

# POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

Survey  
2024



WSU  
Walter Sisulu University  
In pursuit of excellence

**This report was produced by Institutional Research and Planning  
under the Directorate of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation.**

@2024 Institutional Research and Planning  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor New Admin Building, Potsdam Campus  
Planning Monitoring and Evaluation  
Walter Sisulu University

---

**Enquiries:**

Institutional Research and Planning Department (IRP)

[irp@wsu.ac.za](mailto:irp@wsu.ac.za)

Student Tracking Unit and Institutional Research

[stu@wsu.ac.za](mailto:stu@wsu.ac.za)

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Student Tracking Unit and Institutional Research is acknowledged as the  
source of the information.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Project Supervision

**Dr Munienge Mbodila**

(Manager: Student Tracking Unit and Institutional Research)

---

## Data Collection

**Dr Munienge Mbodila**

**Mr Anele Bangani**

(Institutional Researcher)

**Miss Ayathola Mafanya**

(Admin)

**Miss Regomoditswe Mkhabela**

(Student Assistant)

**Miss Nocwaka Pangwa**

(Student Assistant)

**Miss Athini Debeza**

(Intern)

**Miss Esethu Krexeca**

(Intern)

**Mr Xolisa Mabunu**

(Student Assistant)

**Mr Abongile Loyiso Bakubaku**

(Student Assistant)

**Mr Smiley Kgaugelo Mmakola**

(Student Assistant)

**Miss Andisiwe Lufundo**

(Student Assistant)

## Data Analysis

**Mr Anele Bangani**

**Miss Regomoditswe Mkhabela**

**Mr Smiley Kgaugelo Mmakola**

---

## Report Writing

**Mr Anele Bangani**

(Primary Report Writer)

**Dr Munienge Mbodila**

(Secondary Report Writer)

---

## Reviewers

**Mr Ntsundeni Louis Mapatagane**

(Critical Reviewer)

**Dr Munienge Mbodila**

(Internal Reviewer)

# FOREWORD

I am delighted to present the inaugural *Postgraduate Experience Survey 2024* report, which offers valuable insights into our postgraduate students' academic journey, challenges, and overall experience. This report marks a significant step in our ongoing efforts to enhance postgraduate education, ensuring our students receive the highest support, resources, and academic and professional growth opportunities.

At Walter Sisulu University, we recognise that postgraduate education is crucial in driving research, innovation, and societal progress. Understanding our students' perspectives enables us to refine our academic offerings, improve supervision and support structures, and create an environment that fosters intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and research excellence.

The findings in this report provide a comprehensive overview of student engagement, academic satisfaction, and institutional support, serving as a foundation for data-driven improvements in postgraduate education. With these insights, we aim to strengthen our commitment to student success and ensure that Walter Sisulu University remains a hub for academic excellence and innovation.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all postgraduate students who participated in this survey, as well as to the dedicated team involved in data collection and analysis. Your contributions are instrumental in shaping our institution's future of postgraduate education.

As we progress, we remain committed to fostering an enriching and supportive academic experience that empowers our students to excel in their research and professional careers.



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**Dr Munienge Mbodila**

Manager: Student Tracking Unit and Institutional Research  
Institutional Research and Planning  
Directorate of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation  
Walter Sisulu University

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, institutions must continuously strive to enhance the quality of their academic offerings and support services. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through systematically collecting and analysing student feedback and tracking graduates' career destinations. This section outlines a comprehensive approach to implementing student surveys and monitoring postgraduate students at Walter Sisulu University (WSU). The aim is to enhance educational quality, improve student satisfaction, and ensure our graduates are well-prepared for their careers. We used an online survey for alumni tracking to gather and analyse this data systematically. WSU's vision statement makes mention of 'A value-driven, technology-infused African university providing a gateway for local talent to

be globally competitive and make a sustainable socio-economic impact, of our educational programs, and make data-driven improvements and resource allocations that will benefit current and future students.

This initiative is designed to promote a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring that the institution remains responsive to the needs of students and aligned with industry standards and regulations. The benefits of these surveys, which will enhance WSU's teaching and learning quality, improve student satisfaction, and better prepare our graduates for their careers, will also bolster the institution's reputation, placing WSU in a more competitive position in the higher education landscape globally and in South Africa.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

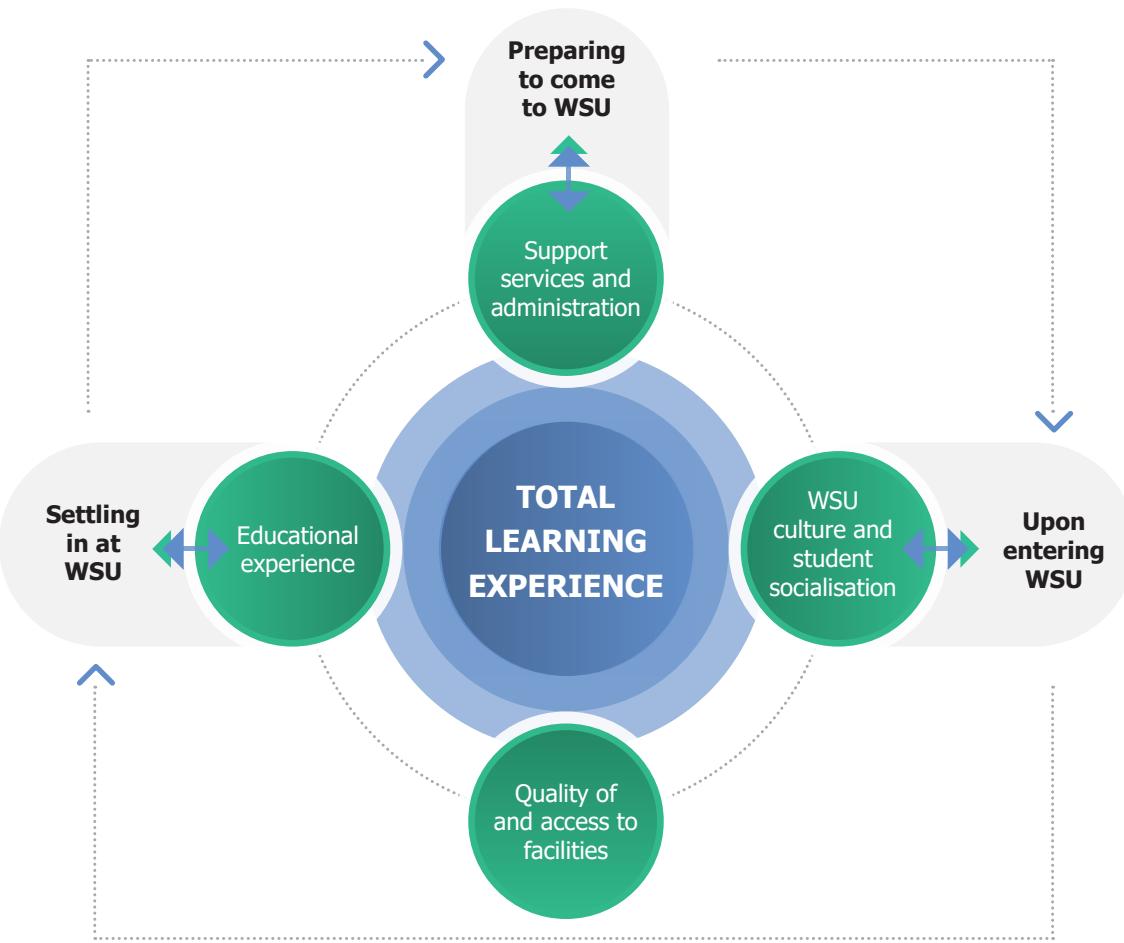
In the South African context, the literature has shown that higher education institutions face unique challenges, including addressing historical inequities and aligning educational outcomes with national development goals. Comprehensive student surveys such as student satisfaction and graduation destination are critical for improving educational quality and fostering equity. Most South African universities use various student surveys to address access, quality, student support, and inclusivity issues. Mokoena (2012) highlights the importance of student feedback in promoting inclusive education practices. Regular surveys at WSU can provide insights into student needs, helping to implement targeted interventions that enhance the academic and social needs as well as the environment in which students are. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa mandates tracking graduate outcomes to ensure that academic programs contribute to the employability and economic development of the country (CHE, 2016). Within South Africa, the level of education has been linked to finding employment (Bhorat, Cassim, & Tseng, 2016). Graduates tended to have significantly lower unemployment rates than peers without higher education training (Statistics South Africa, 2018, 2019). Although macro trends can link economic activity to the education level, such investigations cannot provide institutional-level information regarding the economic activities of graduates (McCowan et al., 2016). Information about postgraduate destination surveys provides a valuable opportunity for HEI to reflect on the quality of their services and the success of their programmes (Senekal & Munro, 2019). For WSU, strong postgraduate tracking and monitoring will provide valuable data on the employability of graduates and inform curriculum development to better meet market demands.

## 3. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this survey is to gather comprehensive feedback on postgraduate experiences, satisfaction levels, and recommendations for continuous improvement and enhanced support. Through the implementation of this survey, WSU aims to fulfill its strategic goals of elevating the quality of research, enhancing postgraduate satisfaction, and ensuring that postgraduate programs remain aligned with industry demands. This initiative is crucial in fostering a supportive academic environment that promotes student success and long-term institutional growth.

## 4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a conceptual framework inspired by the postgraduate surveys conducted by the Analytics & Institutional Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand (2017). The framework divides the postgraduate student experience into three key phases: preparing to join the university, transitioning upon entry, and settling into university life (Figure 1). It highlights the critical role of support and socialisation mechanisms in shaping interventions aimed at supporting first-year students.



**Figure 1:** Model of student satisfaction with first-year experience (University of Witwatersrand: Analytics & Institutional Research Unit, 2017)

Figure 1 illustrates the framework utilised to assess postgraduate satisfaction across these phases, providing a comprehensive overview of the student experience at WSU. This framework represents holistic feedback that serves as a valuable measure of the university's responsiveness to the needs of its postgraduate students, evaluated through satisfaction levels reported by respondents concerning specific statements.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

### a) Research Design

This study employs a comprehensive mixed methods approach to assess postgraduate student satisfaction. The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches using open-ended questionnaires, providing a holistic understanding of the postgraduate student experience and outcomes. This approach ensures flexibility in data collection within WSU's specific context, capturing relevant insights that may not be achievable through other methods at the required scale.

### **b) Data Collection Methods**

Given the number of postgraduate students at WSU, online surveys are utilised to streamline data collection. Online survey approaches have gained prominence due to their efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and improved turnaround times (Du Toit et al., 2014). However, a challenge associated with online surveys is response rate variability, which has been documented to range from 10% to 92% in international studies (Frawley & Harvey, 2015).

### **c) Survey Administration**

The survey was distributed using bulk SMSes, Facebook posts, and posters to ensure a holistic student satisfaction assessment. This survey includes a variety of question formats, such as Likert scale questions (measuring levels of satisfaction and agreement), Multiple-choice items (assessing categorical preferences and experiences), and Open-ended questions (allowing for in-depth qualitative insights). The key focus areas of the survey include supervision quality, Campus facilities, residences and accommodation, Social and well-being support, academic support services, and extracurricular activities.

### **d) Data Analysis Methods**

Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to identify trends and key factors influencing student satisfaction. This approach enables the identification of patterns and relationships within the data, contributing to a deeper understanding of student's academic experiences and the overall university environment. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis. This method allows for identifying key themes and emerging patterns in student feedback, providing contextual depth to quantitative findings.

## **6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

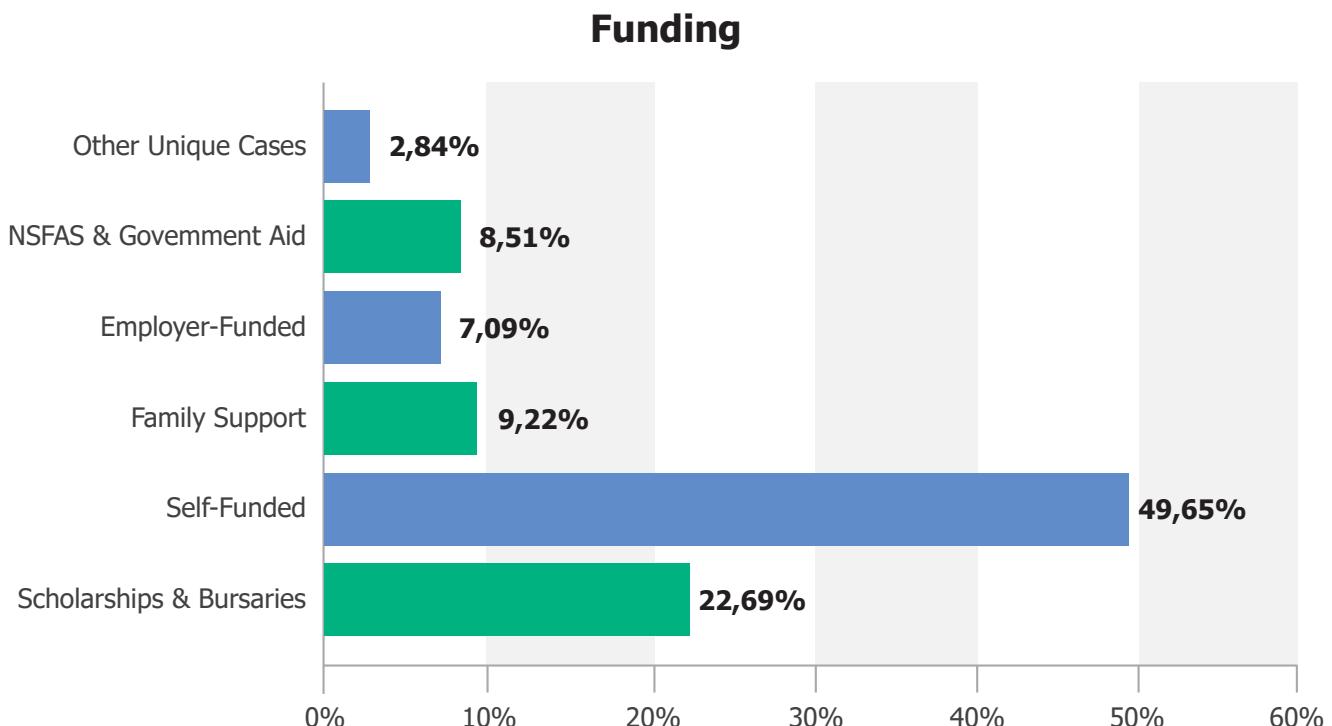
One of the primary foundations of research ethics focuses on protecting research participants. Such protection includes guarding against explicit or implicit harm and the protection of the rights of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ensuring participant confidentiality, gaining informed consent, and adequately using data are ethical considerations for postgraduate student satisfaction surveys. Confidentiality must be maintained to preserve student identities and replies and promote a trusting environment.

To obtain informed permission, participants were made aware of the goal of the surveys and reviews, how the data would be used, and that their participation would be optional. Furthermore, the information gathered will be utilised only to enhance learning outcomes and implement supportive initiatives to improve student success at WSU, but never punitive measures against academics or students. The institution abides by ethical standards and policy to ensure that any information gathered is handled responsibly.

# 7. SURVEY RESULTS

## 7.1. Financials, Residence and Preferences

Financial resources heavily influence access to higher education because students depend on various funding sources to meet their academic goals. This section examines and classifies the primary ways that WSU postgraduate students pay for their education, including government aid (such as NSFAS), employer-sponsored help, personal savings, scholarships, and other non-traditional financial arrangements. Through an analysis of various financing streams, the study sheds light on the financial obstacles and advantages faced by students, giving WSU practical knowledge to create more successful assistance plans and fair regulations that improve student achievement and retention.



**Figure 2:** Postgraduate students' funding categories

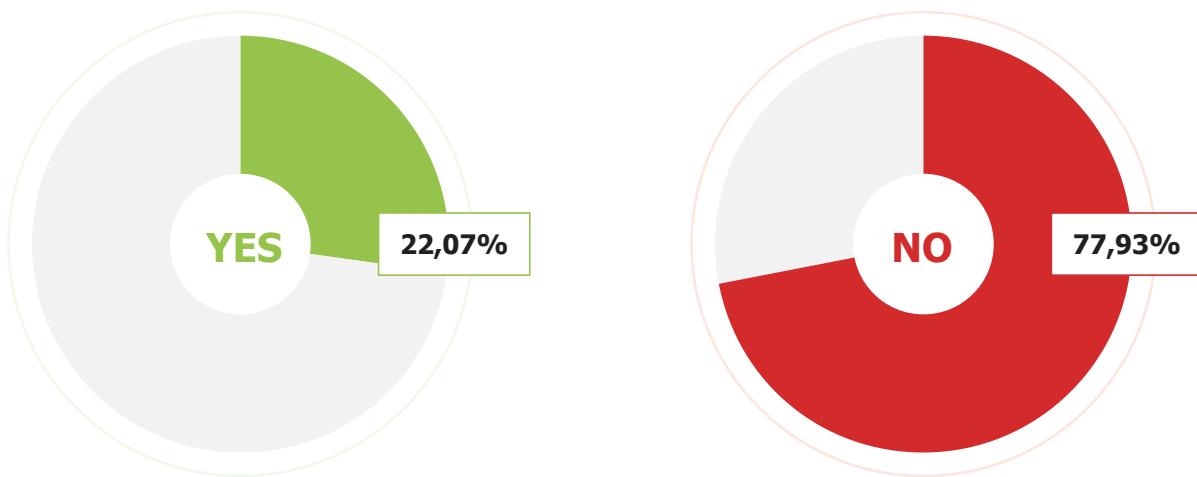
According to the data, nearly half (49.65%) of WSU students heavily rely on self-funding as their primary financial strategy. This highlights possible financial strain as many of them probably balance personal savings, loans, or income from employment to cover expenses. This could result in stress and impact academic performance, contradicting the aim of "enriching the student experience". Bursaries and scholarships (22.69%) are the second-largest support pillar, demonstrating institutional or outside aid's important but constrained role in easing tuition costs. Together, NSFAS/government aid (8.51%) and family contributions (9.22%) support fewer than one-fifth of students, indicating structural issues with public funding distribution (such as delays and eligibility restrictions) and gaps in available familial

resources. Their employers sponsor a smaller subset of students (7.09%); these students are probably connected to business alliances or workplace upskilling initiatives.

Notably, "Other Unique Cases" (2.84%), however marginal, highlight unusual or risky funding sources (such as informal loans), illustrating the varied and frequently insecure financial realities that students face.

Because self-funding predominates, it indicates systemic injustices and calls on institutions to increase scholarships, expedite access to government help, and resolve bottlenecks that disproportionately affect low-income students. Additional diversification of financial safety nets could be achieved through employer collaborations and customized assistance for "unique case" students. WSU could also establish workshops to educate students on financial planning and available funding opportunities and increase partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organisations to secure more bursaries and scholarships.

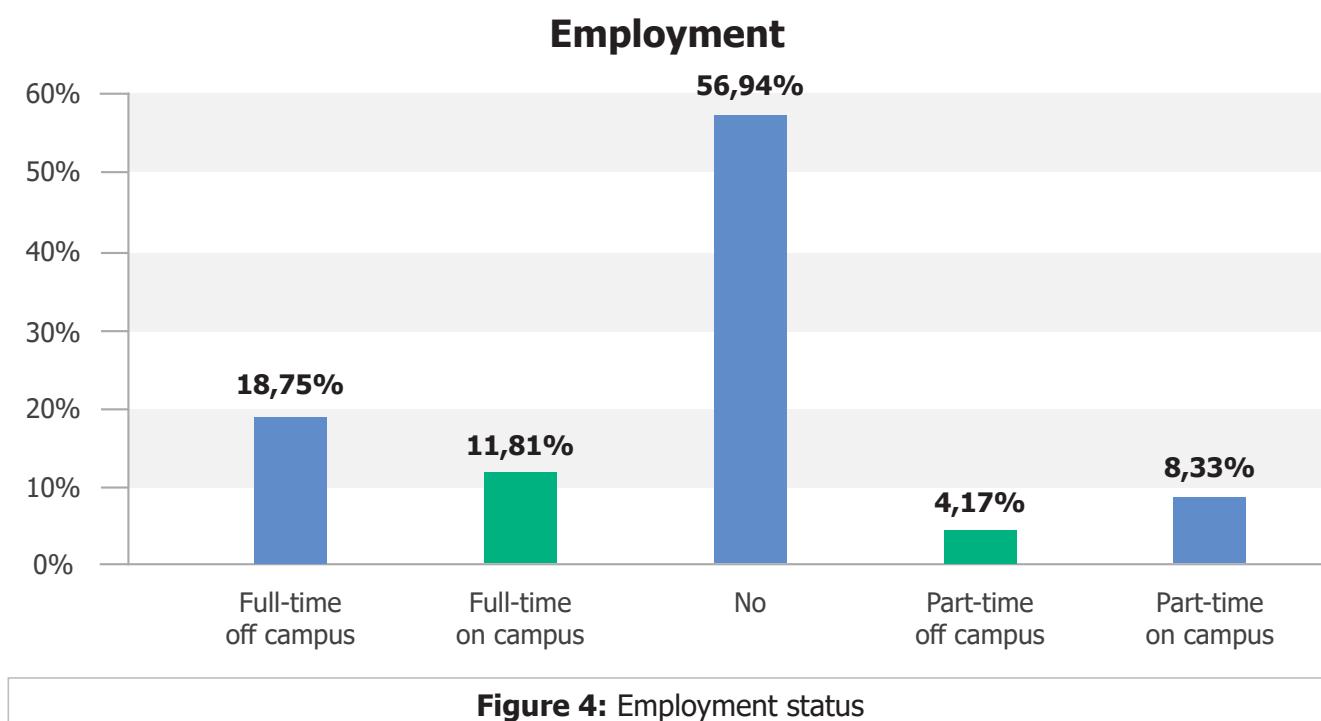
Building on Figure 2, which examined funding sources, participants were asked to provide their financial status regarding living allowances. Postgraduate living allowances are crucial for ensuring financial security since they allow students to fully concentrate on their demanding coursework without being distracted by part-time employment or stress linked to survival. By providing equal access to underprivileged students, they advance equity, lower the likelihood of dropouts associated with excessive living expenses, and protect mental health by easing the burden of financial instability. These stipends significantly boost innovation and institutional competitiveness by allowing students to focus on continuous, high-quality research, especially in areas that tackle pressing societal issues like sustainability or public health. The detailed analysis is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Access to living allowances

This survey revealed that 77.93% did not receive a living allowance, while only 22.07% reported receiving financial support for living expenses. Living allowances, typically sourced from bursaries, NSFAS, or family contributions, are essential for covering costs such as accommodation, food, and transportation. This disparity highlights a pressing need for increased funding opportunities, better awareness of existing financial aid programs, and support services such as part-time job placements or emergency financial assistance. Addressing these issues through collaborative efforts between the university, funding institutions, and the government is essential to ensure equitable financial support and improve the overall well-being of postgraduate students.

Living allowances are more crucial because most postgraduate students (56.94%) are not employed, indicating that they may be relying on such allowances to get by. Figure 4 shows the employment status of WSU postgraduate students.



The employment status of postgraduate students varies widely, with 56.94% not working. This suggests that most prioritise full-time studies, relying on scholarships, family support, savings, or loans. However, this also indicates potential financial struggles, as these students may face difficulties covering living and academic expenses.

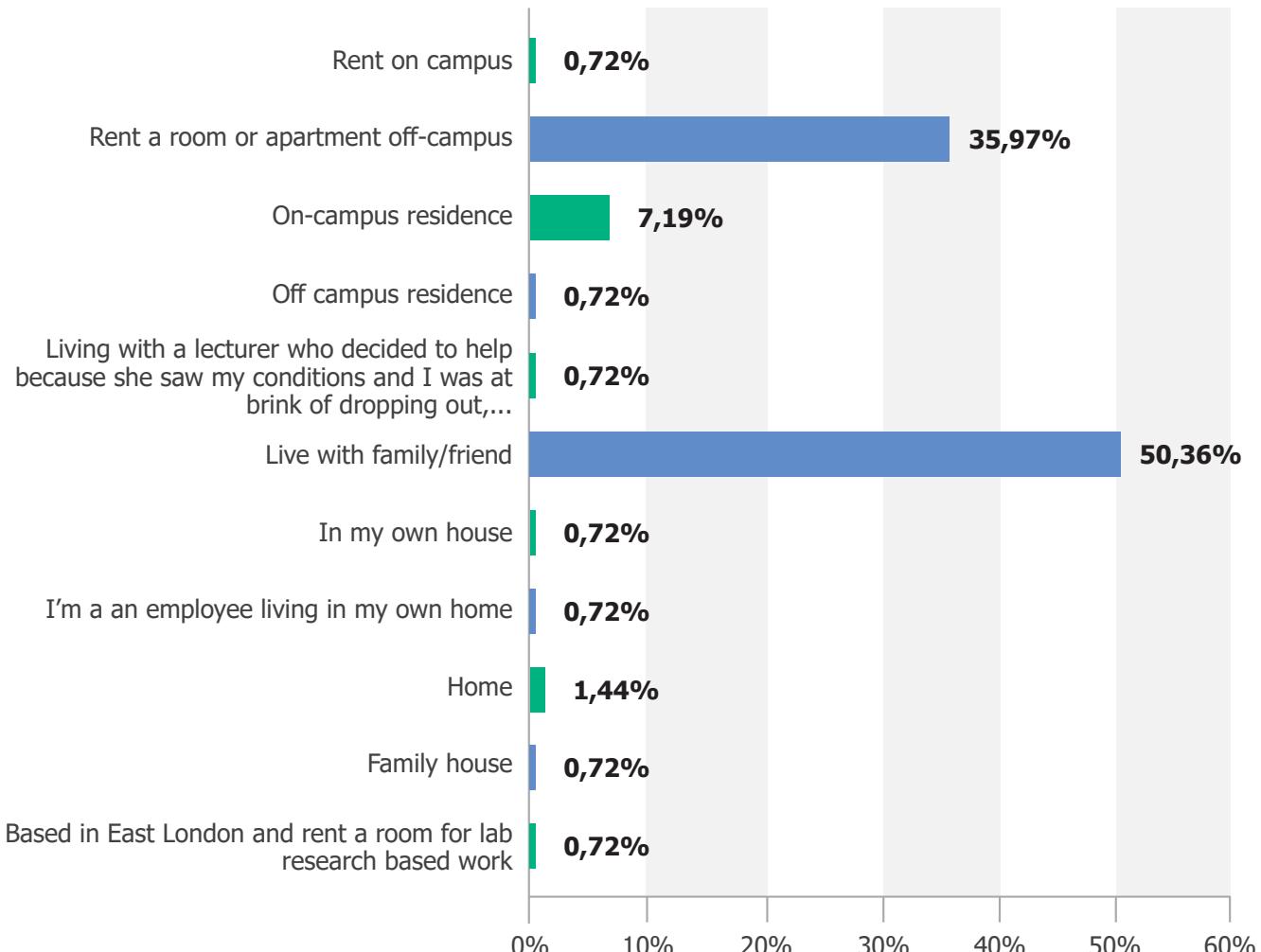
Among employed students, 18.75% work full-time off campus, likely balancing demanding careers with their studies. This could impact their time for coursework and research. Meanwhile, 11.81% hold full-time on-campus jobs, such as teaching or research assistantships, which provide financial support while keeping them academically engaged.

Part-time employment is less common. About 8.33% work part-time on campus in roles like administrative or lab assistant positions, while 4.17% work part-time off campus, possibly in freelance or remote jobs. These students may benefit from additional income without the pressures of full-time work but must carefully manage their schedules.

On-campus (20.14%) and off-campus (22.92%) employment levels are relatively balanced, with slightly more students working off-campus. On-campus roles, such as research or administrative jobs, allow students to align work with their studies but still require significant time commitments. Off-campus employment, dominated by full-time positions (18.75%), suggests that many students juggle demanding careers in industries like corporate sectors or healthcare, which may limit their access to campus resources and academic support.

Postgraduate students' access to academic resources and support is heavily influenced by their accommodation status, with on-campus residents typically benefiting from proximity to libraries, labs, and mentorship networks.

### Current Residence

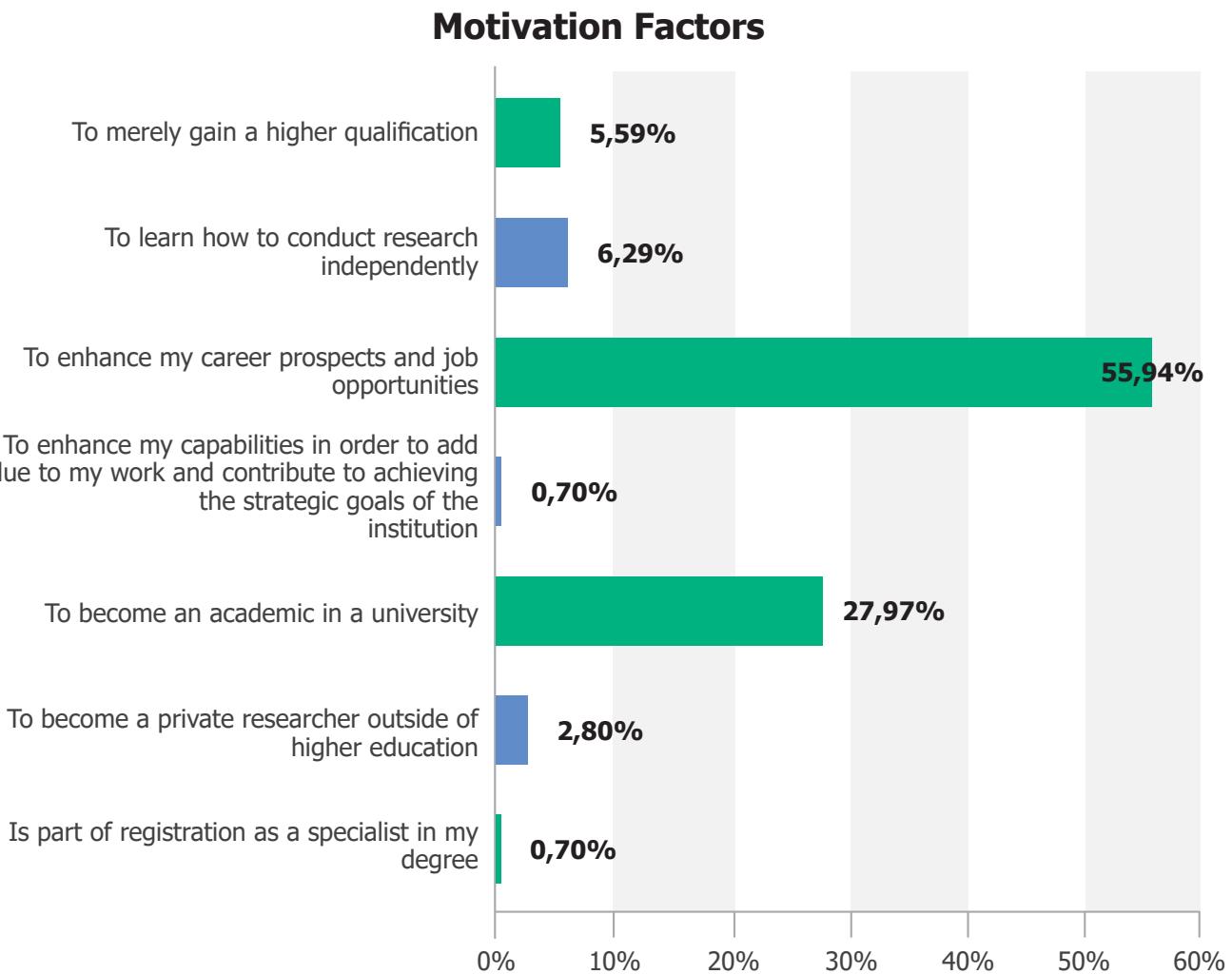


**Figure 5: Living arrangements**

According to the analysis in Figure 5, over 90% of students reside off campus, with 50.36% living with family or friends and 35.97% renting off-campus accommodations. This reflects reliance on cost-effective housing solutions, likely due to financial constraints. Only 7.91% live on campus, suggesting scarce availability or high demand for university housing. A small subset (2.88%) faces unconventional living conditions, such as residing with lecturers or commuting for specialised lab work, highlighting hidden vulnerabilities in student housing stability.

These findings highlight the need for more funding opportunities to support non-working students, expanding on-campus residence and part-time jobs to provide flexible income options, and targeted assistance for off-campus workers who may struggle with academic commitments.

A complex combination of personal, professional, and societal reasons drives postgraduate students at WSU to pursue advanced studies despite financial and residence obstacles. WSU may create focused interventions that increase student resilience and success by better understanding these factors, which are based on necessity and aspiration. A more thorough examination of these incentives and practical solutions for WSU can be found in Figure 6 below.

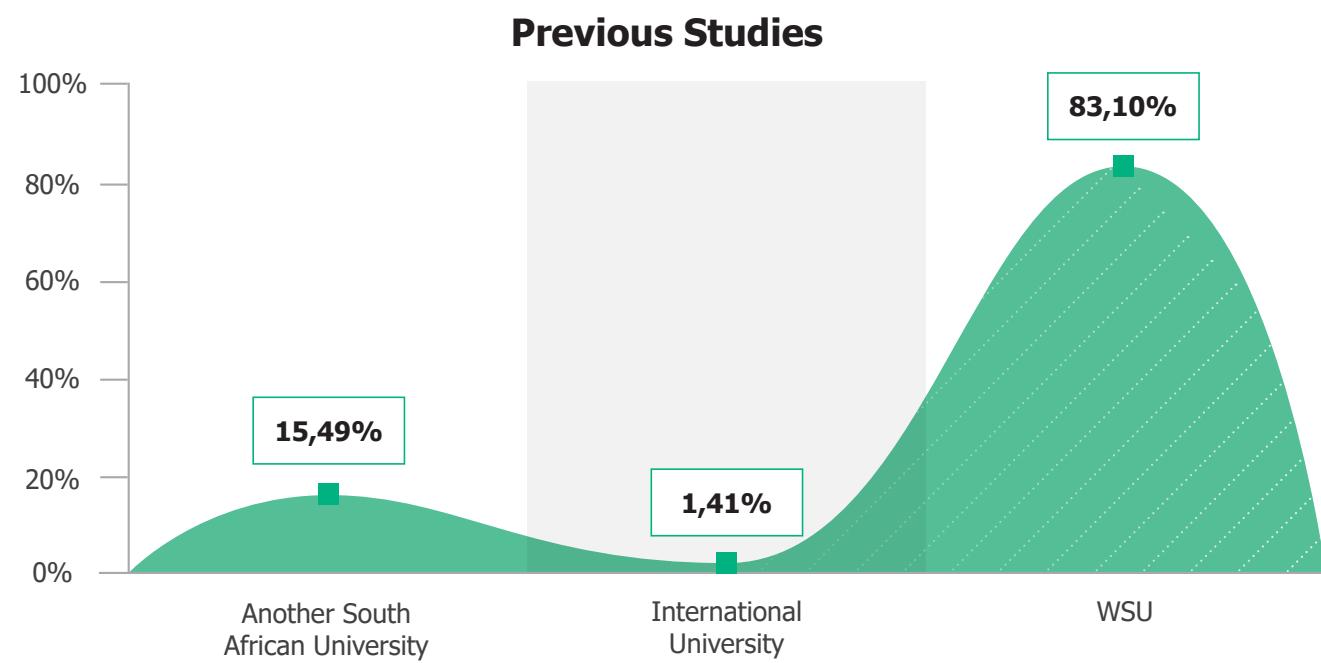


**Figure 6:** Primary motivations for enrolling in the Postgraduate Programme

The Graph in Figure 6 above represents the key reasons individuals pursue postgraduate studies. Enhancing Career Prospects and Job Opportunities stands out as the most significant motivator, with 60% of respondents selecting it. This emphasises the importance of postgraduate qualifications in improving employment opportunities and career growth. A notable proportion of respondents aim to become academics in a university, reflecting the academic aspirations of the critical segment of students.

Motivations such as learning to conduct independent research, becoming private researchers outside higher education, and gaining a higher qualification are less prevalent but highlight diverse personal and professional goals. Other motivations, such as enhancing capabilities for strategic goals or pursuing postgraduate study as a specialist requirement, show niche objectives linked to specific professional or academic needs.

Most students (83.10%) had previously attended WSU, indicating a high internal movement from undergraduate to postgraduate courses and strong institutional commitment (see Figure 7). Academic familiarity, faculty relationships, or intentional recruitment could cause this. A lower percentage (15.49%) came from other South African universities, indicating restricted inter-institutional mobility. The low worldwide reach of just 1.41% of students who studied abroad was probably caused by difficulties obtaining visas, financial constraints, or a lack of foreign marketing.



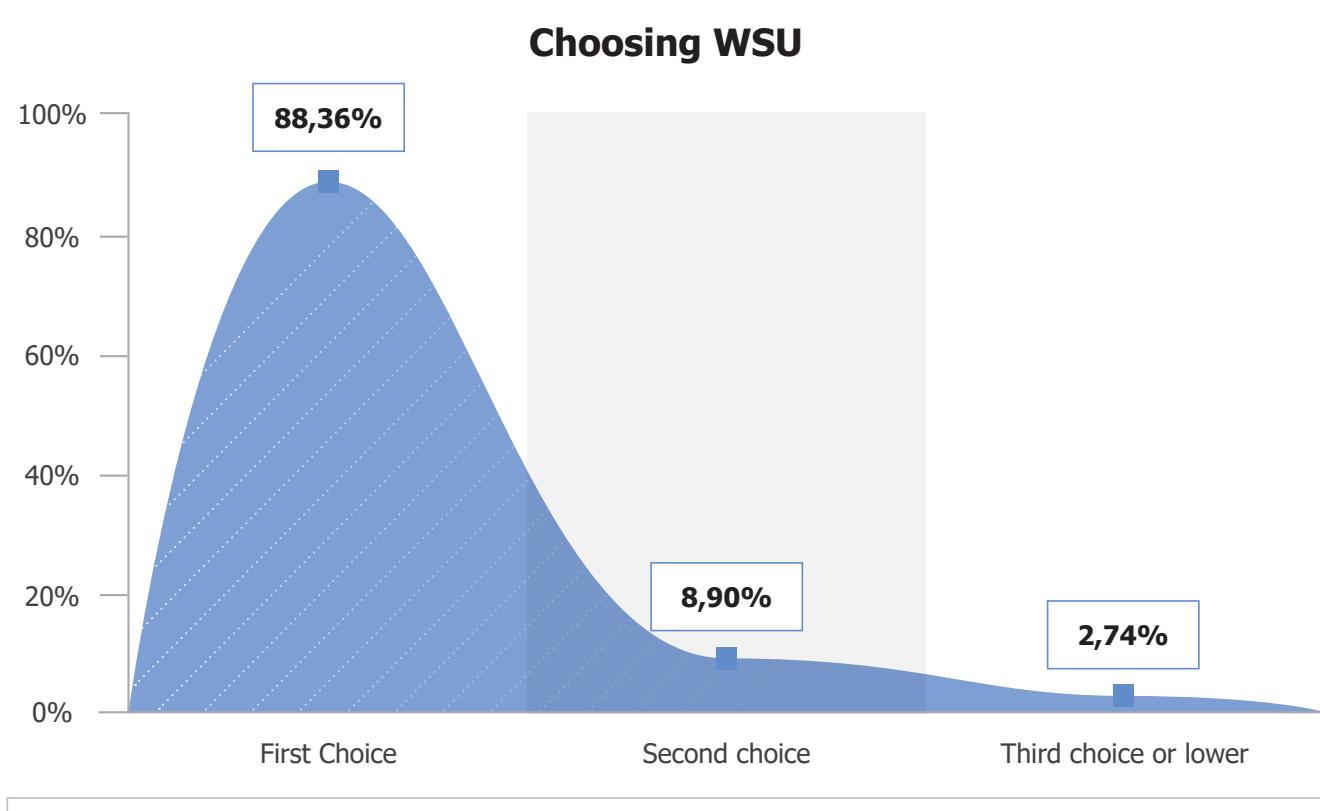
**Figure 7:** University where previous studies were done

WSU demonstrates strong institutional retention, with 83.10% of its postgraduate cohort originating from undergraduate programs. While this reflects effective academic continuity and student satisfaction, it raises concerns about intellectual homogeneity and limited cross-pollination of ideas. The marginal representation of students from other South African universities (15.49%) suggests underutilised

potential for inter-institutional collaboration. Joint initiatives, such as interdisciplinary research projects addressing national challenges or hybrid learning models integrating regional case studies, would enrich academic discourse while preserving WSU's commitment to Eastern Cape development.

With only 1.41% international enrolment, WSU has untapped potential to bolster its global footprint. Enhancing international engagement would elevate WSU's research impact, enrich classroom dynamics, and position it as a hub for cross-border solutions to issues like climate resilience, transforming regional strengths into global influence.

The study reveals that 5.56% of postgraduate respondents self-identify as living with disabilities. However, the research did not specify the nature of these disabilities (e.g., physical, sensory, learning, or mental health conditions). This gap underscores the need for deeper investigation to tailor support mechanisms, as disabilities vary widely in their impact on academic access and participation. Walter Sisulu University (WSU) has established a dedicated unit for students with disabilities, which likely provides services such as assistive technologies, exam accommodations, or accessible infrastructure.



**Figure 8:** Choosing WSU

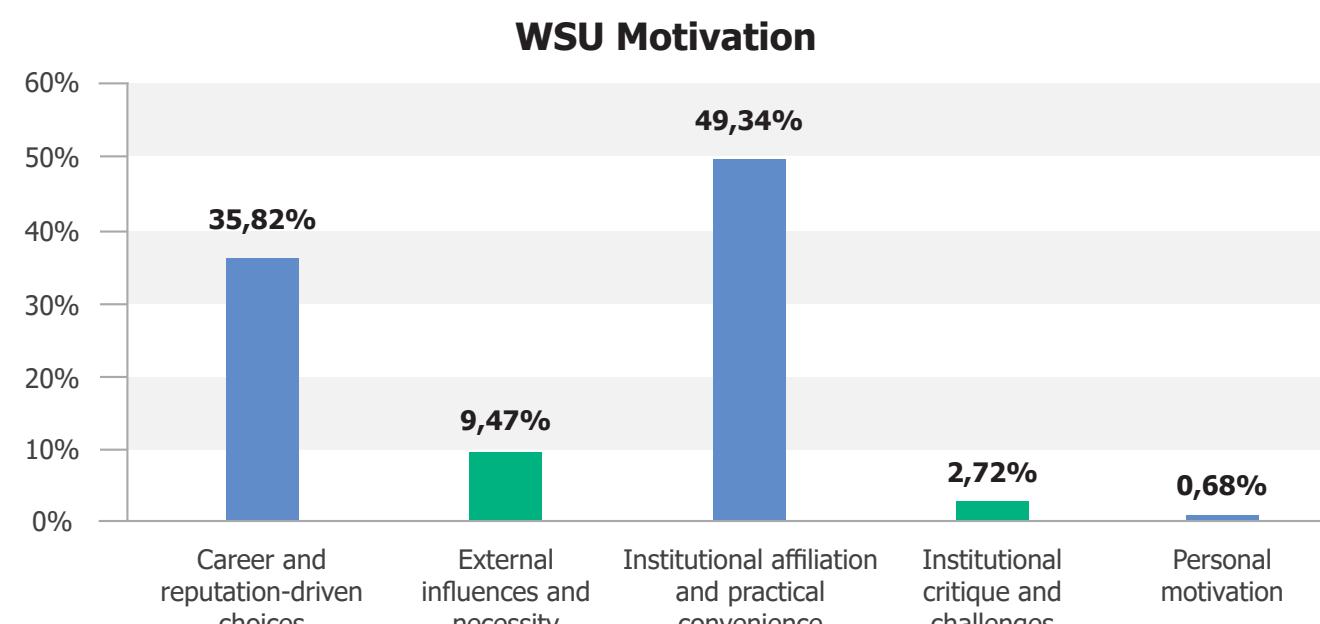
Notably, most postgraduate students selected WSU as their first-choice university (as indicated in Figure 8), a trend likely linked to the institution's strong retention of its undergraduate cohort (see Figure 7). Students who completed their undergraduate degrees at WSU may prefer to continue here due to familiarity with campus systems, existing academic relationships, or trust in institutional support structures—including the disability unit. For students with disabilities, this loyalty could reflect prior

positive experiences with the university's accommodations, though further research is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

This high percentage (88.36%) suggests that WSU's academic programs and support services effectively meet student needs, reflecting the strategic plan to enrich the student experience. The 8.90% of students who considered WSU their second choice, highlight areas where improvements in student support services, such as mentorship, counselling, and career guidance, could shift perceptions to the first choice. The small percentage (2.74%) in the third choice or lower category signals specific gaps, arguably related to infrastructure or administrative services, that need targeted interventions.

To fully align with WSU's strategic goals, it is recommended that feedback mechanisms be enhanced, pain points identified, and success stories from the majority who had a positive experience be promoted. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of student satisfaction will ensure that WSU maintains its commitment to delivering a premier educational environment that consistently exceeds student expectations.

Expanding on the preferences shown in Figure 8, Figure 9 explores the primary reasons behind students' decision to pursue their chosen qualification at WSU, highlighting key factors influencing their choice.



**Figure 9:** Primary Reasons for choosing a qualification at WSU

At WSU, career prospects and reputation (35.82%) are crucial in decision-making. Many postgraduate students and professionals choose WSU because of employment prospects, particularly in fields where graduates have a strong track record. The reputation of specific faculties, such as Health Sciences or Education, further influences enrolment. However, while some recognise WSU's strengths in specific disciplines, others may still prefer institutions with broader national or international recognition.

A significant portion of postgraduate students enrol at WSU due to external factors (9.47%), such as recommendations from family, friends, or employers. Individuals sometimes opt for WSU because other institutions reject them or it is the most feasible choice given financial constraints. Compared to other universities, the affordability of education at WSU plays a role, though not as dominant as institutional affiliation.

Institutional affiliation and practical convenience (49.34%) are the most influential factors for WSU postgraduate students. Many applicants choose WSU simply because they previously studied here or were already working/living here. The location, funding availability, and accessibility make it a practical choice for students who want continuity in their education without having to relocate or adjust to a new academic environment. Additionally, some students may remain at WSU due to existing academic relationships with faculty and research supervisors.

Although not a major deciding factor, administrative inefficiencies and institutional challenges at WSU (2.72%) have been noted; issues such as a disorganised research committee, financial difficulties, and lack of adherence to policies have been cited by some students as concerns. However, these factors do not overwhelmingly deter enrolment, as students focus on practical benefits and career outcomes rather than institutional shortcomings.

Intrinsic motivation and personal drive (0.68%) appear to have the least impact on WSU enrollment decisions. While some students recognise gaps in institutional strategy or wish to improve specific practices, these personal convictions do not significantly dictate their decision to study at WSU. Instead, most students prioritise career stability, financial feasibility, and institutional convenience over personal ambitions.

**Table 1:** Motivational factors for choosing qualification at WSU

Category	Factor (Student comment)	Percentage
<b>Institutional affiliation and practical convenience</b>	I previously studied at this institution	30,41
	I was working and living here, so it just made sense	0,68
	The location of the institution	12,84
	Funding was available	5,41
<b>Career and reputation-driven choices</b>	Graduates have good career/employment prospects	18,92
	The institution's reputation in my subject	2,03
	Overall Reputation	2,7
	Reputation of the department/faculty	4,73

<b>Career and reputation-driven choices</b>	Programme Uniqueness: Only institution offering this programme	0,68
	The cost was more affordable	6,76
<b>External influences and necessity</b>	It was recommended to me	6,76
	The employer advised me to enrol	1,35
	Primary choice universities rejected me	0,68
	Never wanted to do MMed with WSU	0,68
<b>Institutional critique and challenges</b>	Disorganized research board	0,68
	WSU doesn't fully pay other institutions	0,68
	Policies not adhered to	0,68
	Policies are for compliance, not improvement	0,68
<b>Personal motivation</b>	Observing overlooked practices compromising institutional strategy	0,68

Table 1 further explains the factors influencing students' decision to enrol at WSU. The data indicates that prior affiliation with the institution is a significant factor for many students, with 30.41% choosing to continue their education at an institution where they previously studied. This suggests a strong sense of loyalty and comfort with familiar surroundings. Additionally, career prospects play a crucial role, with 18.92% of students influenced by the good employment opportunities for graduates. The institution's location is also essential, as 12.84% of students consider proximity and convenience in their decision-making process. Affordability and funding availability are notable factors, with 6.76% and 5.41% of students, respectively, highlighting the importance of financial considerations.

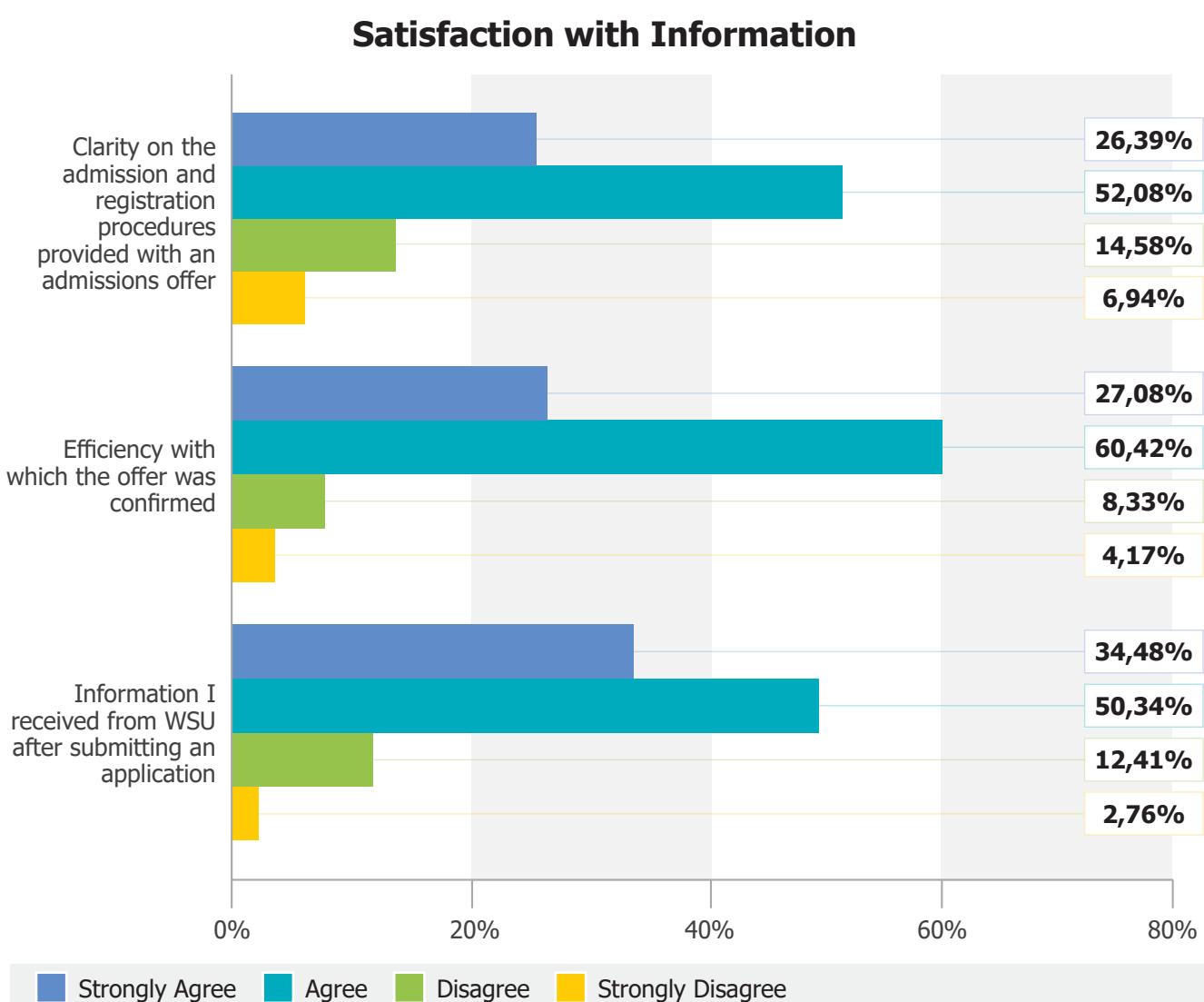
On the other hand, factors such as the institution's overall reputation (2.7%), the reputation of specific departments (4.73%), and recommendations from others (6.76%) have a moderate influence. Minor factors include employer advice (1.35%), rejection from primary choice universities (0.68%), and structural issues within the institution (0.68%). Interestingly, personal convenience, such as already living and working in the area, and the uniqueness of the program offered each account for only 0.68% of the decision-making process. This data suggests that while practical and career-oriented considerations are paramount, personal motivations and institutional critiques play a minimal role in students' choices.

To further align with the goal of "*Enriching the Student Experience*," WSU should consider enhancing alumni engagement through structured mentorship programs, career fairs, and networking events. Upgrading campus infrastructure, housing, and recreational facilities could foster a stronger sense of community, leveraging the institution's favourable location. Additionally, focusing on academic excellence through faculty development and research promotion would attract students to prioritise high-quality education.

## 7.2. Administration and Management

The administration and management of WSU's postgraduate programme play a crucial role in determining whether students persist or drop out, making professionalism and the principles of Ubuntu essential. A well-structured system with clear communication, responsive support, and efficient research processes ensures students can navigate academic and financial challenges effectively. Timely disbursement of funding information, streamlined thesis approvals, and accessible supervisors enhance the student experience, while Ubuntu fosters a sense of belonging, compassion, and academic collaboration. By integrating professionalism with empathy, WSU can reduce dropout rates, improve completion rates, and strengthen its institutional reputation, ultimately creating a supportive and efficient postgraduate environment.

Figure 10 evaluates students' satisfaction with the information provided by WSU after submitting their applications, offering insights into the university's communication effectiveness.



**Figure 10:** Satisfaction with Information Received from WSU after Applying

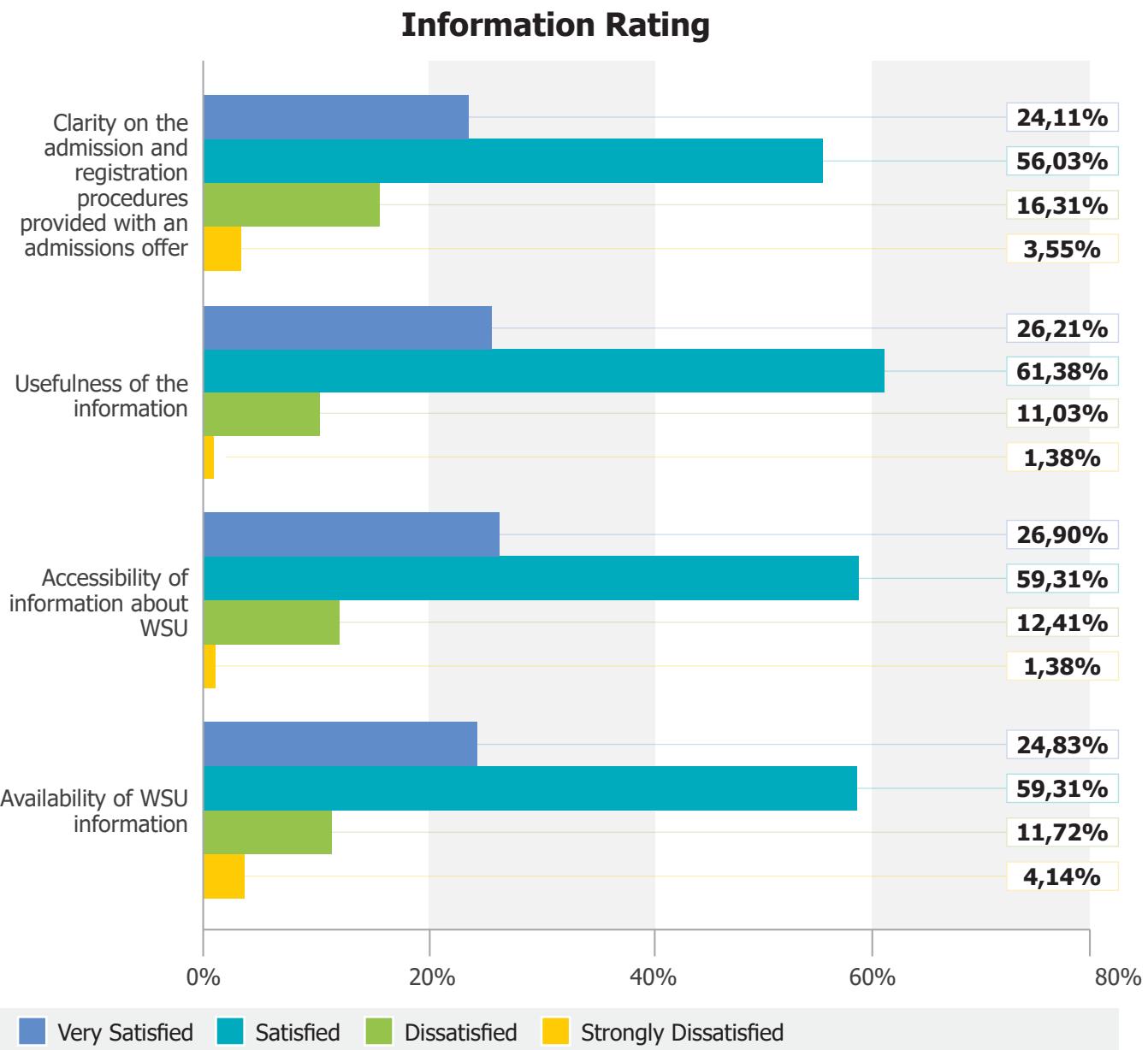
This graph illustrates the distribution of responses to a survey question regarding students' perceptions or experiences with application and registration processes. Most respondents either agree (50.34%) or strongly agree (34.48%) with the statement posed, indicating positive sentiment overall. A smaller proportion disagrees (12.41%) or strongly disagrees (2.76%), suggesting limited dissatisfaction.

The high percentage of positive responses, 84.82%, demonstrates satisfaction, indicating that WSU's initiatives may already positively impact student experiences. While dissatisfaction is minimal, understanding the reasons behind these responses can help address specific issues.

The 12.41% who disagree and 2.76% who strongly disagree present an opportunity to investigate areas where students feel underserved or dissatisfied. Enhancing the student experience further and aligning with WSU's strategic goal 2 is needed. WSU should engage with the minority who expressed dissatisfaction to identify specific concerns, such as academic support, campus facilities, or social activities.

The student satisfaction levels regarding the information they receive from WSU are a crucial indicator of the effectiveness of communication between the university and its postgraduate students. High satisfaction levels suggest that the university provides clear, accurate, and timely information, essential for students to make informed decisions about their academic and professional paths. This can include information about course offerings, enrolment procedures, funding opportunities, and career services. Effective communication helps build trust and confidence in the institution, fostering a positive relationship between the university and its students.





**Figure 11:** Satisfaction rating with information received from WSU

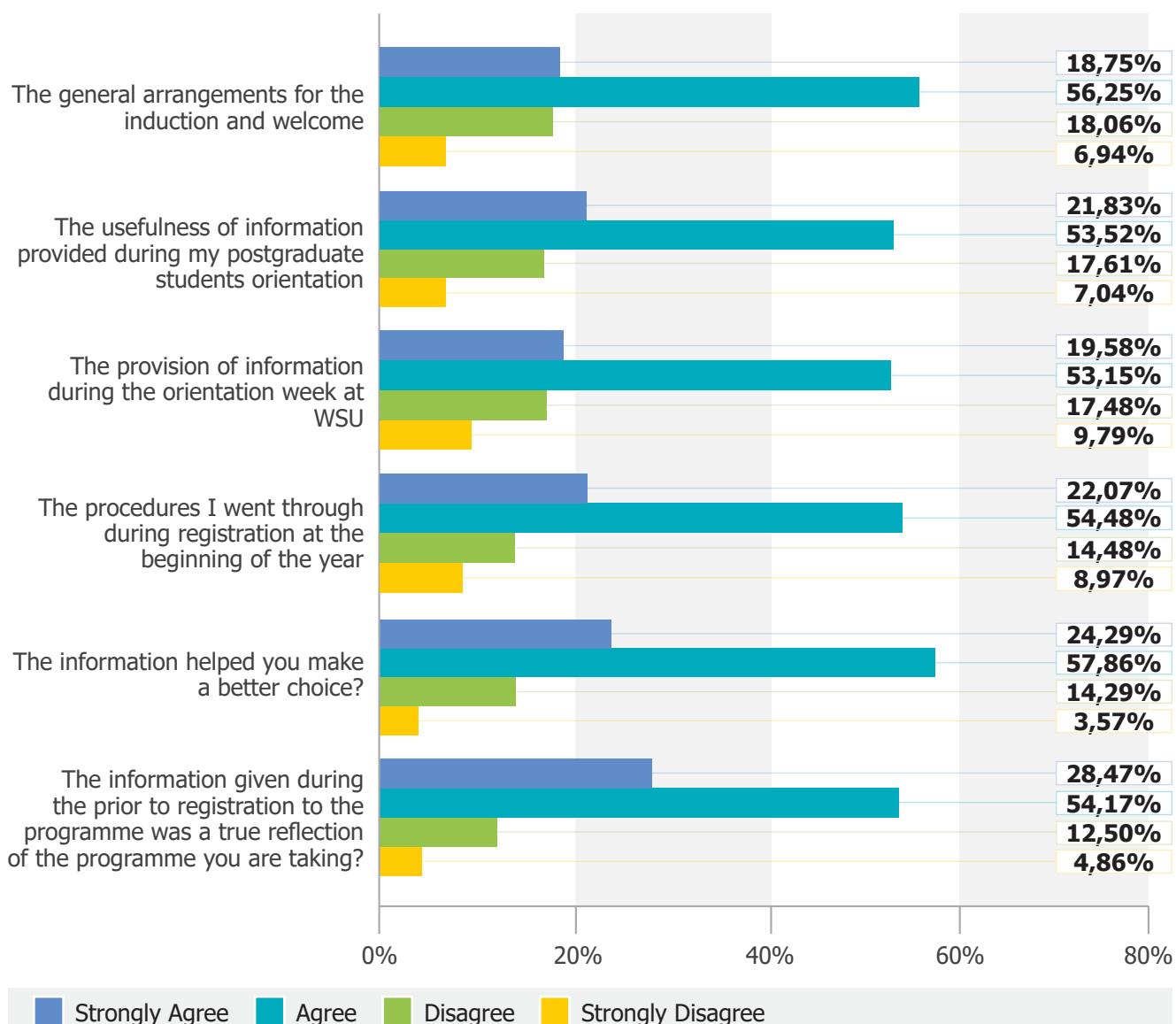
According to data, students are typically satisfied with the information provided by WSU. The vast majority of students express satisfaction or high satisfaction with the information they receive in terms of its availability (84.14%), accessibility (86.21%), and usefulness (87.59%). This suggests that WSU does a good job of giving its postgraduate students information that is understandable, practical, and accessible. According to the high satisfaction ratings, the university's communication tactics successfully provide students with the required information, which is essential for their academic planning and decision-making.

Nonetheless, several things need improvement, mainly when explaining the admissions and registration processes. Even though most students are very satisfied (24.11%) or satisfied (56.03%) with how clear these procedures are, 19.86% of students voiced discontent. According to this, almost one in five

students believe that the information on entrance and registration is unclear, which may cause them to become confused and possibly postpone their academic journey. Improving the detail and clarity of the material given during the admissions process could allay these worries, increase overall student happiness, and facilitate their transfer to the university.

A well-structured registration and orientation process is essential in shaping a postgraduate student's academic journey, ensuring a smooth transition, fostering engagement, and enhancing overall satisfaction. An efficient registration system, supported by digital solutions and clear communication, minimises bureaucratic hurdles while personalised academic planning and financial transparency help students make informed decisions. Orientation should extend beyond logistics, incorporating academic training, research guidance, and skill development to prepare students for success.

## Registration and Orientation



**Figure 12:** Satisfaction with registration and orientation

The data in Figure 12 on student satisfaction with various aspects of the registration and orientation at WSU indicates a generally positive experience, though there are areas for improvement. Most students agree or strongly agree that the information provided before registration accurately reflected the program they are taking (82.64%) and helped them make better choices (82.15%). This suggests that WSU has relevant and accurate information that aids students in making informed decisions about their academic paths. Additionally, over 76% of students are satisfied with the procedures during registration, indicating a relatively smooth and efficient process.

However, there are notable areas where dissatisfaction is higher, particularly regarding the provision of information during orientation week and the general arrangements for induction and welcome. Approximately 27.27% of students disagree or strongly disagree with the usefulness of information during orientation, and 25% express dissatisfaction with the general arrangements for induction and welcome. These figures highlight the need for WSU to enhance its orientation and induction processes to meet the needs and expectations of postgraduate students. Improving these areas could significantly boost overall student satisfaction and ensure a more positive start to their academic journey at WSU.

When students were asked to express their ideas on improving WSU's registration and application process, several important themes revealed themselves. Their comments emphasise the need for timely and precise information, efficient registration processes, and easily accessible application processes while highlighting the university's strengths and opportunities for development. How well these procedures work significantly impacts students' academic experiences and capacity to adjust to university life. Financial aid and fair access to resources are also crucial for guaranteeing that no student has needless obstacles or hardships while pursuing their education.

Below are the students voices:



**“I had to deregister certain modules weeks into the programme because apparently they're not available/not being taught. The modules shouldn't be advertised on the website or during registration if they're not actually available. And it cost me money since I had already been invoiced for the modules. Dissatisfied does not even begin to describe.”**

**“I believe that the 'first-come, first-served' approach to applications and registration creates a disadvantage for students from under-resourced backgrounds who may lack reliable access to the internet or face delays in receiving necessary documents. A more inclusive process would involve prioritizing equitable access, possibly by allowing students to register within specific intervals based on their**

unique circumstances. Additionally, funding should be more accessible to postgraduate students. Many of these students face financial challenges that limit their ability to continue their studies, and expanding funding opportunities would help ensure they can complete advanced degrees without financial hardship."



"Extending the registration period for students who are not funded."

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A recurring theme in the feedback is the need for improved communication and timely dissemination of information. Students emphasised the importance of receiving prompt responses to applications and being informed of the outcomes via email, phone, or text. There were also calls for better clarity and transparency in the registration process, with suggestions to integrate the application and finance clearance processes to reduce stress and delays. Additionally, students highlighted the need for clear and timely information about program details, orientation schedules, and registration procedures to avoid confusion and ensure a smooth transition into their studies.

Below are the students' voices:



"Firstly, the online application system should be arranged in such way it picks up when you are a university employee and clearance/waiver of initial payment be automated. The application process needs to be integrated to finance clearance processes. Mine was a bit stressful where I had to make several follow ups before I was cleared to be able to register. Also, there is still a need to be informed when you have been admitted even if it is via sms, rather than expecting an applicant to check from the student portal which also has its hiccups and what about those who don't have data to keep on checking admission status on the portal."

"I was not aware the Post graduate will be physical. I spend R4500 every time there's a block session on accommodation, travelling and catering. Whilst I'm aware this is for my benefit, I wish I was informed prior to take informed decisions. I therefore wish the University will improve on information sharing."

**"In my course we did not have a information given to us prior choosing nor registration."**

**"Early response to applications, specifically postgraduate applications when you have already graduated and submitted everything. This late reply costs us funding as the funders request the admission confirmation for processing. The institution must also aid unfunded postgraduate students by giving them job opportunities within the institution as that could also be beneficial to both the institution and the students."**

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Financial issues were a significant concern for many students. There were numerous requests to eliminate specific fees, such as registration fees and additional charges for PhD and research-only master's programs. Students also called for more accessible funding opportunities, including bursaries for all postgraduate students, regardless of their employment status. The feedback indicated that financial constraints often hinder students' ability to continue their studies, and there were suggestions for the university to provide job opportunities within the institution to support unfunded postgraduate students.

Below are the students' feedback:



**"The University must create funding schemes for post graduate students also because even though they are employed still can't afford to pay for their own tuition."**

**"Registration fee must be provided for students, regardless of their depts (money owed to WSU) from previous studies taken at WSU. There are terms that hinder students from registering, they are asked to pay 10% of their dept before they get registration fee, which may be costly depending on how much they owe the institution. Students who were previously studying at WSU must be provided with registration fee without them having to pay the 10% of their dept."**

“I am a student that is coming from a poor family but I want to become an academia in this institution. I would like postgraduates to be offered funding and accommodations or be offered jobs in this institution so that we can not struggle because I have experienced hunger. Sometimes I sleep with hungry stomach.”

“More funding from the university.”

Students expressed a desire for more efficient and user-friendly systems for application and registration. Many suggested that the entire process should be conducted online to avoid unnecessary trips to the admissions office. There were also calls for the university to address technical glitches and improve the overall functionality of the online systems. Additionally, students highlighted the need for early administration and registration processes to prevent delays and ensure that all students can begin their studies on time.

Below are the students' feedback:



“Improve technology systems so that we don't have to come to campus when facing problems during registration.”

“May it be done online rather than having to have a human being sort it for you and make unnecessary errors.”

“The application process needs to be aligned with the system that WSU uses. The system often has glitches and when you call in at Administration office, you'll be sent from pillar to post without being given useful information or being directed to the relevant person/department. The Admins office is the worst, and the leadership needs to do better to improve the experience of WSUs postgraduates/clients.”

“The online application and registration process is by far the best so I guess all you can do is fine tune it to be smoother.”

Equity and inclusivity were essential themes in the feedback. Students from under-resourced backgrounds expressed concerns about the 'first-come, first-served' approach to applications and registration, which disadvantaged those with limited internet access or delays in receiving necessary documents. There were suggestions for a more inclusive process that prioritises equitable access and provides additional support for disadvantaged students. Additionally, students called for the university to address perceived favoritism and ensure all students have equal access to benefits and support services.

Below are the students' feedback:



“What I would like to be changed is quite full thing when is time to register.”

“Welcoming of students in the administration office during registration, for example couple of days going there without assistant until i met someone i know.”

There must be a toll free call centre for each department, during the process. Students sometimes often register under pressure, poorly advised and some underprepared for university especially those from deep rural areas unlike those from model c schools. As result they end up registering wrong modules. Again students end up in middle of the courses cancel and add modules. This draconian condition is causing students to be over burden by student dept, which delays students from attaining their degrees on record time, denies student a financial freedom and that leads to another aspect of employability. By look of things this process could be avoided it not an inevitably kind of issue.”

“I feel like Post graduate students are not given much attention as first graduates, maybe it is because it is assumed that since we've been enrolled in the institution before we are sorted.”

The feedback also highlighted the need for improved orientation and support services. Students suggested that orientation programs should be tailored to the needs of part-time students and provide comprehensive information about available resources, including financial assistance and psychological support. There were also calls for better communication about the availability of support services and for the university to ensure that these services are effectively utilised by students.

Below are the students' feedback:



- " 1. Be allowed to choose PART or FULL TIME.
- 2. Be able to download Proof or Admission and Registration when required.
- 3. Be able to download the Fees Invoice.
- 4. Be able to track your Admission and Registration Process.
- 5. Be able to know the admission and registration turnaround time."

" Certain benefits of the university are granted to well known students that are related to WSU staff members. The sections of support at WSU exist but are not utilised by the students as they have no knowledge like psychologists."

" I wish that information be relayed to students on time, as to how everything will be conducted, eg attending classes physical or online."

" WSU must have research booklet that has everything online and printed one. It would have help students and secondly it must assist students with funding opportunities."

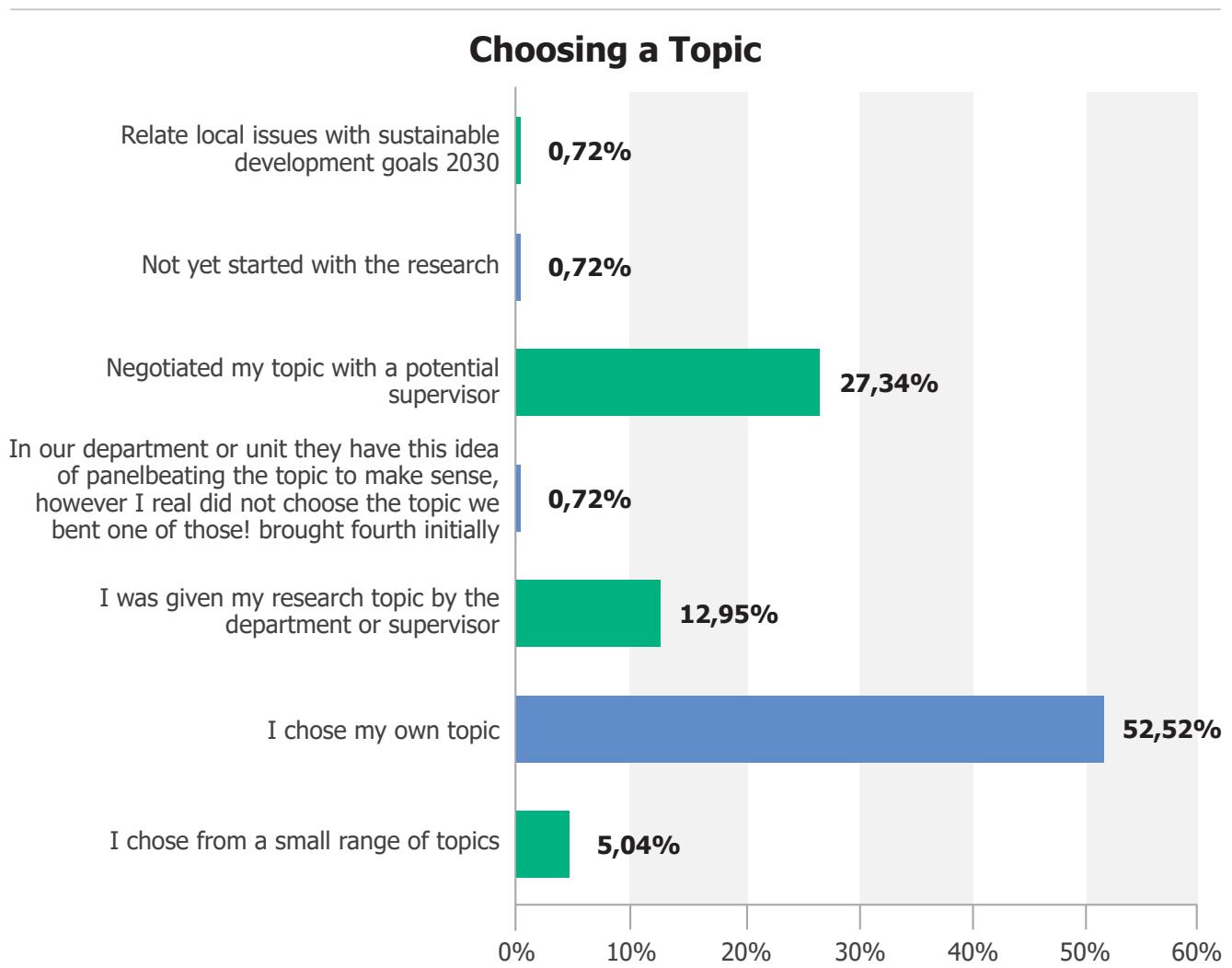
To enhance satisfaction, WSU could focus on gathering detailed feedback from dissatisfied students to identify specific pain points. Expanding resources such as in-person assistance, online guides, and real-time support during registration could address these challenges. Regular monitoring through surveys and feedback mechanisms will allow WSU to adapt its strategies proactively, ensuring continuous improvement and fostering greater institutional loyalty.

### 7.3. Selecting a Research Topic and Supervision

The selection of the research topic has a big impact on postgraduate success. In addition to matching the student's passions and interests, a well-chosen topic keeps them motivated and involved throughout the research process. Students are more inclined to devote the time and energy required for a more comprehensive and perceptive examination when they are at ease and excited about their subject. Overcoming the inescapable obstacles and disappointments associated with postgraduate research requires this internal drive.

The process of selecting a research topic can vary. Sometimes, students choose their topics, allowing them to explore areas they are genuinely interested in. This freedom can foster creativity and innovation. However, in other cases, the faculty may specify certain areas from which students can choose, sometimes with the guidance of a supervisor. This approach can ensure that the research aligns with the faculty's expertise and available resources, providing a structured framework for the student. Whether the topic is self-chosen or faculty-directed, the key is that students feel a sense of ownership and satisfaction with their research focus, as this is fundamental to their success and fulfilment in postgraduate studies.





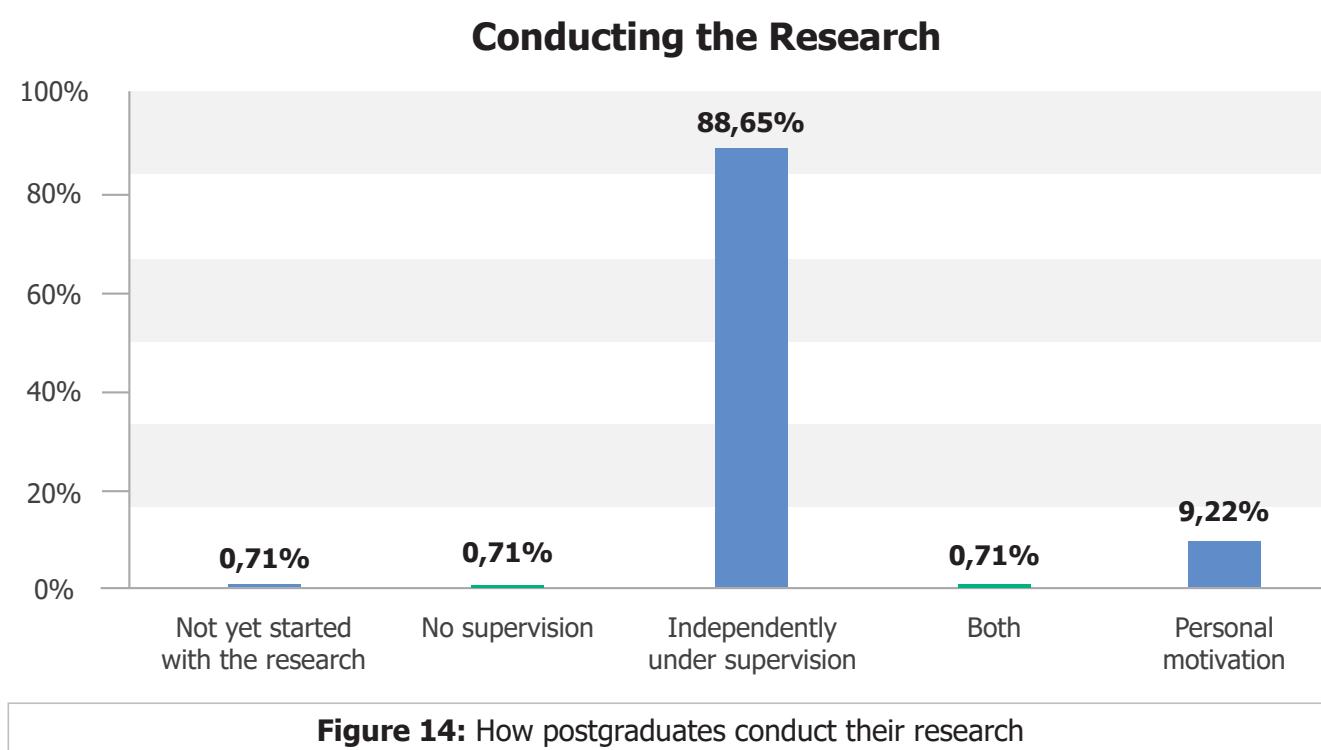
**Figure 13:** Approaches to selecting a research topic

Figure 13 illustrates how respondents selected their research topics. The data includes various topic selection methods, each represented by a corresponding percentage. The responses illustrate different degrees of autonomy and guidance in the topic selection process, reflecting individual and institutional influences. 52.52% of respondents chose their topic. This indicates that significant academic independence and personal interest drive research choices.

This may suggest that many respondents prefer or are encouraged to explore topics aligned with their personal or professional goals. 27.34% negotiated their topic with a potential supervisor: This highlights the collaborative nature of research topic selection in many academic settings. Engaging with supervisors could help align research goals with existing projects or expertise within a department. 12.95% of the respondents had their research topic assigned by the department or supervisor. This indicates that some respondents operate within predefined frameworks or contribute to ongoing institutional research priorities. While this may limit autonomy, it can also provide clear direction and support.

A smaller group (5.04%) selected their topics from a limited range of options, often constrained by departmental focus areas, or specific academic programs. Additionally, 0.72% of respondents reported selecting topics based on specific categories, including relating local issues to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, not yet starting their research, or receiving departmental guidance that involved refining or 'panel beating' a topic.

Building on the insights from Figure 13 regarding how students select their research topics, Figure 14 shifts the focus to how postgraduate students conduct their research. This visual provides an overview of the various approaches students take. It highlights that most conduct their research independently under supervision, while a smaller proportion work within research groups or use alternative methods. It offers insights into the balance between independence and collaboration in postgraduate research practices.

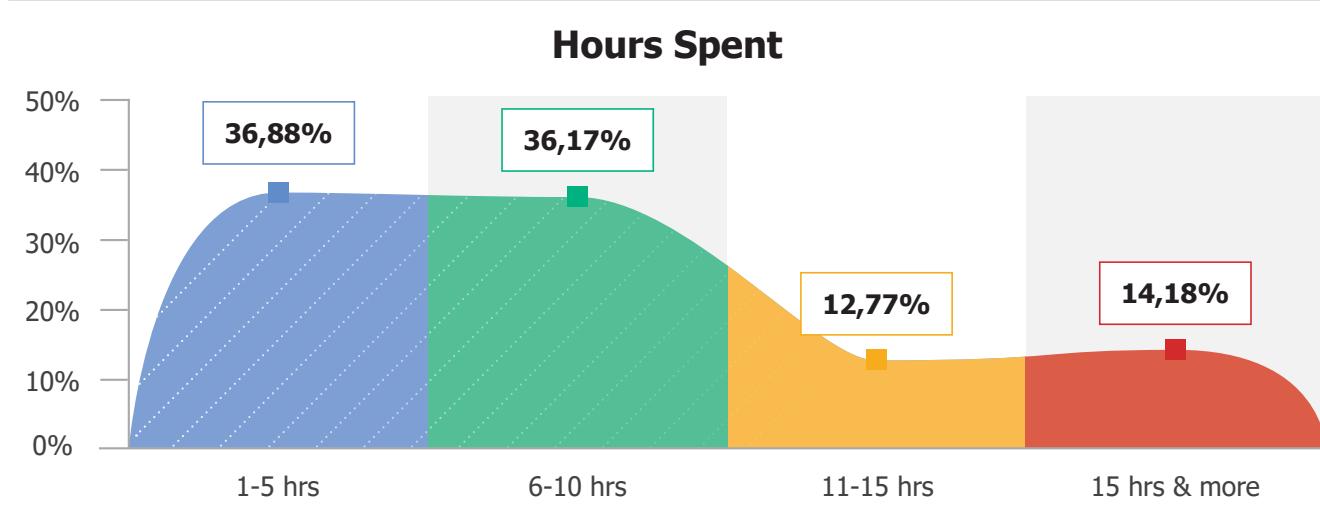


The analysis highlights the predominant approach to conducting research is to work independently under supervision, shedding light on the academic environment and support systems. About 88.65% of respondents indicated that they work independently under supervision. This overwhelming majority suggests that most students prefer, or are expected, to conduct their work autonomously while benefiting from the supervisor's guidance. This structure promotes self-reliance and critical thinking while ensuring students stay on track and maintain academic rigour.

Collaboration has been observed, as 9.22% of the students claim to work as part of a research group. This indicates that a smaller proportion of students collaborate closely within teams. Group-based

research often fosters interdisciplinary work and collective problem-solving but may be less common depending on the field or academic environment. An exceedingly small number of students conduct their work without any formal supervision, which might suggest prominent levels of experience or unique research contexts.

This hybrid approach suggests a balanced dynamic, allowing individual responsibility and collaborative synergy. The data underscores a strong preference or structural norm for independent research under supervision, highlighting the importance of guided autonomy in academia. Group research and unsupervised work are much less common, suggesting that individualised mentorship remains the cornerstone of research methodologies.



**Figure 15:** Estimated time spent doing research work

Figure 15 illustrates how many hours students dedicate to their weekly research projects. The data shows different levels of time commitment, providing insights into the varying degrees of effort and focus students allocate to their work. Most students (36.88%) spend 1-5 hours per week on research projects. Some students dedicate minimal time to their projects, possibly due to other commitments such as work, or other responsibilities.

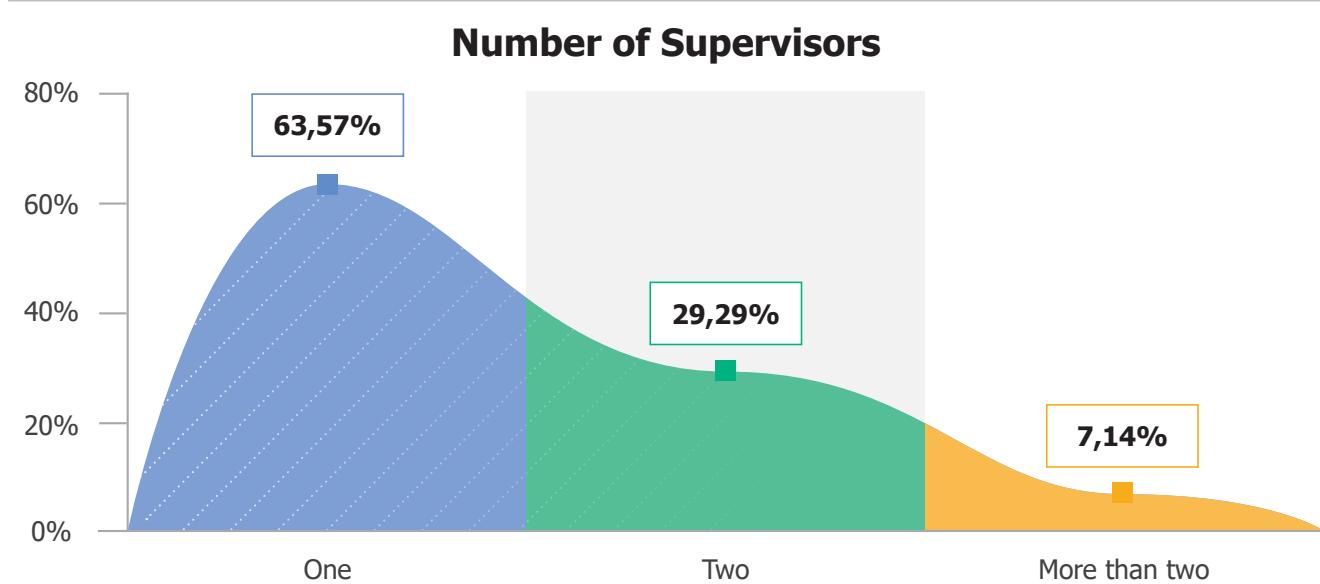
Around 36.17% spend 6-10 hours per week. This group represents another substantial portion, suggesting a moderate but consistent time commitment, likely balancing research with other academic or professional obligations. A smaller group of 12.77% spend 11-15 hours per week dedicating more time, indicating a higher level of engagement, possibly due to more intensive research phases or fewer external commitments. The results indicate that about 14.18% of students spend 15 hours or more weekly. This group reflects those heavily involved in their research, likely working on complex projects, nearing deadlines, or engaged in full-time research roles such as funded projects.

The data reveals that most students allocate between 1 and 10 hours per week to their projects, suggesting that research is often conducted alongside other responsibilities. However, a smaller

proportion dedicates more than 11 hours, indicating varied levels of commitment, potentially driven by the nature or urgency of their research tasks.

It is typical for postgraduate students to have a single supervisor who offers targeted direction and assistance during the research process. However, there are times when the intricacy and interdisciplinary study character calls for the participation of several supervisors. This usually happens when the research involves multiple academic disciplines and requires specific knowledge and skills that one supervisor might not have. A more comprehensive support system, a range of viewpoints, and improved research quality can all be obtained from having multiple supervisors. Even though overseeing several supervisors might be difficult, effective communication and well-defined roles can make the process go more smoothly, improving the student's academic experience and leading to more comprehensive and significant research findings.

Building on the insights from Figure 15 regarding how postgraduate students conduct their research, Figure 16 shifts the focus to the number of supervisors assigned to postgraduate students.



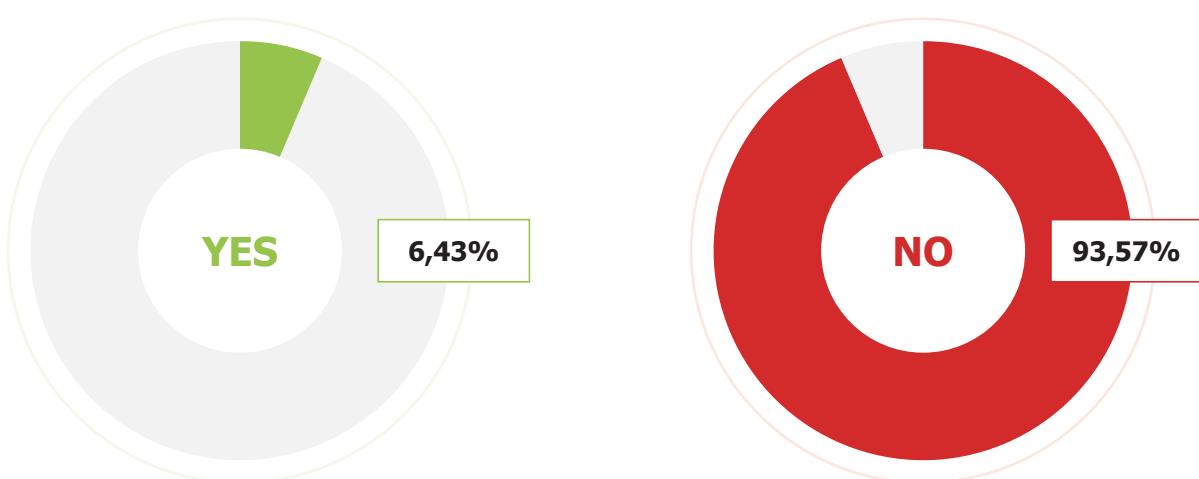
**Figure 16:** Number of supervisors assigned to postgraduate students

The visual representation in Figure 16 illustrates the distribution of supervisors assigned to postgraduate students at WSU. It shows that 63.57% of students have one supervisor, while 29.29% have two, and only a tiny portion, about 7.14%, have more than two supervisors. This data provides insight into the supervision structures in place for postgraduate programmes.

The analysis of this graph aligns with WSU's research goals by highlighting the importance of ensuring adequate supervisory support for postgraduate students. To understand the distribution of supervisory responsibilities, the university can evaluate whether students receive sufficient guidance, support and mentorship during their academic journey. This insight can help identify areas for improvement in

supervisor allocation and workload distribution, ensuring that students have the needed support to achieve their academic and research goals.

There are instances where students and supervisors may need to part ways during a postgraduate study. The reasons for such separations can be diverse, ranging from differences in research direction and personal conflicts, to changes in availability or expertise. Given the unique nature of each situation, it is essential to investigate these cases individually rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. This tailored investigation ensures that the student and the supervisor's specific circumstances and needs are adequately addressed, leading to more effective and fair resolutions. By adopting a case-by-case approach, institutions can better support their students' academic progress and maintain a positive and productive research environment.



**Figure 17:** Percentage of students who changed supervisor(s) during their programme

The graph in Figure 17 illustrates the responses to a survey question focused on changing supervisors during a postgraduate study. The results reveal a significant disparity, with 93.57% of respondents indicating that they did not change supervisors and only 6.43% admitting that they did. This substantial difference suggests that most postgraduate students do not experience a change in supervisors during their studies, indicating a generally stable and satisfactory supervisory relationships.

However, the small percentage of students who change supervisors highlights the importance of addressing targeted intervention with individual circumstances that may lead to such changes. These cases underscore the need for WSU to have flexible and supportive policies to manage supervisor changes effectively, and ensuring that students have access to the necessary resources and support. In such circumstances, of relationship challenges between student and supervisor, the university can help maintain the continuity and quality of the student's research, ultimately contributing to their academic success and well-being.

Further responses emphasise the significant difficulties postgraduate students encounter due to supervision adjustments. Many students encountered instability due to supervisors being transferred or departing the university without providing adequate notice or justification. Confusion and disruption to their scientific progress resulted from this lack of continuity and transparency, further complicating their academic path, some students complained that their new supervisors were too busy or lacked the necessary training. The supervisors' lack of constant support and direction significantly hampered their ability to satisfy academic requirements and deadlines.

Below are the students' feedback:



"  
1) My team of 3 supervisors left the University.  
2. Department had one to supervise me.  
3. My new supervisor left without any word.  
4. Again, Department had none to supervise my project."

"Previous one relocated."

"The first ones left and the current ones said my work was not worthy to be sent to external examiners. I chose them to fulfill their desires more than having this qualification as I am have my NQF level 9."

"The main supervisor did not ever pass from wsu and did not able to navigate with the difficult guideline set up by wsu to just pass the mmed. The supervisor was not even trained adequately."

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Additionally, students expressed frustration over the lack of communication and support from their respective departments. Instances where students were assigned multiple supervisors quickly without proper explanation exacerbated their difficulties. Some students felt that their work was undervalued or not given due consideration by their supervisors, affecting their motivation and progress. The feedback underscores the need for better communication, consistent supervision, and adequate training for supervisors to ensure that postgraduate students receive the necessary support to complete their studies.

One student indicated that:



"Lack of communication with my previous supervisor."

Other students responded that:



"I wrote an email requesting the supervisor that had supervised me at Honours level however a different supervisor was allocated to me without an explanation as to why the preferred supervisor and co supervisor were not assigned to me. After 2 consultations with the now assigned supervisor I got yet another email from yet another supervisor who said I was allocated to them."

"Some where busy."

"There was no support."

Postgraduate students and their supervisors communicate in a variety of ways. Some have daily, weekly, or biweekly meetings, while others only contact their supervisors when necessary or after making notable progress. Students may benefit from this flexibility by being able to ask for assistance when they run into problems or require clarification on their research. Less frequent or tense interactions might cause annoyance and overwhelm, mainly if there is unclear communication or set departmental milestones. Setting precise schedules and expectations can foster a more productive and encouraging connection. Timely and helpful supervision is essential for academic success.

Below are the students' feedback:



"Any time there is a need to contact my supervisor."

"Daily."

"Every two weeks."

"Monthly."

"Never."

"Once in quarter."

"Only during class times."

"Perhaps once in 2 months ( insane right?)."

"Weekly."

---

Setting clear rules and upholding a high standard of competence and professionalism are crucial during meetings or contact sessions between postgraduate students and their supervisors. Both sides' expectations should be outlined in these rules, along with the frequency of meetings, the amount of preparation needed, and the particular objectives for each session. By establishing these guidelines, students and supervisors may ensure that their interactions are fruitful and centred on furthering the student's study.

A student confirmed that:



"I contact them whenever I need clarity on something, even though at times I don't get response. Also my interaction with them is strained by not having a clear schedule of time frames reflecting milestones from the department /faculty. At times I feel so overwhelmed and not respond on time on their feedback. It's really frustrating."

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Another one indicated that;



“I only meet my supervisor when I have made progress with the work I have to do.”

Upholding professionalism is just as crucial. Supervisors ought to be approachable, offer helpful criticism, and show a sincere interest in the student's development. In contrast, students should actively participate in the research process, arrive prepared, and show consideration for their supervisor's time. Misunderstandings, annoyance, and a breakdown in the working relationship may result from failure to meet these criteria. A pleasant and supportive supervisory relationship is essential for the student's academic achievement and personal development. This is achieved by effective communication, mutual respect, and dedication to the research goals.

A student indicated that:



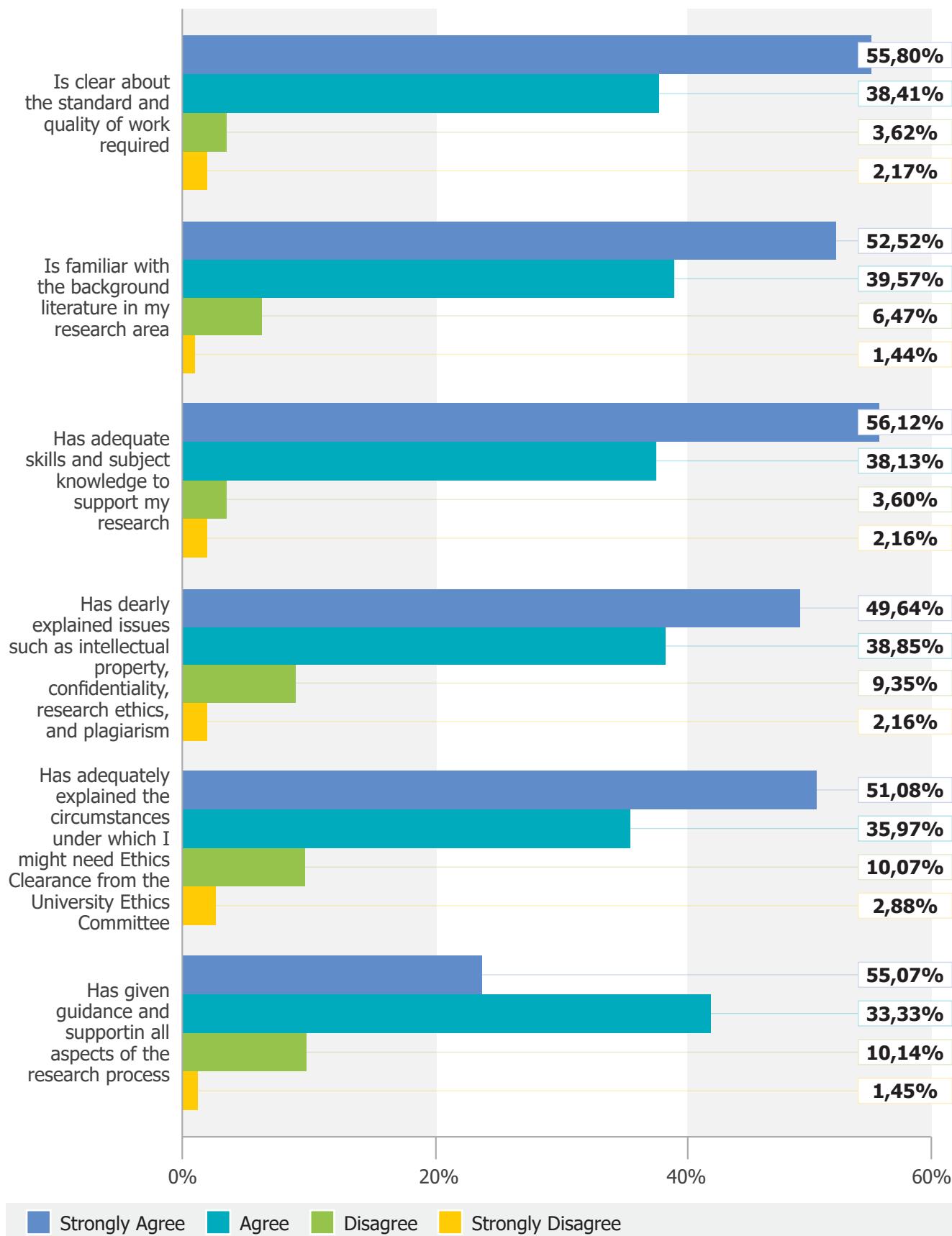
“I rarely consult her or call her, for me her comments and corrections often inform inspire of them given as form of rhetoric (😊) but it is interesting relationship fostering growth in me.”

While the other stated that:



“He is always available when I need him.”

## Supervisor Guidance and Expertise

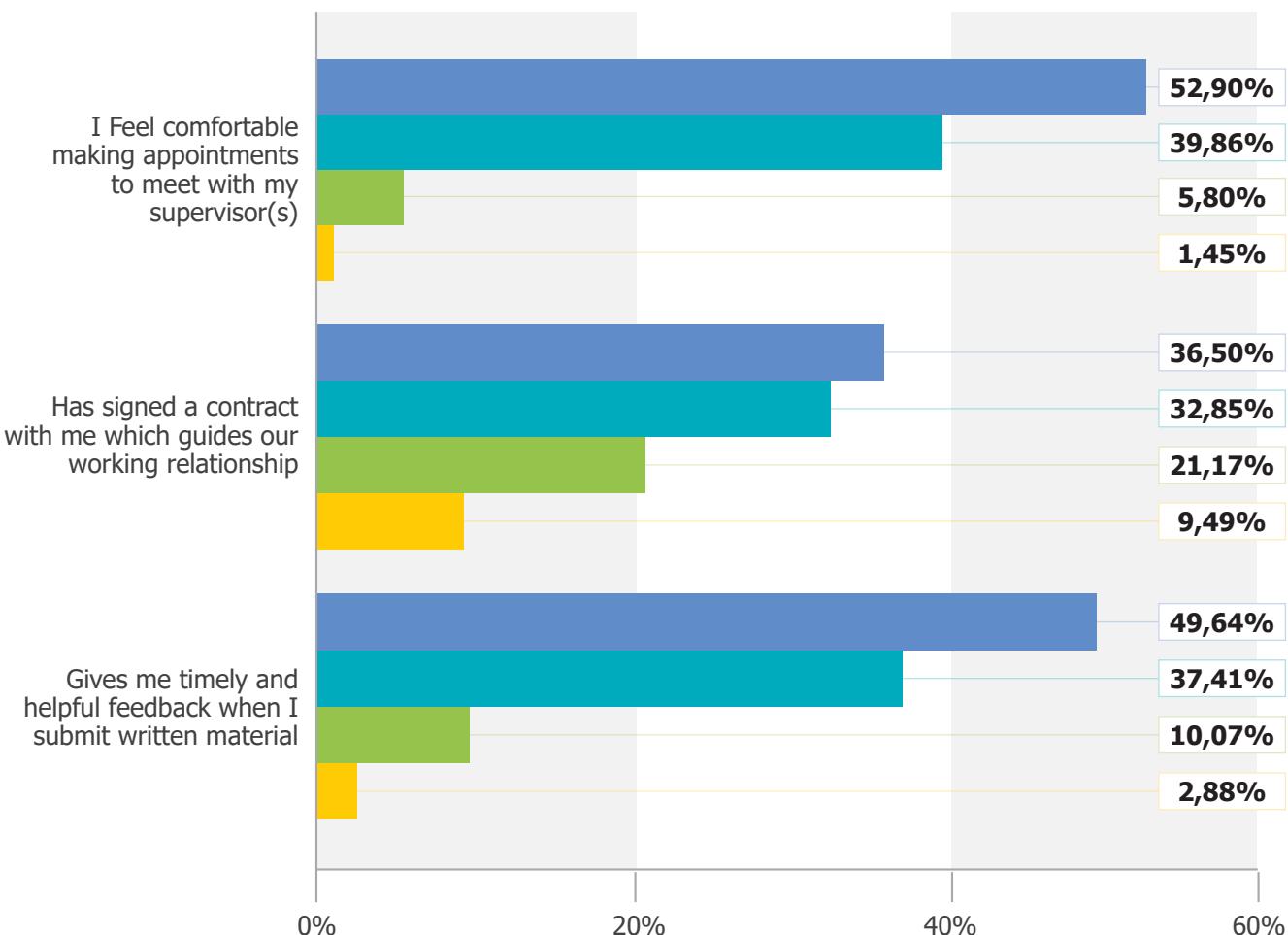


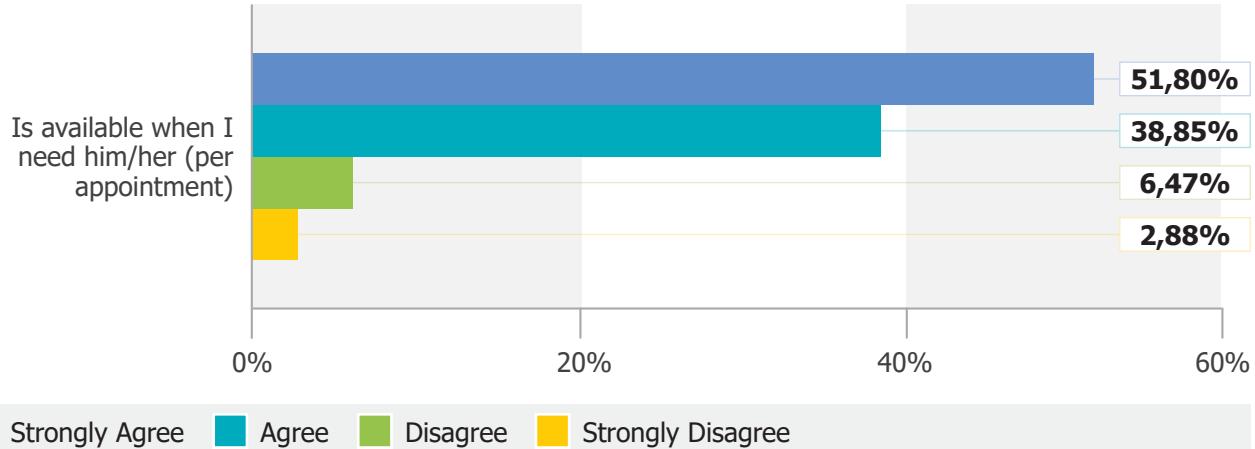
**Figure 18:** Relationship between student and supervisor(guidance)

The survey results in Figure 18 indicate that most postgraduate students have a positive experience with their supervisors. Most students agree or strongly agree that their supervisors are available when needed (90.65%), provide guidance and support throughout the research process (88.40%), and have adequately explained the need for ethics clearance (87.05%). Additionally, supervisors are generally seen as knowledgeable and skilled, with 94.25% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that their supervisors have adequate subject knowledge to support their research. This suggests that supervisors are fulfilling their roles in guiding students through their academic journey.

However, there are areas where improvements can be made. A notable percentage of students disagree or strongly disagree with certain aspects of their supervisory experience. For instance, 12.95% of students feel supervisors have not adequately explained intellectual property, confidentiality, research ethics, and plagiarism. Similarly, 12.95% of students are dissatisfied with the timeliness and helpfulness of feedback on written material. These areas of concern highlight the need for better communication and more comprehensive support from supervisors to ensure that students fully understand all aspects of their research and receive timely feedback.

## Supervisor Availability and Interaction





**Figure 19:** Supervisor availability and interaction

Another significant concern is the lack of formal agreements guiding the working relationship between students and supervisors. While 89.15% of students feel comfortable making appointments with their supervisors, only 69.35% agree or strongly agree that they have signed a contract with their supervisor. This indicates that several students may not have a clear, formalised understanding of their supervisory relationship, which can lead to misunderstandings and unmet expectations. Establishing clear contracts and guidelines can help improve the overall supervisory experience and ensure students and supervisors align their goals and expectations.

Postgraduate students' comments point to several advantages of their experiences with supervisors. Many students value their supervisors' availability, prompt and helpful comments, and outstanding communication skills. It is common to characterise supervisors as understanding, useful, and appreciative of the intellectual contributions made by students. Students highlighted that they would appreciate assistance with precise instructions, scholarship applications, and chances for research presentations. These constructive interactions significantly boost students' academic achievement and motivation, which foster a supportive and fruitful research atmosphere.

Below are students' voices:



“At least he sits in the Ethics and Research Committee so I am aware of the deadlines and presentations dates...”

“Beat guidance and advices, good communication. My Supervisor is a through person, so as a student I learnt that I need to write quality work before I submit anything.”

“Clearly explaining what I need to do is one of the best encounters I have with my supervisor. The level of understanding we have for each other. She's friendly in a professional way which makes it easy for me to ask questions when I don't understand.”

“Always available for communication, formed a group for us, responds quickly to advise on the proposal and the project.”

---

But there are significant obstacles as well. Some students complained that delays and dissatisfaction resulted from their supervisors' occasional lack of responsiveness or excessive busyness. There was also discussion of problems like unclear communication, a lack of feedback, and a lack of support. Some students also thought their supervisors did not give them enough direction to navigate institutional constraints, and they encountered issues with the ethics clearance procedure. To guarantee that every student gets the direction they require to be successful in their postgraduate studies, these drawbacks underscore the necessity of better communication, better time management, and more all-encompassing support.

Below are students' voices:



“I was given a Supervisor by my Department based on my topic. I tried reaching out to her, submitted all my proposals but never get any feedback. She only replied to say she received the copies and will revert later but she never did until now.”

“I only had one session with my supervisor it was virtual and I'm still waiting for Proposal feedback.”

“My supervisor had no time for me although she was helpful when we meet.”

“My supervisor is a bit lazy but sometimes makes wonders by replying on time sometimes doesn't reply up until i remind him.”

“My supervisor is just very busy.”

Based on the feedback from postgraduate students, several key suggestions for improvement have emerged. Firstly, improving communication is essential. Ensuring timely and clear communication between supervisors and students, including prompt responses to emails and feedback on submitted work, is crucial. One student emphasised "greater clarity on expectations regarding research goals, deadlines, and communication norms." Additionally, increasing supervisor availability is essential, as many students noted that their supervisors were often too busy. Regular meetings and consistent support can significantly enhance the supervisory experience.

Below are students' responses:



“Motivation of students is needed, there are times we feel like we fell like we have made rong decisions by persuing our studies.”

“Personal support and funding!”

“Research time allocation, WSI does not monitor progress of researchers as a result we do a program of a year for 3 years because research study is holding us back.”

“Statistician assistance. We have no one and pay R10 000 for our own stats.”

Another critical area for improvement is the ethics clearance process. Expediting this process can help avoid delays in research progress, as students expressed frustration with the lengthy procedures. Structured interactions are also necessary, with precise schedules and expectations for meetings and feedback to help students stay on track. Rather than group feedback, personalised feedback can address specific student needs and concerns more effectively. Furthermore, providing support and funding, especially for students over 35 years old, and offering more physical workshops on research methods can enhance students' skills and financial stability.

Below are students' voices:



- "The response from the Ethics committee for ethical clearance should at least not take long. One could be done with proposal and wait for ethical clearance for weeks which causes a delay."
- "Supervisor should clearly explain every step of the research study and not assume that since we have done research we should know everything."
- "The supervisor and the student must have a written agreement with a time frame that will have deadlines, this will help all students to finish their research projects in due time without having to overlap."
- "Those with co-supervisors need to be patient with them as it is always not easy to have a 3rd person in a relationship. Supervisors and co-supervisors must be trained on how to make this work."
- "Supervisor must only have 5 or less students."

Supervisors and co-supervisors training on effective supervision practices and how to manage multiple students is another vital suggestion. Implementing written agreements between students and supervisors outlining expectations, deadlines, and responsibilities can help ensure clarity and accountability. Finally, reducing the number of students assigned to each supervisor can ensure that supervisors can provide adequate attention and support. These suggestions aim to enhance the overall supervisory experience and support postgraduate students' academic journey.

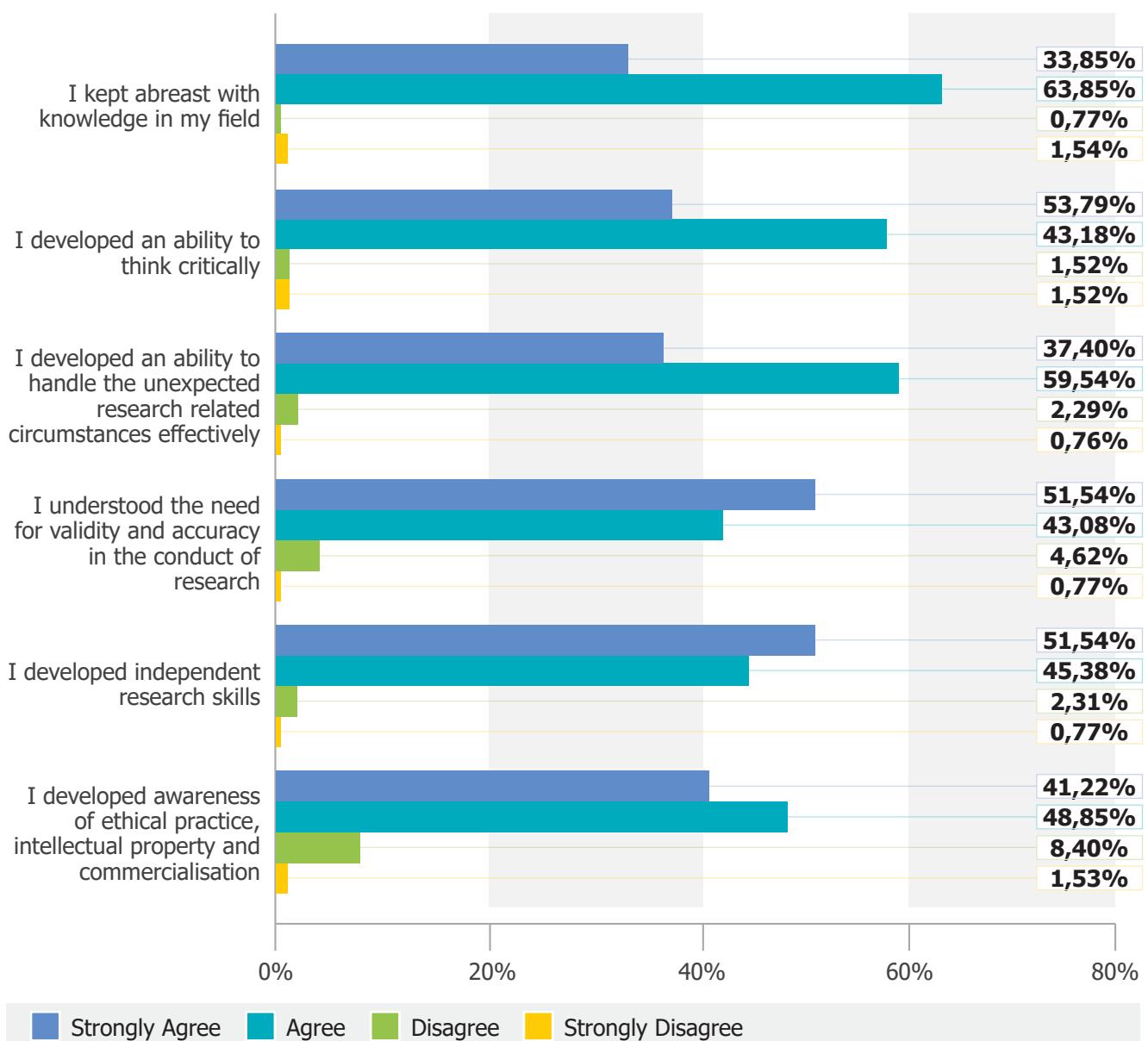
#### **7.4. Learning Experiences and Research Culture**

Research projects are essential to postgraduate education because they assist students in developing their intellectual and soft skills. Students directly acquire academic skills like research methodology, data analysis, and critical thinking. These skills are necessary for thorough and reliable research, allowing students to contribute significantly to their field of study. Students gain the ability to approach

problems methodically and draw conclusions that are supported by evidence through literature reviews, experimental design, and data interpretation.

Indirectly, research projects aid in developing critical soft skills in students. For instance, collaborating with peers, supervisors, and other stakeholders is frequently necessary when working on a research project, which improves communication and teamwork skills. Students develop organisational and time management abilities as they juggle several assignments and due dates. Presenting research findings at conferences or seminars also improves presentation and public speaking abilities, which increases self-assurance and professional competence. These soft skills help students become well-rounded and flexible, which is beneficial in academic and professional contexts.

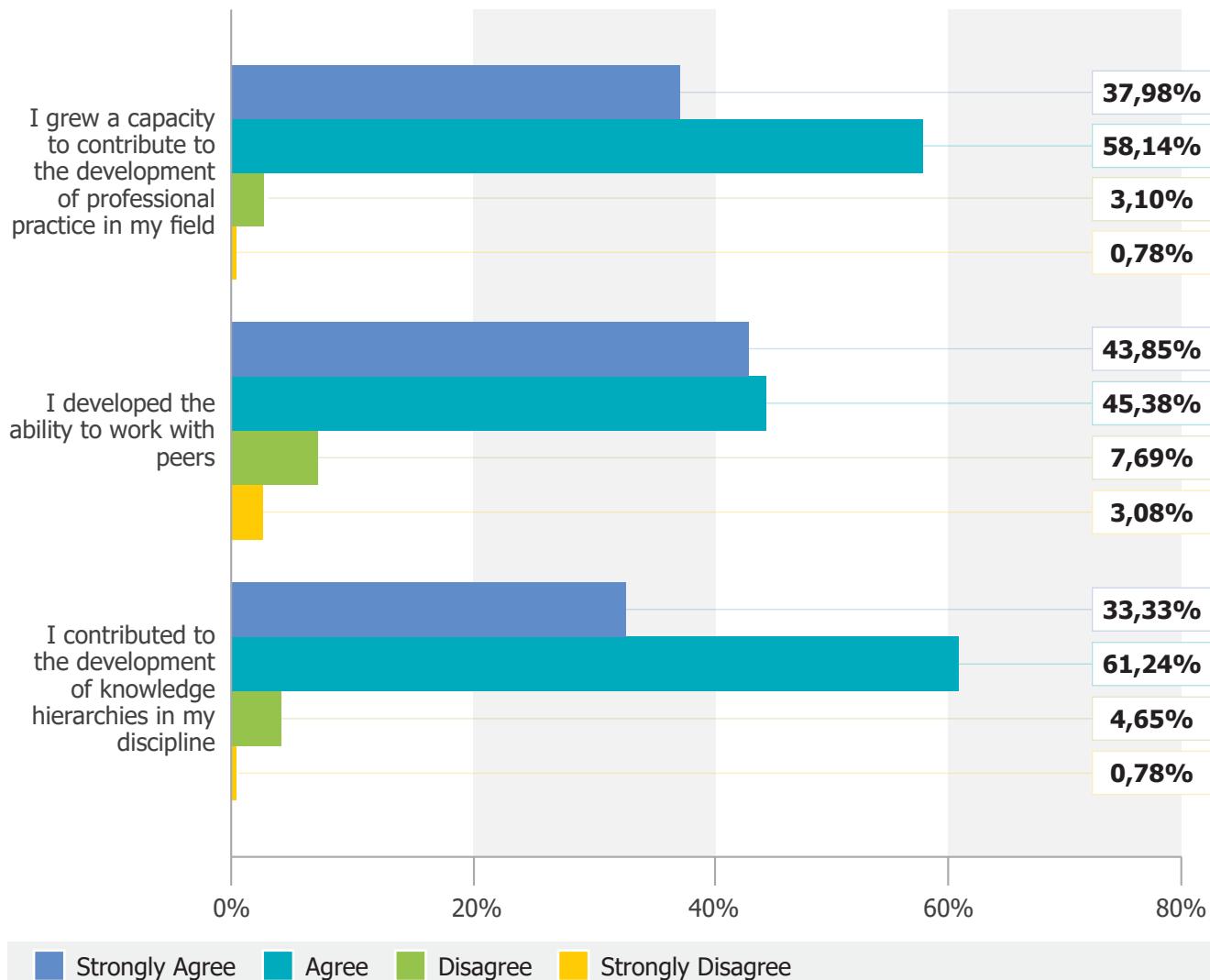
### Research Competences and Knowledge



**Figure 20:** Learning experiences acquired (research competences and knowledge)

Figure 20 shows that postgraduate students generally feel optimistic about the skills and knowledge developed through their research activities. A significant majority of students agree or strongly agree that they have developed critical thinking abilities (96.97%), kept abreast with knowledge in their field (97.70%), and developed independent research skills (96.92%). Additionally, many students feel they have grown in their capacity to contribute to professional practice (96.12%) and understand the need for validity and accuracy in research (95.62%). These high levels of agreement suggest that research activities foster essential academic and professional skills among postgraduate students.

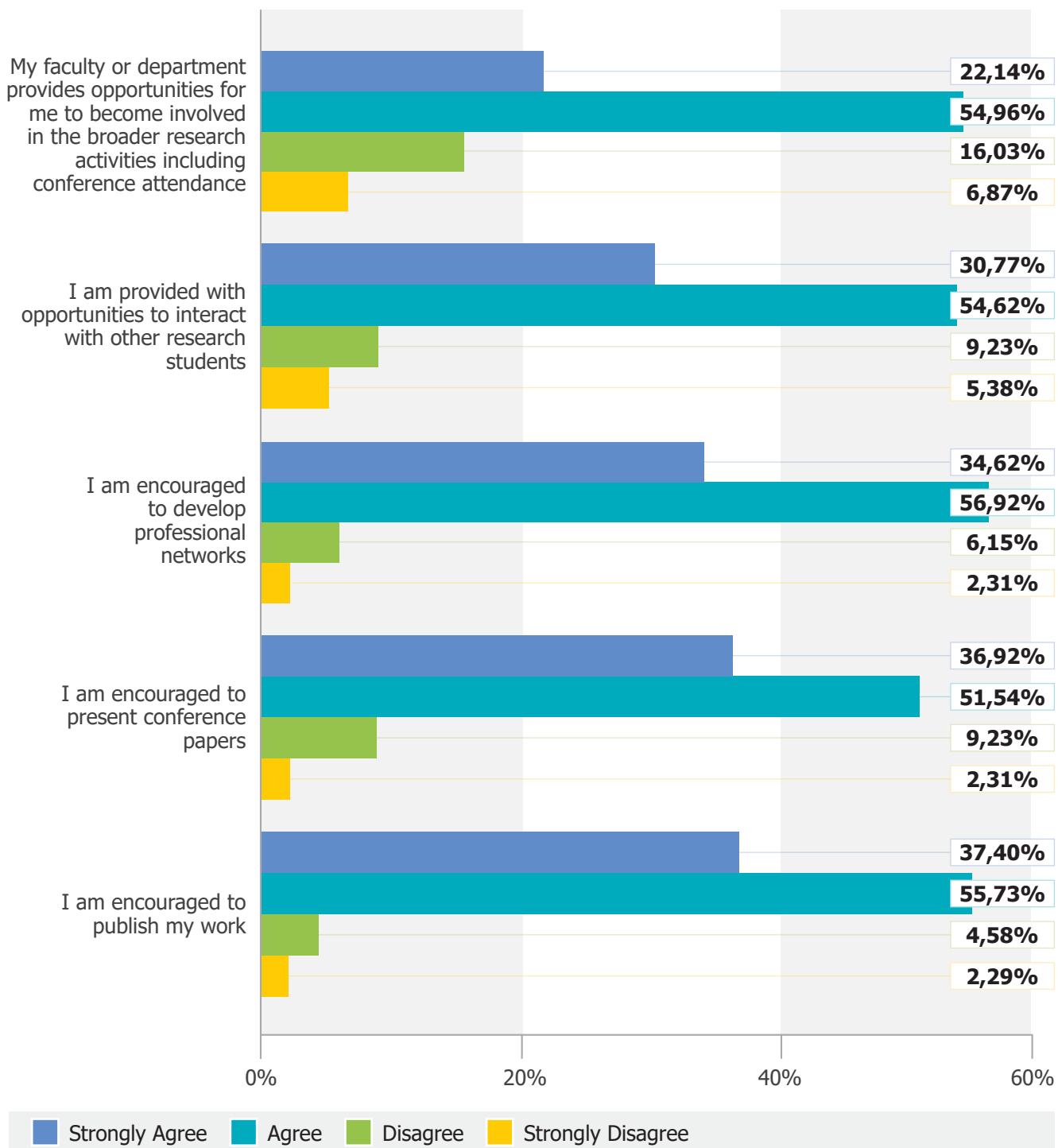
### Professional Development and Impact



**Figure 21:** Learning experiences acquired (professional development and impact)

However, there are areas where some students feel less confident. For example, 10.77% of students disagree or strongly disagree that they have developed the ability to work with peers, and 9.93% feel the same about their awareness of ethical practices, intellectual property, and commercialisation. These figures indicate that while most students benefit from their research experiences, there is room for improvement in fostering collaborative skills and ethical awareness.

## Opportunities and Encouragement

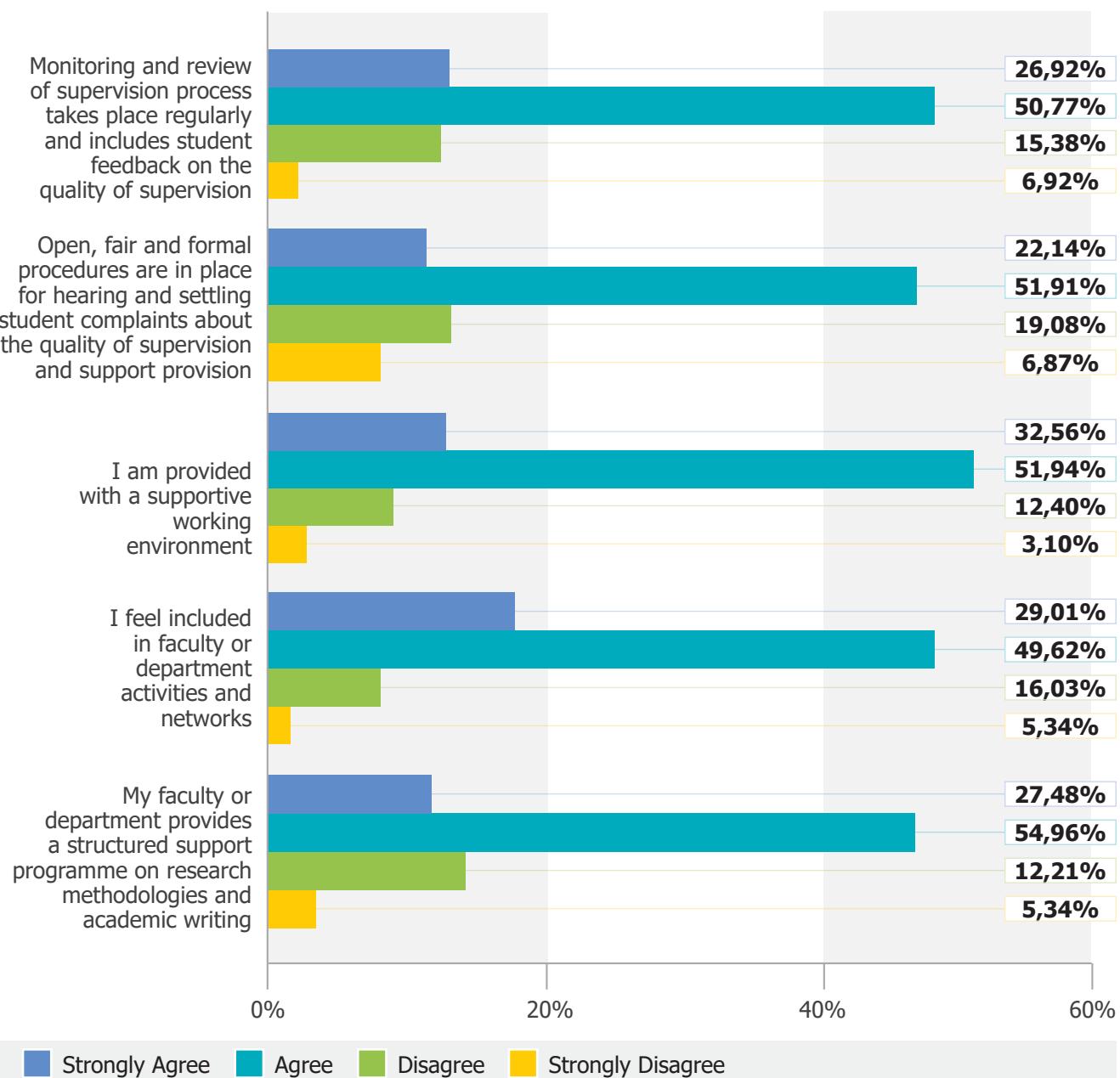


**Figure 22:** Institutional research culture (opportunities and encouragement)

Most postgraduate students feel optimistically about the encouragement and support they receive from their faculty or department. Most students agree or strongly agree that they are encouraged to publish their work (93.13%), present conference papers (88.46%), and develop professional networks (91.54%). Additionally, several students feel provided with a supportive working environment (84.50%)

and opportunities to interact with other research students (85.39%). These positive responses suggest that faculties and departments are generally successful in fostering a collaborative and supportive research culture. However, there are areas where improvements can be made.

## Support Structures and Procedures



**Figure 23:** Institutional research culture (support structures and procedures)

A notable percentage of students disagree or strongly disagree with the availability of structured support programs on research methodologies and academic writing (17.55%), and the presence of open, fair, and formal procedures for hearing and settling student complaints about the quality of supervision and support provision (25.95%). Additionally, 22.30% of students feel that monitoring and the supervision

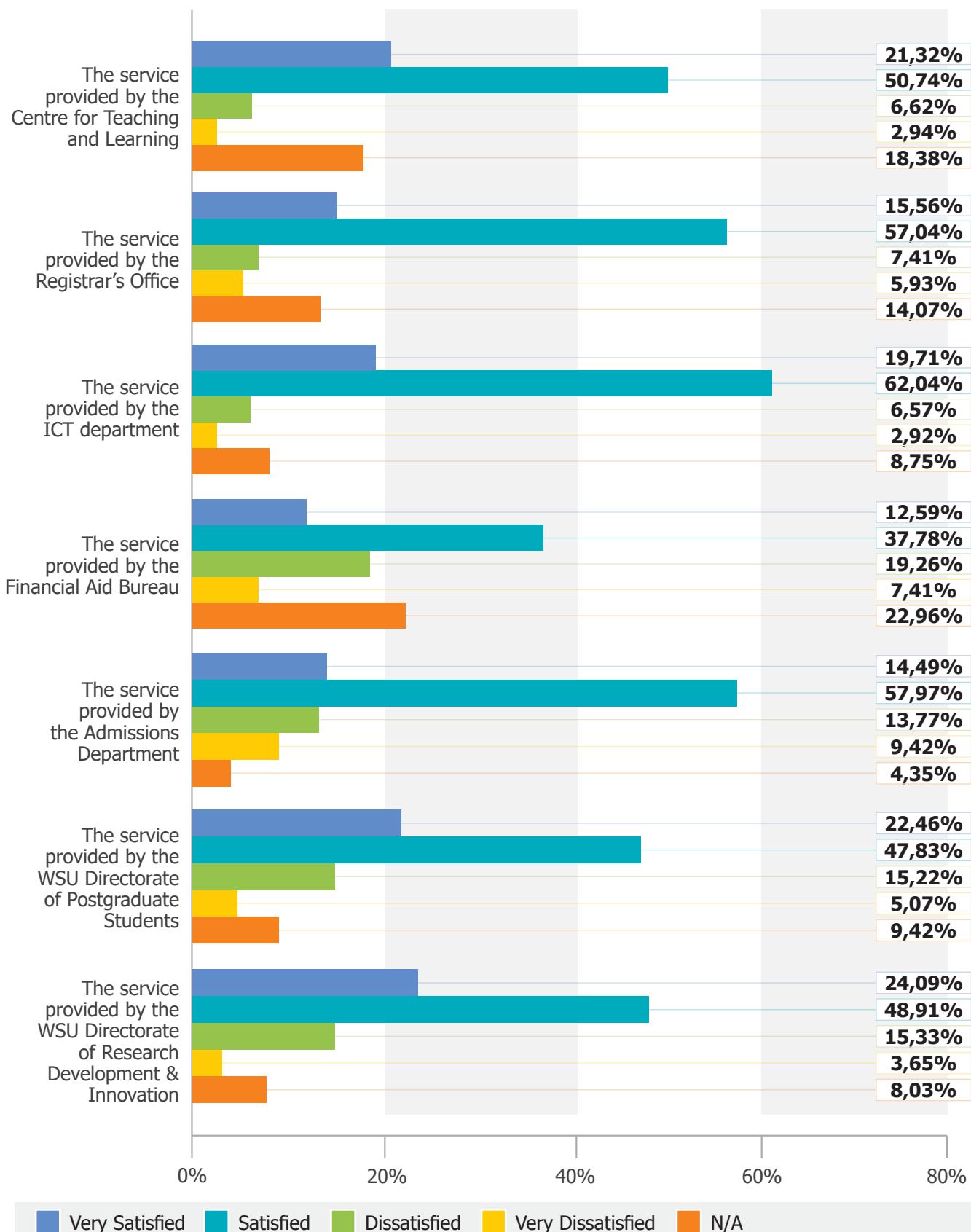
review process, including student feedback on the quality of supervision, is lacking. Addressing these concerns by enhancing support programs, ensuring transparent complaint procedures, and regularly reviewing supervision processes can further improve the postgraduate experience and ensure that all students receive the necessary support to succeed in their academic endeavours.

## 7.5. Postgraduate Support Services

Adequate support services are crucial for enhancing the academic experience and overall well-being of WSU postgraduate students. The survey results in Figure 21 and Figures 24 & 25 provide valuable insights into students' satisfaction with various departments, highlighting strengths and improvement areas. Understanding these perspectives is essential for the university to address gaps and ensure that all students receive the necessary support to succeed in their academic journey. This analysis aims to shed light on the effectiveness of different services and offer recommendations for enhancing the support provided to postgraduate students.



## Support Services Cluster 1



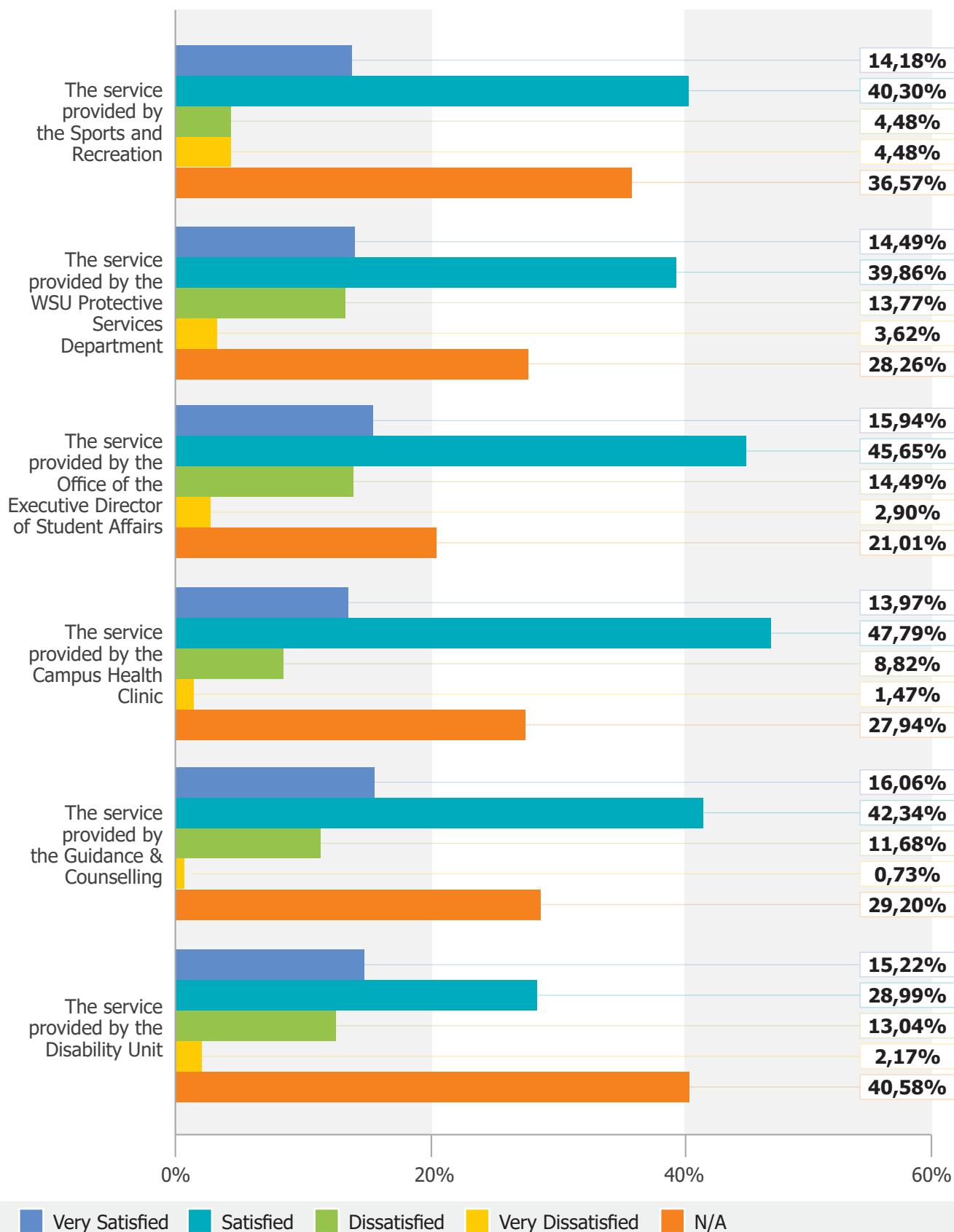
**Figure 24:** Support services rating (cluster 1)

The Admissions Department received the highest satisfaction, with 57.97% of respondents satisfied and 14.49% very satisfied with their services. Similarly, the ICT Department and the Registrar's Office also garnered high satisfaction levels, with 62.04% and 57.04% of respondents satisfied, respectively. These departments appear to be effectively meeting the needs of postgraduate students, providing essential services that facilitate their academic journey.

On the other hand, some departments received lower satisfaction ratings. The WSU Postgraduate unit and the WSU Directorate of Research Development & Innovation had 15.22% and 15.33% of respondents dissatisfied, respectively. This may be related to the student's experiences in these offices since they deal directly with students on the issue of bursaries and any kind of support related to their smooth journey at WSU. The Financial Aid Bureau and the Disability Unit also had notable dissatisfaction levels, with 19.26% and 13.04% of respondents dissatisfied. These figures suggest that areas within these departments require improvement to support students' needs better and enhance their overall experience.



## Support Services Cluster 2



**Figure 25:** Support services rating (cluster 2)

A significant portion of respondents marked "N/A" for several services, indicating that they may not have utilised them or were unaware of them. For instance, 40.58% of respondents marked "N/A" for the Disability Unit and 36.57% for the Centre for Teaching and Learning. This may be due mainly to the type of research-based programs with less intervention in this unit, like undergraduates. This also highlights a potential gap in postgraduates' awareness or accessibility of these services. Increasing the visibility and accessibility of these departments could help ensure that all students are aware of and can benefit from the support available to them. Addressing these issues can lead to a more comprehensive and supportive environment for all students at WSU.

Space was provided for postgraduate students to raise suggestions that may improve support services. Key issues include the need for more administrative support to handle applications and registrations, better communication from the Financial Aid and Postgraduate offices, and the provision of bursaries for postgraduate students. Additionally, there is a call for frequent experience surveys to understand and address student needs and grievances promptly. The importance of psychological support, timely communication about research training trips, and improved safety and security measures on campus are also highlighted.

Below are students' voices:



**“Admin need more assistant workers that are dealing with application and registration issues.”**

**“Financial Aid and Postgraduate offices must be able to provide postgraduate with bursaries.”**

**“Frequent experience surveys should be conducted so that the institution will know our needs and grievances and respond to them on time.”**

**“Psychological support. I sought out psychological support and filled out the relevant forms but never heard back after that. Additionally, the way that my instructors structure the schedule for the course has been haphazard at times. One of our modules only began classes late August after we as students had been asking about it since the beginning of the year. There seems to be little oversight/accountability in this regard and it has compromised the class's ability to excel in this module.”**

“ Security services are not satisfactory as student still experiences incidents of rape, theft, assault and some even death whilst on campus residents. Clinic needs to open and provide services from 08:00 till 15:00 from Monday-Sunday as students continue to need these services. Crisis response strategies within the institution needs to be improve, a contingency plan of plan is needed, the deaths of students crossing the road at Myezo needs to be eliminated with a construction of a crossing bridge from myezo to NMD. I aknowledge the efforts of the recently established “Disability Unit”, however, there is still a long way to go in terms of improving the transition experiences of FTENs with impairment. We need to see signs, guides within the various campuses of WSU. We need a scannable guiding map for each campus which shows the exact locations of various departments and it’s staff members.”

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Moreover, students have expressed the need for better client services from postgraduate office staff, including respectful and timely communication. There are also concerns about the availability of resources such as PPE in labs and the need for workshops and information booklets to help students navigate available services. Enhancing the visibility and accessibility of the disability unit, providing suitable environments for disabled students, and ensuring that part-time students have access to online classes and tests are also crucial.

Below are students' voices:



“ The bad attitude by employees needs change, especially the Financial Aid Office.”

“ The postgraduate Office staff, especially the administrators need to improve or trained on client services, how to write appropriately when issuing notices, how to communicate on time with clients (post graduate students) Also the Director needs to improve on interpersonal skills, how to communicate without intimidating post graduate students. I don't even know which office will assist me at

the time of data gathering because I was never answered when I asked. The focus is for us to complete proposals within 3 months, regardless of realities and various factors already articulated above. I need clear guidelines on what to expect at different phases of my study journey, what form of support, where and how to access it. We need not be shouted at 😠, we need support and guidance throughout our journey. Administrators need to respect clients (post grads) and be trained on communication skills (written and verbal) Also, the manager in that office needs to respond to emails and phone calls."

“Work in the lab includes availability of ppe such as gloves that I struggle to find. Also working in the lab at night required that accommodation in close to the institution is solicited which is not catered for now. Also visibility of security on the floors where the labs are would be appreciated as I previously had an encounter of a thug trying to break into the lab and security services could not be reached.

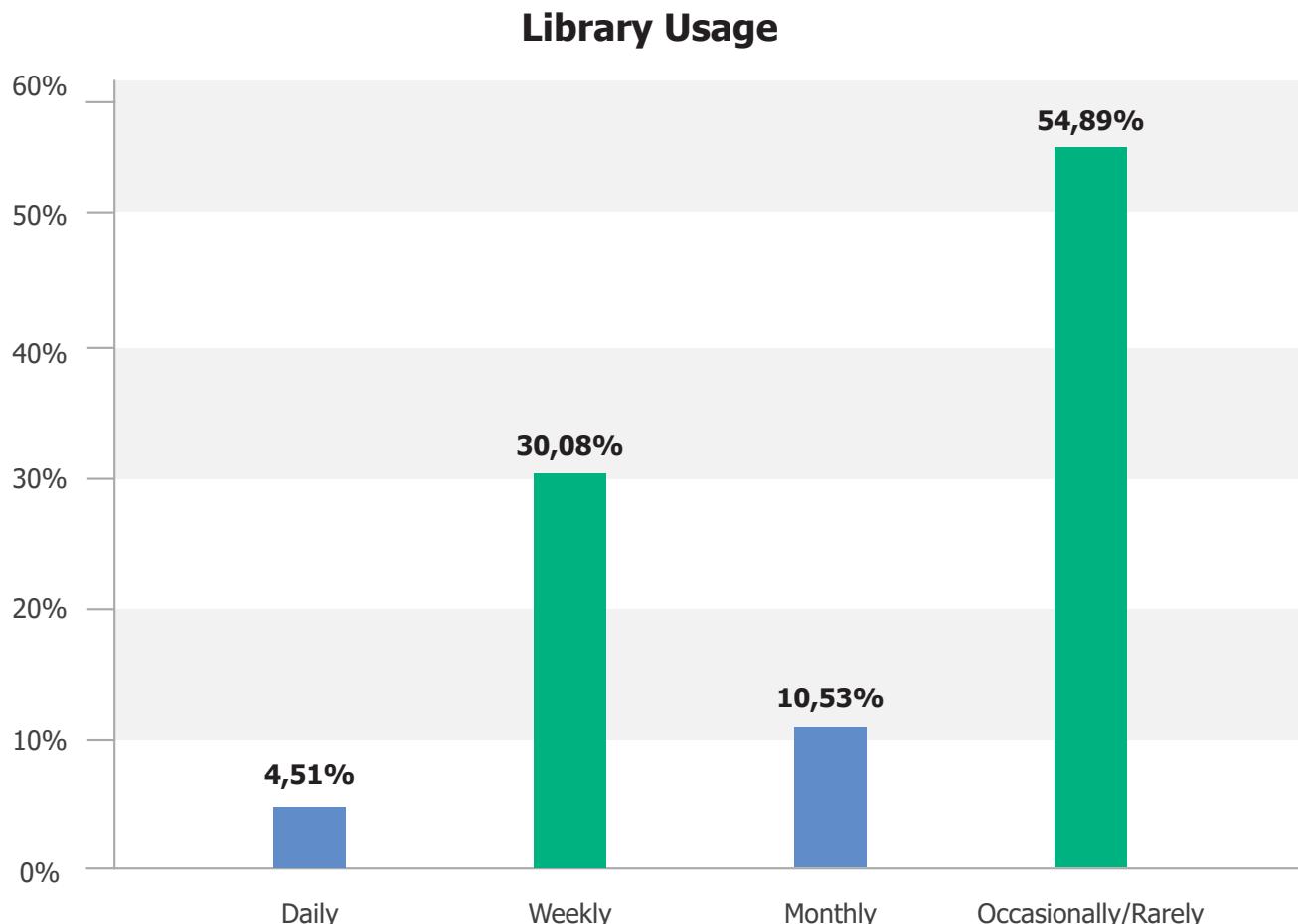
SRC fees and data that we pay can be channeled to our research activities such as writing retreats.”

“Yes some Lecturers must know that part time is part time not all of us are funded or have money to go to campus, so please the online classes and tests is what we need as part time students.”

The feedback emphasises the need for a supportive and responsive administrative framework to help students succeed academically and personally.

## 7.6. The Library

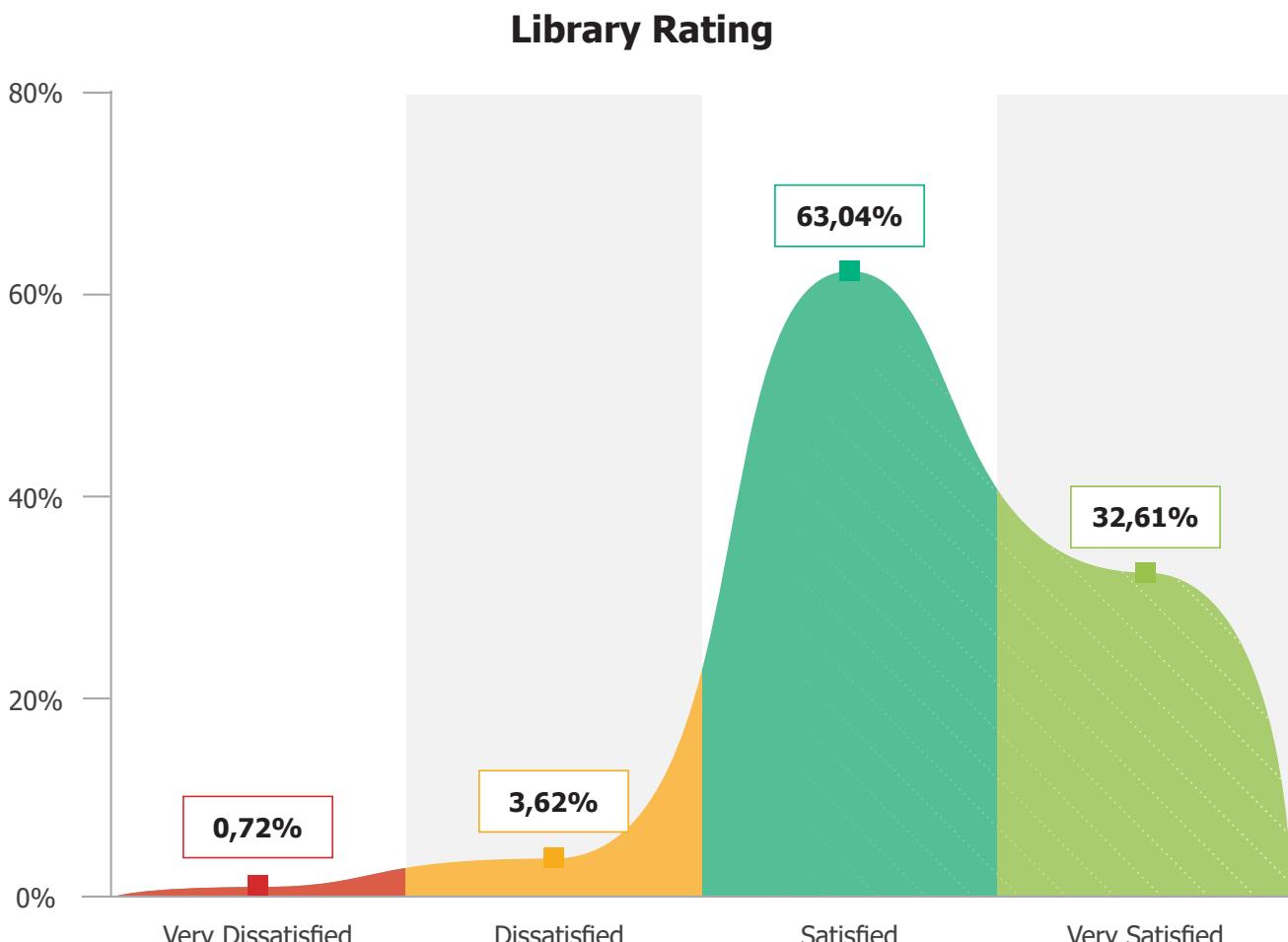
Library usage among students showcases a wide range of habits and preferences. While some students rely on the library daily for their academic needs, others visit it weekly, monthly, or only occasionally. This variation highlights how students utilise library resources to support their studies and research.



**Figure 26:** Frequency in library use

Library usage among students varies significantly, reflecting diverse study habits and needs. A small percentage of students, around 4.51%, visit the library daily, likely relying on it as a crucial resource for their academic work and a quiet place to study. These students might be those who prefer a structured environment or need access to physical resources that are only available in the library.

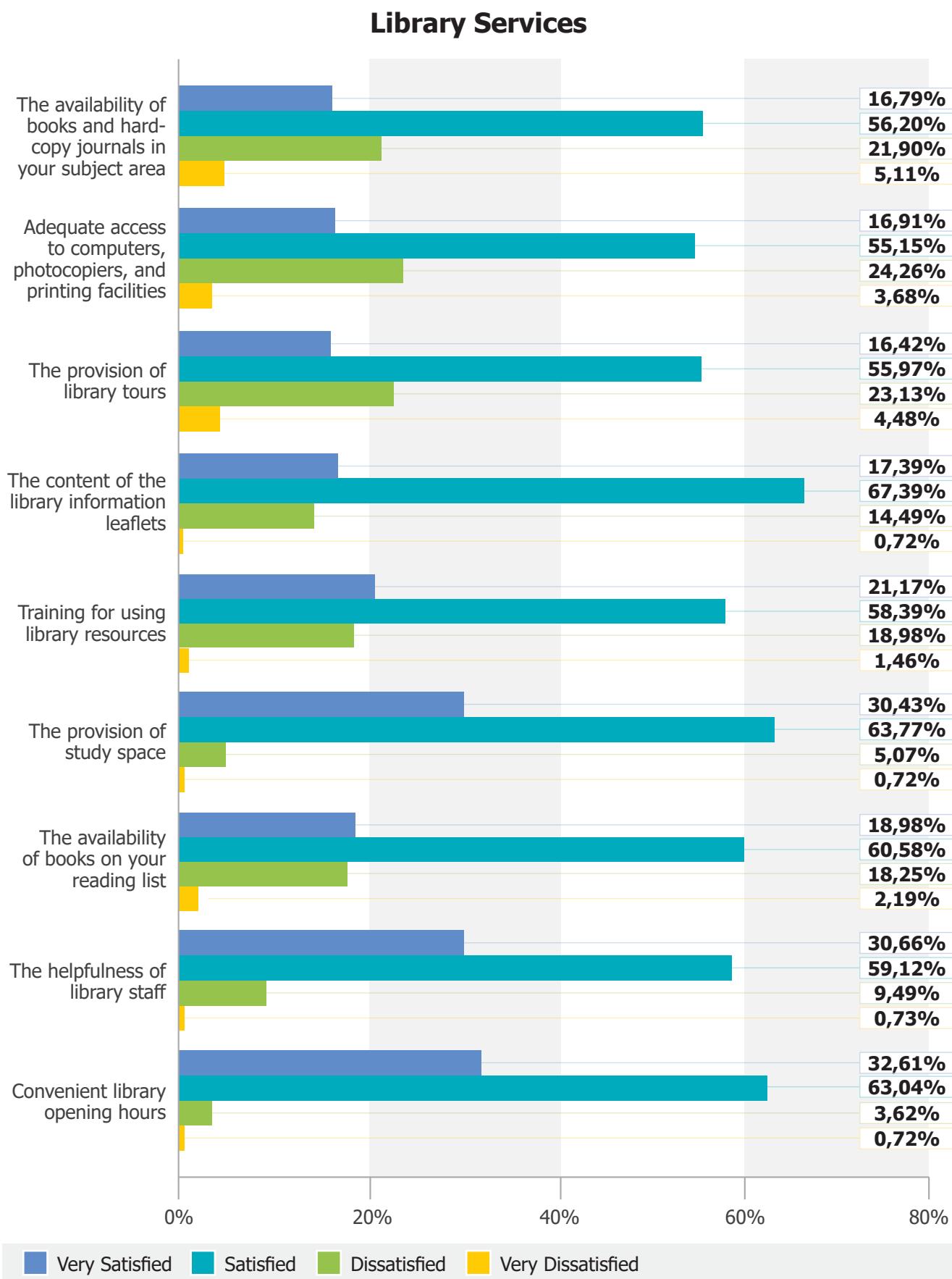
A larger group, 30.08%, uses the library every week. These students might visit the library to access specific resources, attend study groups, or work on assignments that require more intensive research. Monthly users, making up 10.53%, might only visit the library when they have major projects or exams that necessitate more in-depth study sessions. Most students, 54.89%, use the library occasionally or rarely, possibly relying more on digital resources or finding other study environments more conducive to their needs. This distribution highlights the varying roles that the library plays in students' academic lives, from a daily necessity to an occasional resource.



**Figure 27:** Satisfaction with the library

Student satisfaction with library services is overwhelmingly positive, reflecting the library's success in meeting the needs of its users. A significant majority, 63.04%, report being satisfied with the services provided, indicating that the library effectively supports their academic and research needs. Additionally, 32.61% of students are very satisfied, suggesting that the library not only meets but exceeds the expectations of a substantial portion of the student body.

On the other hand, a small fraction of students, 3.62%, are dissatisfied, and an even smaller percentage, 0.72%, are very dissatisfied. These figures highlight that while the library is generally providing a valuable and appreciated service, there are still areas for improvement. Addressing the concerns of these dissatisfied students could further enhance overall satisfaction and ensure that the library continues to be a vital resource for all students. This feedback is crucial for the library to understand and respond to the specific needs and preferences of its users, ultimately fostering a more supportive and effective learning environment.

**Figure 28:** Satisfaction with the library services

Student views on library services staff are generally positive, with most students expressing satisfaction. Specifically, 59.12% of students are satisfied with the service provided by the library staff, while 30.66% are very satisfied. This indicates that most students find the staff helpful, knowledgeable, and supportive in their academic endeavours.

However, a small percentage of students are still not as pleased with the service. About 9.49% of students are dissatisfied, and 0.73% are very dissatisfied. These figures suggest that while the library staff is doing well overall, there are areas where improvements can be made to enhance the experience for all students. Addressing these dissatisfied students' concerns could further improve service quality and ensure that the library remains a valuable resource for everyone.

Feedback on the availability of books in the library shows a generally positive trend, with 60.58% of students expressing satisfaction and 18.98% being very satisfied. This indicates that most students find the library's collection adequate for their academic needs. However, there is a notable portion of less satisfied students. About 18.25% of students are dissatisfied, and 2.19% are very dissatisfied with the availability of books. These figures suggest that while the library's collection meets the needs of most students, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. Ensuring a wider range of books and more up-to-date resources could help improve satisfaction levels and better support the diverse academic requirements of all students.

Student feedback on the library space at WSU is overwhelmingly positive, with 63.77% of students expressing satisfaction and 30.43% reporting that they are very satisfied. This suggests that most students find the library environment conducive to their academic needs, appreciating the available resources, study areas, and overall atmosphere. Many students likely benefit from the library's accessibility, quiet spaces, and research facilities, which support both independent study and collaborative learning.

At the same time, a small percentage of students feel that improvements could be made. While only 5.07% expressed dissatisfaction and 0.72% reported being very dissatisfied, these figures indicate that certain aspects of the library may not fully meet the needs of all students. Some common concerns in academic libraries typically include limited seating, inadequate lighting, noise disturbances, or restricted access to essential materials. Addressing these issues could further enhance the overall student experience and ensure that the library remains a welcoming and productive space for all.

Potential improvements could include increasing seating capacity to accommodate more students, particularly during peak hours, ensuring better lighting to create a more comfortable reading and study environment, and designating additional quiet study zones for those who require minimal distractions. Additionally, expanding access to digital resources, improving Wi-Fi connectivity, and extending library operating hours could also benefit students who rely on the library for research and study.

The data in Figure 28 reflects student satisfaction with training for library resources, with 58.39% of respondents indicating satisfaction and 21.17% expressing high satisfaction. This suggests that most students find the training useful in helping them navigate and utilize library services effectively. However, a significant portion—18.98%—are dissatisfied, and 1.46% are very dissatisfied, highlighting areas for improvement.

To enhance library resource training, WSU could consider offering more interactive workshops, personalized guidance sessions, and on-demand video tutorials. Expanding digital literacy programs, integrating hands-on demonstrations, and providing multilingual support may also help address concerns and improve the overall effectiveness of training. Ensuring that students are well-equipped to use library databases, research tools, and citation management software will further strengthen their academic success and research capabilities.

Most students (84.78%) find the library leaflets helpful, indicating they effectively communicate important academic and research-related information. This high satisfaction rate suggests that students appreciate the clarity, relevance, and accessibility of the leaflets, which may include resource guides, study tips, and service announcements. However, 14.49% of students expressed dissatisfaction, highlighting the need for improvements in content accuracy, design, and accessibility. Some students may find the information outdated, the layout cluttered, or the text difficult to read due to small fonts or language barriers. A small but essential 0.72% reported being very dissatisfied, potentially due to misinformation, inadequate distribution, or a lack of inclusivity for students with disabilities. Addressing these concerns while maintaining the strengths of the leaflets will enhance their effectiveness in supporting students' academic needs.

To improve the impact of library leaflets at WSU, the university could conduct targeted surveys or student focus groups to identify specific concerns and areas for enhancement. Regular content updates will ensure that all information remains current and aligned with student needs, while design refinements—such as clearer layouts, larger fonts, and multilingual options—can improve readability and accessibility. Providing digital formats, braille versions, and audio alternatives would further promote inclusivity. Additionally, WSU can expand distribution channels by placing leaflets in high-traffic areas such as student lounges, lecture halls, and residence halls, as well as sharing them through online student portals.

The data on the provision of library tours at WSU reveals that while most students (55.97%) are satisfied with the tours, a notable proportion (23.13%) are dissatisfied, with an additional 4.48% being very dissatisfied. This suggests that while the tours are generally effective in familiarising students with library resources and services, areas require improvement to enhance the user experience. The 16.42% of very satisfied students indicate that some aspects of the tours meet or exceed expectations, likely due to informative sessions, engaging presentations, and comprehensive guidance on navigating the library system. However, the dissatisfaction levels suggest that some students may find the tours lacking depth, insufficient interaction, or not tailored to their academic needs.

To improve the library tours at WSU, the university could consider incorporating interactive elements such as hands-on demonstrations, digital guides, or gamified learning experiences to make the tours more engaging. Offering customised tours based on faculty-specific research needs or student academic levels could also enhance their relevance. Additionally, ensuring that all students, including part-time and distance learners, have access to virtual library tours would help bridge accessibility gaps. Gathering direct feedback from students who found the tours unhelpful could provide valuable insights into specific shortcomings, whether related to tour structure, clarity of information, or scheduling convenience. By making these improvements, WSU can ensure that all students feel confident in utilising library resources effectively, ultimately supporting their academic success.

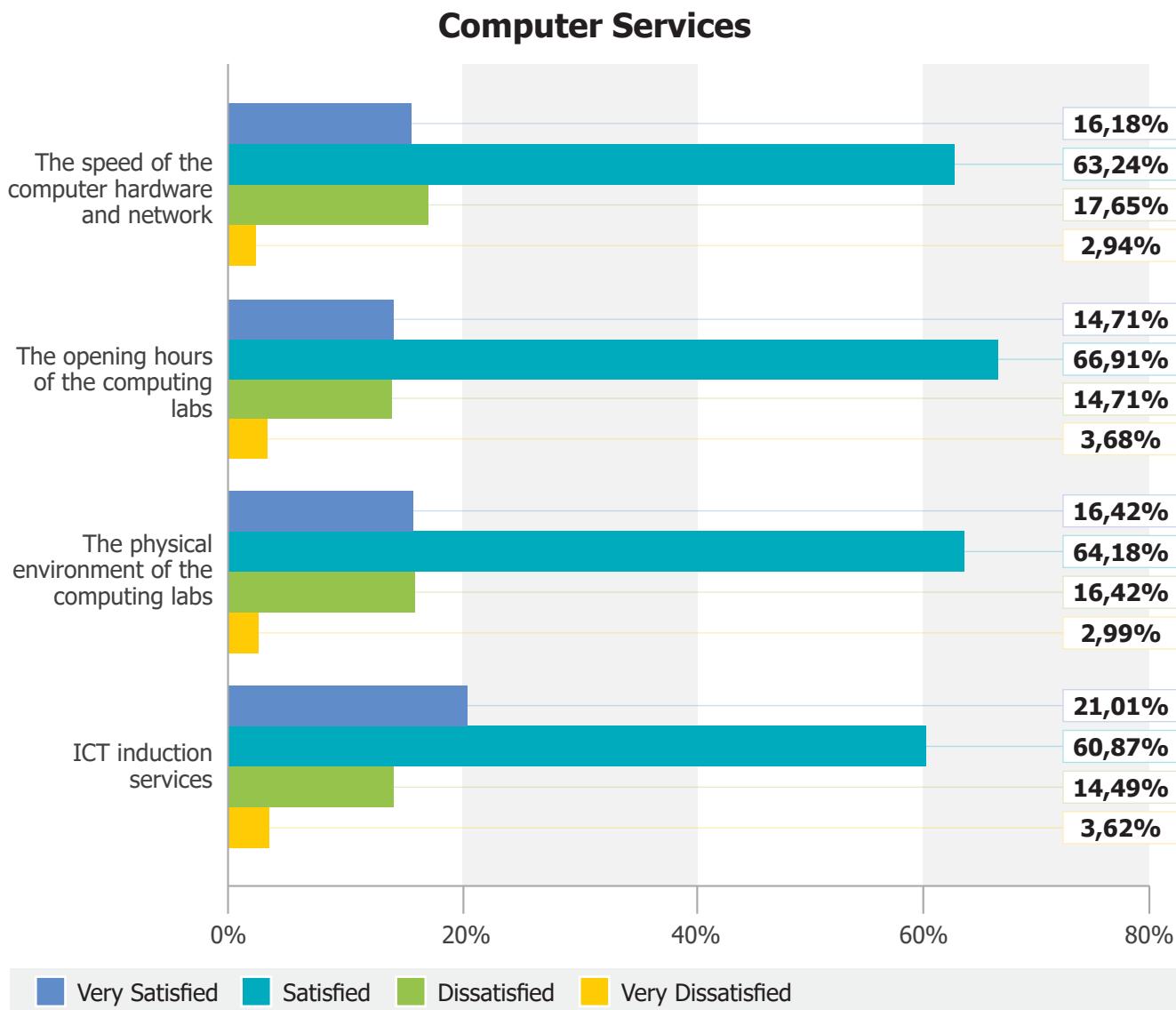
A majority of students, 55.15%, are satisfied with the availability and functionality of computer and printing resources, while 16.91% are very satisfied. This indicates that many students find the computer and printing facilities adequate for their needs. However, a significant portion of students are less satisfied. About 24.26% are dissatisfied, and 3.68% are very dissatisfied with the access to these facilities. These figures suggest that there are notable areas for improvement. Enhancing the availability of computers, ensuring that printing facilities are reliable and easy to use, and possibly increasing the number of these resources could help address the concerns of these students and improve their overall experience.

According to Figure 25 on book and journal availability, the majority of students (56.20%) are happy with the current journal collection, and 16.79% are very satisfied. This implies that by offering necessary academic resources, the library is satisfying the demands of most students. Nonetheless, 5.11% of students are highly dissatisfied, and a significant portion (21.90%) are unhappy. These numbers show that even while the library's collection is generally sufficient, there are still gaps in the resources needed to assist research and better student learning.

WSU can think about boosting access to online academic databases, diversifying its digital library services, and ensuring that necessary course materials are easily accessible in both digital and physical media to improve the availability of books and journals. Addressing dissatisfaction would also benefit from regular interaction with teachers and students to discover materials that are in high demand and to close collection gaps. Students may also have more access to specialist materials through establishing an effective interlibrary lending program or collaborations with other academic institutions. By implementing these measures, WSU can guarantee that every student has access to the tools required for academic achievement.

## 7.7. ICT and Campus Facilities

Campus amenities and ICT services are essential to helping students achieve academically and enjoy their time at university. Reliable computer laboratories, fast networks, and well-kept campus facilities all help create a positive learning atmosphere. Student opinions on these facilities offer important information about their usefulness and potential improvement areas. There are still issues with accessibility, upkeep, and service effectiveness, even though many students are happy with the quantity and caliber of ICT services, computer laboratories, and other campus resources.

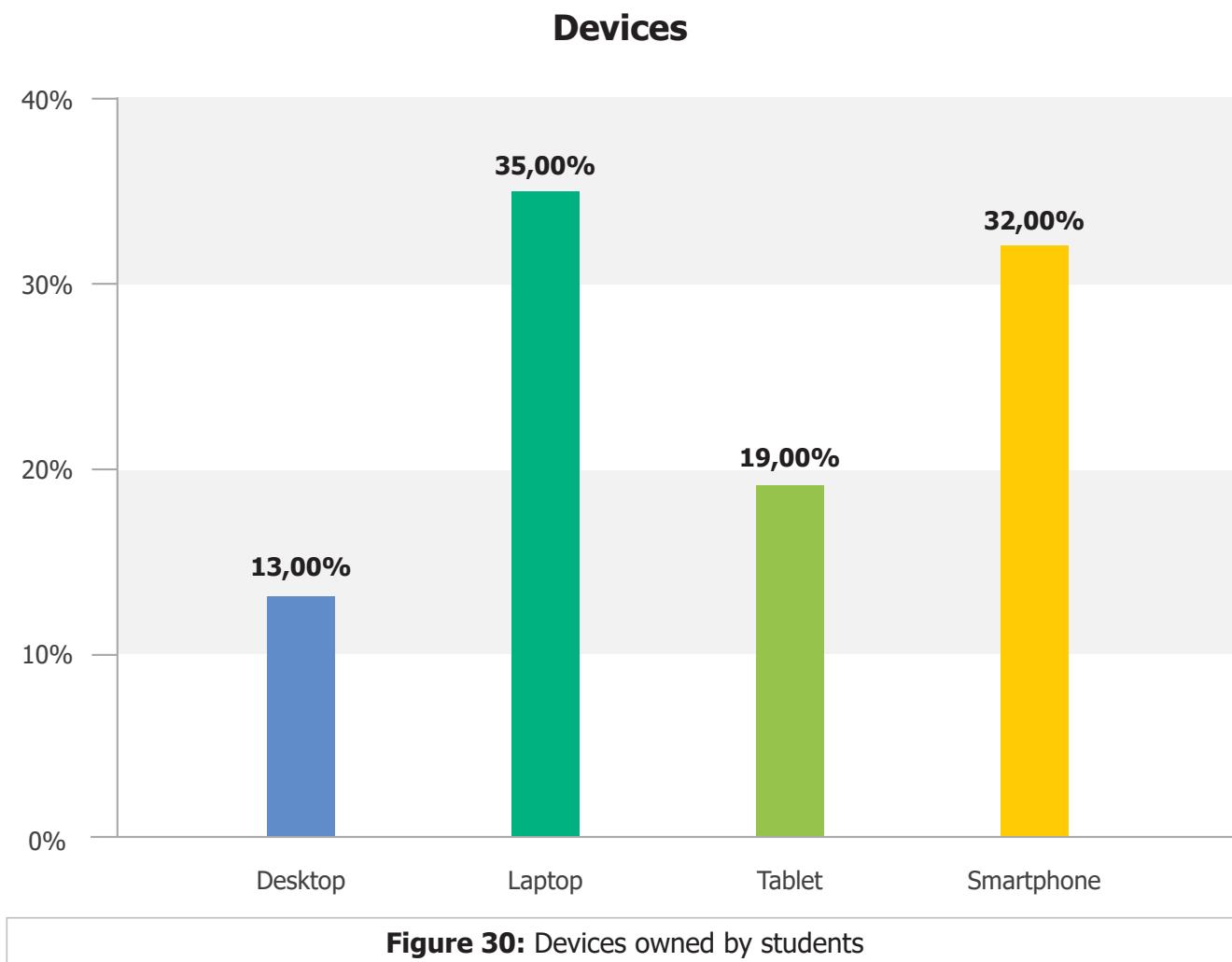


**Figure 29:** Satisfaction with computer services

The satisfaction data on ICT induction services and computing lab facilities suggests a generally positive perception among students. A significant majority (60.87%) are satisfied with ICT induction services, with 21.01% being very satisfied, indicating that the university's efforts in providing IT orientation and support are effective for most students. Similarly, satisfaction levels for the physical environment of computing labs (64.18%), their opening hours (66.91%), and the speed of computer hardware and network (63.24%) reflect a well-maintained and accessible digital learning environment. However, some students remain dissatisfied, particularly with the speed of computer hardware and network (17.65%), followed by the physical environment of the computing labs (16.42%), suggesting areas and high-end users that require further attention.

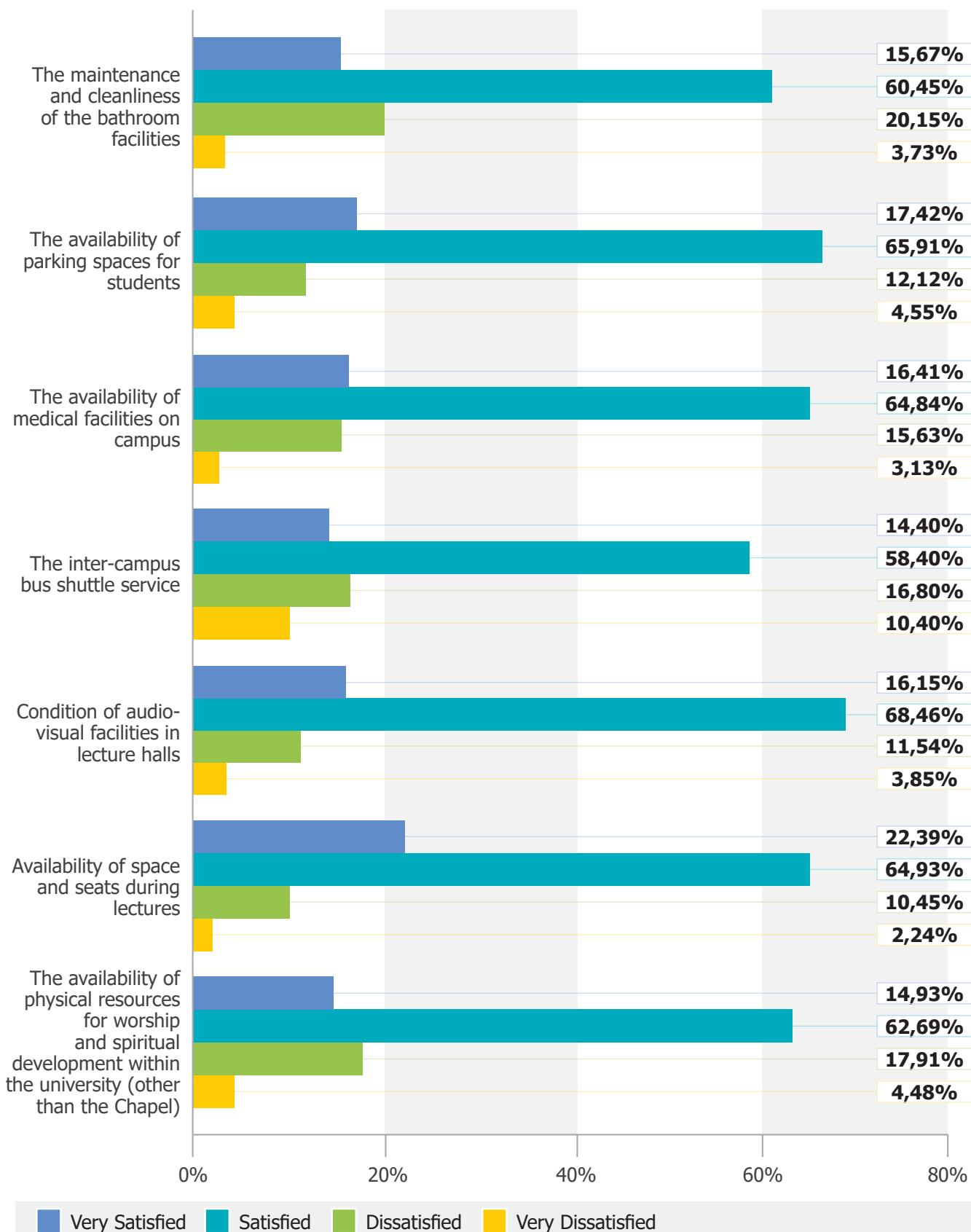
To enhance student experiences, WSU could focus on improving network reliability and upgrading outdated computer hardware to support high-performance tasks. Expanding computing lab facilities

or optimising their layout could address concerns about the physical environment, ensuring adequate workspace and ventilation. Additionally, extending lab operating hours where feasible could benefit students who require after-hours access for research or assignments. Gathering targeted feedback from dissatisfied users can help refine these improvements, ensuring that ICT services and infrastructure fully meet the needs of the student body.



The data in Figure 30 reveals that students overwhelmingly rely on portable devices, with laptops (35%) and smartphones (32%) accounting for two-thirds of device ownership. This highlights a strong preference for mobility, emphasising the need for WSU to prioritize mobile-friendly digital resources, such as responsive websites, streamlined apps, and bite-sized content optimized for smaller screens. Tablets (19%) also play a role, likely for reading or multimedia tasks, while desktops (13%) remain niche tools, potentially limited to specialized academic work or shared campus labs.

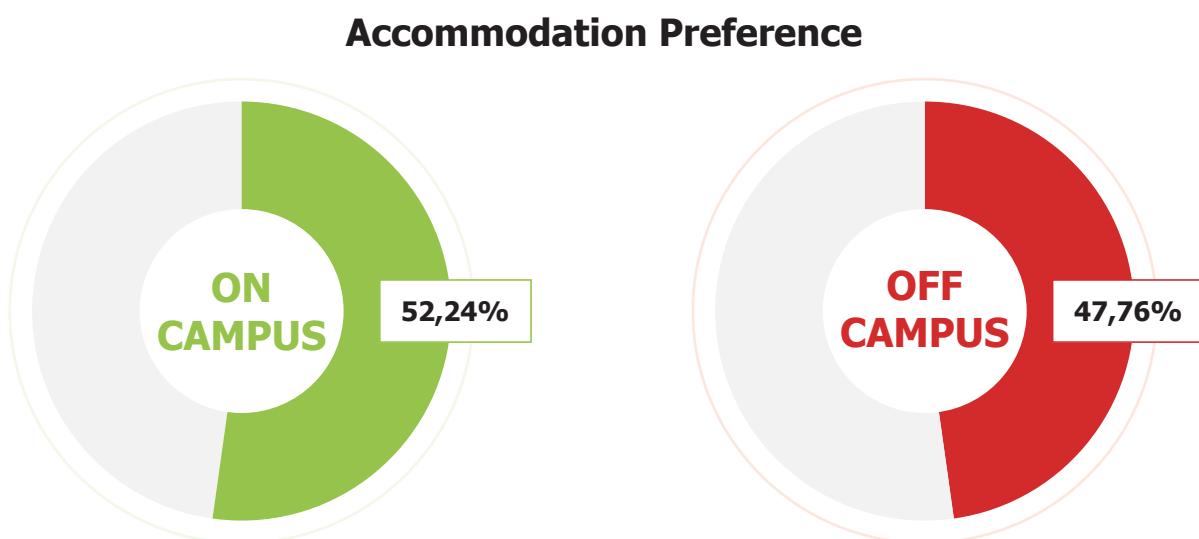
## Campus Facilities



**Figure 31:** Satisfaction with campus facilities

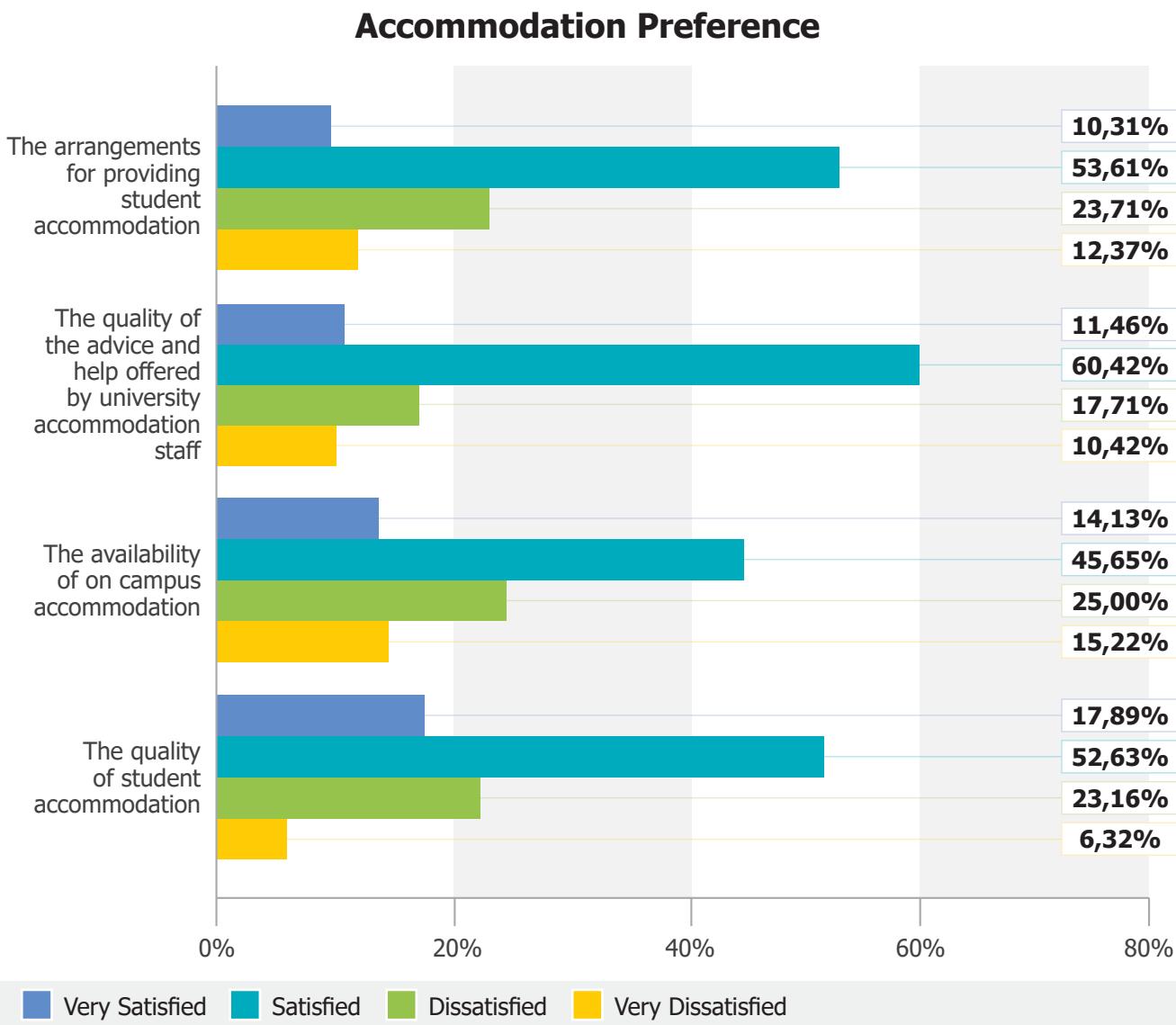
Although some places need improvement, the campus facilities satisfaction survey shows largely good feedback. The majority of students express satisfaction with the availability of medical services (64.84%), the state of the audio-visual equipment in lecture halls (68.46%), and the space and seats available for lectures (64.93%). Likewise, comparatively high satisfaction ratings are given to the availability of parking (65.91%) and the upkeep of restrooms (60.45%). Concerns still exist, though, with 16.80% of students complaining about intercampus bus services and 17.91% of students complaining about the availability of worship facilities. Furthermore, there is a notable need for improvement, since the bathroom's upkeep and cleanliness have the greatest dissatisfaction percentage (20.15%).

By boosting bus frequency and making sure that scheduling is better to meet the needs of students, WSU might give priority to transportation service enhancements to improve student satisfaction. Additionally, more frequent maintenance and sanitary inspections should be conducted to improve restroom cleanliness. The learning atmosphere will also be improved by ongoing investments in lecture hall infrastructure, such as modernized audio-visual equipment. All students can have a more welcoming and encouraging campus experience at WSU if these major issues are resolved.



**Figure 32:** Accommodation preference

The accommodation preferences of postgraduate students at WSU reveal a near-even split between on-campus (52.24%) and off-campus (47.76%) living, reflecting diverse priorities and needs. The slight majority favouring on-campus housing may stem from the convenience of proximity to academic resources (e.g., libraries, labs), social and professional networking opportunities, and streamlined access to university services like workshops or mentorship programs. This preference could also indicate a desire for a structured, immersive academic environment, particularly among international students or those new to the area. Conversely, the significant off-campus cohort (nearly half) likely prioritizes factors such as affordability, independence, privacy, or family-friendly housing options. Off-campus living may also appeal to part-time students balancing work or caregiving responsibilities, as it offers flexibility to choose locations closer to employment or personal commitments.



**Figure 33:** Satisfaction with on-campus accommodation

The survey results in Figure 33 reveal a mixed picture of student accommodation experiences. While most students express satisfaction with the quality of student accommodation (52.63%) and the advice/help offered by university accommodation staff (60.42%), there are significant concerns regarding the availability of on-campus accommodation and the arrangements for providing it. Specifically, 25.00% of students are dissatisfied with the availability of on-campus housing, and 23.71% are dissatisfied with the arrangements for providing it. These figures suggest that many students may struggle to find suitable on-campus housing, leading to increased stress and potential disruptions to their academic and social lives.

The dissatisfaction with the availability of on-campus accommodation indicates a potential shortage of housing options, which could force students to seek off-campus alternatives that may be less convenient and more costly. This situation can negatively impact students' overall university experience, as they might face longer commutes, higher living expenses, and less integration into campus life.

Furthermore, the dissatisfaction with the arrangements for providing student accommodation suggests that the processes for allocating and managing housing may be inefficient or unclear. This can result in delays, confusion, and frustration among students, further affecting their satisfaction and well-being.

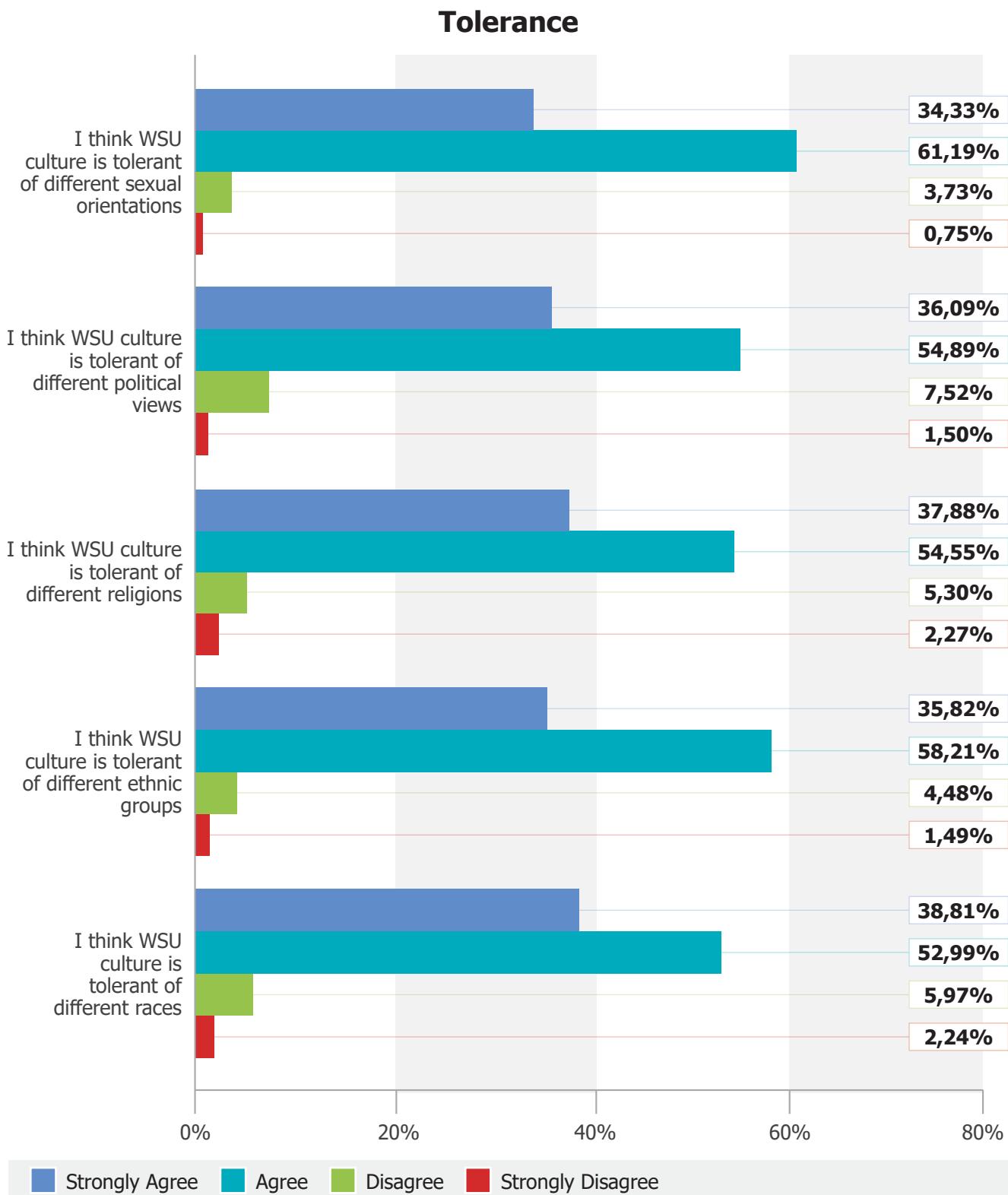
Despite these challenges, the high satisfaction rates with the quality of accommodation and the support from university staff indicate that once students secure housing, they generally find it to be of good quality and appreciate the assistance provided. This positive feedback provides a strong foundation for WSU to build upon.

## 7.8. Institutional Culture

Institutional culture shapes the student experience, staff engagement, and overall academic environment. It encompasses the values, beliefs, and practices that define interactions within the university community. A strong institutional culture fosters inclusivity, academic excellence, and a sense of belonging among students and staff. Feedback from stakeholders highlights both the strengths and challenges in creating a supportive and cohesive university environment. While many appreciate the university's commitment to diversity and academic growth, there are areas where improvements can enhance communication, collaboration, and overall student satisfaction.

The results shown in Figures 34 and 35 indicate that most WSU students have a positive perception of the institutional culture.

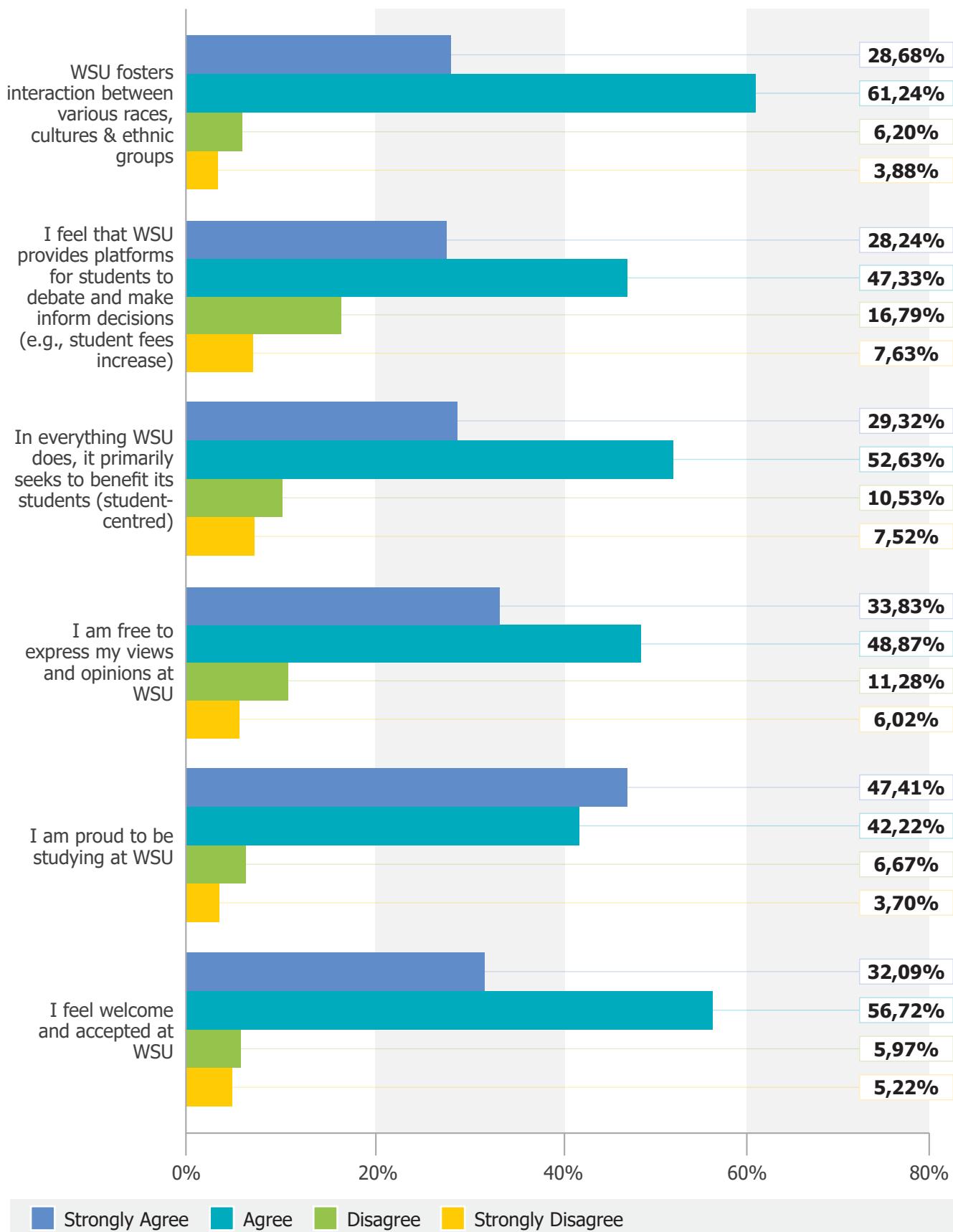




**Figure 34:** Student views on institutional culture (tolerance)

Furthermore, the culture at WSU is perceived as highly tolerant, with over 90% of students believing that the university is tolerant of different races, ethnic groups, religions, political views, and sexual orientations.

## Student Centeredness and Inclusivity



**Figure 35:** Student views on institutional culture (student centeredness and inclusivity)

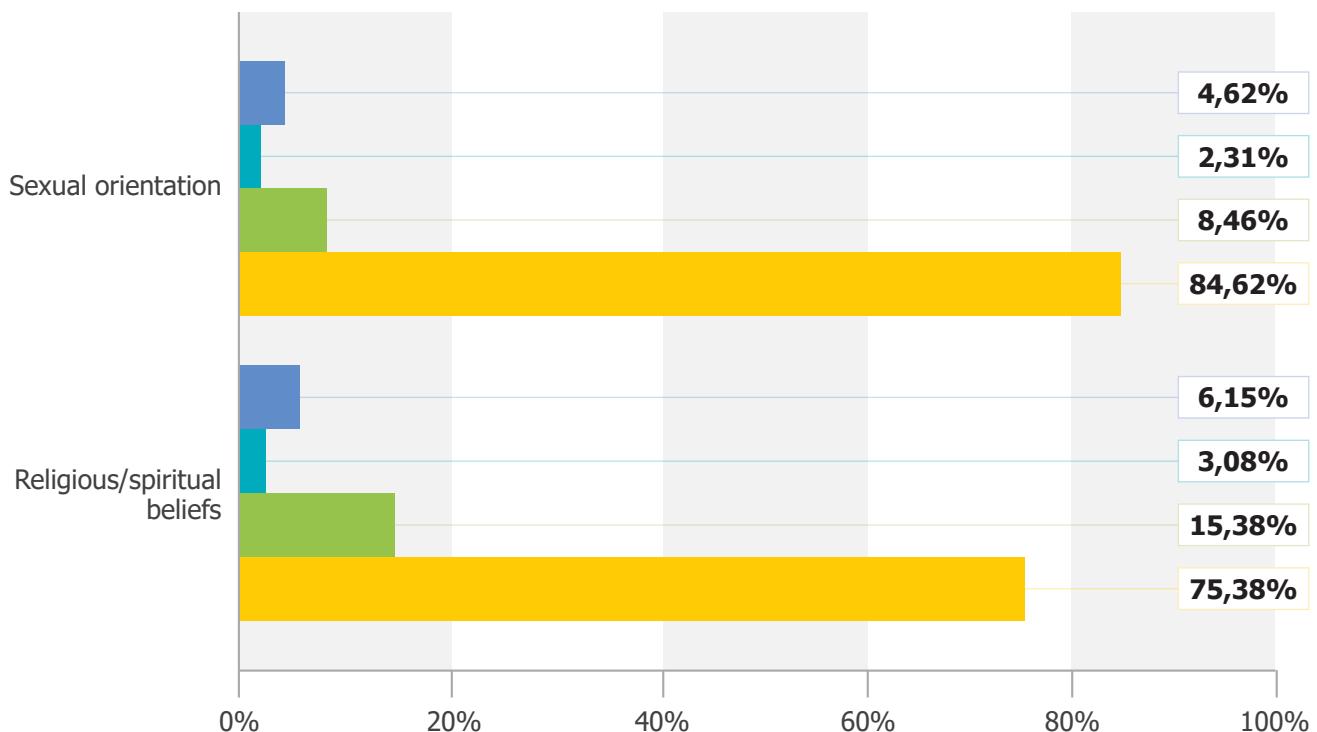
A significant proportion of students feel welcome and accepted, with 88.81% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this sentiment. Additionally, 89.63% of students express pride in studying at WSU. The university is also seen as a place where students can freely express their views and opinions, with 82.7% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.

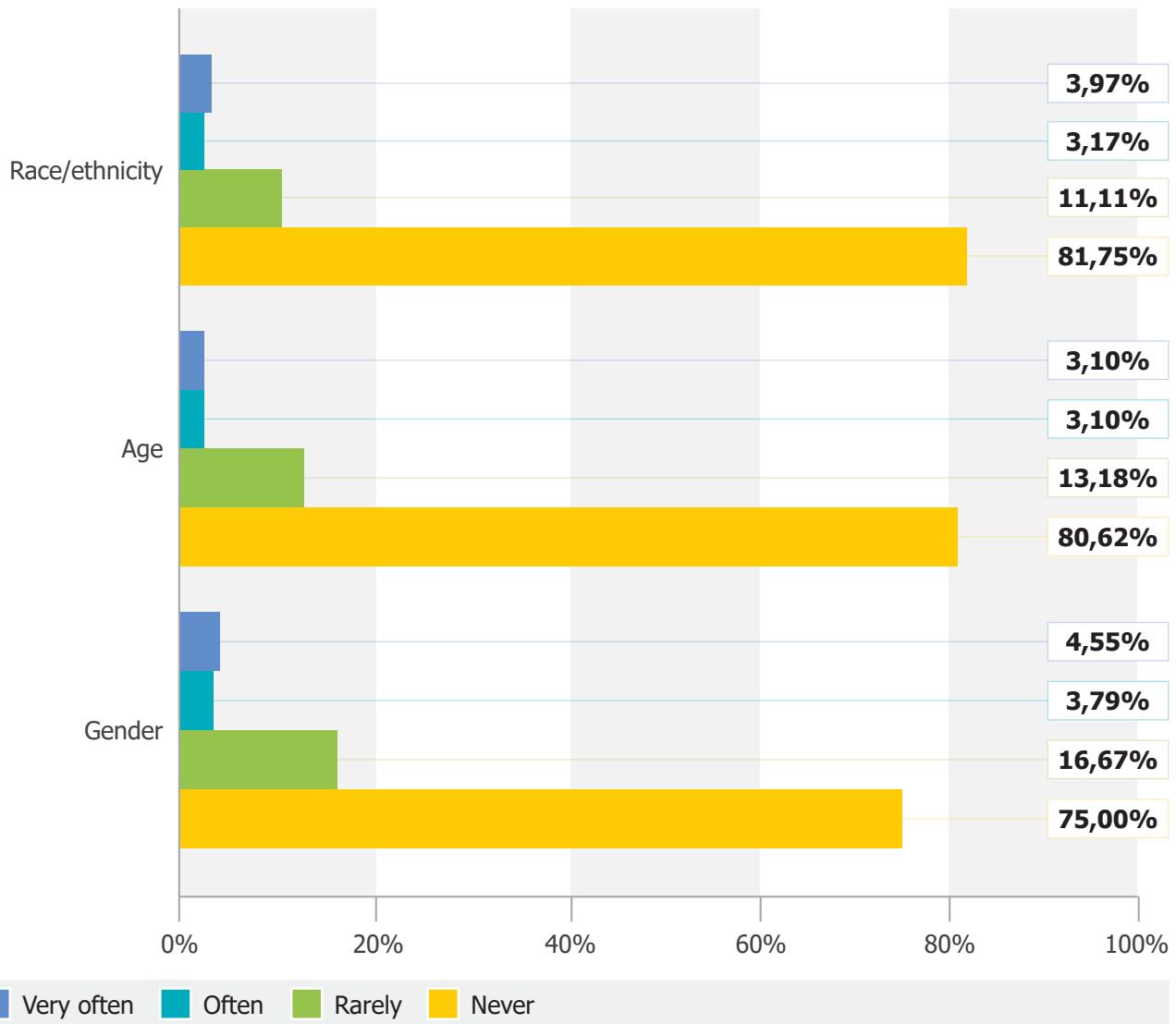
Moreover, the survey highlights that WSU is viewed as a student-centred institution, with 81.95% of students feeling that the university primarily seeks to benefit its students. The university also provides platforms for students to debate and make informed decisions, as 75.57% of respondents indicated. Additionally, 89.92% of students believe WSU fosters interaction between various races, cultures, and ethnic groups. These findings suggest that WSU is successful in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for its diverse student body.

University harassment, which includes cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and harassment based on discrimination, fosters a hostile climate that jeopardizes the academic or professional performance of staff members and students. Because of its serious effects, measures are put in place to stop harassment, clear reporting channels are set up, in-depth investigations are conducted, and disciplinary measures are taken.

According to the data gathered from the responses, the campus atmosphere is generally good, with most students reporting no instances of harassment or discrimination across a range of incident kinds and identifying variables. There are some noteworthy outliers, though, especially when it comes to discrimination based on socioeconomic background and political views, as well as a smaller but noteworthy percentage of students who have been the victims of assault, or exclusion.

### Harassment on Identity

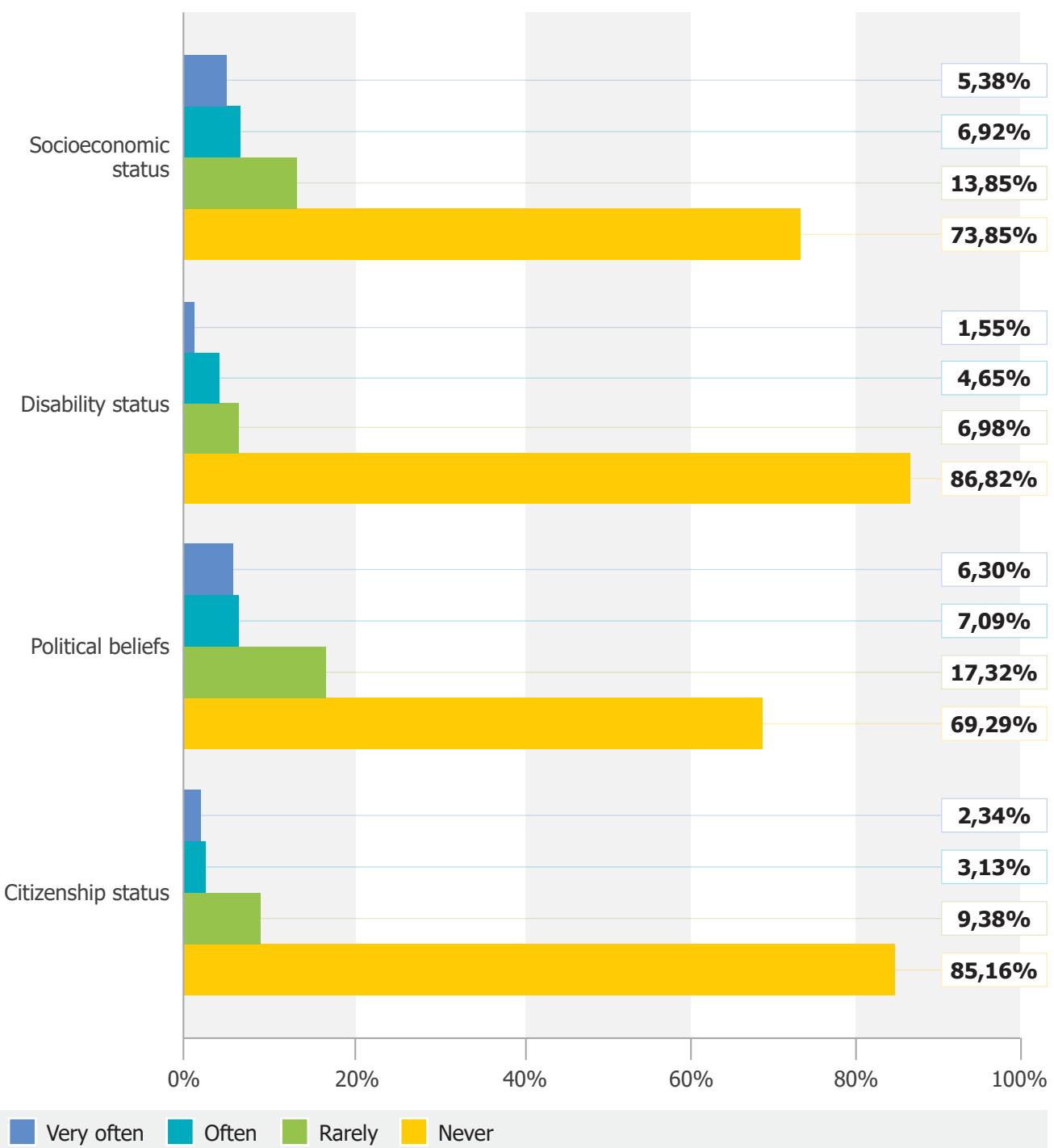




**Figure 36:** Student experiences with discrimination or harassment (identity)

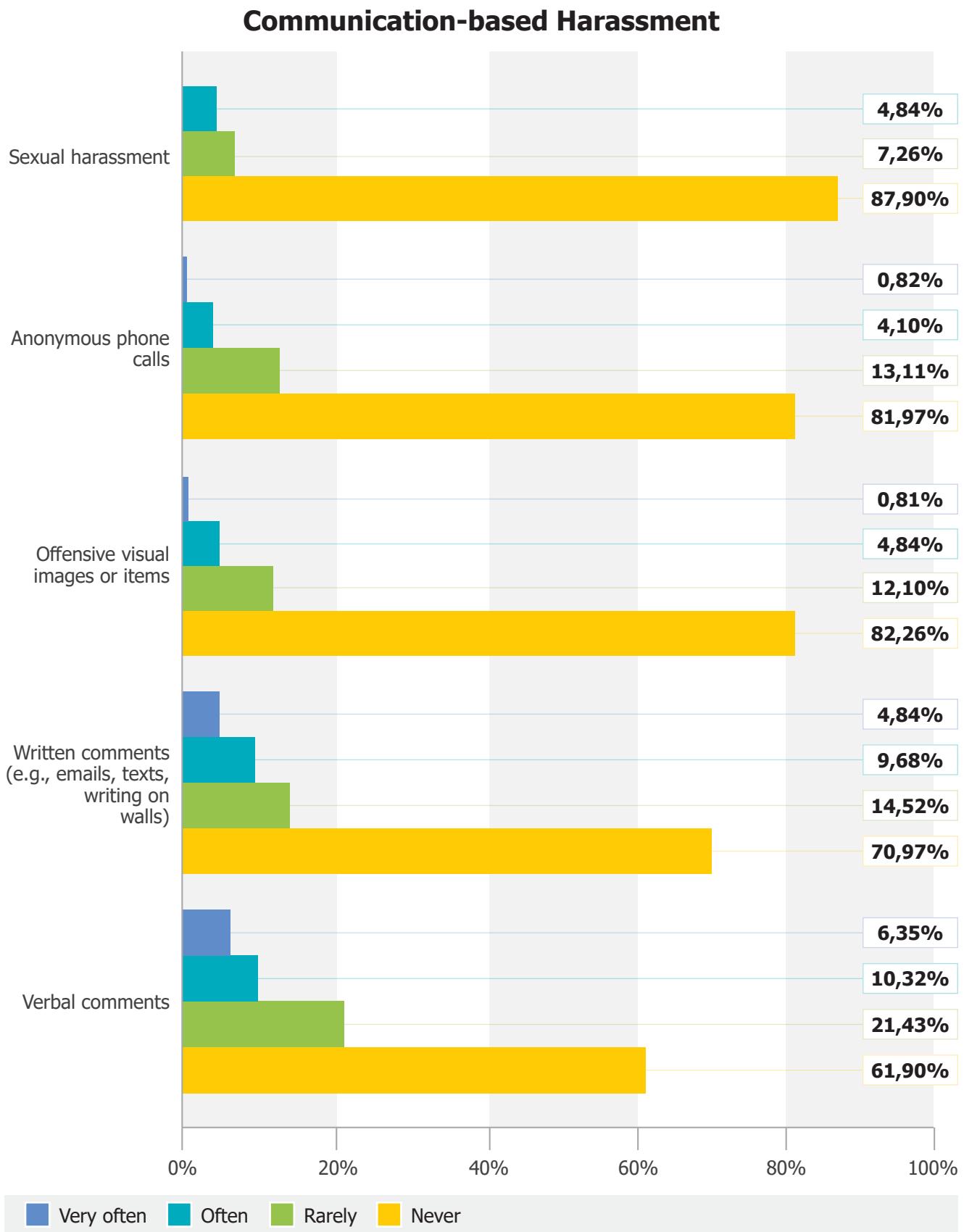
Figures 36 and 37 indicate that most students at WSU have never experienced harassment or discrimination based on various identity factors. Across categories such as gender, disability status, age, citizenship, political beliefs, race/ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, the percentage of students who responded that they never experienced discrimination is consistently high, ranging from approximately 69% to 87%. This suggests that the overall campus environment is largely inclusive and non-discriminatory for most students. However, some variations exist, with lower percentages in categories like political beliefs and socioeconomic status, where students reported a slightly higher occurrence of discrimination.

## Harassment on Status and Beliefs



**Figure 37:** Student experiences with discrimination or harassment (status and beliefs)

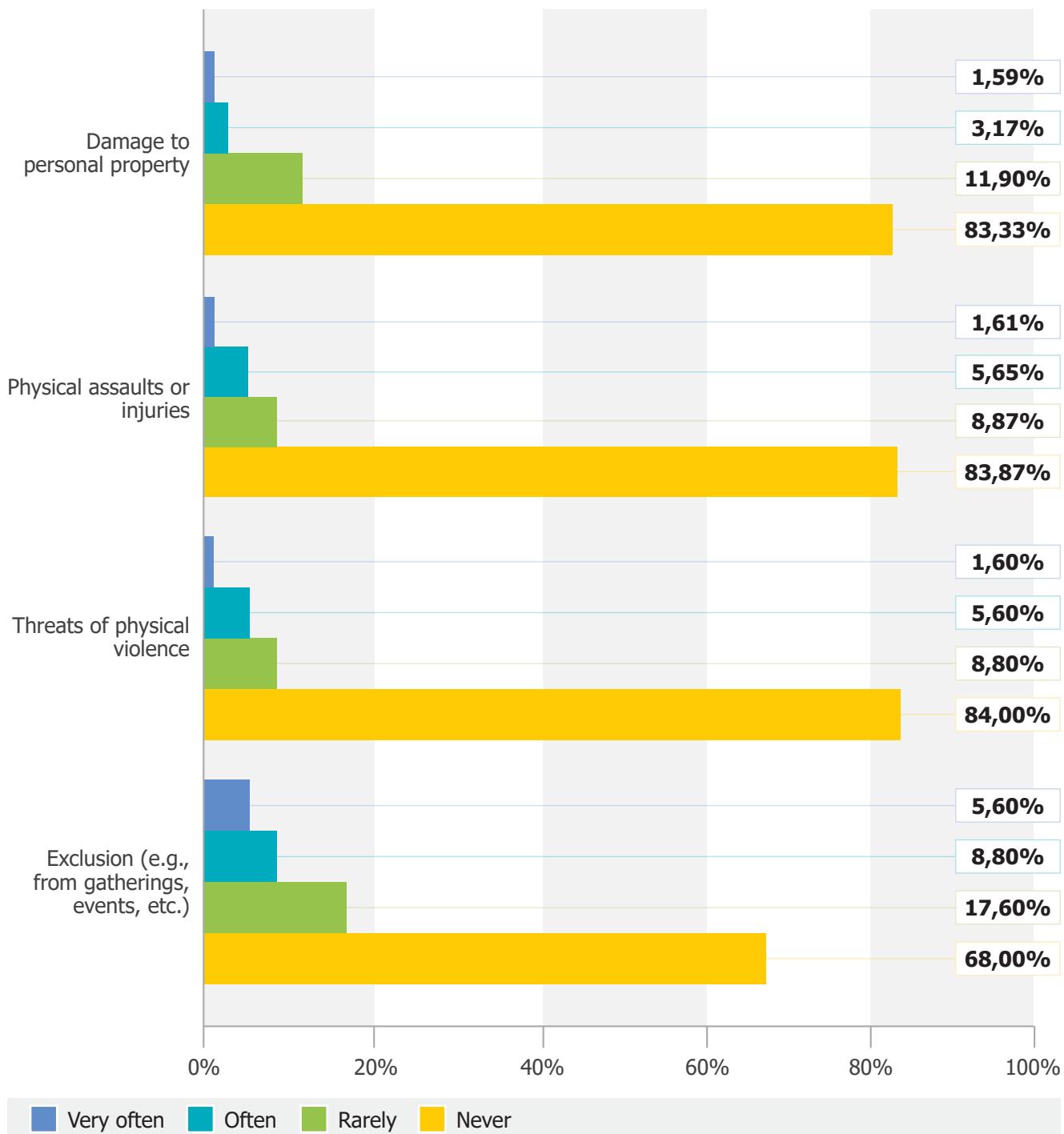
Despite the majority reporting no issues, a small but notable percentage of students have experienced discrimination. The highest reported discrimination appears to be related to political beliefs (17.32% Rarely, 6.30% Very Often) and socioeconomic status (13.85% Rarely, 5.38% Very Often).



**Figure 38:** Prevalent forms of harassment (communication-based)

The data in Figures 38 and 39 suggest that a majority of students have not experienced incidents of harassment, exclusion, or violence on campus. Specifically, over 60% report never experiencing verbal comments (61.90%), written harassment (70.97%), exclusion (68.00%), or anonymous phone calls (81.97%). Similarly, serious offences such as threats of physical violence (84.00%), physical assaults (83.87%), and sexual harassment (87.90%) are reported as "never" occurring for most students.

### Physical and Exclusionary Harassment



**Figure 39:** Prevalent forms of harassment (physical and exclusionary)

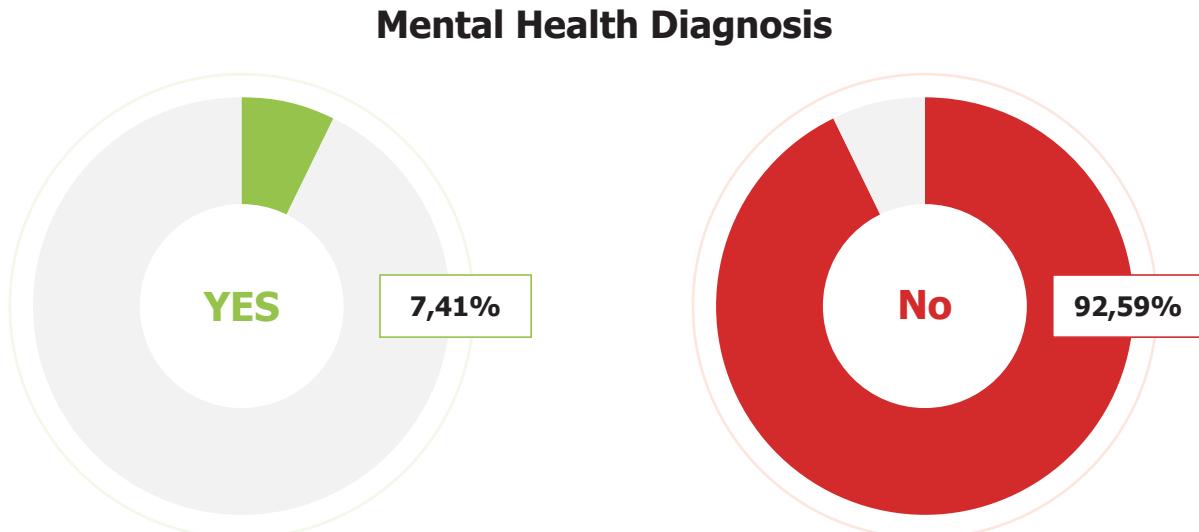
Around 21.43% report rarely experiencing verbal comments, 17.60% report exclusion, and 12.10% report encountering offensive visual images or items. These findings indicate that while harassment and discrimination are not widespread, they are still present and affect a portion of the student population. This highlights the need for continued efforts in fostering inclusivity, awareness, and support for affected students. While the overall data suggests a positive campus climate, addressing even these smaller percentages is essential in ensuring every student feels safe, respected, and valued at WSU.

## 7.9. Mental Health

Mental health plays a crucial role in postgraduate students' overall well-being and academic success. The pressures of advanced studies, combined with personal and financial challenges, can contribute to mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Recognising these challenges, universities must prioritise mental health awareness and support systems to ensure students can access the necessary resources.

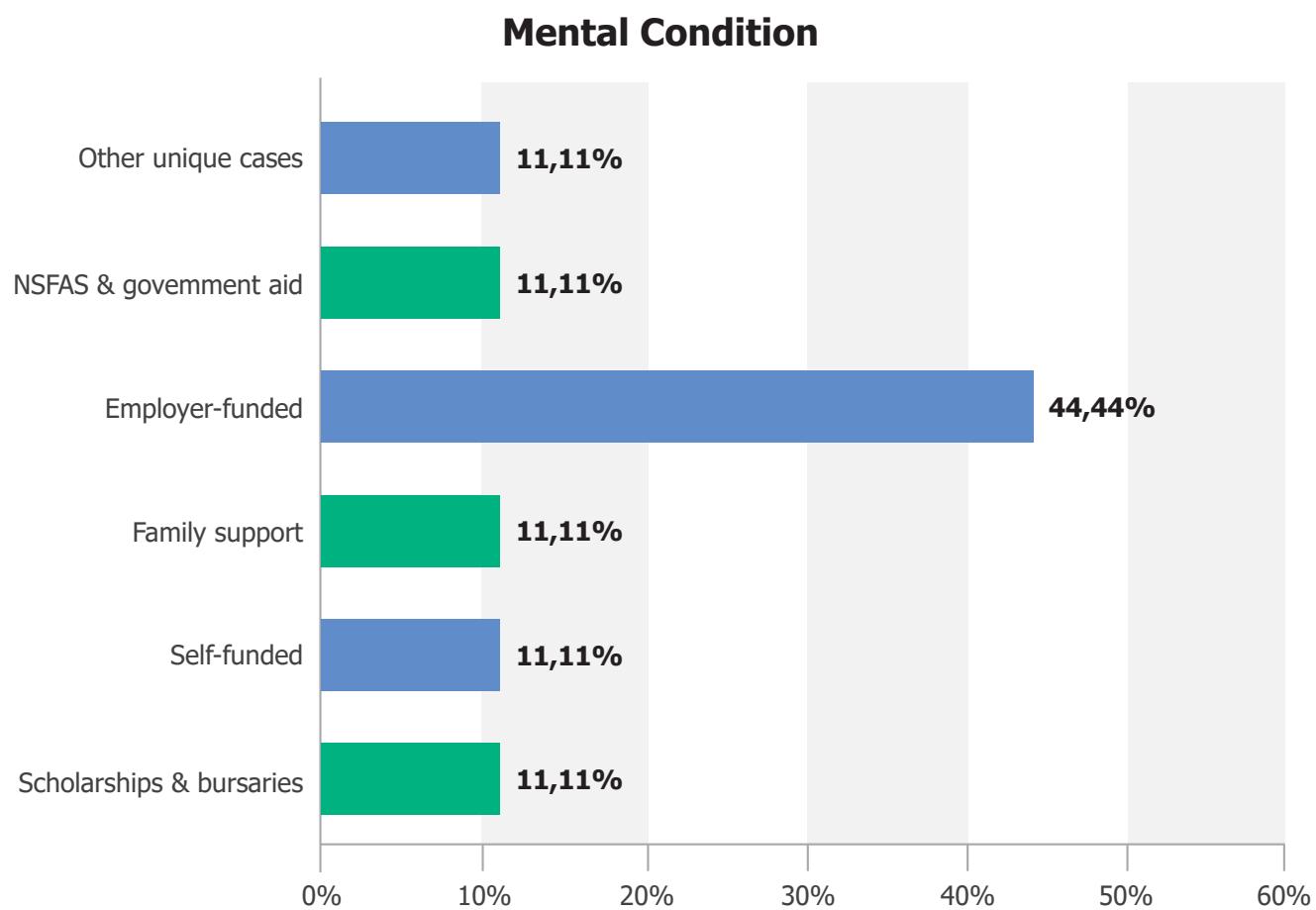
This section examines the prevalence of mental health diagnoses and symptoms among postgraduate students at WSU. It highlights key findings on diagnosed conditions, everyday emotional struggles, and the extent to which students experience stress and anxiety. The insights gathered to emphasise the importance of proactive mental health interventions, including counselling services, peer support groups, and awareness programs, to foster a supportive and inclusive academic environment.

The data in Figure 40 indicates that 7.41% of postgraduate students at WSU have received a mental health diagnosis, while the vast majority (92.59%) have not. This suggests that while the prevalence of diagnosed mental health conditions is relatively low, there is still a notable portion of students who may require mental health support and resources.



**Figure 40:** Mental health diagnosis

Given the increasing awareness of mental health issues in academic settings, it is essential for WSU to ensure that adequate support systems, such as counseling services, awareness programs, and accessible mental health resources, are in place to assist students in need. Addressing mental health concerns proactively can contribute to a more supportive and inclusive campus environment.

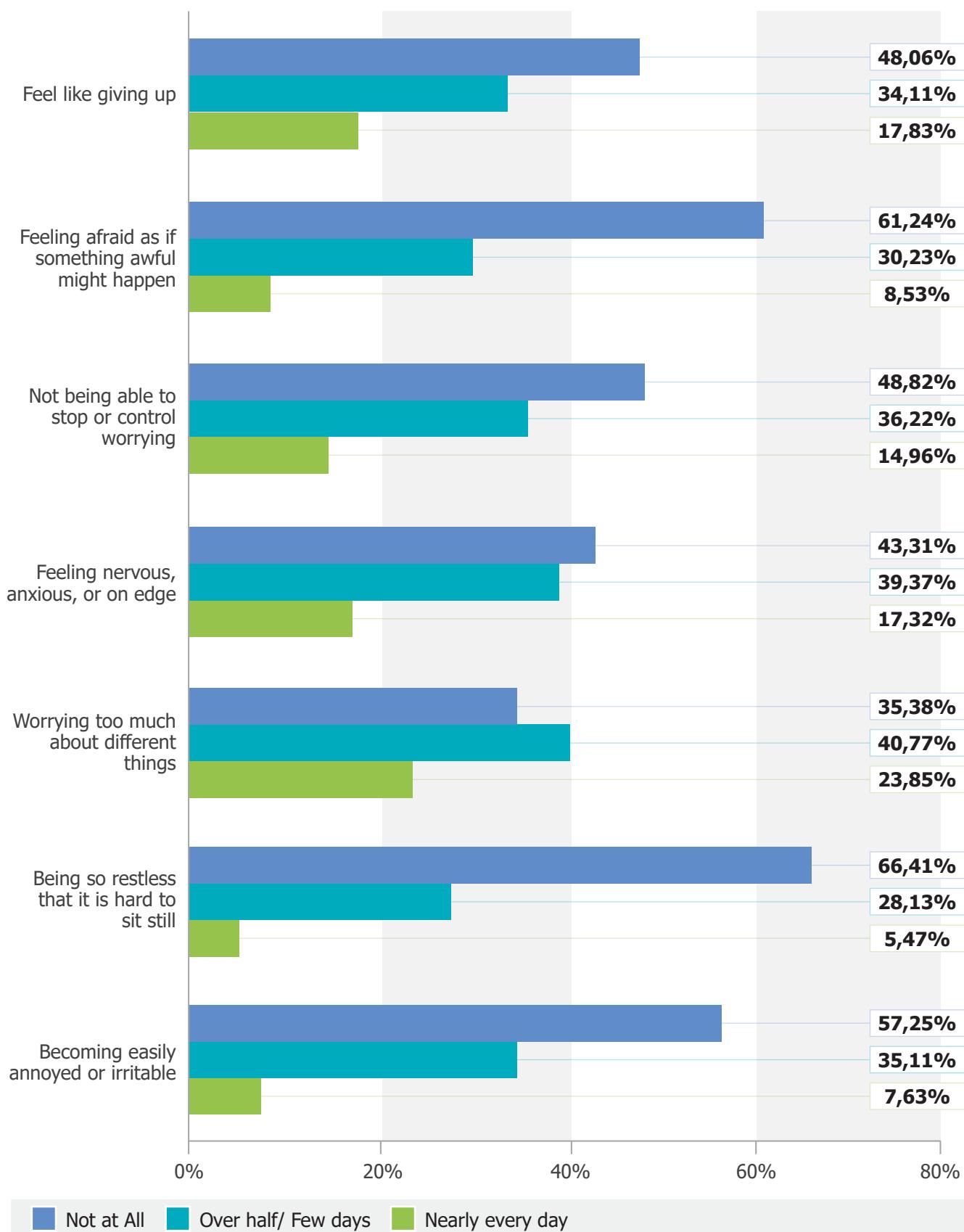


**Figure 41:** Description of mental health condition

Depression is the most commonly diagnosed mental health condition among students at WSU, accounting for 44.44% of reported cases. Other conditions, such as anxiety, bipolar disorder, and various forms of depression (mild, severe, and comorbid with anxiety), each make up 11.11% of the cases. This indicates that while depression is the dominant concern, a range of other mental health conditions also impact students.

These findings indicate that WSU should prioritize mental health interventions that address depression while also considering comprehensive support systems for anxiety and bipolar disorder. Expanding counseling services, providing peer support groups, and raising awareness about mental health resources could help students manage their conditions more effectively and improve their overall well-being.

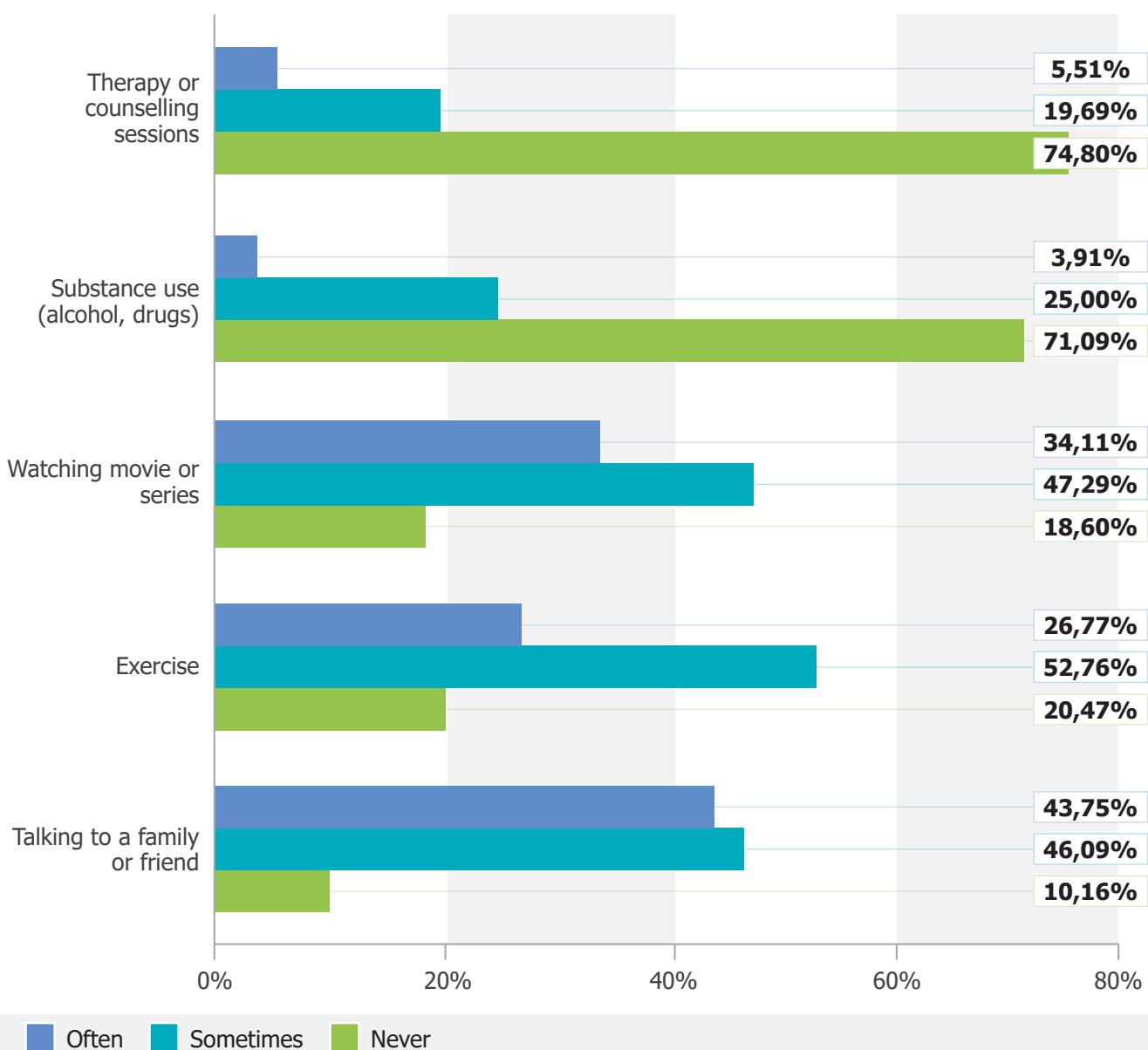
## Weekly Mental Experiences



**Figure 42:** Student weekly mental experiences

A significant portion of postgraduate students experience symptoms of stress and anxiety, with worrying too much (23.85%) and feeling like giving up (17.83%) being among the most common issues reported nearly every day. Additionally, many students experience nervousness, restlessness, and an inability to control worrying at least a few days a week. However, a notable proportion of students report not experiencing these symptoms, with over half (57.25%-66.41%) indicating they do not struggle with issues such as restlessness or irritability. These findings suggest that while many students maintain stable mental well-being, a significant subset faces challenges related to stress, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness. WSU should consider implementing targeted mental health initiatives, including stress management workshops, counselling services, and peer support programs, to support better students dealing with persistent anxiety and emotional distress.

### Coping Mechanism

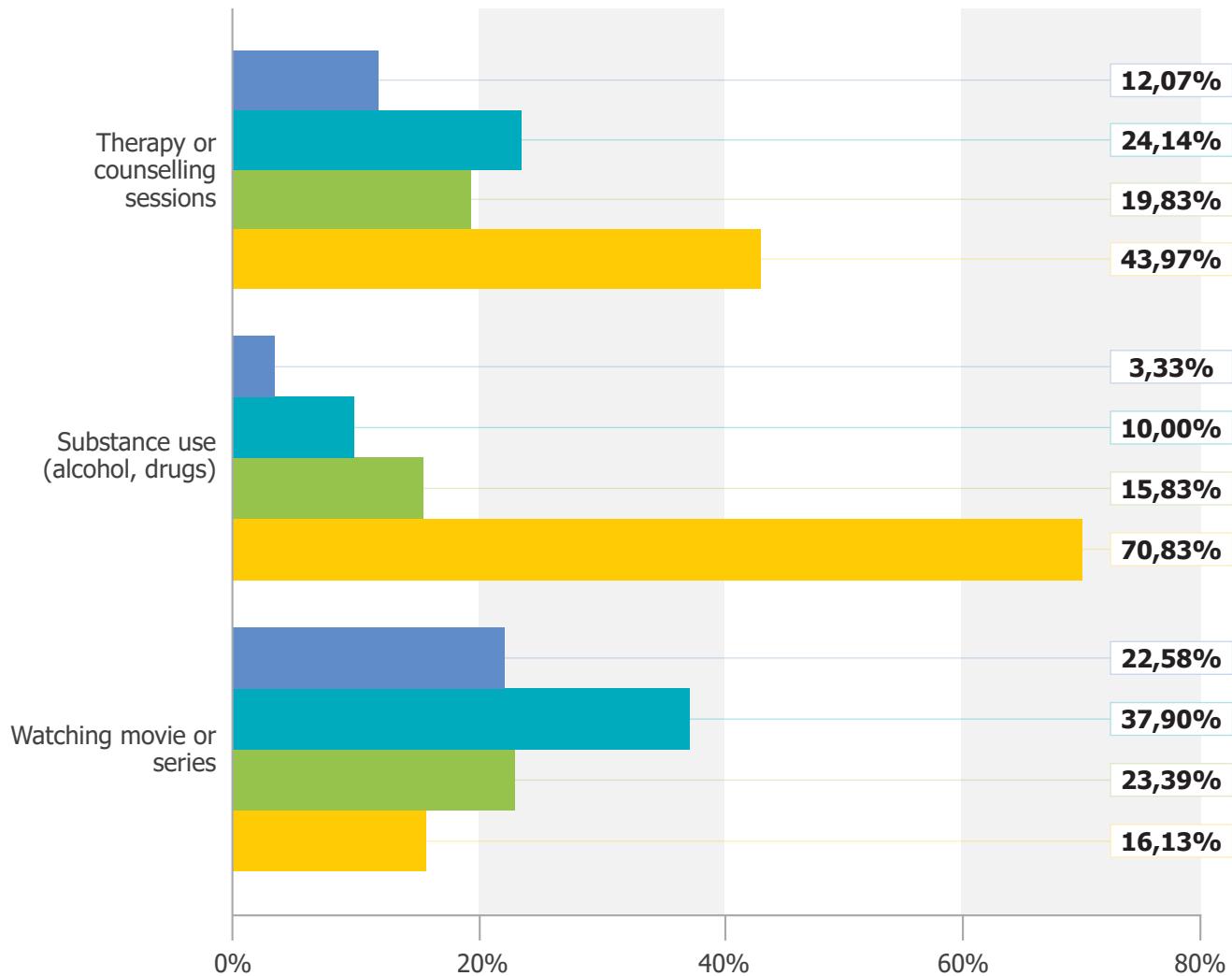


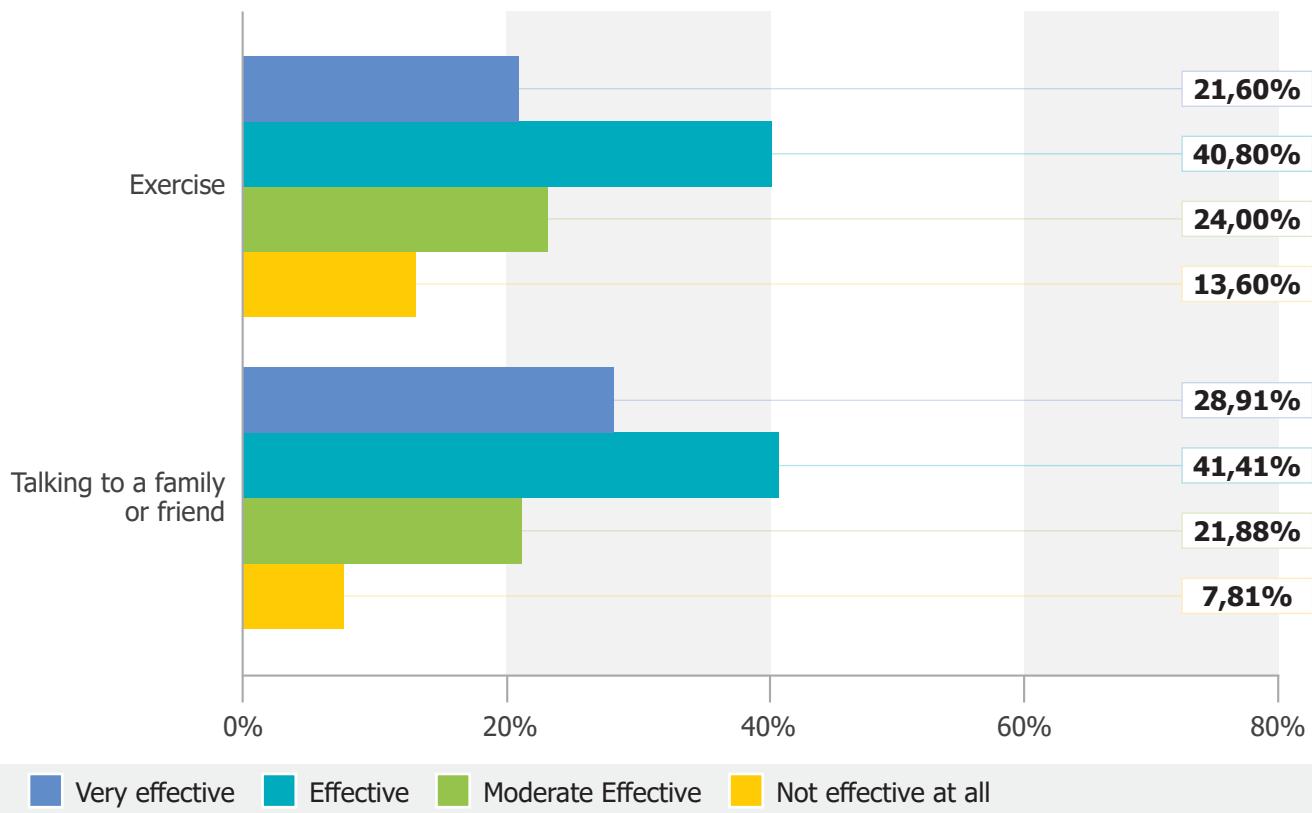
**Figure 43:** Coping mechanisms

The most common coping mechanism among postgraduate students at WSU is talking to a family member or friend, with 46.09% of students engaging in this strategy sometimes and 43.75% doing so often. Exercise is another frequently used method, with 52.76% of students sometimes exercising and 26.77% doing so often. Watching movies or series is also a popular way to cope, with nearly half (47.29%) engaging in this activity sometimes and 34.11% doing so often.

Conversely, substance use and therapy or counselling sessions are the least utilised coping mechanisms. A significant majority (71.09%) reported never using substances such as alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism, while 74.80% have never attended therapy or counselling. Only 5.51% of students reported often seeking therapy or counselling, and 3.91% frequently resort to substance use. These findings suggest that while students rely heavily on social support and recreational activities, formal mental health services remain underutilised.

### Effectiveness of Coping Mechanism





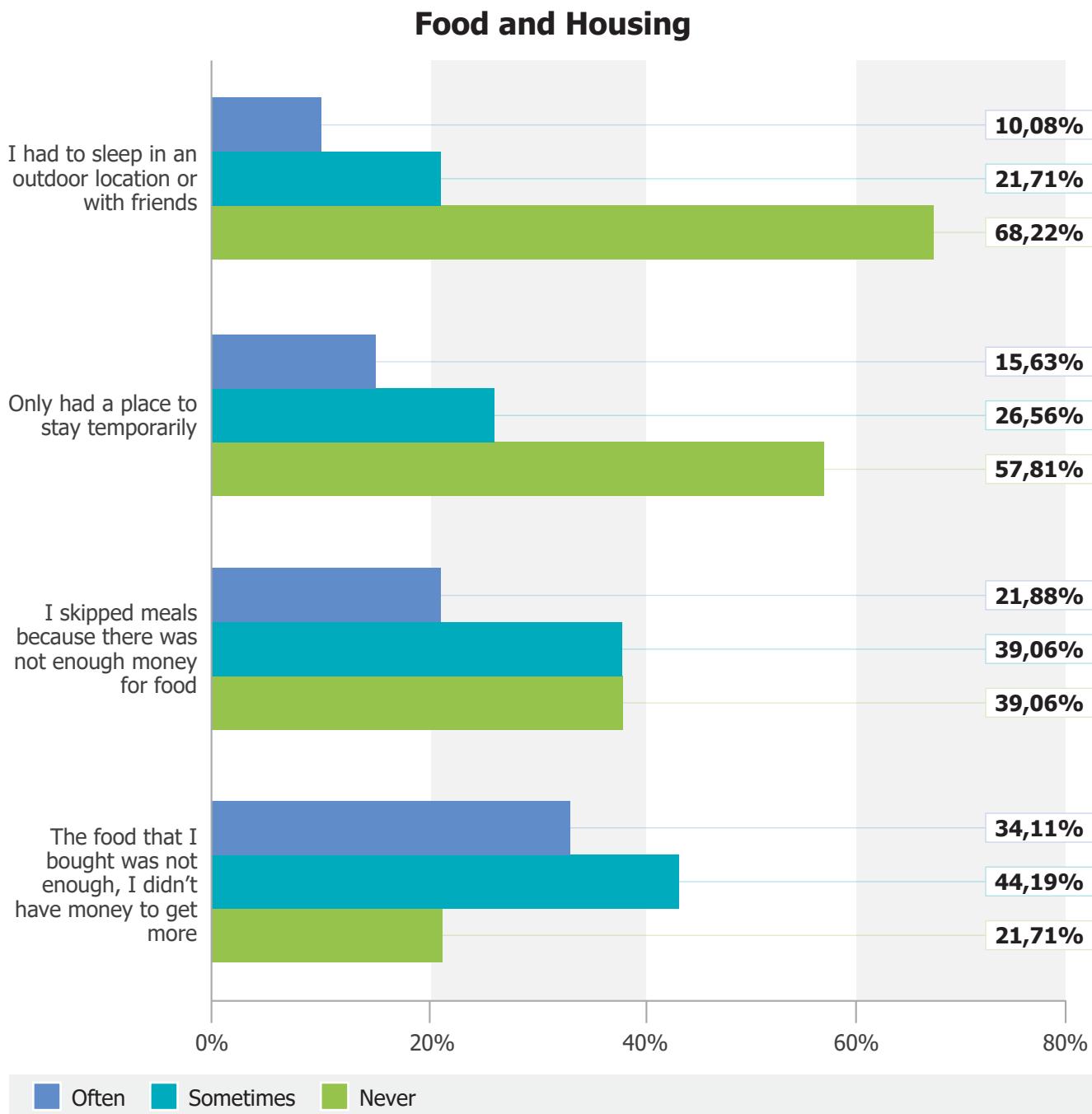
**Figure 44:** Effectiveness of student coping mechanism

Talking to a family member or friend is perceived as the most effective coping mechanism, with 41.41% of students rating it as effective and 28.91% as very effective. Exercise also received high effectiveness ratings, with 40.80% finding it effective and 21.60% very effective. Watching movies or series is considered moderately effective, with 37.90% rating it effective and 22.58% very effective.

On the other hand, substance use is overwhelmingly seen as ineffective, with 70.83% of students stating it is not effective at all. Therapy or counseling sessions received mixed responses, with 43.97% considering them not effective, but 24.14% finding them effective. These findings highlight the need for increased awareness and accessibility of formal mental health services while also reinforcing the importance of peer and social support in coping with mental health challenges.

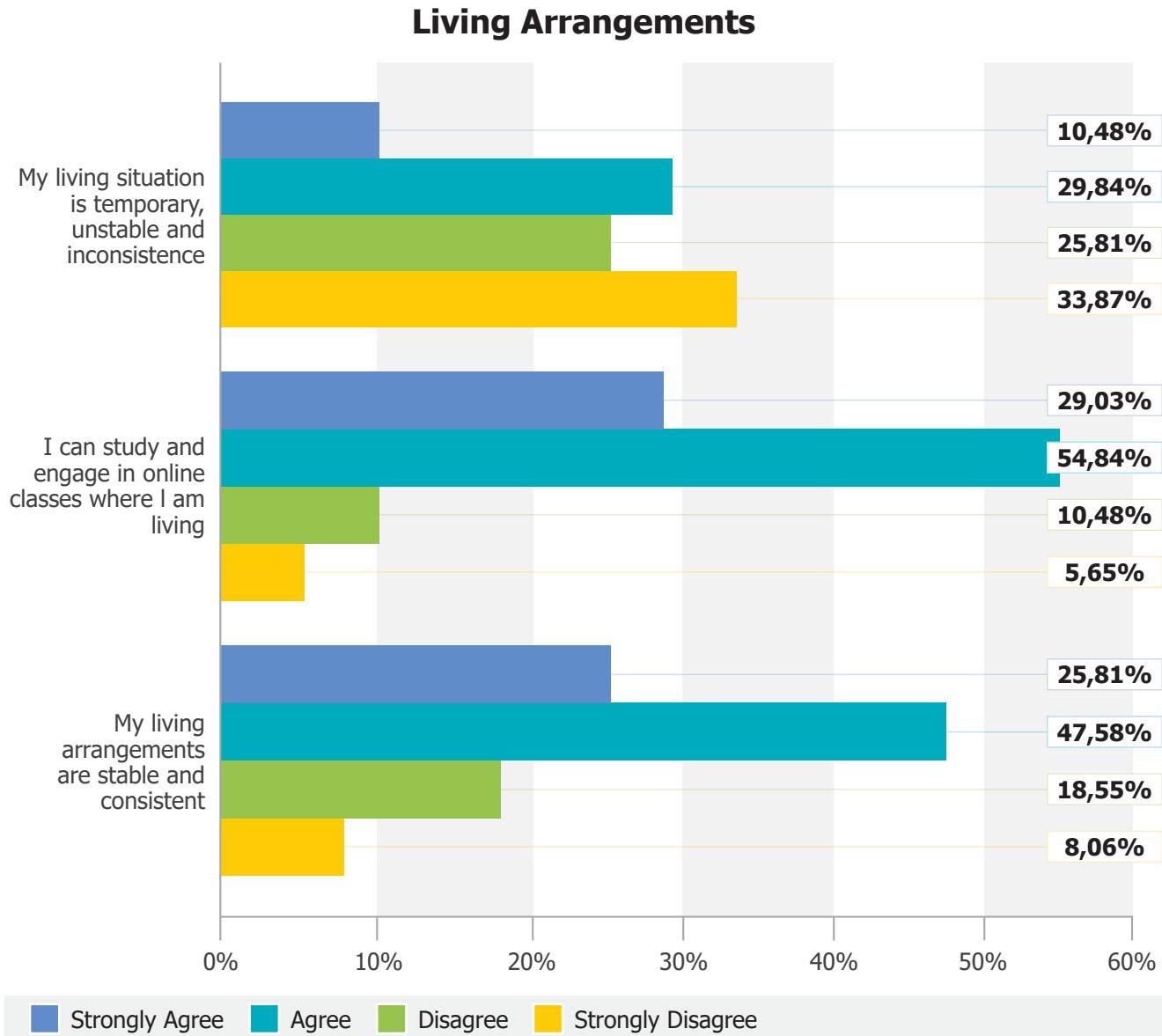
## 7.10. Food and Housing Insecurity

The security of food and housing significantly impacts students' well-being and success. Students who experience food insecurity may struggle to concentrate in class, face health issues, and find it challenging to afford essential supplies. Those living in unstable housing often lack a comfortable place to study, leading to increased stress. To address these challenges, universities are increasingly recognising these issues and implementing programs such as emergency aid, affordable housing options, and on-campus food banks to support students.



**Figure 45:** Food and housing

The statistics in Figure 45 highlight challenges related to food insecurity and housing instability. For instance, 21.71% of respondents never experienced food insufficiency, while 34.11% often did. Similarly, 39.06% never skipped meals due to lack of money, but 21.88% often had to. Regarding housing, 57.81% had a stable place to stay, whereas 15.63% often had only temporary housing. Additionally, 68.22% never had to sleep outdoors or with friends, but 10.08% often did. These figures underscore many individuals' difficulties in securing basic needs like food and shelter.



**Figure 46:** Living arrangements

The majority of students (47.58%) agree that their living arrangements are stable and consistent, with an additional 25.81% strongly agreeing. This suggests that most students have secure housing. Similarly, 54.84% of students agree and 29.03% strongly agree that they can study and engage in online classes where they live, indicating that most students have a conducive study environment.

However, instability remains a concern for a significant minority. While 29.84% of students agree that their living situation is temporary or unstable, 33.87% strongly disagree, highlighting a split in experiences. Additionally, 25.81% of students disagree that their living arrangements are stable. These findings suggest that while most students have stable housing and a suitable study environment, universities should consider targeted support for students facing housing instability, which could impact their academic performance.

## 7.11. General Feedback

WSU postgraduate students have raised significant concerns regarding their academic experience. While some express satisfaction with specific initiatives, many face overwhelming challenges that hinder their academic progress and well-being. Insights from quantitative feedback from postgraduates are classified according to themes such as Financial Instability and Lack of Funding, Housing Challenges and Accommodation Shortages, Inadequate Mental Health Support, Academic and Administrative Inefficiencies, Security Concerns and Campus Safety Issues and Positive Experiences and Institutional Strengths.

One student stated that



“I need funding... I had difficulty studying without any financial support.”

Other students' voices



“It's hard to a postgraduate student without funding.”

“We are unfunded... we should be offered food parcels.”

“I have to sleep hungry... couldn't focus on studies because of stress.”

“Unfunded and unallocated... too much cost when it comes to living.”

Many postgraduate students struggle to find safe and affordable housing. Due to limited on-campus accommodation, they are forced to seek off-campus housing, which is often expensive and unsafe. Some students feel neglected by the university regarding housing policies and support.

One student reported



"WSU must provide accommodations for postgraduates, funded or not."

Another student testified by saying



"Some live in unsafe places because they cannot afford rent."

Another one



"We live in fear in rental places... might be taken out since we are not allocated there."

Postgraduate students feel that WSU's mental health services are insufficient, as they primarily cater to undergraduates. The lack of a dedicated mental health office leaves many without proper counseling and psychosocial support, exacerbating stress and academic burnout.

Student Voices:



"A physical office for psychosocial support is urgently needed... focus is on undergrads."

"We are expected to call a private counselor... not easy when you need immediate help."

"There's so much workload... no peace."

Several students report frustration with academic and administrative inefficiencies, including poor supervision, bureaucratic delays, and inconsistent communication from faculty officers. Some departments, particularly in Psychology and Humanities, have been singled out for ineffective processes.

Student Voices:



“The supervision process is extremely poor... delayed progress.”

“Red tapes for proposal submissions... one submission recommended, not multiple.”

“A year qualification takes 2-3 years.”

“Faculty officers have not been helpful... poor reception.”

Students have reported experiencing security issues on campus, including discrimination by security personnel and financial scams. These incidents create an unsafe learning environment and reduce trust in the university's ability to protect students.

One student says



“Security personnel... discrimination, ill-disciplined.”

Another one responded by saying



“Experienced a cybercrime... lost R2 500.”

Despite the challenges, some postgraduate students have highlighted positive aspects of their academic journey at WSU. Supportive supervisors, practical workshops, and commendable postgraduate office initiatives are among the strengths noted by students.

One student indicated



**"Very satisfied with my progress... great team of supervision."**

while another saying



**"Postgraduate office is doing an excellent job... keep up the good work."**

**"Workshops are effective."**

## 8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey results offer a thorough perspective of postgraduate students' experiences at WSU, showing both strengths and current issues. Significant obstacles still exist in the areas of financial stability, housing security, mental health services, and administrative efficiency, despite the institution's strengths in areas like academic retention, supervisor support, and creating an inclusive atmosphere.

Many students struggle to meet their basic necessities, which causes stress and disrupts their academic performance. Financial precarity is still a major worry. Even though people are highly satisfied with some services, such ICT infrastructure, library resources, and helpful supervisors, barriers to housing, mental health care, and bureaucratic procedures impede both academic achievement and individual well-being. Furthermore, even though WSU's campus culture is generally seen as welcoming and student-centered, persistent problems with safety, discrimination, and ineffective administrative systems underscore the necessity of focused interventions to establish a more just and encouraging learning environment.

A diversified strategy is required to solve these issues. To guarantee that students have access to increased scholarships, emergency financing pools, and crucial financial literacy initiatives, it should be

a top priority to strengthen financial support systems. By reducing financial stress, housing instability, and food insecurity, such programs will free up students to concentrate on their academic and professional development.

It's also critical to address housing instability. Living conditions for postgraduate students, especially those with families or special needs, would be significantly improved by creating a housing advocacy office and increasing the amount of inexpensive on-campus accommodation.

Improving mental health services is just as crucial. Destigmatising these issues and promoting a culture of well-being can be achieved by setting up a special postgraduate mental health office, offering free counselling, and incorporating mental health awareness into classroom environments. In order to prevent academic demands from causing serious mental health crises, faculty and supervisors should also receive training on how to spot burnout symptoms and refer students to the right resources.

Another important area that needs to be improved is administrative efficiency. Delays and frustrations that frequently obstruct students' progress can be minimised by implementing digital platforms to expedite project approvals, ethical clearance, and other bureaucratic processes. Enforcing supervisor training will improve academic support and guarantee equitable and open communication between supervisors and students.

Furthermore, creating a really supportive environment on campus requires enhancing safety and inclusivity. A safer, more welcoming campus will result from addressing complaints of prejudice by providing anti-bias training for security staff, improving cybersecurity, and building more gender-neutral and disability-inclusive facilities. These programs will support a more inclusive institutional culture and foster trust, especially when combined with proactive strategies for resolving student issues.

WSU has noteworthy qualities that can be used to support long-term institutional growth in spite of these obstacles. Postgraduate students will gain useful skills and networking opportunities by expanding successful programs, like research workshops and multidisciplinary collaborations. The university's reputation can be further improved by promoting its strengths, particularly in the fields of education and health sciences, which can draw top-tier staff and students. Developing strategic alliances with other organisations can also lead to new research opportunities that tackle local issues and advance scholarly discussions worldwide.

WSU may develop into a more just, encouraging, and globally competitive university by resolving these systemic flaws and enhancing its current advantages. Postgraduate students can be enabled to succeed academically, professionally, and personally through focused interventions and ongoing institutional commitment, guaranteeing that WSU will continue to be a key player in determining the direction of higher education in the area.

Most students conducted their research independently under the supervision of one primary supervisor, reflecting a common model of individualised guidance. However, some students worked in groups or had multiple supervisors, which requires clear communication and collaboration to ensure consistency.

The minimal occurrence of supervisor changes during the programme indicates stability in supervisory relationships. Still, the small number of changes suggests the need for early conflict resolution mechanisms to address potential issues.

To further improve the postgraduate experience, the university should refine its orientation and induction programs based on student feedback. Supervisory practices should be strengthened through additional training for supervisors and improved communication frameworks, particularly for those with multiple supervisors. Encouraging more collaborative research opportunities can complement independent research practices and foster peer learning. The university can provide a more comprehensive and supportive environment for its postgraduate students by addressing these recommendations.

Here is a comprehensive table summarising the recommendations and responsible areas based on analysis:

Focus Area	Key Issues Identified	Recommendations	Responsible Units/ Stakeholders
<b>Financial support</b>	Financial precarity; difficulty meeting basic needs; stress due to lack of funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand scholarships and emergency funding pools</li> <li>Implement financial literacy programs</li> </ul>	Financial Aid Office, Student Affairs, External Partnerships
<b>Housing stability</b>	Lack of affordable accommodation; special needs of postgrads not met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a housing advocacy office</li> <li>Increase affordable on-campus postgraduate housing options</li> </ul>	Residences Office, Infrastructure & Facilities
<b>Mental health &amp; well-being</b>	Poor access to mental health care; stigma; lack of faculty awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a postgraduate mental health office</li> <li>Provide free counselling services</li> <li>Train supervisors to detect burnout</li> <li>Integrate mental health awareness in classrooms</li> </ul>	Student Counselling, Faculties, Human Resources
<b>Administrative efficiency</b>	Bureaucratic delays (project approvals, ethics clearance, etc.); frustrations with processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitize administrative processes</li> <li>Enforce supervisor training for better communication and support</li> </ul>	Registrar's Office, ICT, Research Office
<b>Campus safety &amp; inclusivity</b>	Reports of discrimination; inadequate inclusive facilities; safety concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct anti-bias training (especially for security staff)</li> <li>Improve cybersecurity</li> <li>Build gender-neutral and disability-friendly infrastructure</li> </ul>	Security, Transformation Office, Infrastructure

<b>Academic Support &amp; Supervision</b>	Inconsistent supervision models; communication gaps in multiple-supervisor settings; limited peer research engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen supervisory practices through regular training</li> <li>• Develop conflict-resolution mechanisms for supervisor-student relationships</li> <li>• Promote collaborative and interdisciplinary research</li> </ul>	Postgraduate Office, Faculties, Research Office
<b>Orientation &amp; Induction</b>	Orientation programs not fully aligned with postgraduate needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesign orientation programs based on student feedback</li> </ul>	Postgraduate Office, Student Affairs
<b>Institutional Growth &amp; Reputation</b>	Untapped potential in health and education sectors; limited visibility of strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote successful programs (e.g., research workshops)</li> <li>• Build strategic academic partnerships</li> <li>• Showcase achievements to attract top-tier talent</li> </ul>	Marketing & Communications, Research Office, Strategic Partnerships

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