PGR Support Survey 2023 Report

Mikaila Jayaweera Bandara (PGR Policy & Enhancement Adviser)

Kiran Faisal (PGR Strategy & Policy Manager)

Mary Beth Kneafsey (Head of Research Governance, Policy & Integrity)

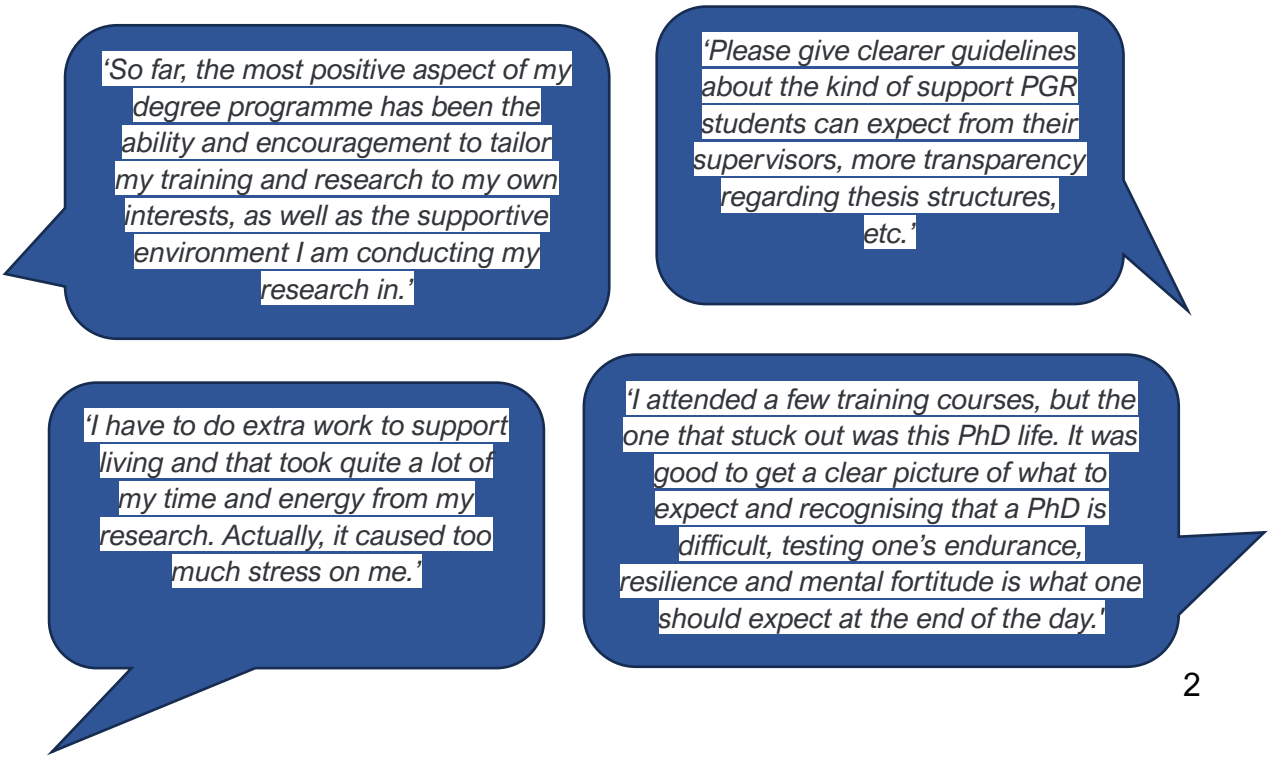
Contents:

Comments 2
Response Rates 3
Positive Aspects of Research Degree Programme 5
Awareness of PGR Information, Communication & Events 7
Researcher/Professional Development 8
Support for Timely Completion 10
Cost-of-living Crisis 16
Appendix Figures 19

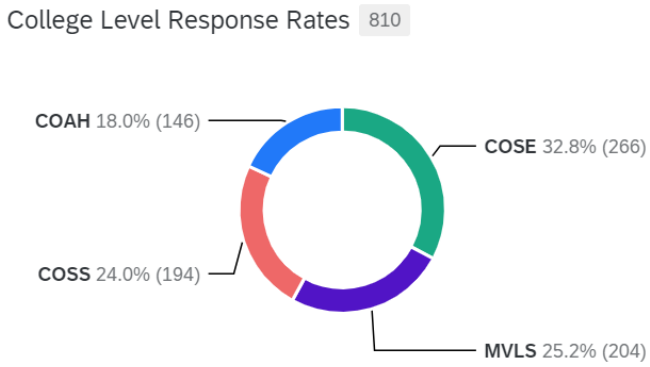
Comments

- The PGR Support Survey 2023 is considered 'part 2' of the PGR Experience Survey 2023. The survey was launched on the 15th November 2023 and was active for one month, gaining 810 respondents in total.
- It is evident that majority of respondents have established positive relationships with their supervisor or supervisory team. Additionally, the support and guidance provided by supervisors to help students complete their research on time is recognised by PGRs.
- Awareness of certain PGR information, communication & events across the University was encouraging, but it should be noted that the bulk of students were in their 1st year of programme, which could play a part in why awareness of certain comms, events or opportunities were less than others.
- Majority of respondents had engaged with Researcher Development training and events and is received well by students, especially writing workshops. The newly launched training management system Inkpath has no doubt been effective for students to get involved and explore the vast training options available.
- The cost-of-living crisis is an important topic that unquestionably will have some sort of influence on students personal and/or academic life, which is why it is no surprise that majority of respondents were experiencing financial challenges or difficulties whilst pursuing their research degree. Although less than half of respondents did not believe the crisis had affected their research and academic progress, those who did greatly expressed its impact on their mental wellbeing and having to work extra jobs outside of their research to help pay for essential living costs.

A few feedback comments from PGR respondents

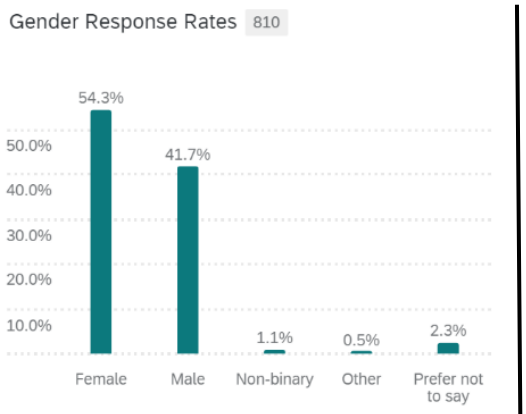


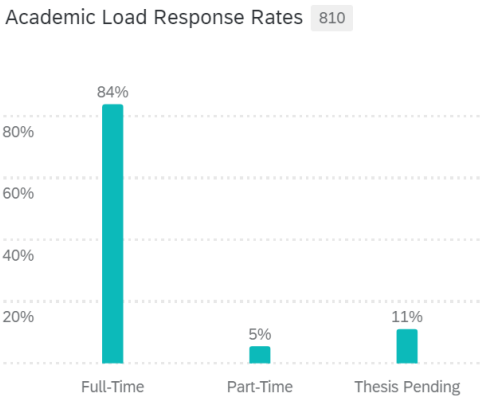
Response Rates

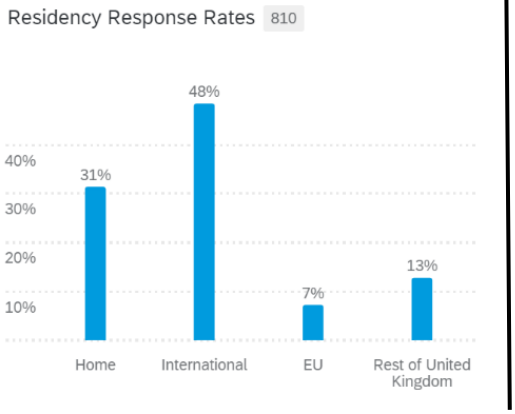


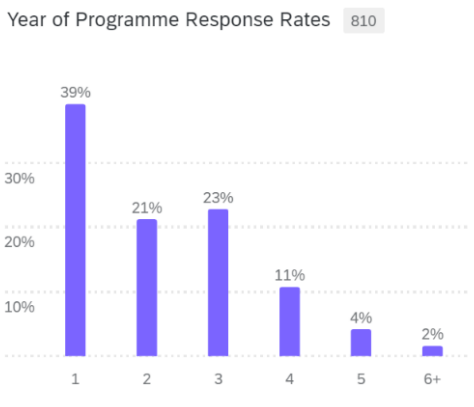
College	% of College Population
COAH	21.1%
MVLS	17.9%
COSE	18.6%
COSS	23.8%

- The PGR Support Survey 2023 had 810 respondents which equated to 19.9% in a total population of 4072 PGR students at the time the survey was launched.
- COSE (32.8%) and The James Watts School of Engineering (11.7%) had the highest response rates at College and School level, respectively.
- 54.3% of respondents were female and 41.7% male. Respondents that identified as non-binary and other, collectively made up 1.6% of PGRs. 2.3% of respondents preferred not to disclose their gender.
- Majority of respondent's academic load were full-time (84%).
- 48% of respondents were international.
- Regarding year of programme, 39% of respondents were in their 1st year and 21% and 23% in their 2nd and 3rd year, respectively.







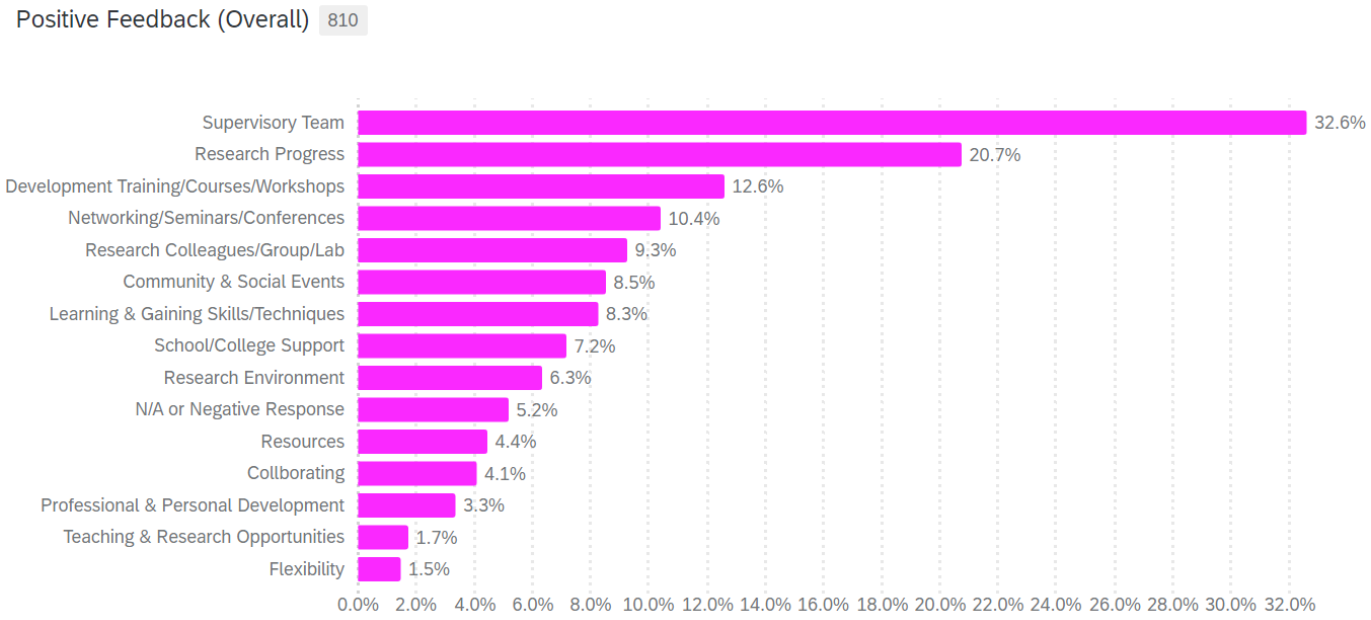


School Level Response Rates 810

School	↓ Count	Count
James Watt School of Engineering	95	11.7%
Education	60	7.4%
Critical Studies	60	7.4%
Computing Science	57	7.0%
Adam Smith Business School	57	7.0%
Social & Political Sciences	50	6.2%
Biodiversity, One Health & Veterinary Medicine	43	5.3%
Humanities	40	4.9%
Health & Wellbeing	36	4.4%
Culture & Creative Arts	32	4.0%
Chemistry	32	4.0%
Physics & Astronomy	31	3.8%
Geographical & Earth Sciences	31	3.8%
Cardiovascular & Metabolic Health	30	3.7%
Infection & Immunity	26	3.2%
Cancer Sciences	23	2.8%
Molecular Biosciences	19	2.3%
Psychology & Neuroscience	18	2.2%
Law	18	2.2%
Medicine, Dentistry & Nursing	13	1.6%
Mathematics & Statistics	13	1.6%
Social & Environmental Sustainability	11	1.4%
Modern Languages & Culture	11	1.4%
Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre	4	0.5%

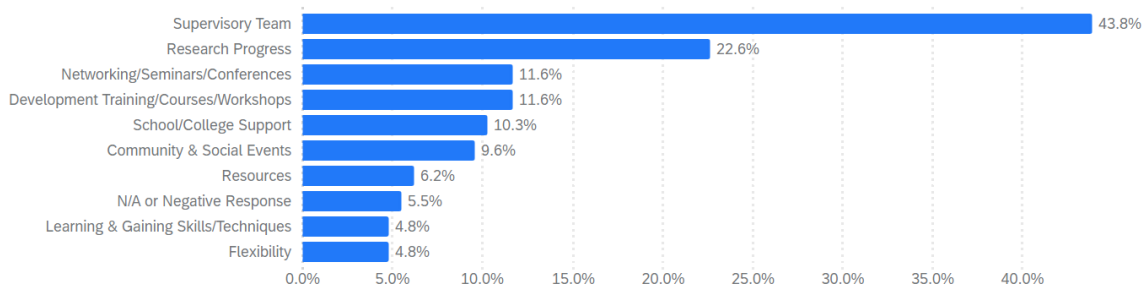
Positive Aspects of Research Degree Programme

Q1: *'What has been the most positive aspect of your research degree programme so far?'*

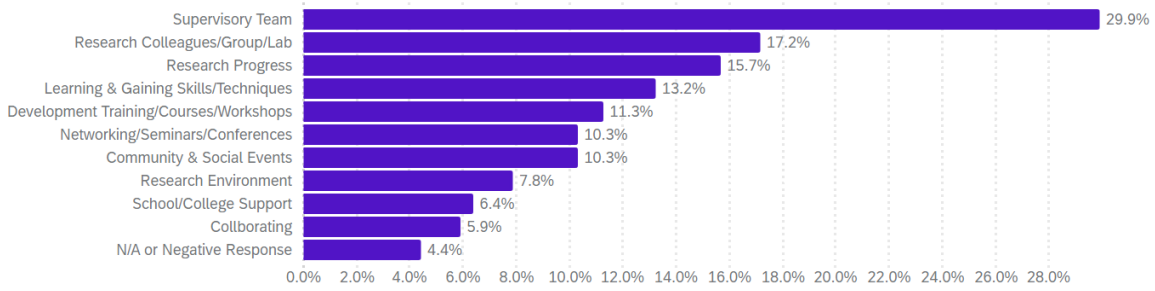


- The top positive aspect (32.6%) of student's research degree programme was their supervisor or supervisory team. This was also mirrored at College level for COAH, MVLS, & COSS, and 2nd for COSE. The support, guidance, and investment provided by student's supervisors was greatly voiced by PGRs and deemed invaluable towards their research progress.
- PGR's research progress, where students expressed enthusiasm for their specific research focus, was the second top positive aspect (20.7%) of student's research degree overall and leading answer for COSE.
- 12.6% of PGRs also communicated their enjoyment and gratitude for the development training, courses and/or workshops they had completed. Attending conferences, seminars and getting a chance to network with other researchers followed closely (10.4%).
- Appreciation for their research colleagues, research group/ lab was expressed by 9.3% of respondents. Student's felt that peer support and progressive relationships gained through their research group contributed to a stimulating and friendly research environment.
- It should be noted that 5.2% of respondents either left the question blank or declared they did not have a positive experience. However, many students who commented that they didn't have anything positive to say about their research degree did not elaborate on a reason. The few that did, mentioned they felt a lack of support from their department, felt pressurised, or felt that even if you complain, nothing will change.

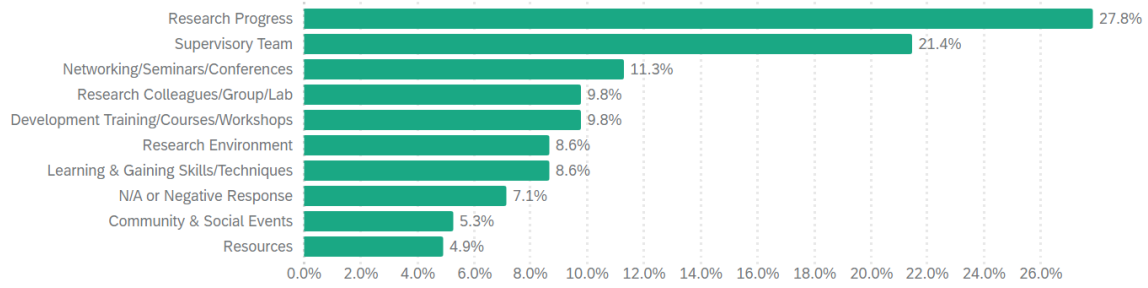
COAH (Top 10) 146



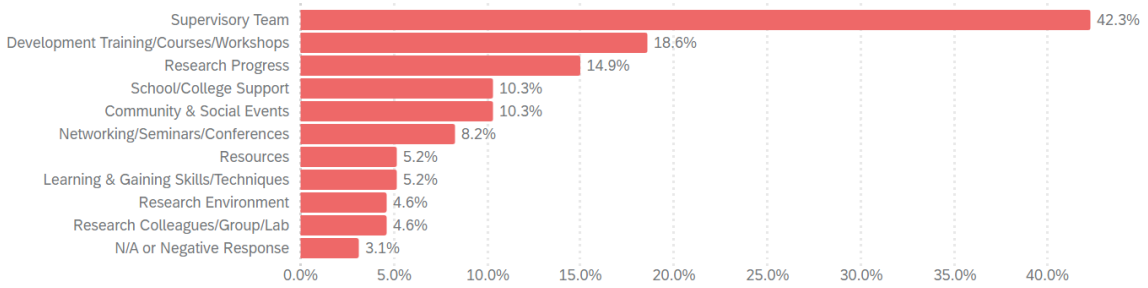
MVLS (Top 10) 204



COSE (Top 10) 266

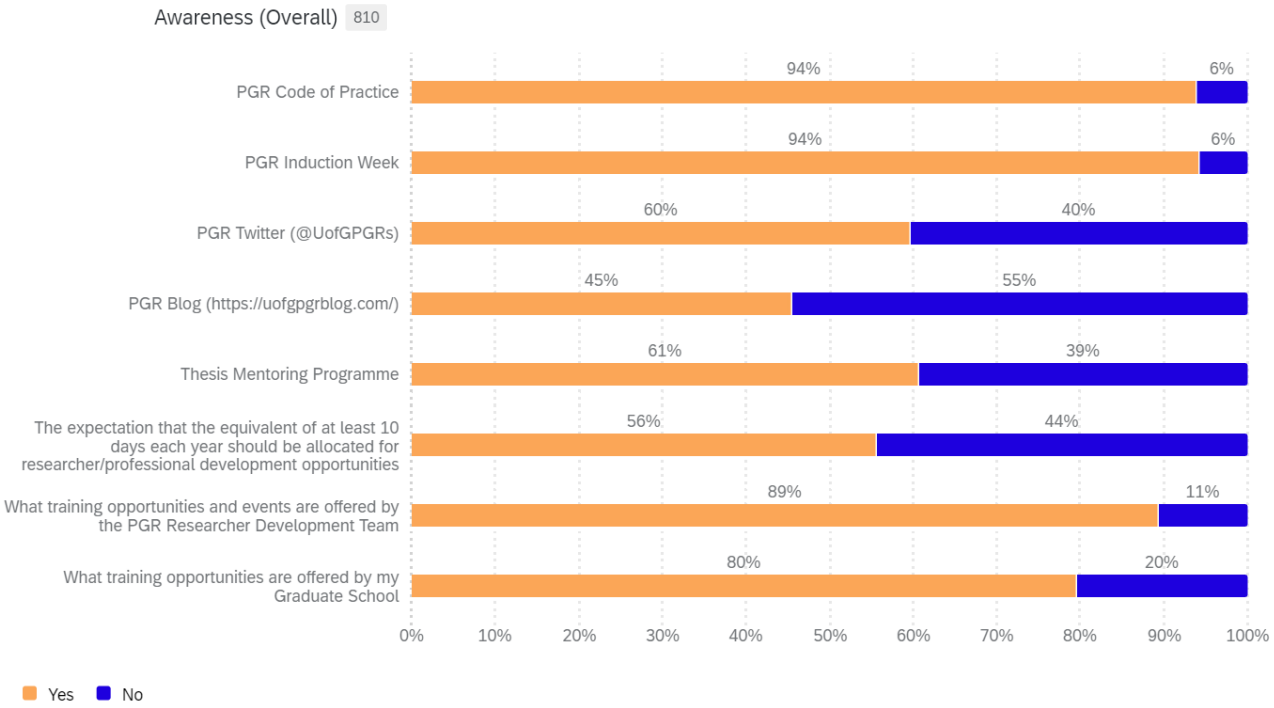


COSS (Top 10) 194



Awareness of PGR Information, Communication & Events

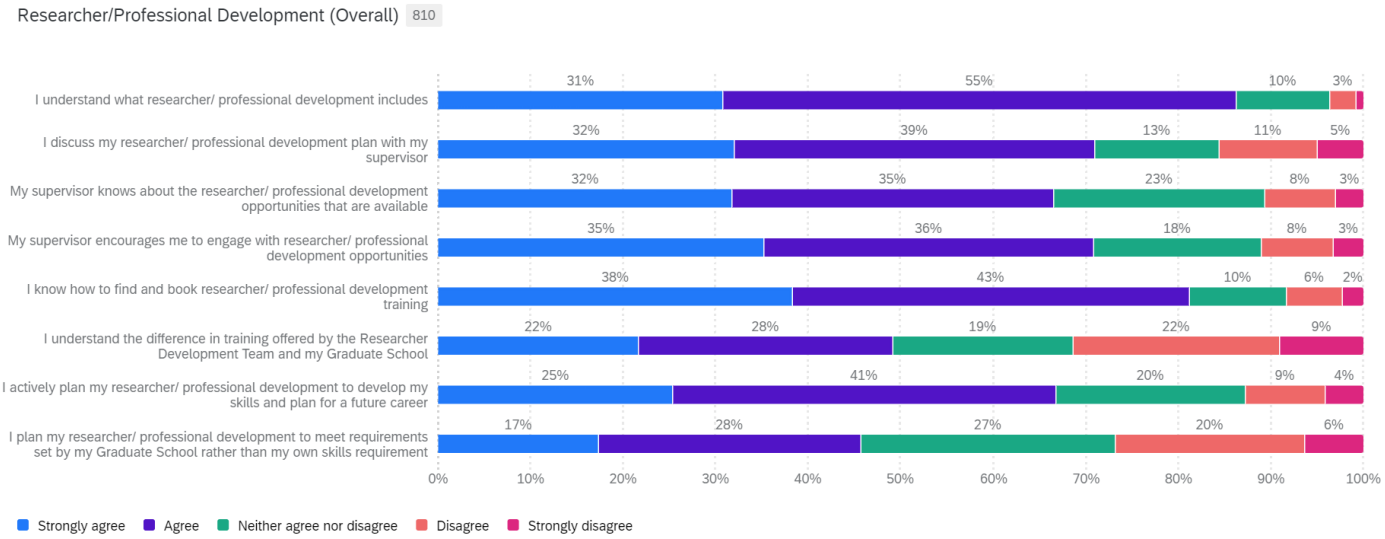
Q2: *'Since starting my research degree programme, I am aware of the following:'*



- Encouragingly, 94% of overall PGR respondents were aware of the PGR Code of Practice and PGR Induction week. This was closely reflected for all four Colleges (Appendix Figs. 1A-1D).
- 60% of respondents knew about the PGR Twitter (now known as X) @UofGPGRs account, which consistently posts opportunities and updates for PGRs. Needless to say, not all PGR's will have social media such as X, but if they do, perhaps now they will be made aware of the account's existence. This also applies to the PGR Blog webpage, as less than half of respondents were aware of the blog post site, a community space for PGRs to share their experiences.
- 39% of respondents were not aware of the Thesis Mentoring Programme provided by the Researcher Development Team, however 39% of PGRs who completed the survey were in their first year of programme and thesis writing may not yet be on their radar.
- It is strongly encouraged by the University for PGRs to set aside at least 10 days each year for researcher/professional development. 56% of respondents were aware of this statement which is reiterated in the PGR Code of Practice. COAH respondents were least aware (45%) of this guideline (Appendix Fig. 1A).
- Overall, majority of respondents were aware of training opportunities provided by the PGR Researcher Development Team and by their Graduate School. High levels of awareness were also shown at College Level (Appendix Figs. 1A-1D).

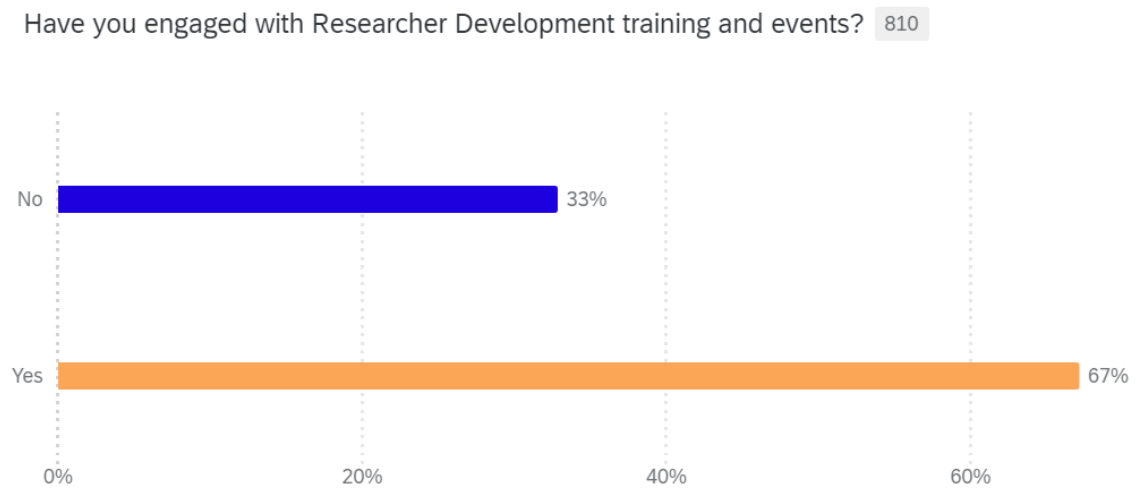
Researcher/Professional Development

Q3: *'Using the scale provided indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding researcher/professional development:'*

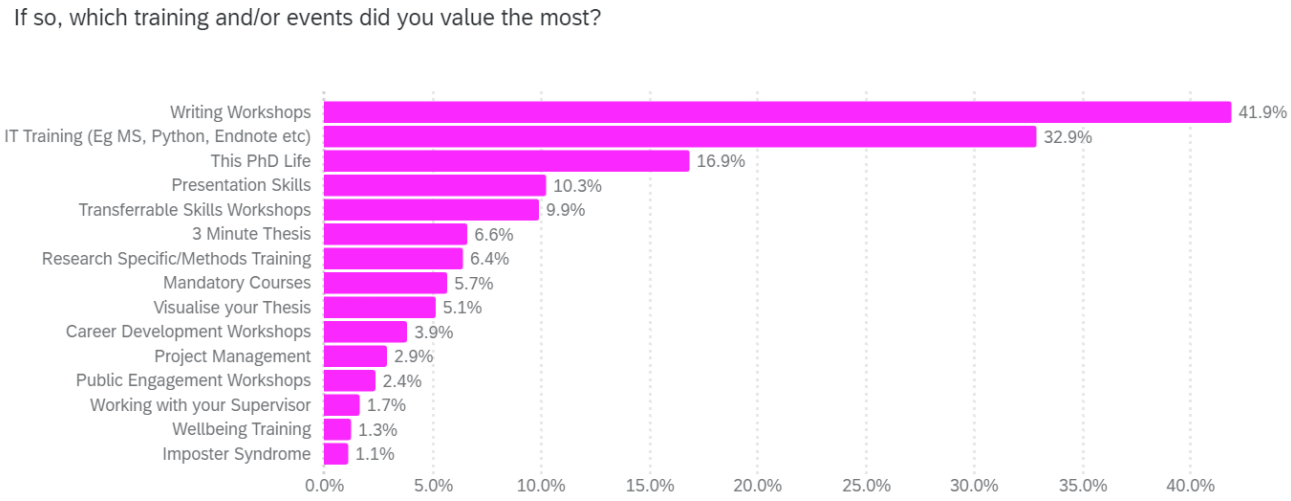


- Majority of respondents overall and at College level (Appendix Figs. 2A-2D) understood what researcher/professional development includes and knew how to find and book training.
- Regarding supervisors and researcher/professional development, 71% of PGRs agreed that they discuss development plans with their supervisor. MVLS were in agreement the most (77%) and COSE the least (65%).
- Although slightly fewer respondents agreed (67%) that their supervisors knew about development opportunities available, 71% of PGRs did agree that their supervisor encourages them to participate, especially for MVLS (75% agreement).
- Overall, 66% of respondents agreed that they actively plan researcher/professional development to develop their skills and plan for a future career. At College level, both COAH and COSS agreed the most with this statement (70%).
- 50% of respondents agreed that they understood the difference in training offered by the Researcher Development Team and their Graduate School.
- Mixed results were apparent at College level concerning PGRs planning their researcher/professional development to meet requirements set by their Graduate School rather than their own skill requirements; with agreement ranging from 38% - 51% (Appendix Figs. 2A-2D).

Q4: *'Have you engaged with Researcher Development training and events? (For example, writing workshops, transferrable skills workshops, IT training, This PhD Life, 3 Minute Thesis, Visualise your Thesis) If so, which trainings and/or events did you value the most?'*

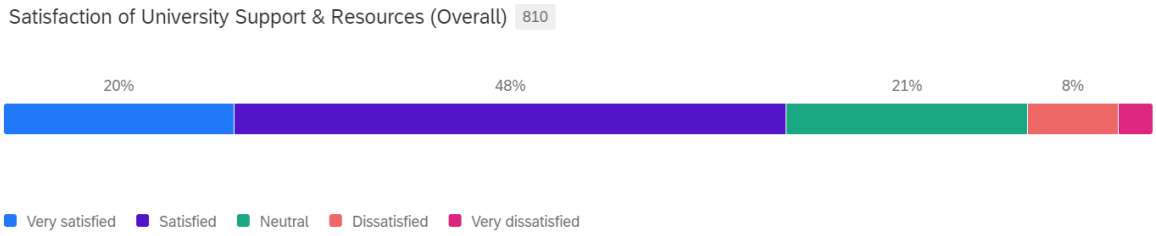


- 67% of students agreed that they had engaged with Researcher Development training and/or events.
- When asked which training and/or events they valued the most, writing workshops were predominantly mentioned, followed by IT training such as Python, MS Excel, Introduction to Endnote, etc.
- Top 5 training and/or events at College level are shown in Appendix Figs. 3A – 3D.

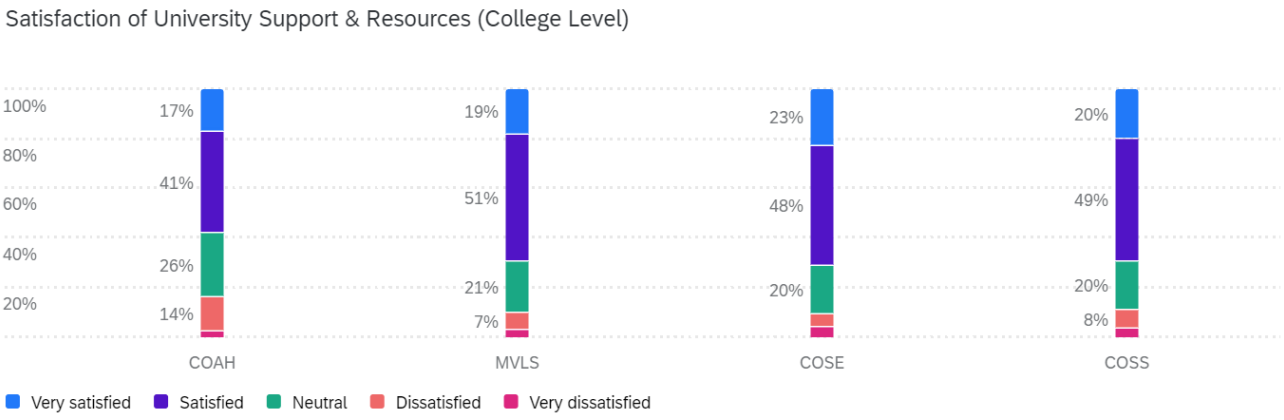


Support for Timely Completion

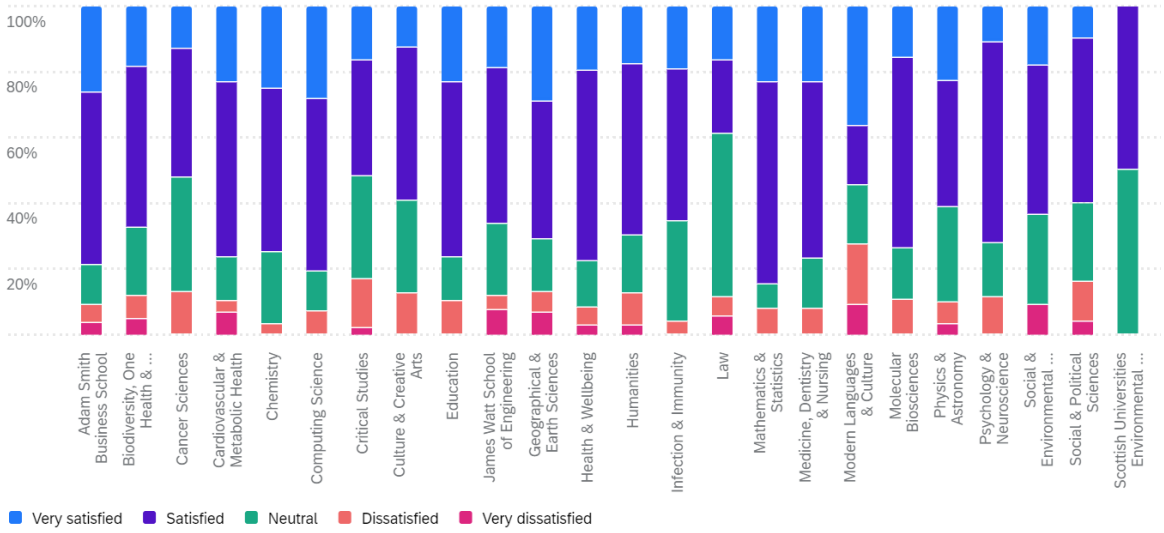
Q5: *'How satisfied are you with the overall support and resources provided by the University to help you complete your research on time?'*



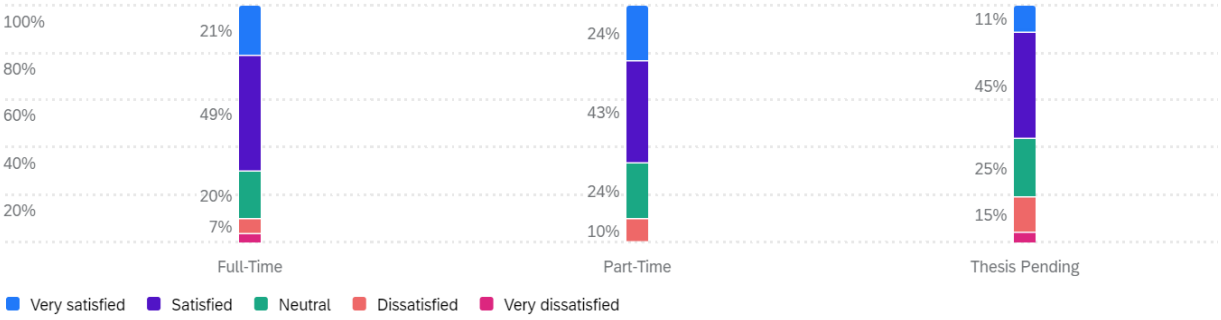
- Generally, 68% of respondents agreed they were satisfied with the overall support and resources provided by the University to help them complete their research on time, and 21% of students felt neutral.
- At College level, COSE had the highest agreement of 71% compared to COAH, MVLS, and COSS, which were 58%, 70%, and 69%, respectively.
- At School level, results show some variability across the University. School of Mathematics & Statistics had the highest satisfaction rate of 85%, and Adam Smith Business School second highest with 79%. Three schools had a dissatisfaction rate of 15% or higher.
- Full-time students had the highest satisfaction rate (70%) in comparison to part-time (67%) and thesis-pending (56%).
- Male PGRs were slightly more satisfied (71%) with the University's support and resources compared to female students (68%).
- Regarding residency, international students had the highest satisfaction rate of 74% (Appendix Fig. 4A).
- Respondents in their 1st year of programme had the highest agreement of 75% (Appendix Fig. 4C) and students in their 4th year or programme the lowest (49%).



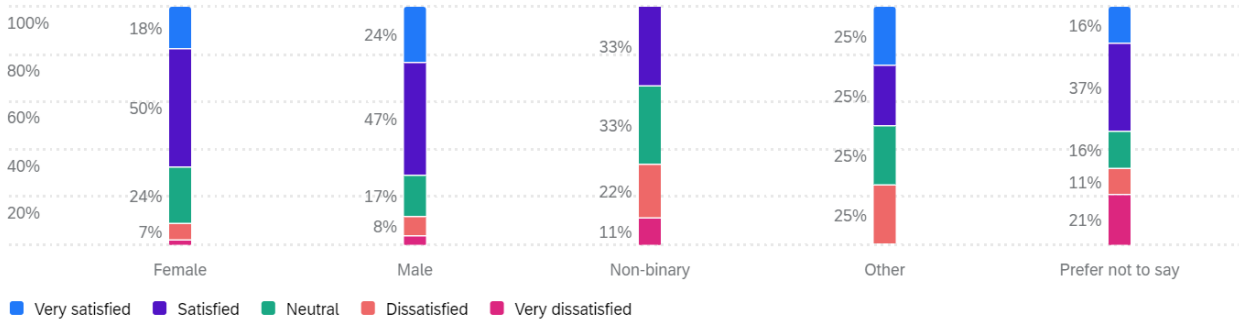
Satisfaction of University Support & Resources (School Level)



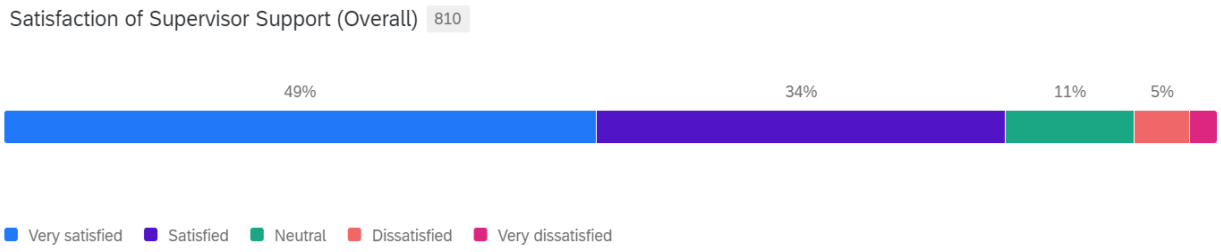
Satisfaction of University Support & Resources (Academic Load)



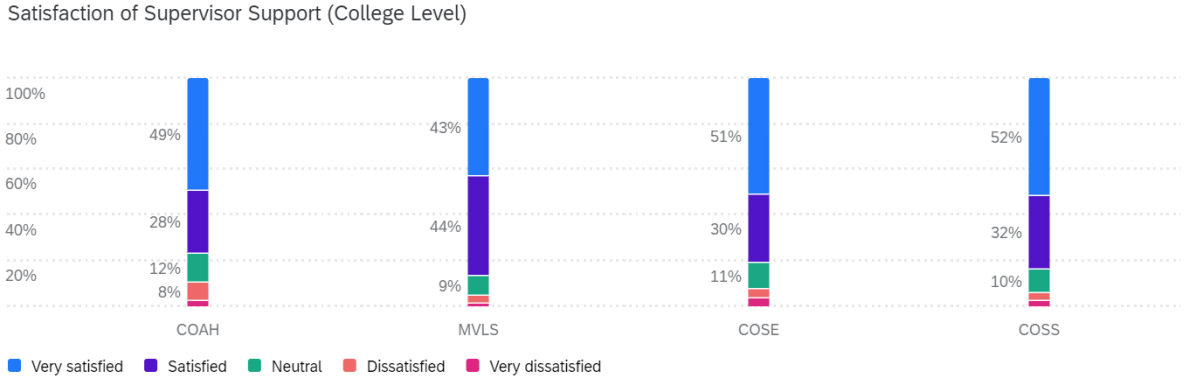
Satisfaction of University Support & Resources (Gender)



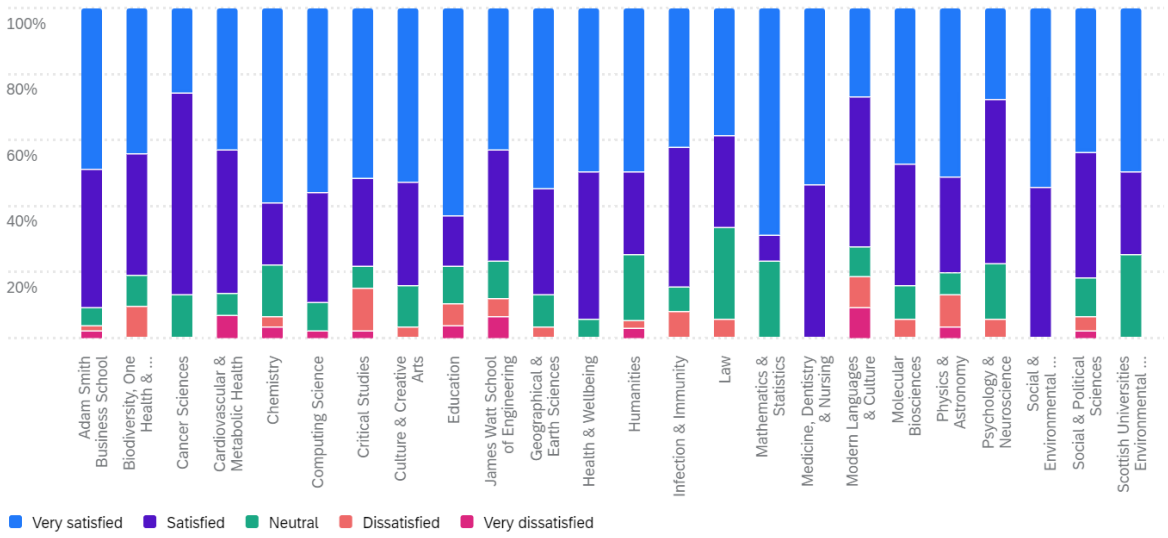
Q6: *'How satisfied are you the with the guidance and support provided by your supervisor to help you complete your research on time?'*



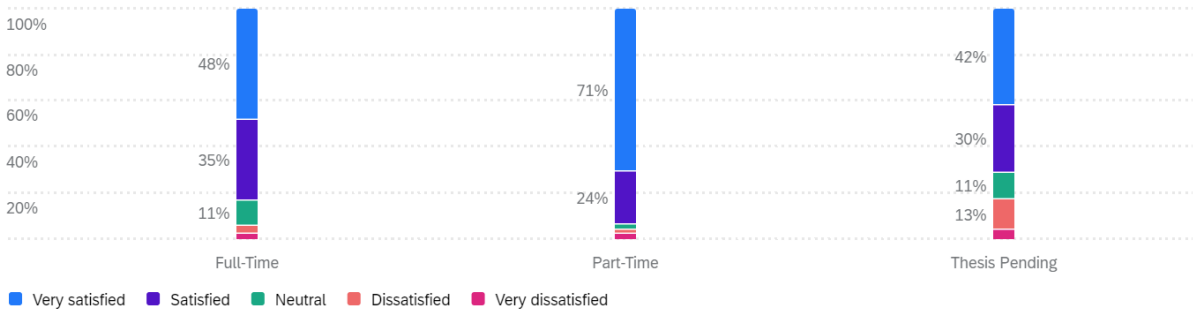
- Overall, 83% of respondents agreed they were satisfied with the guidance and support from their supervisor to help with timely completion of their research.
- At College level, MVLS had the highest satisfaction rate of 87% compared to COAH, COSE and COSS, which had satisfaction rates of 77%, 81%, and 84%, respectively.
- PGRs from School of Medicine, Dentistry & Nursing and PGRs from School of Social & Environmental Sustainability were 100% satisfied with support provided by their supervisor.
- Additionally, four other Schools had 0% dissatisfaction rates (Cancer Sciences, Health & Wellbeing, Mathematics & Statistics and SUERC). These schools displayed neutrality ranging from 13% - 25%.
- Part-time students had the highest satisfaction rate (95%) in comparison to full-time (83%) and thesis-pending (72%).
- Female students were marginally more satisfied (84%) with support from their supervisor compared to male students (83%).
- International and home students had high satisfaction rates of 85% and 82%, respectively (Appendix Fig. 4B).
- PGRs in their 1st year of programme had the highest satisfaction level of 91% and PGRs that were in their 6th year or more had the lowest (Appendix Fig. 4D).



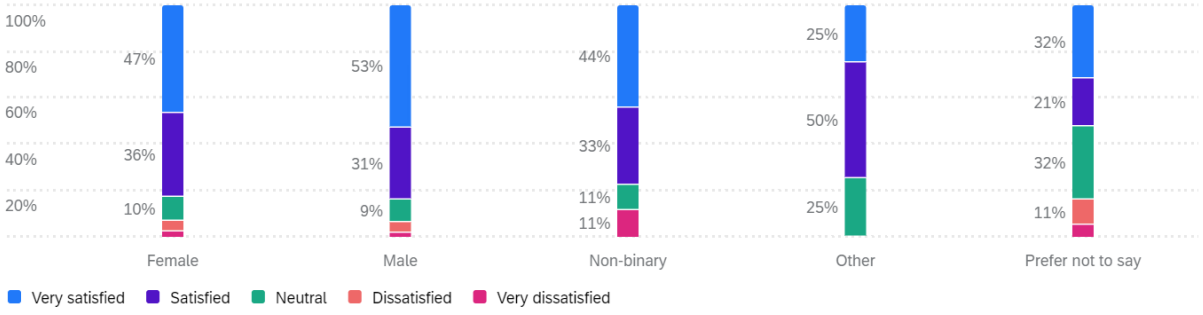
Satisfaction of Supervisor Support (School Level)



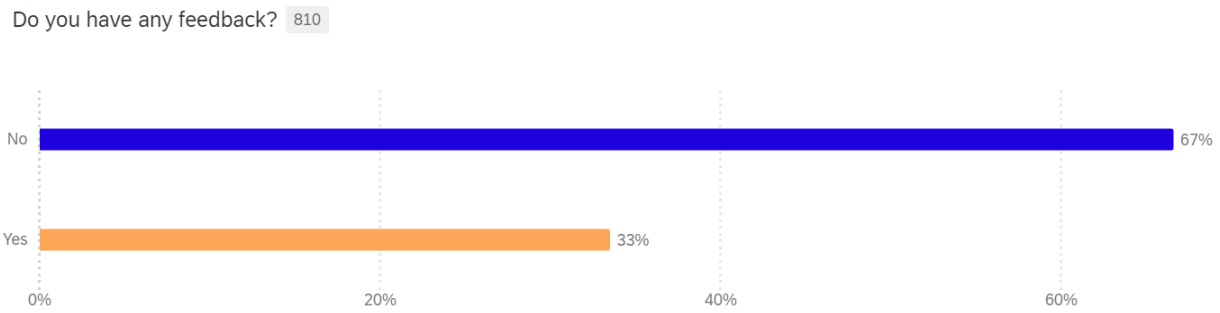
Satisfaction of Supervisor Support (Academic Load)

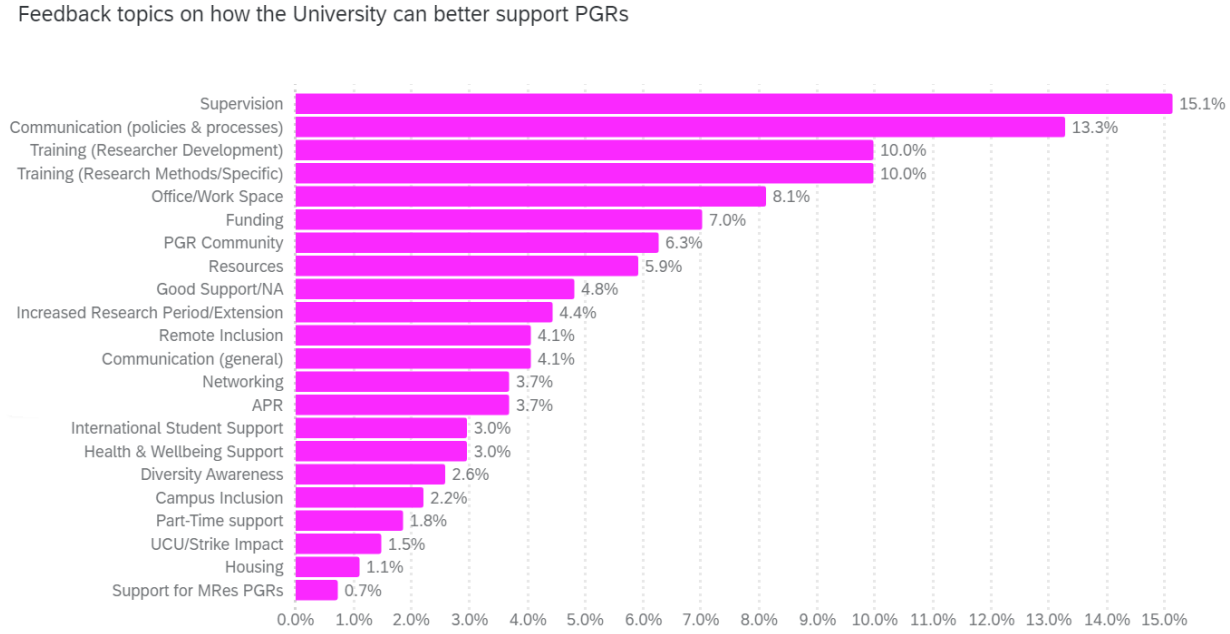


Satisfaction of Supervisor Support (Gender)



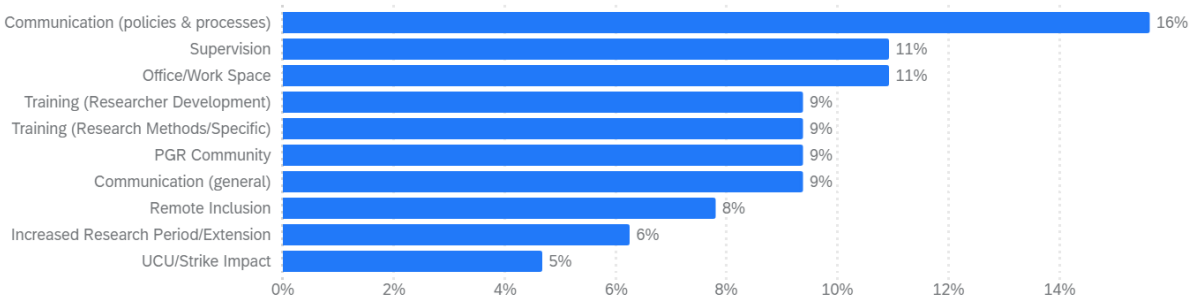
Q7: *'Do you have comments, suggestions, or feedback regarding how the University can better support PGR students in completing their research on time?'*



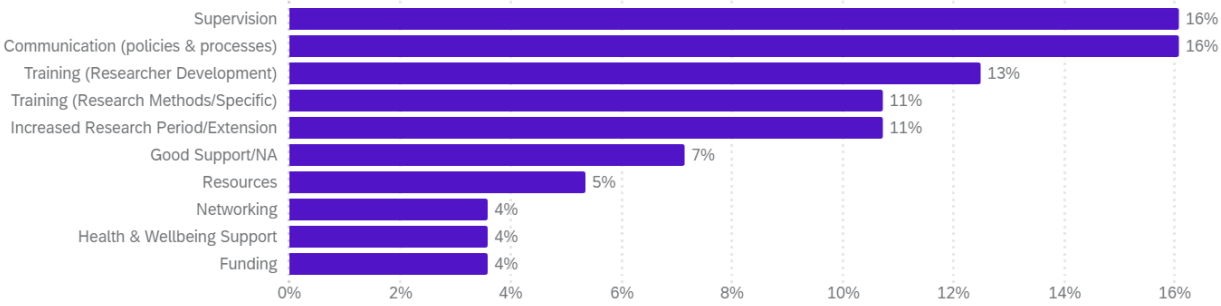


- Although satisfaction agreement was relatively high amongst respondents regarding support from their supervisors, the top feedback topic about how the University could better support them to help complete their research on time was in relation to their supervisor or supervisory team. This was also reflected at College level, apart from COAH.
- This may seem contradictory, but it should be noted that only 33% of respondents wished to express further commentary about University support.
- The need for better communication about PGR processes and policies was also greatly expressed.

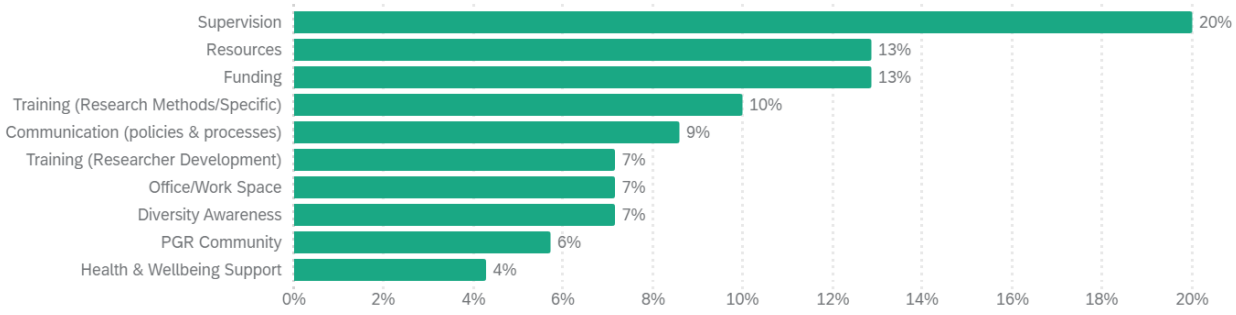
COAH (Top 10)



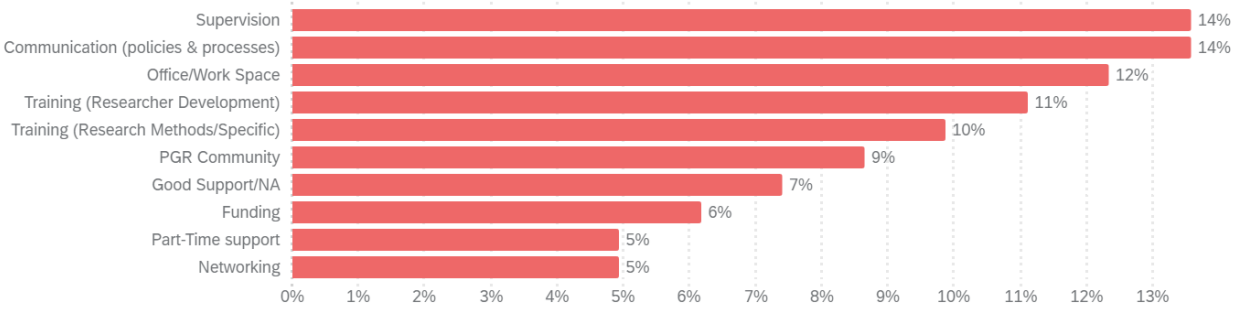
MVLS (Top 10)



COSE (Top 10)

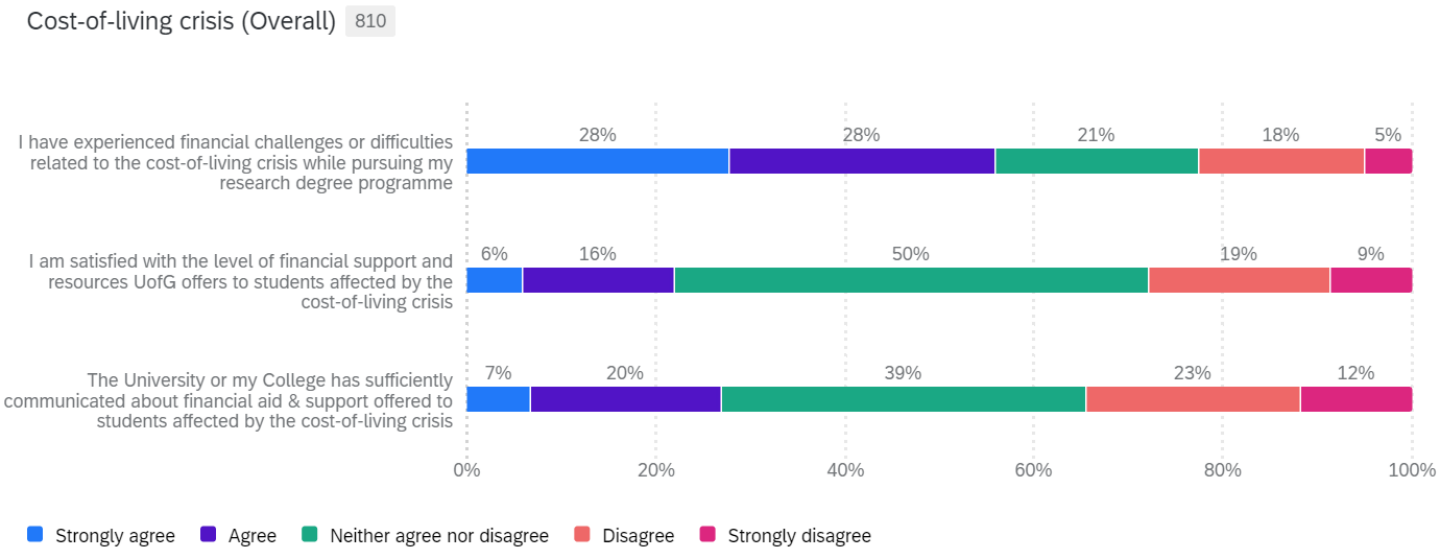


COSS (Top 10)



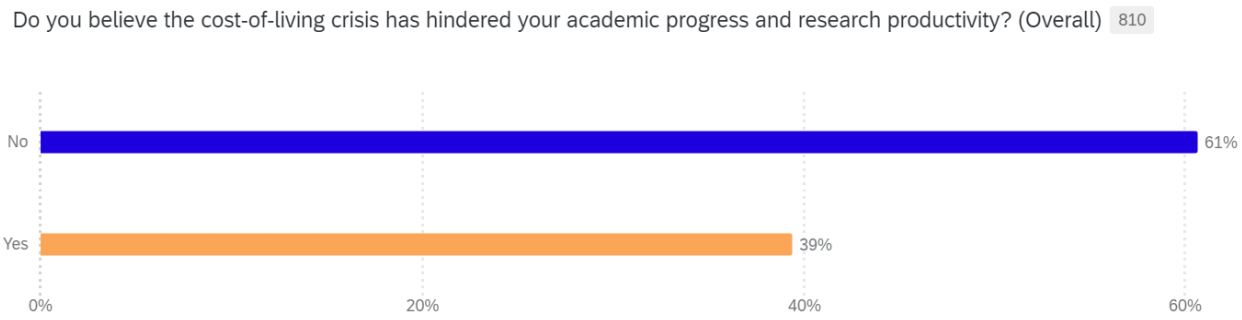
Cost-of-living Crisis

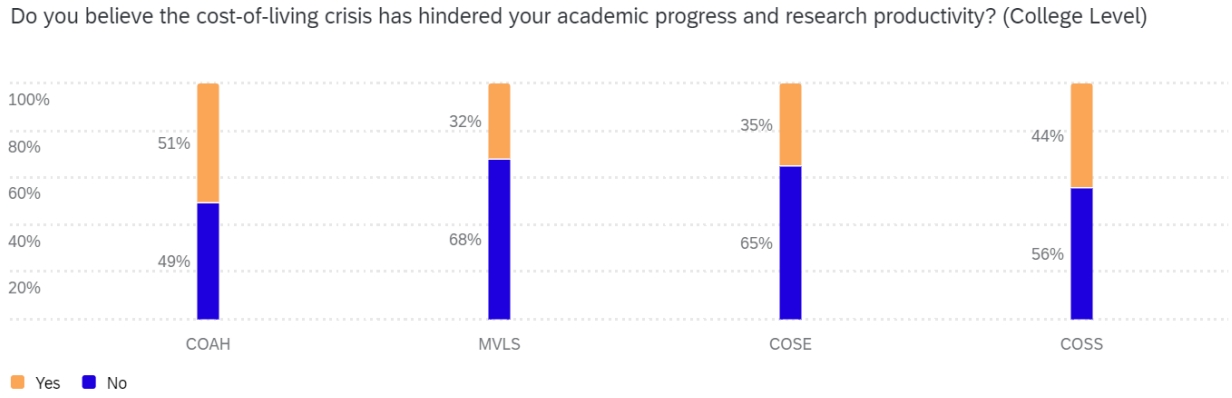
Q8: *'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the cost-of-living crisis:'*



- When asked about the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, 56% of respondents agreed that they were experiencing financial challenges or difficulties whilst pursing their research degree.
- Students mainly felt neutral about the level of financial support and resources the University offered to PGRs affected by the crisis, whilst only 22% of respondents were satisfied.
- Concerning sufficient communication from the University or their College about financial aid & support offered to PGRs affected by the cost-of-living crisis, 39% were neutral and 35% were in disagreement.
- For all three statements asked, similar results can also be seen at College level (Appendix Figs. 5A – 5D).

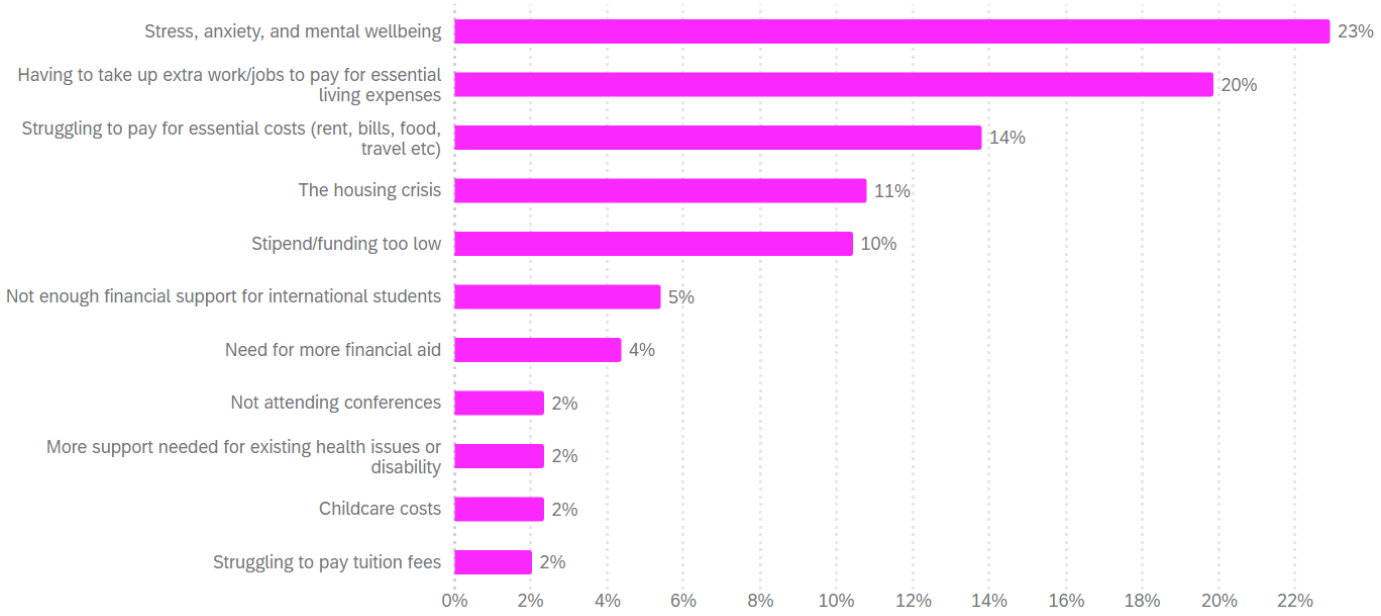
Q9: *'Do you believe the cost-of-living crisis has hindered your academic progress and research productivity? If yes, please provide more details.'*



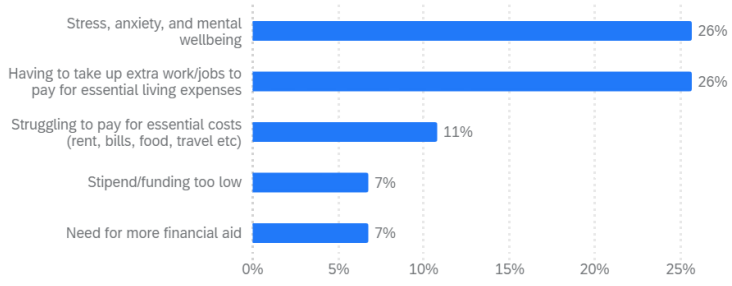


- Majority of students (61%) disagreed that the cost-of-living crisis had hindered their academic progress and research productivity, with MVLS having the highest disagreement (68%) compared to the other three Colleges.
- PGRs from School of Critical Studies believed that the crisis had affected their research the most (57%) followed closely by School of Culture & Creative Art students (56%) (Appendix Fig. 6A)
- When students were asked to describe in more detail how the cost-of-living crisis had affected their research progress, stress and depletion of their mental wellbeing was the top response. This was also the leading response for COAH, MVLS and COSS.
- Students greatly expressed the need to take up extra work outside of their degree to pay for essential living expenses which could be in relation to the third top feedback topic (and primary response from COSE) where students voiced their struggle to pay for essential costs such as rent, travel to campus, bills.

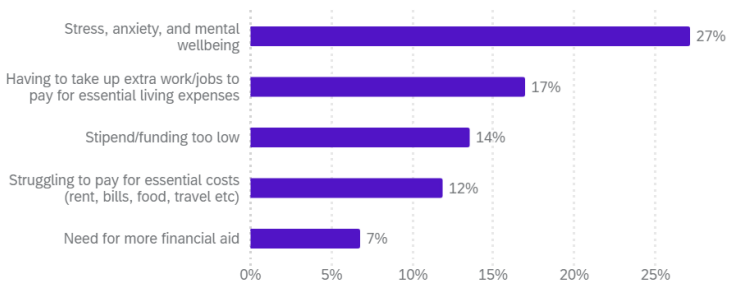
Causes of the cost-of-living crisis affecting academic progress and research productivity



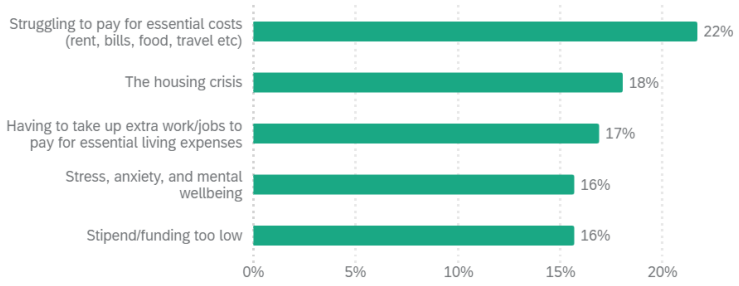
COAH (Top 5)



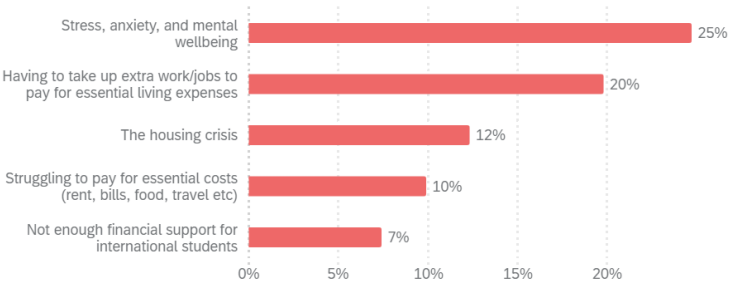
MVLS (Top 5)



COSE (Top 5)



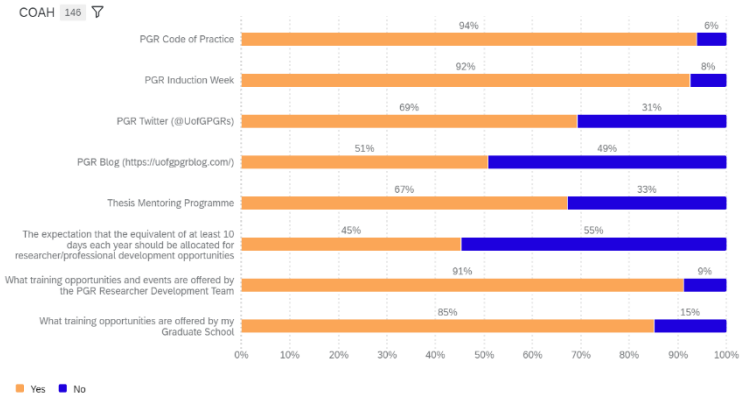
COSS (Top 5)



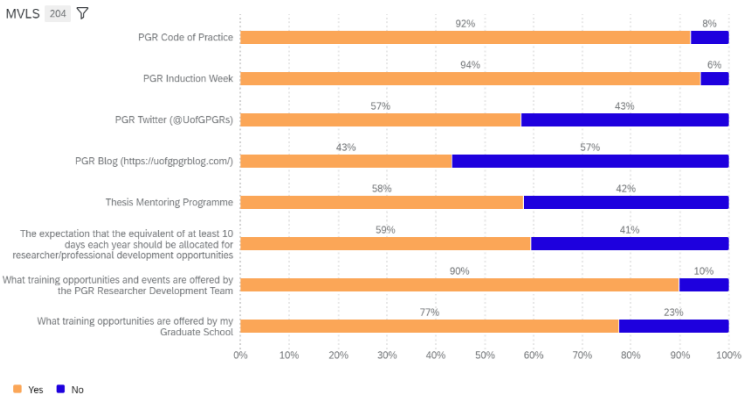
Appendix Figures

Awareness of PGR Information, Communication & Events (College Level)

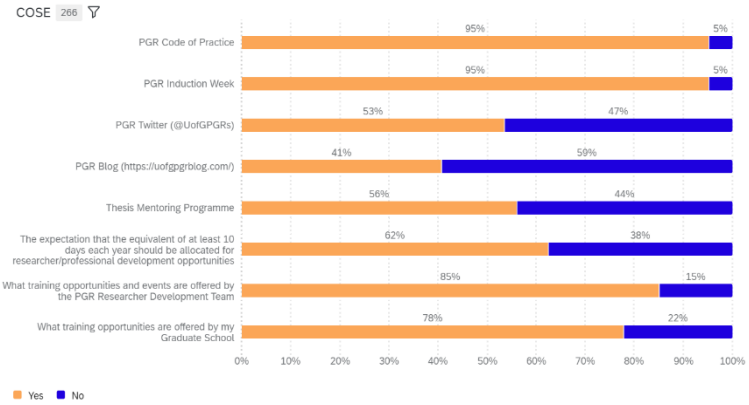
Appendix Figure 1A



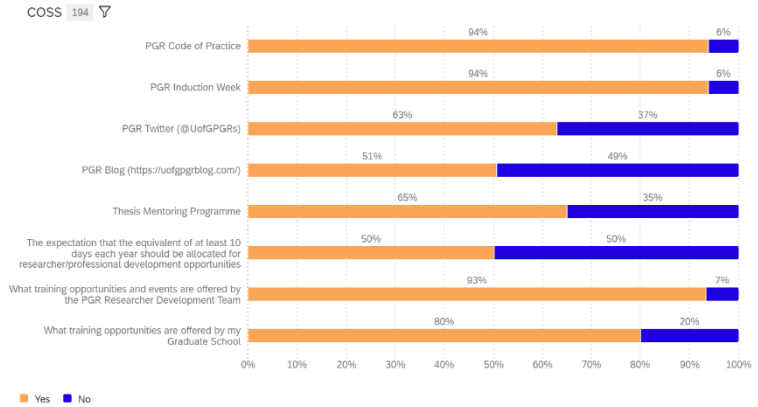
Appendix Figure 1B



Appendix Figure 1C

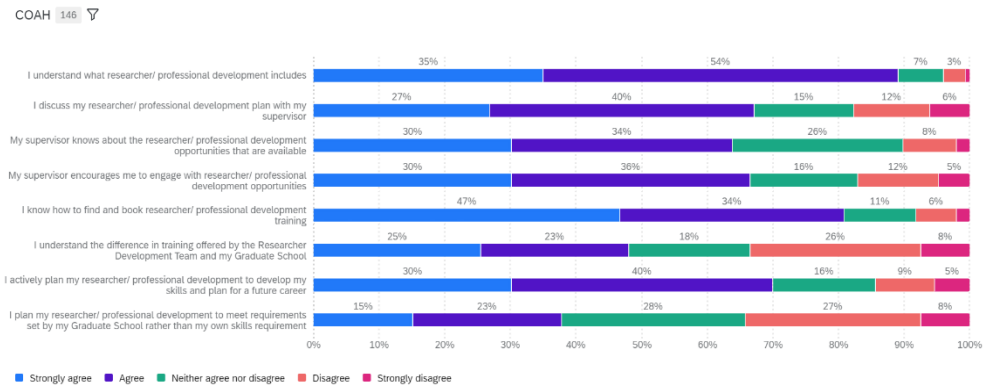


Appendix Figure 1D

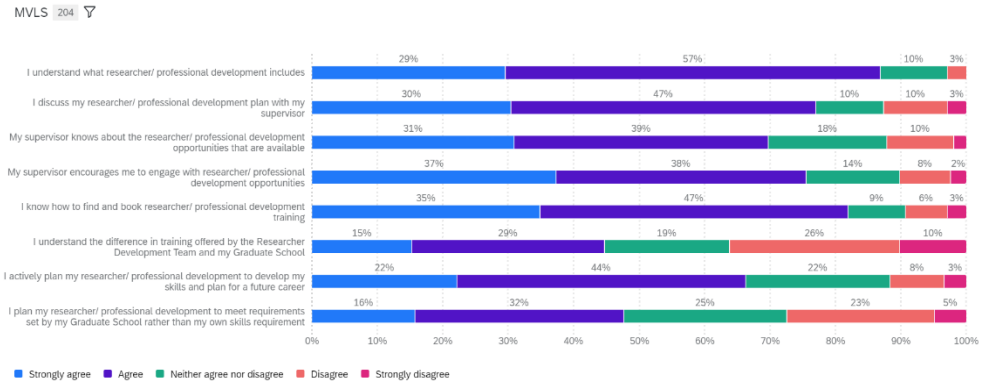


Researcher/Professional Development (College Level):

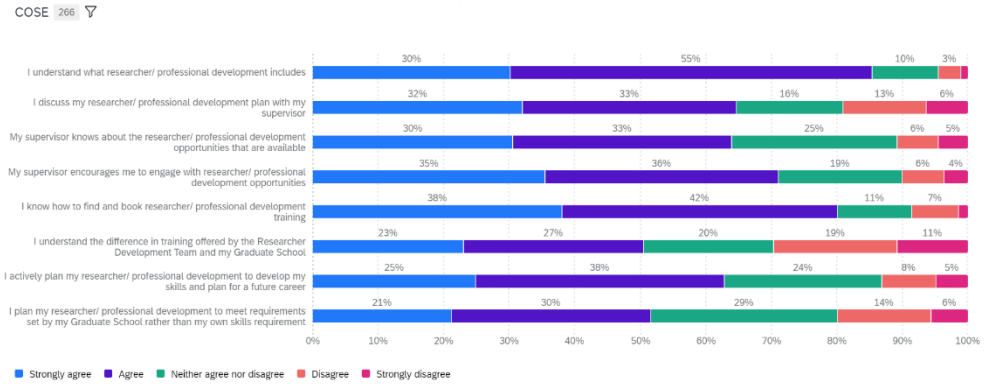
Appendix Figure 2A



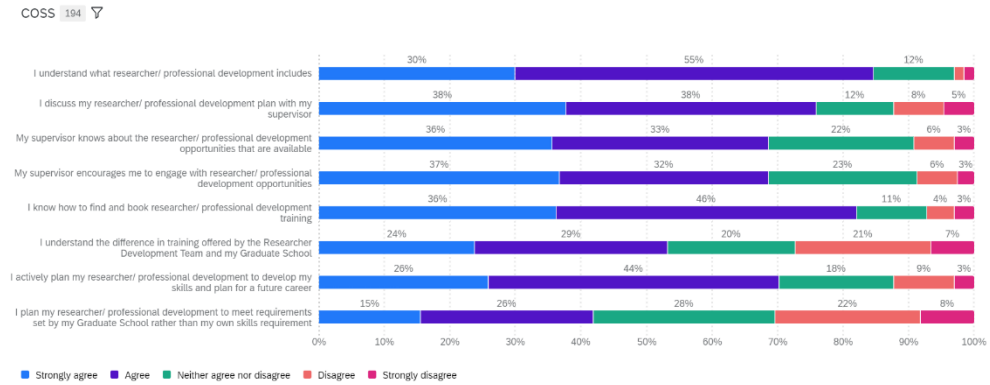
Appendix Figure 2B



Appendix Figure 2C

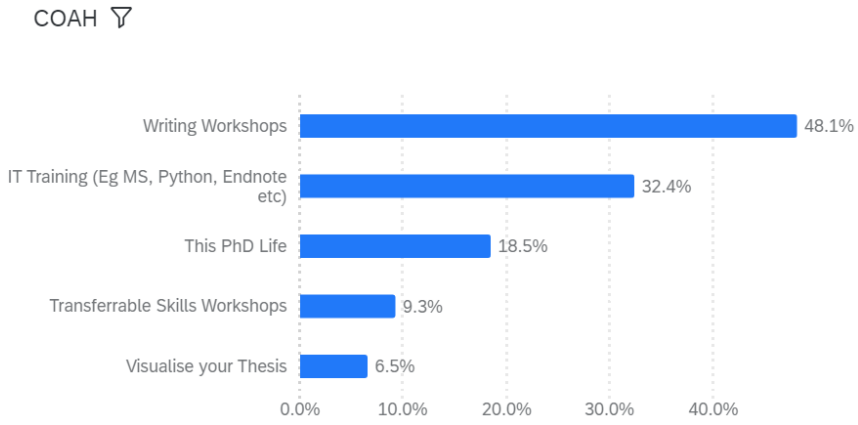


Appendix Figure 2D

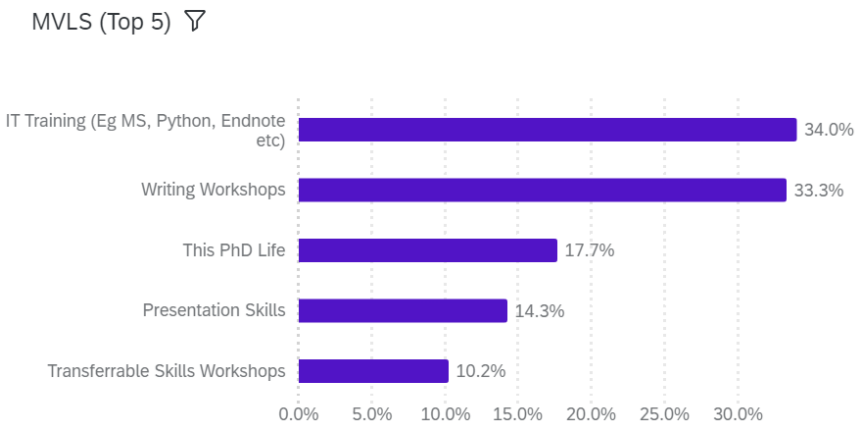


Training and/or events valued the most (College Level):

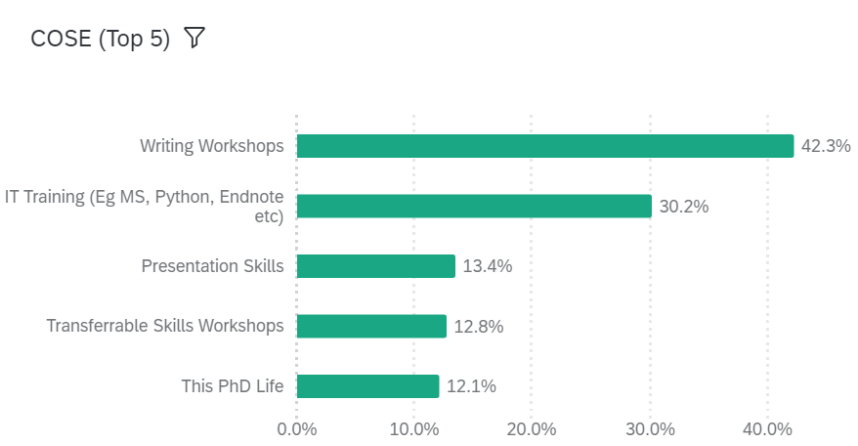
Appendix Figure 3A



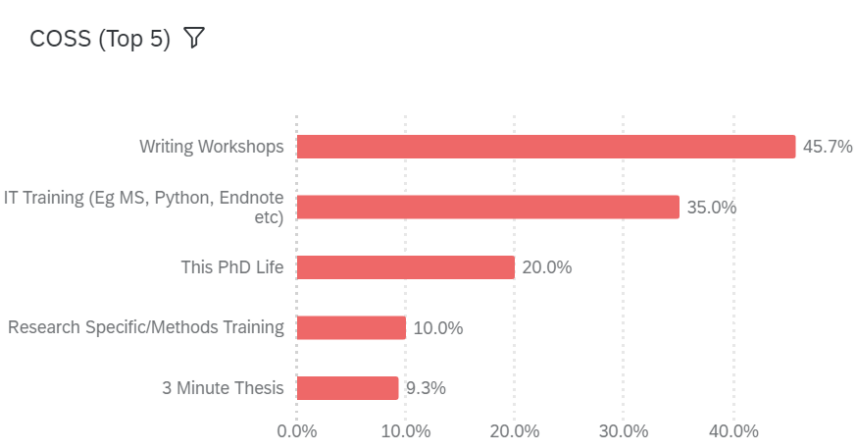
Appendix Figure 3B



Appendix Figure 3C



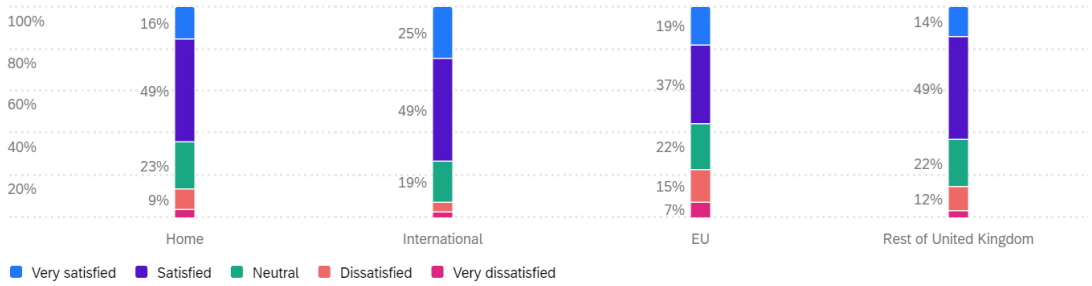
Appendix Figure 3D



Support Satisfaction for Timely Completion (Residency & Year of Programme):

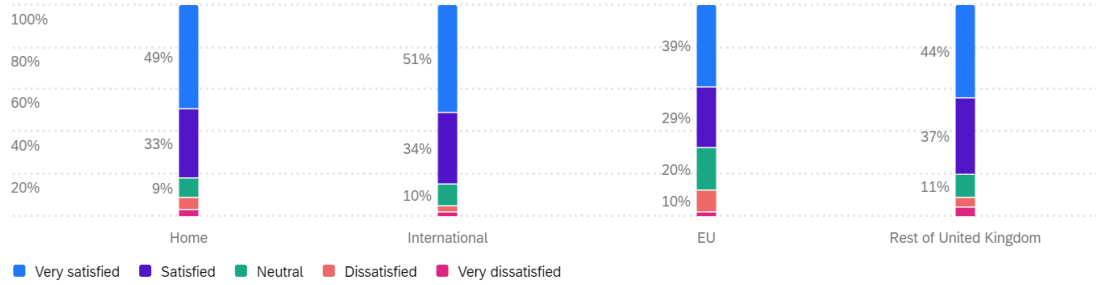
Appendix Figure 4A

Satisfaction of University Support & Resources (Residency)



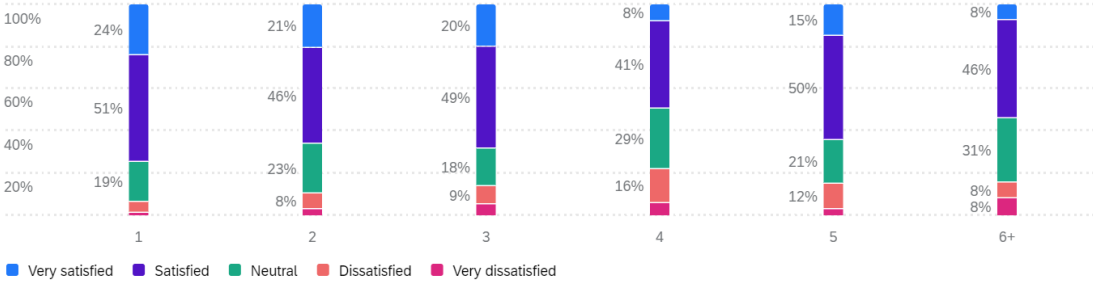
Appendix Figure 4B

Satisfaction of Supervisor Support (Residency)



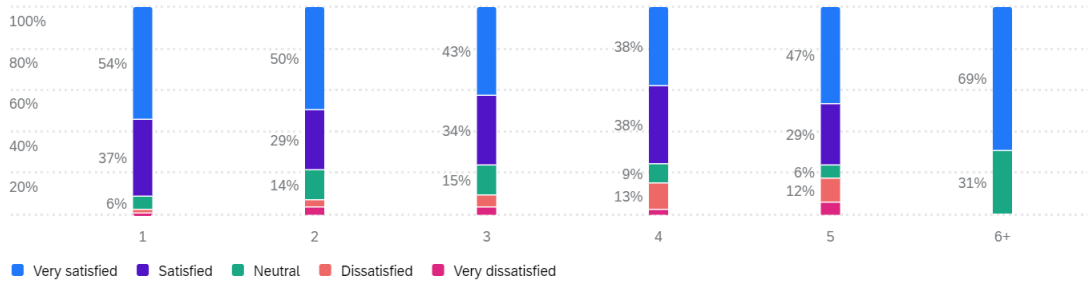
Appendix Figure 4C

Satisfaction of University Support & Resources (Year of Programme)



Appendix Figure 4D

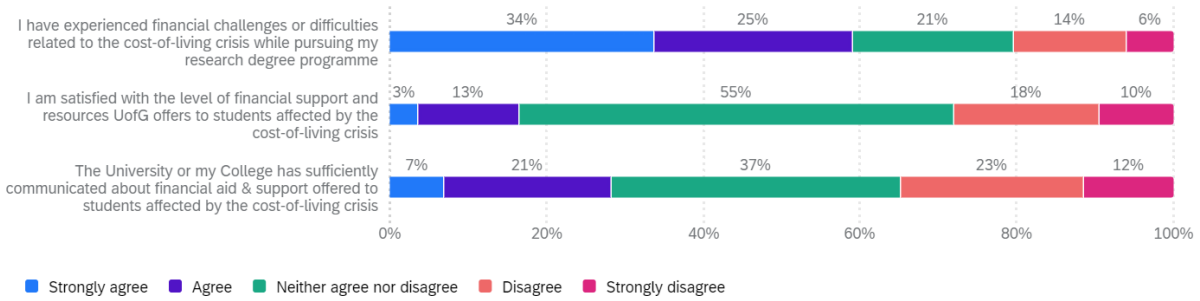
Satisfaction of Supervisor Support (Year of Programme)



Cost-of-living crisis (College level):

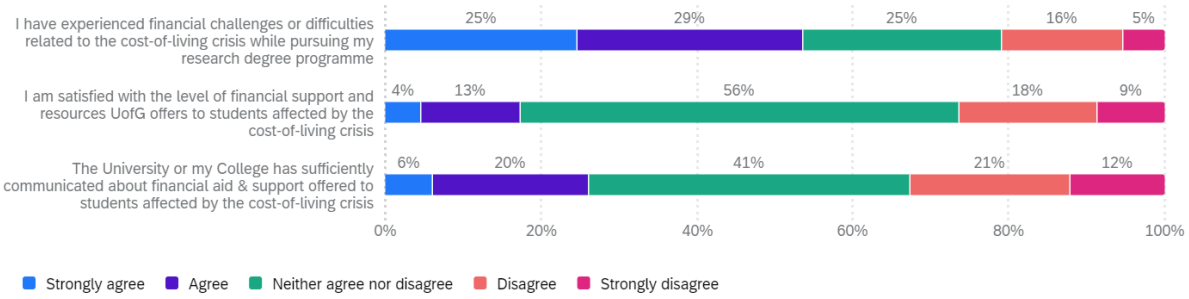
Appendix Figure 5A

COAH 146



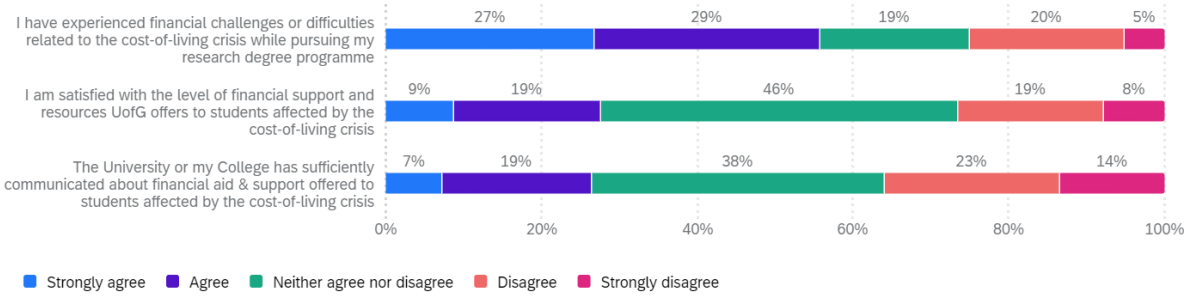
Appendix Figure 5B

MVLS 204



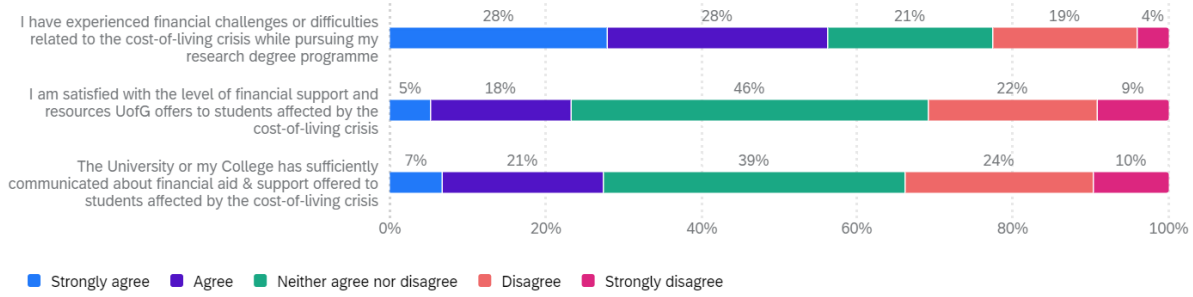
Appendix Figure 5C

COSE 266



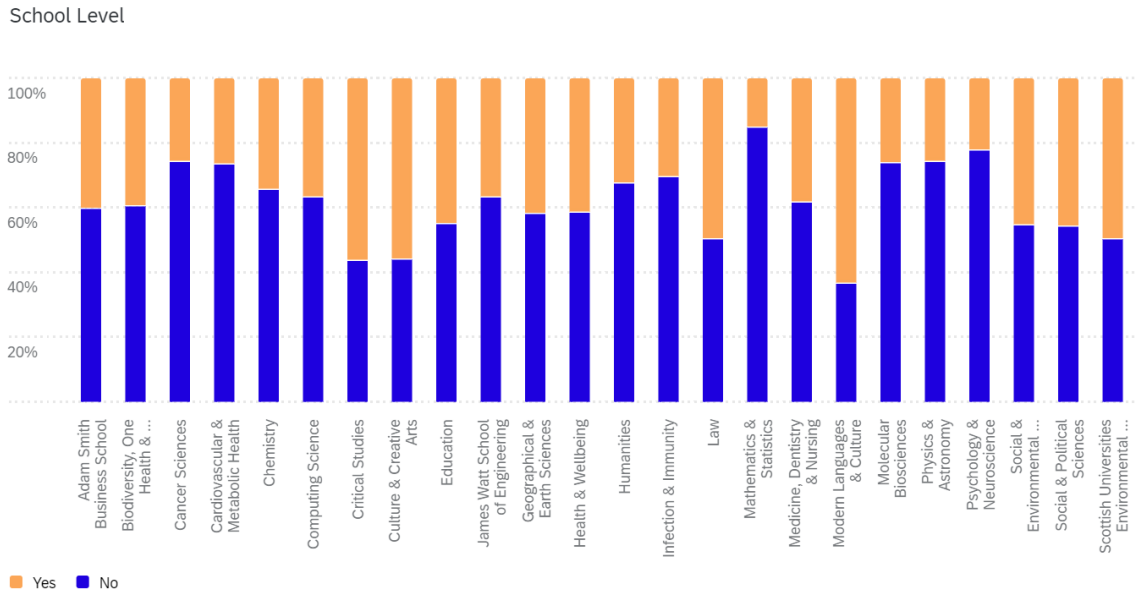
Appendix Figure 5D

COSS 194

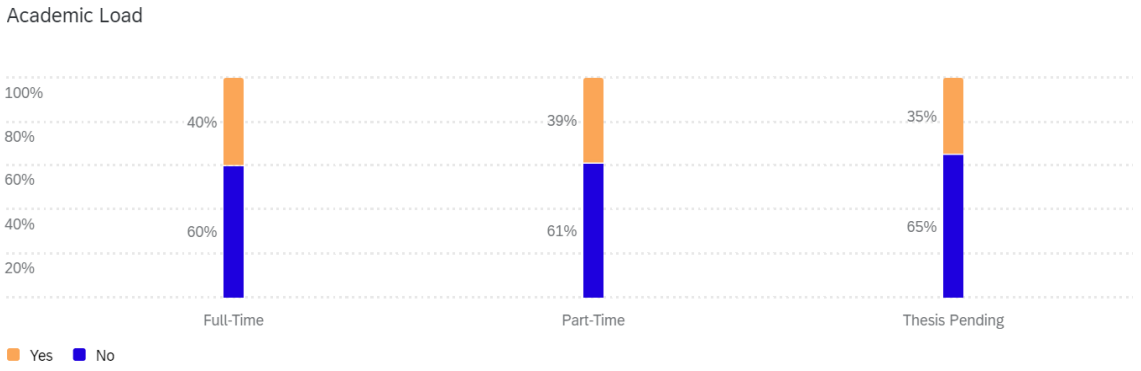


Do you believe the cost-of-living crisis has hindered your academic progress and research productivity? (School Level; Academic Load; Gender; Residency; Year of Programme):

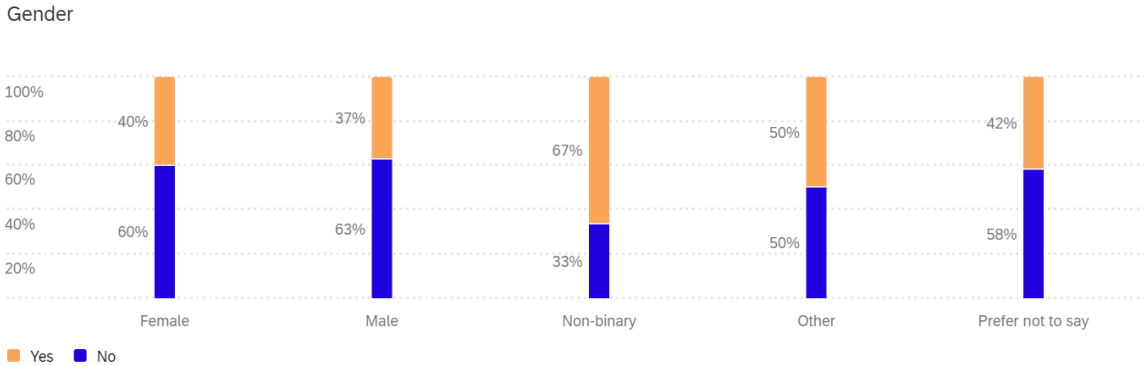
Appendix Figure 6A



Appendix Figure 6B

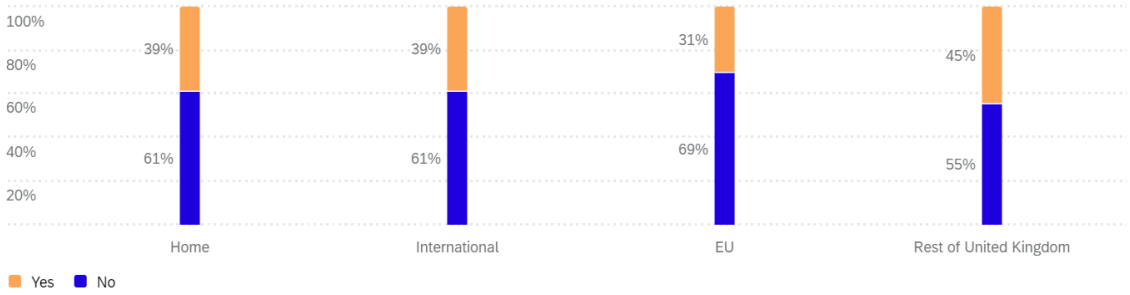


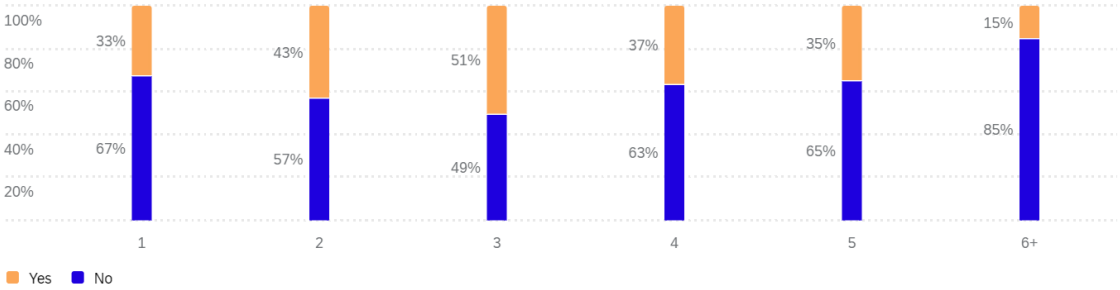
Appendix Figure 6C



Appendix Figure 6D

Residency



Appendix Figure 6E

Year of Programme