
On average, how many hours per week do you usually spend directly caring for one or more family members?	0 - 4 hrs	52.3	79.2	64.5	76.6	73.1	52.3	77.7	66.7	5069.2	65.6
	5 - 19 hrs	17.8	14.8	16.4	11.6	16.1	16.4	12.9	16.1	1208.9	15.6
	20+ hrs	28.1	6.0	17.0	10.6	7.5	29.5	5.8	15.4	1279.8	16.6
	Missing	1.8	0.0	2.1	1.2	3.3	1.8	3.6	1.8	167.1	2.2

Table A4. Students' enrolment and course details, by institution and overall

Enrolment		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	ALL	
Total Observations		**2091**	**84**	**1644**	**864**	**688**	**1039**	**398**	**917**	**N=7725**	
Survey item	**Answers**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Stage in current course	First year	29.8	36.1	39.0	25.4	32.0	27.4	53.4	31.8	2665.8	34.5
	Later year	70.2	63.9	61.0	74.6	68.0	72.6	46.6	67.7	5045.0	65.3
	Missing	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	14.2	0.2
Course load	Full-time	58.4	88.3	75.9	90.2	80.1	42.8	88.7	77.4	5664.0	73.3
	Part-time	37.9	11.7	18.8	8.7	16.4	55.1	6.6	18.9	1,780.1	23
	Missing	0.5	0.0	0.8	0.2	2.3	0.4	1.9	0.1	54.5	0.7
Broad Field of Study	Humanities and social sciences	41.5	61.5	40.5	21.5	36.1	55.0	42.3	44.5	3279.8	42.5
	Health	29.4	16.2	37.4	54.5	34.4	23.8	26.8	27.3	2370.3	30.7
	STEM	28.5	0.0	20.8	23.8	26.8	20.2	28.8	23.3	1869.6	24.2
	Missing	0.6	22.3	1.3	0.2	2.7	1.0	2.1	4.9	205.3	2.6
Class format	Wholly or mainly online									2111.1	27.3
	Hybrid - half online, half face-to-face									2080.9	26.9
	Wholly or mainly face-to-face (in person)									3438.4	44.5
	Missing	0.5	0.0	0.8	0.2	2.0	0.5	1.8	1.8	94.6	1.3

Appendix B: Academic experiences explored in the Survey

Table B1. Seven key experiences that underpin university students' academic wellbeing

Scale domain	Description	No. of items	Alpha
Course Experiences			
Academic Stress	*What the scale measures*: emotional reactions, such as performance anxiety, prompted by assessment tasks and perceptions of the course workload as overly burdensome. These feelings of helplessness, insecurity or being overwhelmed often impair a student's ability to perform well on academic tasks.	5	.86
Course Value	*What the scale measures:* intrinsic interest in the knowledge and skills taught in their course (intrinsic value), as well as beliefs that what they are learning will be beneficial for their lives and careers (utility value of course). Perceptions of course value drive autonomous motivation for study.	5	.81
Academic Self-Efficacy	*What the scale measures:* beliefs that one is academically capable, and experiences of completing difficult tasks. Students are more likely to experience feelings of competence when they are appropriately challenged or stretched. Competency beliefs and experiences, in combination with perceptions of course value, drive autonomous motivation for study.	3	.80
Teacher Support	*What the scale measures:* experiences of teacher 'autonomy support', including perceptions that teachers: understand and care about students, convey confidence in students' abilities to learn, and motivate and inspire students academically.	3	.89
Peer Engagement	*What the scale measures:* a sense of connection with (or disconnection from) other students, and the extent to which peers provide social, emotional and academic support for the student.	4	.86
University Experiences			
Sense of Belonging at University	*What the scale measures:* a sense of connection and belonging at the University, which may be experienced as feeling 'I am in the right place' or at least feeling comfortable in the University environments. We understand 'Sense of belonging at uni' to be a multi-dimensional construct, influenced by (and influencing) students' course experiences and perceptions of the University climate. Our previous research indicates that Sense of belonging at university is strongly associated with Teacher support, Course value and Peer engagement.	3	.82
University Climate	*What the scale measures:* perceptions that the University cares about or values students *as a group*, with a focus on measures to promote mental wellbeing and social inclusion across the student body. Experiences of Uni climate are influenced by perceptions of how well the University understands and responds to students and student concerns through policies, procedures, and practices. Perceptions of Uni climate, including the status and value of students in the University community, may not reflect students' individual course experiences.	6	.87

Note: Response options for all scales are from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Appendix C: Technical notes

Data collection and analysis

All undergraduate students enrolled at participating universities (except those studying offshore or in ELICOS programs) are invited to complete an anonymous, online survey. As an incentive, participants can enter a prize draw for one of ten $200 vouchers. Survey responses are not linked to students' university records and no identifying information is collected. The Uni Student Wellbeing Survey has Human Research Ethics Committee approval from The University of Melbourne (Project ID: 22126)

Data analysis is being undertaken by the principal researchers from the CSHE in collaboration with an expert team based at the Melbourne Institute, The University of Melbourne. Only responses from completed surveys are analysed. A response is considered complete if more than three-quarters of questions are answered, including at least five of the six K6 items, seven of the eight FS items and demographic items required for sample weighting (if applicable). When institutions provide population data, survey responses are weighted for three key demographic variables – age, gender, and international/domestic status.

Open-text responses collected in the Survey were analysed and thematically coded by one member of the research team. By agreement, initial codes were progressively refined or clustered into themes. Once the themes and sub-themes had been established, at least ten percent of responses were independently coded by a second researcher to ensure inter-rater consistency and reliability.

Weighting

Weights are constructed by assuming all students had an equal chance of selection into the sample (i.e., all students were invited to take part in the Survey) and calibrating the responding sample to university provided totals for age (20 or less, 21-24, and 25 or older), gender descriptor (female or Woman, male or Man, or a different descriptor) and international/domestic enrolment status. Calibration is a method that ensures the weighted sample totals match the university totals. Only those students who reported age, gender and international/domestic status and whose response is considered complete were given a weight. Note that the gender totals have been revised: the proportion in the sample reporting a gender descriptor other than female or male is maintained for the revised (weighted) total (as this is vastly understated in the reported university totals). The proportion split between females and males in the reported university totals is then retained in the residual of the revised (weighted) totals for gender.

Missing values

Out of 10,048 survey participants, this report uses information from 7,725 participants who provided valid information regarding age, gender, and international/domestic enrolment status.

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