

Student Academic and Study Support

Full Program Reports Semester 1 2020

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Program | 4 |
| Executive Summary | 4 |
| Program Structure | 5 |
| Recruitment and Employment | 7 |
| Training | 8 |
| Promotion | 9 |
| Engagement and Attendance | 9 |
| PASS COVID -19 Response | 12 |
| PASS Leader Feedback | 14 |
| PASS Student Feedback | 14 |
| SWOVAC Super Study Day - Attendance and engagement | 17 |
| SWOTVAC Feedback | 18 |
| PASS recommendations | 19 |
| Mentor program | 20 |
| Recruitment | 20 |
| Interviews | 20 |
| Training | 20 |
| Mentor Team Leaders | 21 |
| Orientation | 22 |
| Interactions with the Mentor program | 23 |
| School Engagement with the Mentor Program | 26 |
| Mentor Program Weeks 1 to 5 | 28 |
| Modes of contact | 29 |
| Mentor Communication | 29 |
| University Connectedness | 30 |
| Mentor experience | 31 |
| International Postgraduate Mentor Support | 32 |
| Academic Skills and Knowledge Program (ASK) | 34 |
| ASK Executive Summary | 34 |
| Program Summary | 35 |
| Staffing | 36 |
| ASK desk hours | 36 |
| Training | 37 |
| Promotion | 37 |
| Service Data Usage by Week | 37 |
| Enquiry Patterns by Campus | 38 |
| Enquiry Topics | 39 |
| Student Academic Leader Feedback | 41 |
| Online Transition and Impact on ASK Service Quality | 41 |
| ASK Desk Communication Channels | 42 |
| Training Needs | 42 |
| Support in the ASK Role | 43 |
| Suggestions for the Future | 43 |
| ASK Recommendations | 44 |
| Learning Skills Advisors (LSAs) | 44 |
| Introduction | 44 |
| Student Feedback on LSA Appointments | 46 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Writing Space | 47 |
| Number of LSA Appointments per Week | 48 |
| Program representation in LSA consultations | 49 |
| Student demographics | 50 |
| Reasons for LSA Appointments | 51 |
| Embedded Academic Literacy - FedReady February 2020 | 52 |
| Embedded Academic Literacy - Face-to-Face Workshops | 52 |
| Academic Writing Circles | 53 |
| Staff feedback on LSA work with postgraduate students: | 53 |
| LSA staff support - Curriculum development | 54 |
| LSA Recommendations | 54 |
| FedReady | 55 |
| Program Summary | 55 |
| Recommendations | 55 |
| Studiosity Report: Semester 1, 2020 | 56 |
| Summary | 56 |
| Recommendations | 57 |
| Tables and Figures Index | 58 |

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Program

Executive Summary

In Semester 1 2020, Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) supported **20 subjects with a total of 915 students accessing the program 3622 times**. HEALT1111 had the highest engagement, with 37 per cent of enrolled students in attendance. One student accessed PASS 52 times and 152 students attended five or more times. Engagement has more than doubled, showing a **117 per cent growth in the program over the past year**. Of the students enrolled in a PASS supported subject, 13 per cent attended PASS at least once.

The continuing growth and success of the program was complemented with the appointment of a PASS coordinator in November 2019, where this position was non-existent for the majority of 2019. This has meant that long-term planning, training, monitoring of performance, evaluation and adjustments could be done throughout the semester to ensure efficiency within the program. This also contributed to a smooth transition to online delivery in Week 4 due to COVID-19. All PASS Leaders had been trained prior to this and as a result, there was minimum disruption within the program. Furthermore, as a response to teaching delivery being paused, PASS was run for the first time during the mid-semester break to ensure students felt connected to the University during that difficult time. A record 202 students accessed the program during this period, with little prior advertising. Additionally; as a further response to the transition to online learning, three new subjects were added to PASS in Week 7 to provide wider program coverage of first year subjects.

There were **67 PASS Leader positions**, which created approximately **4087 hours work for 48 undergraduate students**. This is a **90 per cent increase in employment hours** from the same period last year. Prior to Semester 1 commencing, each returning PASS Leader attended a full day professional development session and all new employees attended two days of paid training.

When recruiting for Semester 1, SASS emailed all students who had achieved a 'Distinction' or 'High Distinction' in PASS supported subjects, encouraging them to apply. Academics were also contacted for recommendations, and as a result some students who received a Credit grade were also offered the option to apply. Additionally, the continuing growth to the subject offerings was a direct result from communications between Student Academic Study Support (SASS) management and Associate Deans – Teaching Quality (ADTQs), to ensure the program was representative of the Schools' needs. As such, a number of new subjects were added to PASS and this year saw a second-year subject; NURBN2012, added for the first time.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that SASS continues with open communication channels between all relevant academic staff. Additionally, a higher frequency of sessions attached to subjects with large cohorts was seen as a success and should be considered in future planning, economies of scale can be achieved with more online offerings. Finally, maintaining the PASS coordinator position will ensure the program continues to achieve growth and is implemented and delivered efficiently.

Program Structure

The Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) program began at Federation University Australia in 2011. PASS is an integral element of the Student Academic and Study Support (SASS) teams' suite of programs. It aims to build capacity and empower students with understanding, skills and knowledge to successfully transition into higher education and the Federation University learning environment. It is underpinned by a number of goals, including:

1. to support the successful transition of students to tertiary study by integrating discipline specific study techniques and consolidation of subject concepts through peer led learning groups;
2. to strive to enhance students' sense of belonging and connectedness with peers through building a network of friends who they can turn to for support;
3. to cultivate inclusive environments in which students can feel empowered by their fellow peers to succeed at Federation University;
4. to foster the development of skills that will support students to be lifelong learners; and
5. to build the capacity of students to understand how to navigate the Federation University learning environment to access support and services as needed.

In Semester 1 2020, PASS ran from Week 2 of semester until SWOTVAC. The subjects covered all schools at the Berwick, Gippsland, Mt Helen and Online campuses. All students had the option of joining online classes for every subject offered.

In Week 4, the university made the decision to transition all students to online learning as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to the remainder of the semester being delivered online. All PASS Leaders were immediately trained in using Adobe Connect and transitioned to online PASS. As a result, there was no pause in the PASS program in Week 4. Further to this, and to ensure minimal disruption of study, the PASS program ran in a limited capacity over the mid semester break, with a focus on revision of Weeks 1 to 4. This new initiative was utilised by over 200 students in the 2-week break.

Prior to the transition to online delivery, PASS was offered online for all available subjects with the exception of NHPBM1031, as it is a Gippsland-only course offering. The on-campus offerings were chosen based on a comparison of suitable applicants, previous engagement data and overall fail rates. This was done to ensure a wider variety of subjects and to work within budget constraints. However, in Week 4 all sessions were made available to every student enrolled in that course, on all four campuses, in the online environment (See Table 1 and 2).

Table 1: PASS Course Offerings (Based on Campus)

| Semester 1 2020 PASS Course List | Berwick | Gippsland | Mt Helen | Online |
|--|---------|-----------|----------|--------|
| BEHAV1001 Human Behaviour in the Modern World | Yes | Yes | | Yes |
| BUACC1508 Principles of Accounting and Finance | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BULAW1502 Fundamentals of Law | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| CHSUG1001 Introduction to Community Services | | Yes | | Yes |
| CRJUS1285 Crime to Punishment: Processes and Institutions | | Yes | | Yes |
| CRJUS1286 Crime in Contemporary Contexts | | | | Yes |
| EDBED1016 Introduction to Learning and Teaching | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| ENGIN1002 Engineering Physics | | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| FEAFN 1001 Successful Learning at University | | Yes | | Yes |
| HEALT1111 Anatomy & Physiology for Health Professionals 1 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| NHPBM1031 Anatomy & Physiology for Rehabilitation Science (Occupational Therapy) | | Yes | | |
| ITECH1001 Communications & Technology | | | | Yes |
| ITECH1100 Understanding the Digital Revolution | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| ITECH1102 Networking and Security | Yes | | Yes | Yes |
| MATHS1001 Modelling and Change | | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| NURBN2012 Pathophysiology and Pharmacology Applied to Nursing | Yes | | | Yes |
| SCBIO1001 Principles of Biology | | | | Yes |
| SCCHM1001 Chemistry 1 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| SOSCI1002 Sociological Imagination | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| STATS1000 Statistical Methods | | Yes | | Yes |

Table 2: PASS Course Distribution across Schools for 2020 (Semester 1)

| PASS Course for 2020 – School distribution | |
|--|--|
| School of Arts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHSUG1001 Introduction to Community Services • SOSCI1002 Sociological Imagination • CRJUS1285 Crime to Punishment: Processes and Institutions • CRJUS1286 Crime in Contemporary Contexts |
| Federation Business School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BULAW1502 Fundamentals of Law • BUACC1508 Principles of Accounting and Finance • ITECH1100 Understanding the Digital Revolution |
| School of Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDBED1016 Introduction to Learning and Teaching • BEHAV1001 Human Behaviour in the Modern World • MATHS1005 Secrets of the Matrix • FEAFN1001 Successful Learning at University |
| School of Health & Life Science | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BEHAV1001 Human Behaviour in the Modern World • SCCHM1001 Chemistry 1 • STATS1000 Statistical Methods • SCBIO1001 Principles of Biology |
| School of Nursing & Healthcare Professionals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEALT1111 Anatomy & Physiology for Health Professionals 1 • NURBN2012 Pathophysiology and Pharmacology Applied to Nursing • NHPBM1031 Anatomy & Physiology for Rehabilitation Science 1 (Occupational Therapy) |
| School of Science, Engineering & Technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENGIN1002 Engineering Physics • MATHS1001 Modelling and Change • ITECH 1001 Communications & Technology • ITECH1100 Understanding the Digital Revolution • ITECH1102 Networking and Security |

Note: Course highlighted in purple were added in Week 7; subjects highlighted in blue are electives often taken from another School.

Recruitment and Employment

PASS Leaders are targeted for recruitment based on their results. Every student who receives a 'Distinction' or 'High-Distinction' in the subject is given an opportunity to apply for a position via email to SASS. Consideration is also given to students who received a Credit on a case by case basis, provided they have high grade point average (GPA). All PASS Leaders are required to maintain a GPA over six, unless there are extenuating circumstances that justify a lower GPA.

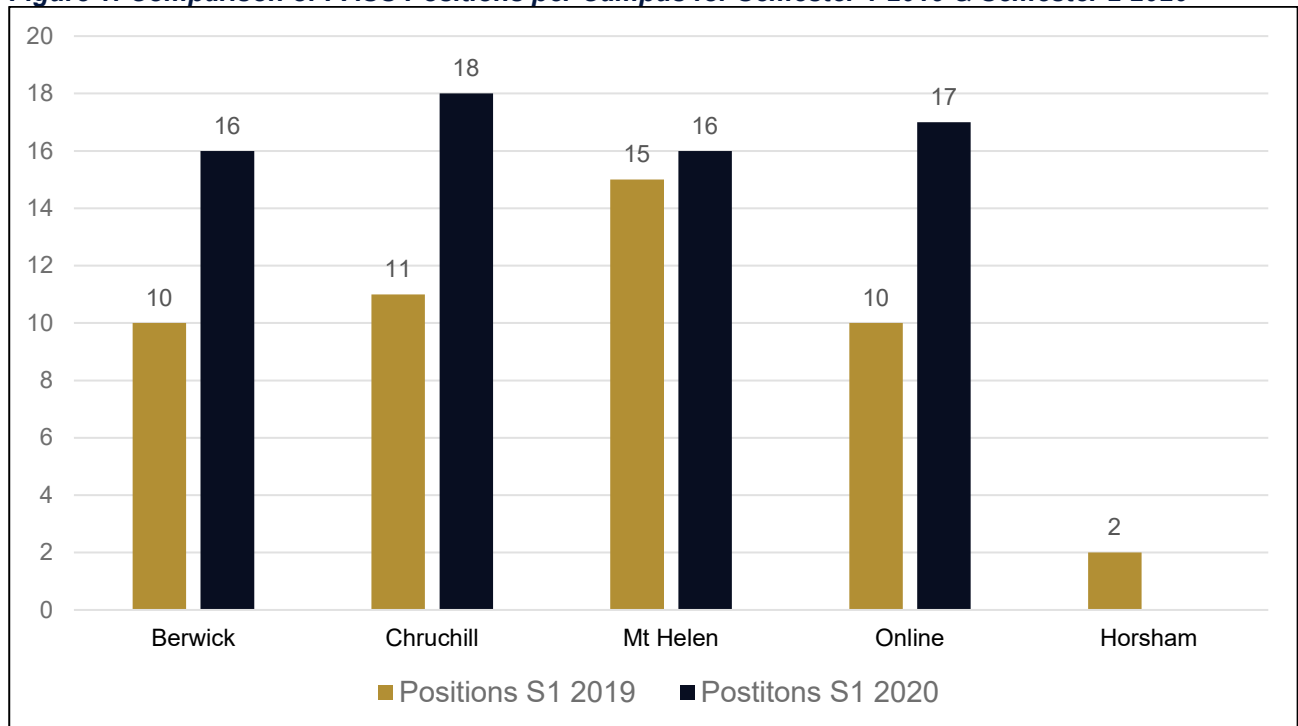
All new PASS Leaders attended a panel interview and were shortlisted from multiple applicants before being offered a position. This step was a new addition to the 2020 recruitment process.

In Semester 1 2020 there were 67 positions that were filled by 48 students. When there were no suitable candidates for a subject (in particular online), more than one session was allocated to a suitable PASS Leader. In total, the PASS program created approximately 4087 hours of employment, compared to 2142 hours in Semester 1 2019.

Recruitment of these student leader positions provides an important opportunity for students to develop skills and capabilities to apply for future employment. This includes preparation of their application with a cover

letter, resume, responses to key selection criteria and attending an interview. The PASS Student Leader roles also present a valuable opportunity for students to generate experience in applying for employment which they can leverage later as graduates entering the workforce. **Figure 1** outlines the proportion of students employed at each campus compared to the same period last year. Employment grew across all campuses with the exception of the Horsham campus where PASS did not run for 2020, due to an unsuccessful pilot in Semester 1 2019 that saw no attendance.

Figure 1: Comparison of PASS Positions per Campus for Semester 1 2019 & Semester 2 2020



Training

All new applicants were required to participate in a training program to prepare for PASS leadership. Training was delivered over two days in a manner that modelled exemplary PASS leadership of peer study groups, based on international PASS standards. Students attended this training after completing an online theory component. Training aims to provide applicants with an opportunity to experience the various activities that could be implemented in PASS sessions. Attendance at training was paid this semester. In previous years students were not paid to attend the Practical Recruitment & Employment Program (PREP).

Training included revision of online content, including learning theories and the ten essential elements of PASS, as well as covering strategies to avoid re-teaching and promote active learning. Applicants were given the opportunity to demonstrate how they would plan their first PASS session, and to facilitate a mock PASS session.

Online training consisted of:

- General Information Module focussing on administration procedures
- Introduction to Student Academic and Study Support (SASS) staff members and Human Resources (HR) Training
- 11 PASS-specific modules, derived from the information contained in the PASS Leader Handbook
- Three hour online session in effective online PASS delivery
- One-to-one session on how to use the Adobe Connect classroom.

Further to this, in Week 4 the entire PASS program transitioned all delivery to online as a response to COVID-19. All PASS Leaders were offered immediate one-to-one training in Adobe Connect, which saw twenty-eight additional PASS Leaders trained for online delivery. As a result, there was no delay in the transition to online for the PASS program.

Promotion

The PASS program was promoted via other SASS programs including FedReady, the Mentoring program, the Learning Skill's Advisors (LSAs) and the Academic Skills and Knowledge (ASK) desk.

PASS Leaders were required to attend 50% of lectures for the course they were supporting, in order to promote PASS sessions. They were also expected to develop and maintain a line of communication with the lecturer of that course. Beginning in 2019, a new function was added in Moodle forums for PASS Leaders to engage with students. Moodle forums for each subject were used by PASS Leaders for weekly reminders to attend sessions.

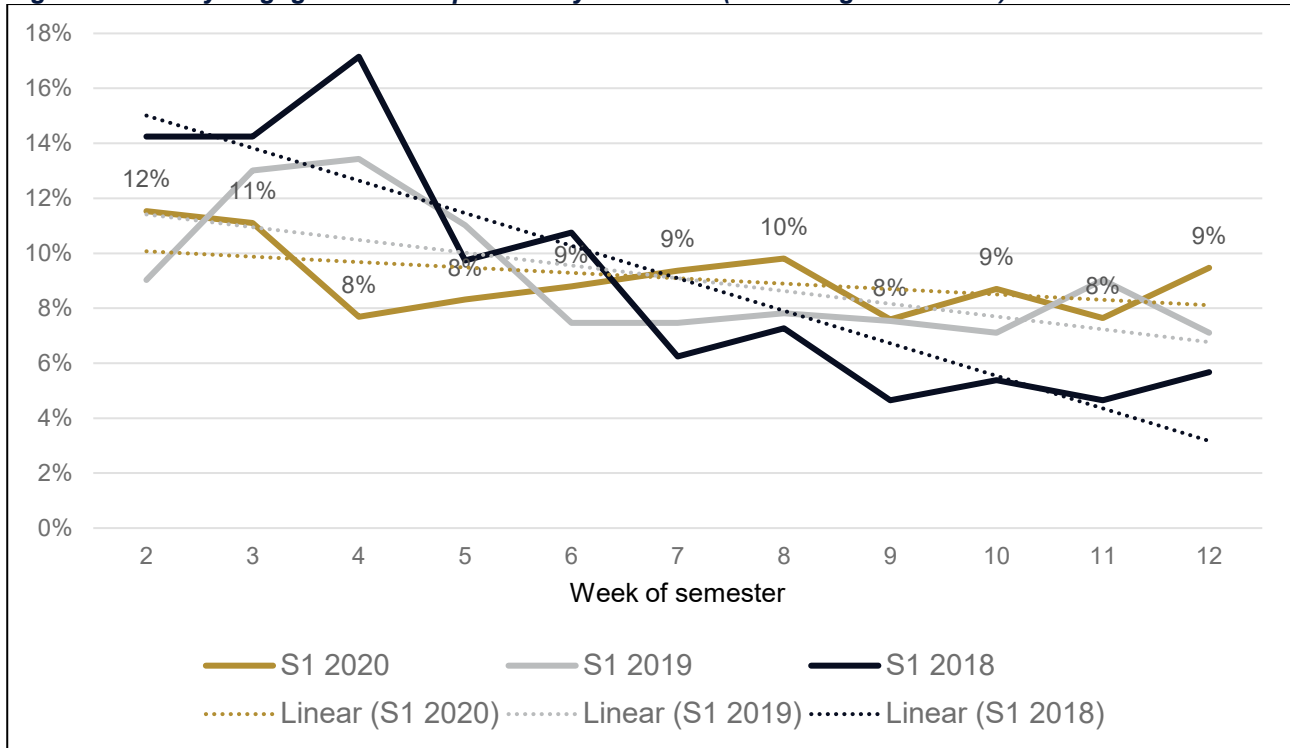
In Week 4, an email is usually sent to all students enrolled in PASS supported subjects outlining the benefits of the program and how they can access it. In Semester 1 this email did not get sent until the end of Week 6 due to COVID-19 communications taking priority. This semester saw both the 'coffee card reward' system and 'Bring a Pal to PASS' promotion cease due to the online transition. Additionally, from Weeks 5 to 12, a social media communications strategy was developed. This saw 3 – 5 posts a week on Facebook and Instagram, promoting all SASS programs. PASS specific messages, PASS Leader biographies and Instagram take overs, all contributed to higher engagement with PASS.

Engagement and Attendance

This semester saw a steady decline in overall engagement from Weeks 2 – 12, this decline was not as steep as previous periods. The analysis of each individual week in **Figure 2** outlines a sharp decrease for Week 4 due to the transition to online learning. Teaching was also paused in Week 4, and many technical issues were experienced within the Adobe Connect classroom. Following this, engagement steadily increased past Week 7; which saw the addition of three new subjects, then dipped slightly in Week 9. Spikes in Week 10 and 12, were most likely coinciding with assessment task due dates and exam preparation. **Figure 2** below, reflects a

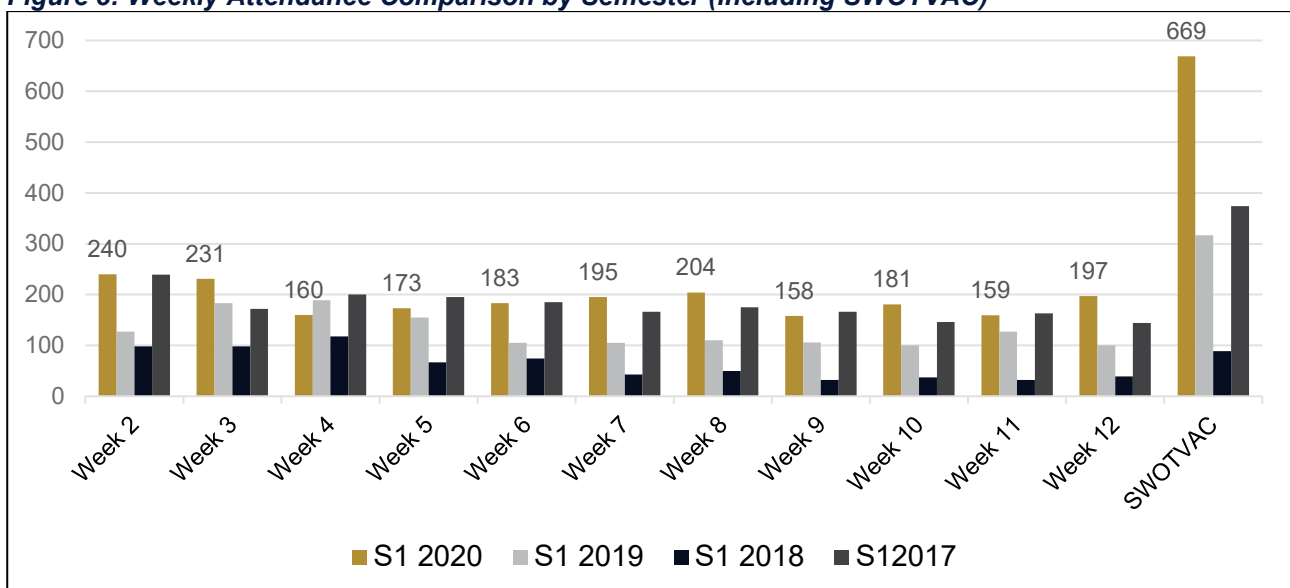
steady increase in attendance from Week 5 to Week 8, of which promotional efforts likely contributed. Week 9 saw a drop in engagement, followed by a small spike in Week 10

Figure 1: Weekly Engagement Comparison by Semester (excluding SWOTVAC)



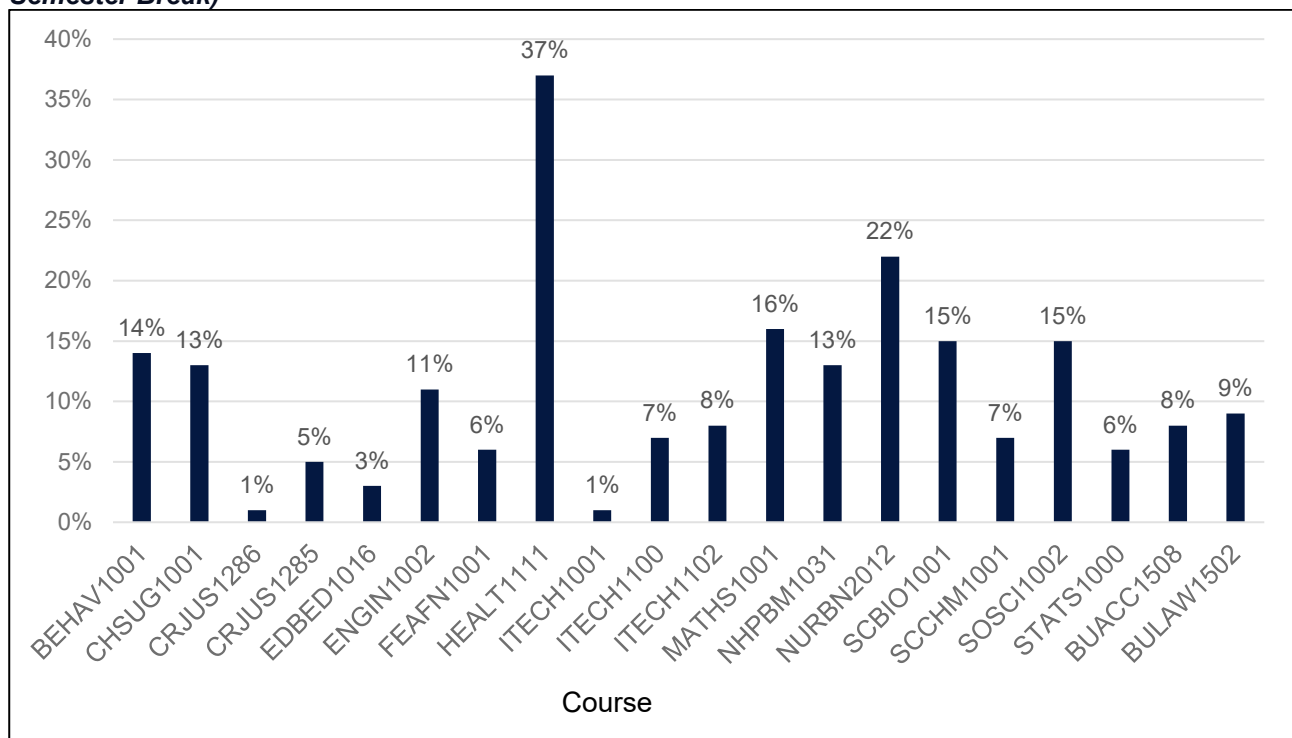
When compared to previous periods, **Figure 3** indicates weekly attendance was significantly higher for most weeks in Semester 1 2020 than previously, in particular Semester 1 2017 where 20 subjects were also supported. This can be attributed to more PASS course offerings with multiple sessions per week, more student enrolments (due to the growth of the Berwick campus), coupled with an influx of students requiring more assistance in the remote learning environment.

Figure 3: Weekly Attendance Comparison by Semester (including SWOTVAC)



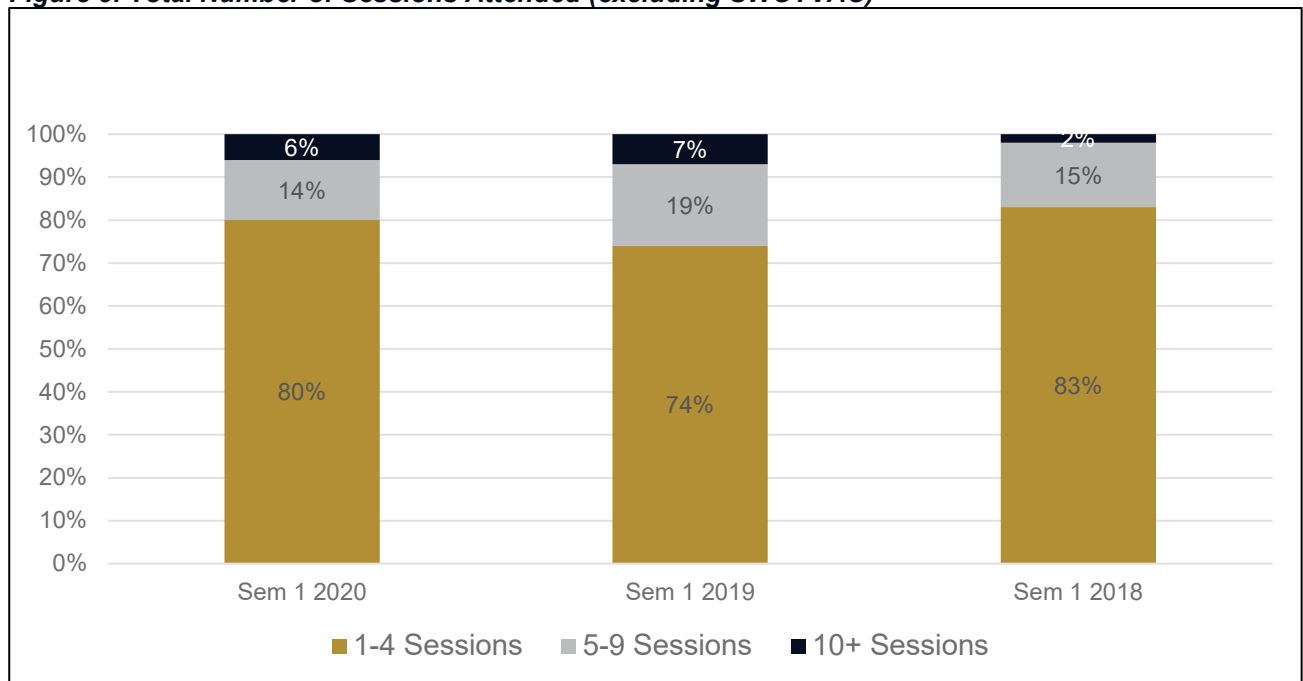
There were a total of **7016 students enrolled in PASS-supported subjects**, overall **13 per cent** (915 students) **of these students attended a PASS session**. **Figure 4** provides breakdown of engagement by subject. **HEALT111** had the highest percentage of engagement with **37 per cent of enrolled students attending a session**. This was followed by NURBN2012 at 22 per cent and MATHS1005 at 16 per cent. Furthermore, SOSCI1002 and SCBIO1001 had at 15 per cent, which presents excellent performance for SCBIO1001, as it wasn't added to the PASS schedule until week seven. Also added in Week 7, the lowest engagement per enrolment was ITECH1001 and CRJUS1296 with just one percent of students attending.

Figure 4: Percentage of Enrolled Students Who Engaged with PASS (includes SWOTVAC and Semester Break)



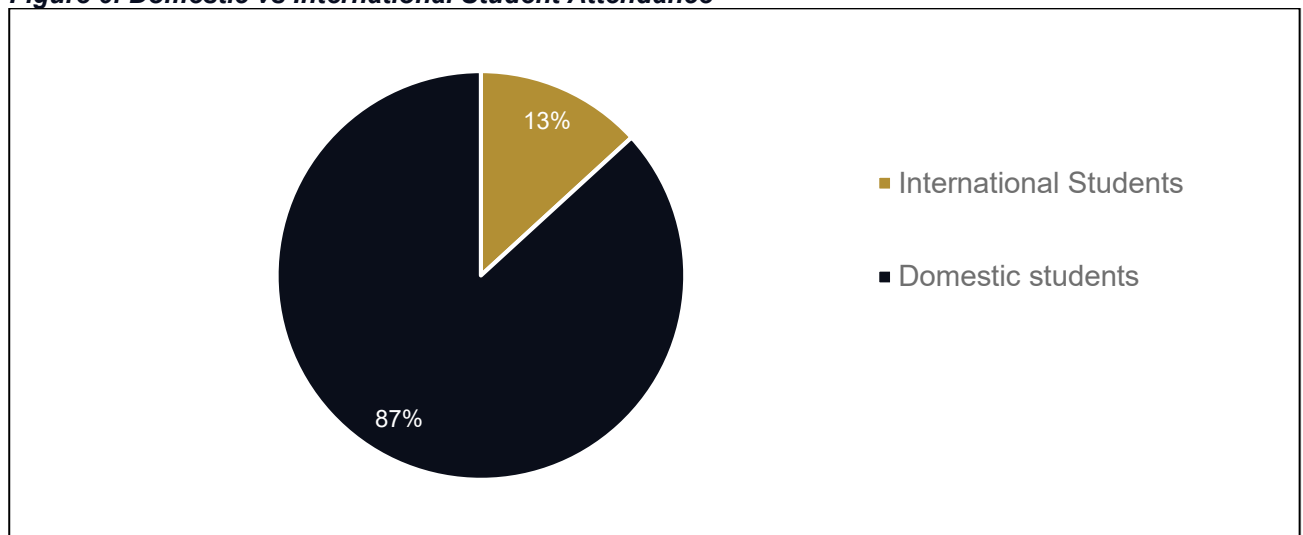
PASS has been shown to be more successful if 5 or more sessions are attended. Figure 5 shows 20 per cent of attendees went to PASS more than 5 times, which equates to 152 students getting the full benefit of PASS. Furthermore, 42 students attended over 10 times and one student attended HEALT1111 a total of 52 times throughout the semester. This was only possible due to all campus sessions being delivered online and available to every student.

Figure 5: Total Number of Sessions Attended (excluding SWOTVAC)



Overall, **13 per cent of PASS attendees were International students and 87 per cent were domestic**, as outlined in **Figure 6**. This is considerably lower to last year and could be a result of COVID-19 and travel restrictions.

Figure 6: Domestic vs International Student Attendance



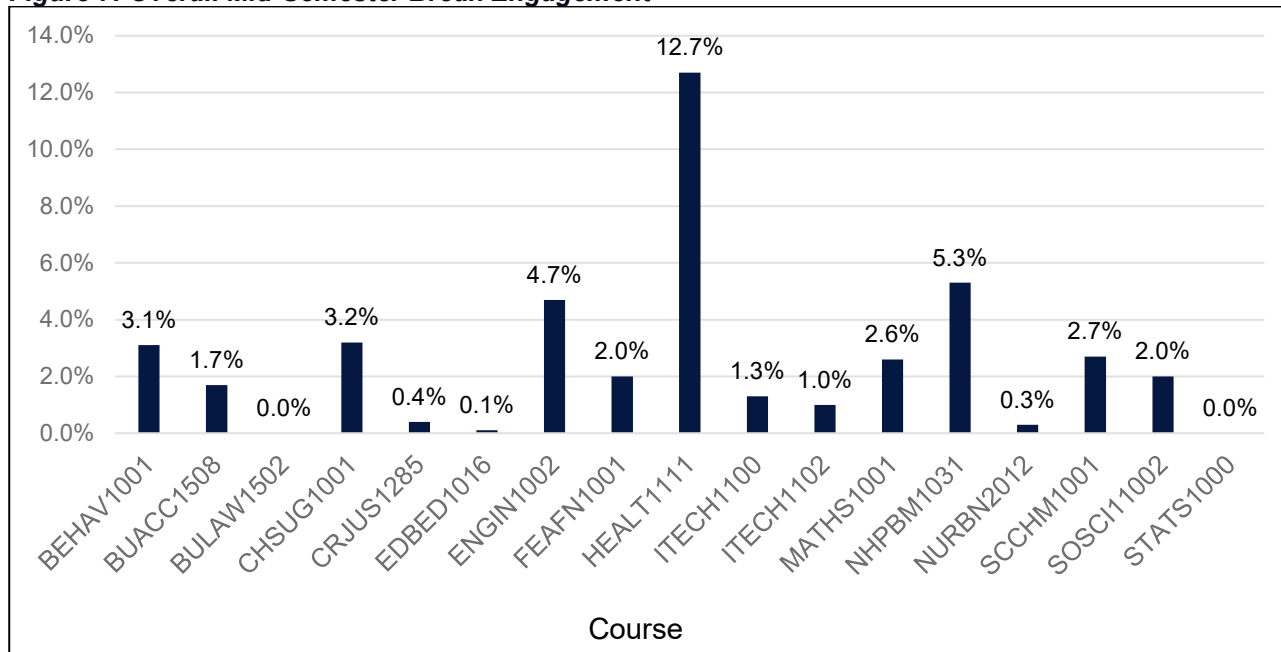
PASS COVID -19 Response

There were three significant changes to the PASS program due to COVID-19. Firstly, program delivery moved online for all PASS sessions in Week 4. This saw all PASS Leaders trained to run PASS online in Week 3 and as a result there was little interruption to the program.

Secondly, as a response to the pausing of teaching delivery and the online transition, PASS continued to run throughout the mid-semester break. **This saw a total of 202 students attend PASS over two weeks.** The

overall engagement outlined in **Figure 7**, shows the **highest attendance was for HEALT1111, where 12.7 per cent of students enrolled in this course attended PASS**. There was no engagement in STATS1000 or BULAW1502.

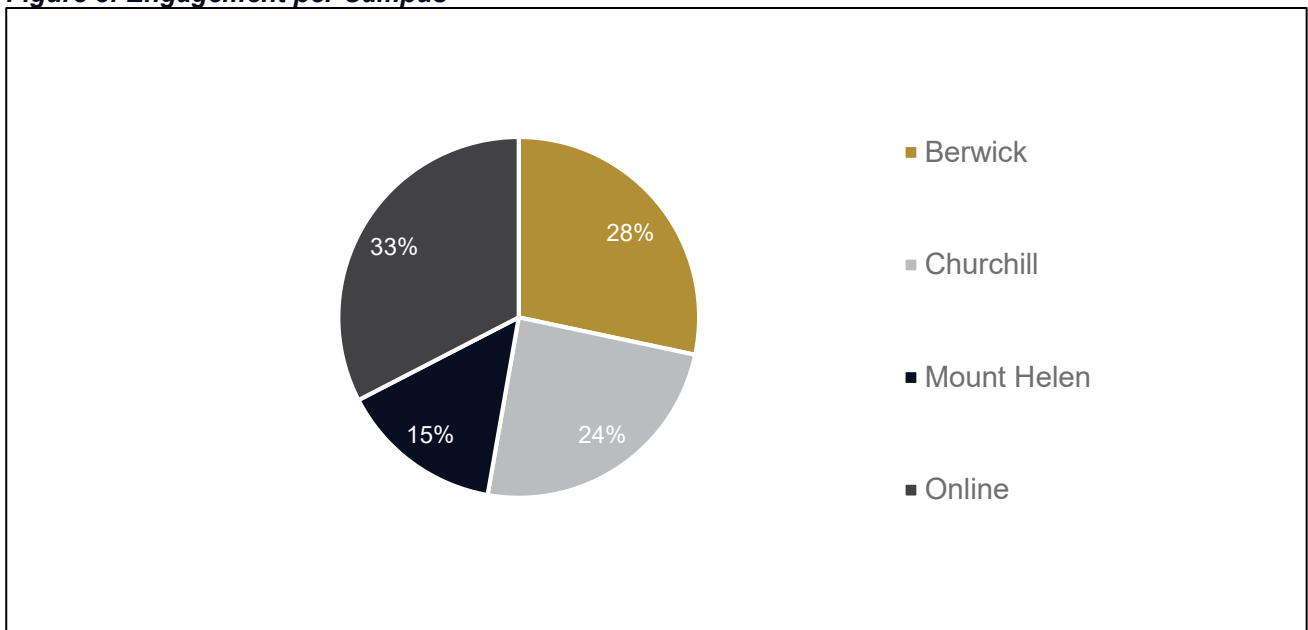
Figure 7: Overall Mid-Semester Break Engagement



Finally, three subjects; CRJUS1286, ITECH1001 and SCBIO1001 were added to the weekly schedule in Week 7. These subjects were determined by reviewing first year subjects and pairing them with already employed PASS Leaders to run sessions. Although CRJUS1286 and ITECH1001 saw only one student attend, SCBIO1001 saw higher engagement than most other subjects at 15 per cent. As a result, SCBIO1020 will be added to Semester 2 PASS offerings.

While all PASS sessions moved to online delivery in Week 4, each session was reported on a campus-by-campus basis. Interestingly, as shown in **Figure 8**, **the online campus sessions saw more engagement than on campus**. This is likely due to these sessions being scheduled later in the day, where they did not clash with class content delivery and other commitments such as childcare and work. **The next highest engagement was Berwick** followed by Churchill, with the Mt Helen campus seeing the lowest attendance for the first time. As all campuses sessions were available to all students every campus, these results likely reflect the session timings, rather than location.

Figure 8: Engagement per Campus



PASS Leader Feedback

PASS Leaders were asked to provide anonymous qualitative feedback on the following six questions:

1. What were your three biggest challenges being a PASS Leader?
2. Can you briefly describe one situation where you feel you really helped a student/s in your session?
3. What was the best thing about the PASS Program this year?
4. What could the PASS Program do better in the future?
5. If there was one piece of advice that you would give to a future PASS Leader, what would it be?
6. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?
7. Most Leaders struggled to adapt to Online delivery of PASS

Responses were mostly positive and commended SASS for good management of the semester and the transition to online. Comments on better communication with more notice from SASS were also made. Many students struggled with the transition to online and many reflected on their own growth.

PASS Student Feedback

A student feedback survey was distributed amongst all students who we enrolled in a PASS supported subject. A total of 16 questions were asked, which were a combination of multiple choice, matrix and the following three open ended questions:

1. What motivated you to attend PASS?
2. Based on the sessions you attended, what did you MOST like about the PASS program?
3. If you could improve anything about the PASS experience, what would it be?

Common responses to the above questions included suggestions that PASS sessions should be recorded and mentioned that session times were not suitable, or should be offered more often. The ability to have two way conversations (which is difficult with large groups) was also suggested. Many student expressed that they like the revision, the informal environment and the knowledge of the PASS Leader.

This semester the following questions was included, “Did you attend PASS on campus before the transition to online?” of which 72 per cent of attendees responded that they did not attend an on campus PASS session. When communicating to students about PASS, most students heard about it via the course Moodle shell, within the lecture or via their Mentor.

Figure 9: Breakdown of All the Ways Students Heard About PASS

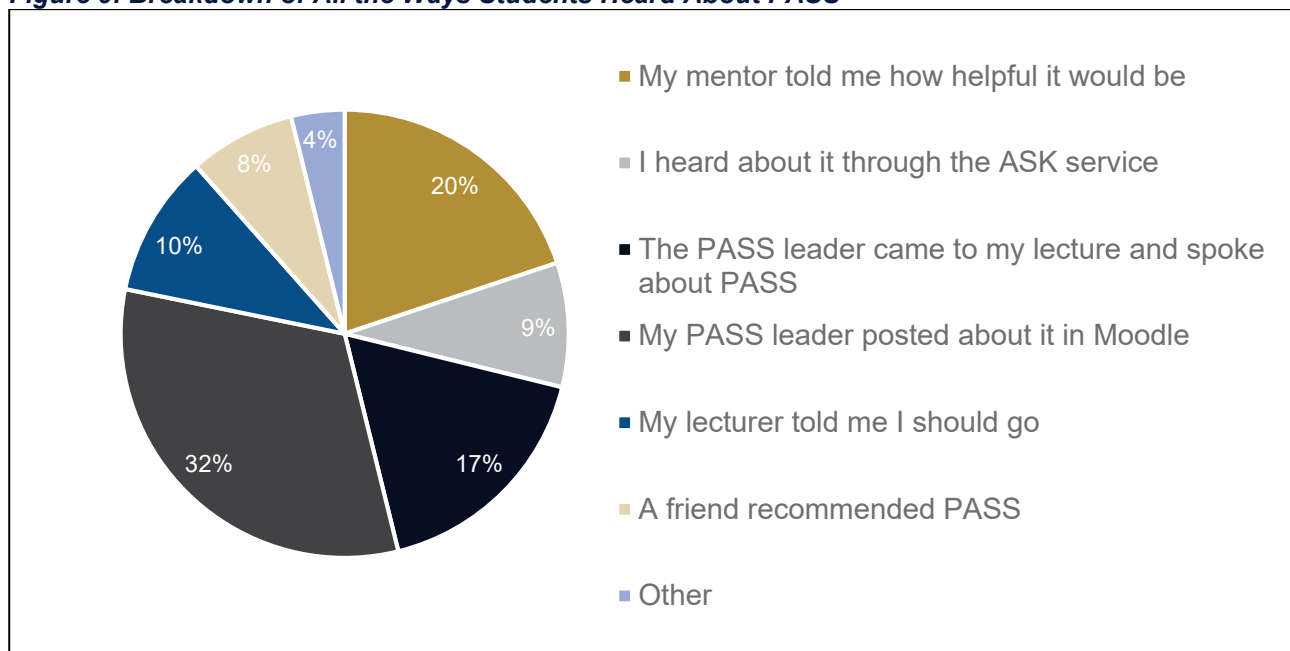
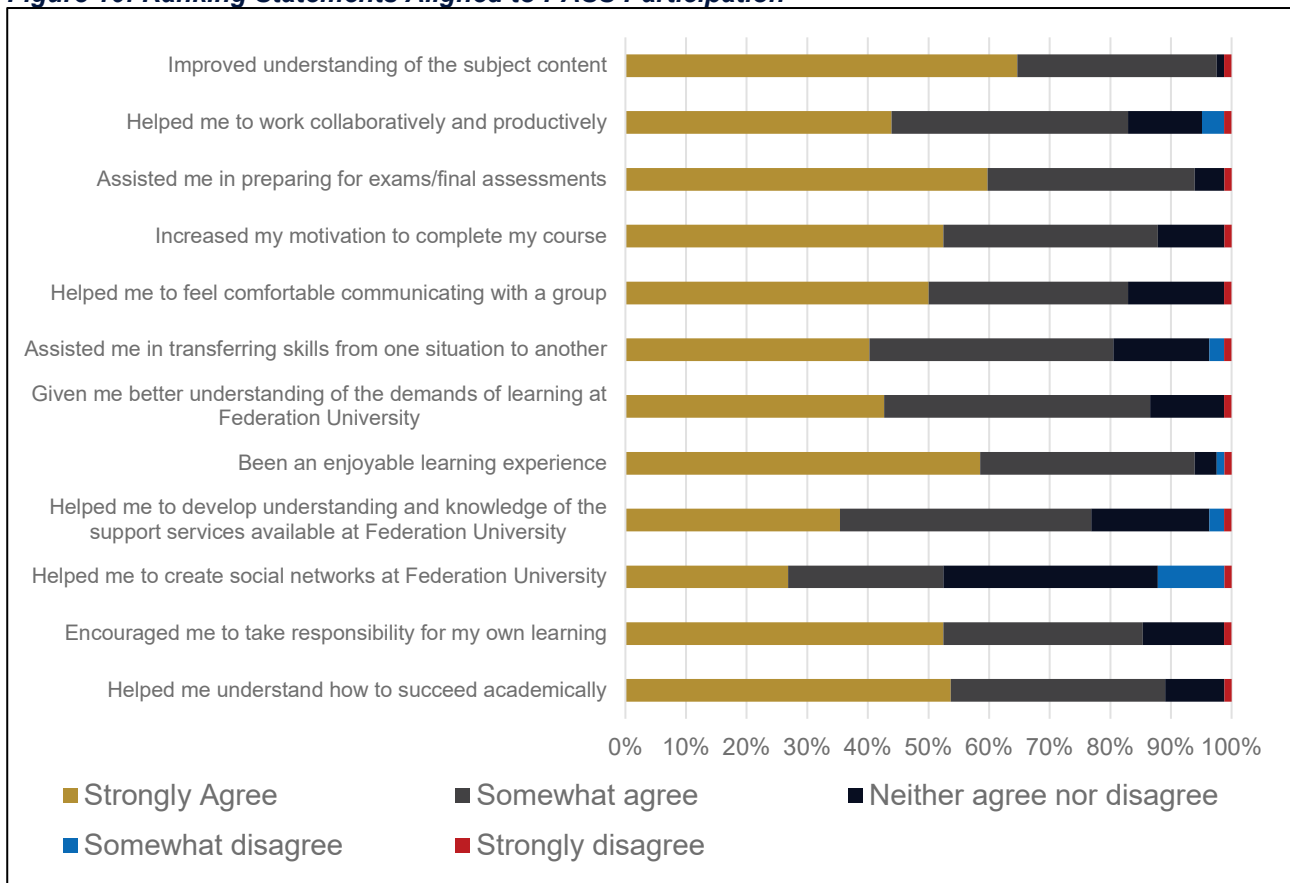


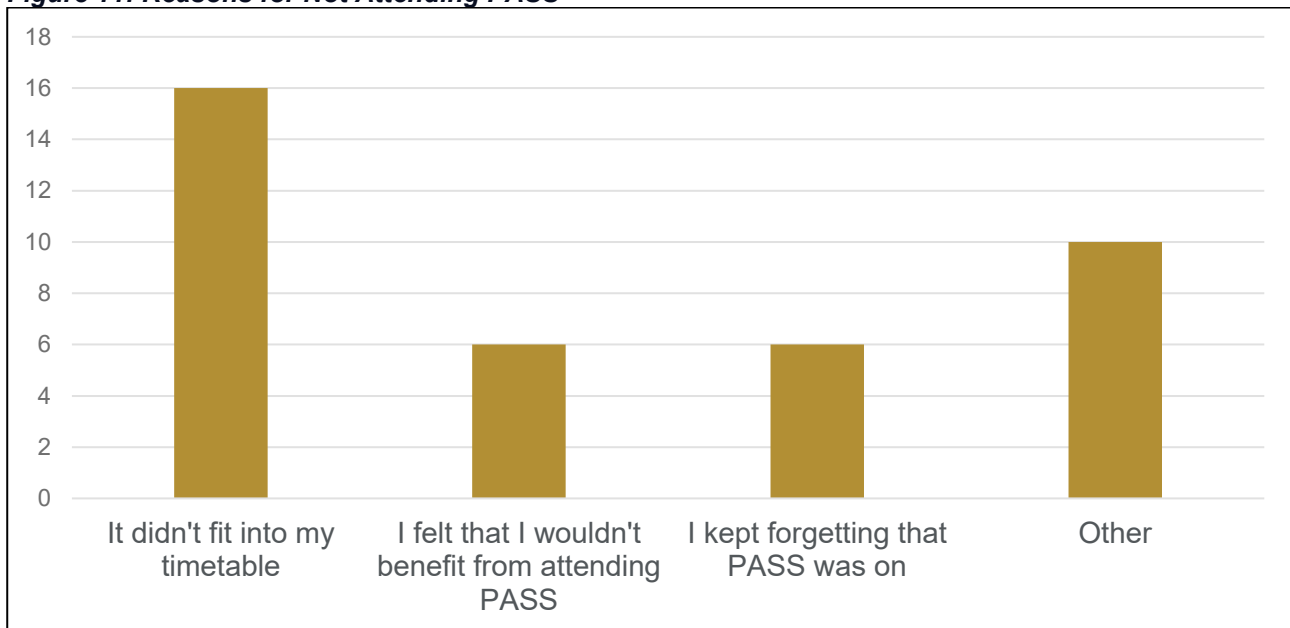
Figure 10 indicates **Most students strongly agreed that PASS helped them understand the subject content**, how to succeed academically and to prepare for exams. They also found it was an enjoyable learning experience, increased their motivation and encouraged them to take responsibility. Creating social networks, and learning about other supports within the university scored lower this semester than previous periods.

Figure 10: Ranking Statements Aligned to PASS Participation



As the survey was sent to all students who were enrolled in a PASS supported subject, some students who didn't attend PASS responded with their reasons for not attending PASS, and the responses are outlined in **Figure 11**.

Figure 11: Reasons for Not Attending PASS



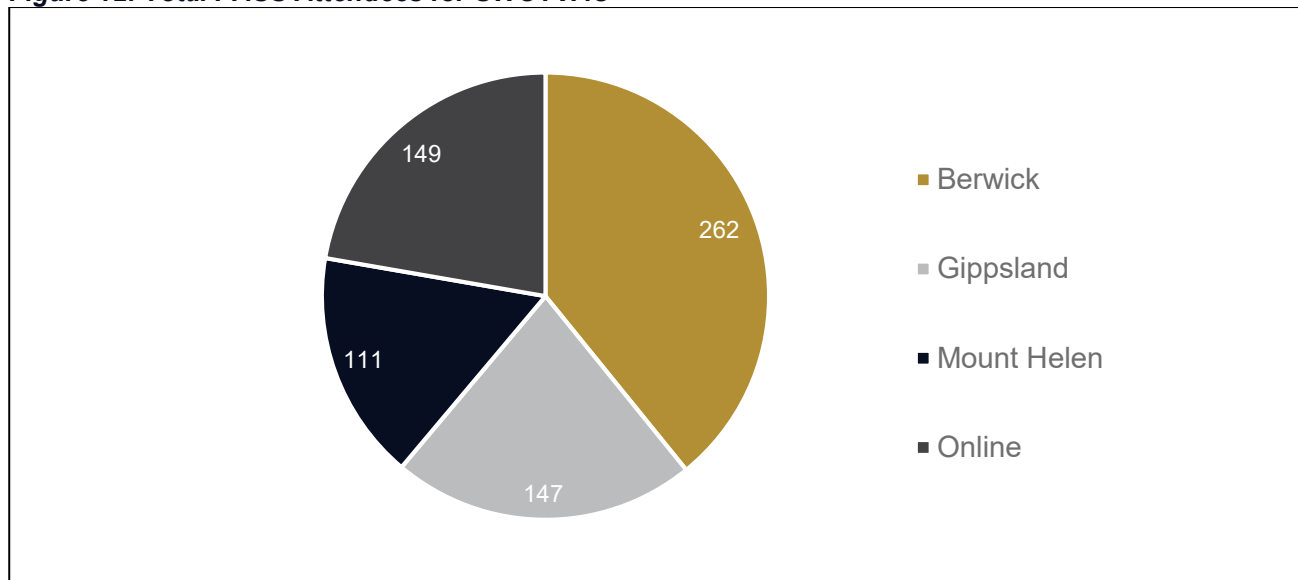
The 'Other' responses for not attending were:

- *"It was yet another thing to do and keep track of. it was time spent not working on things that had direct consequences"*
- *"I have no idea what PASS is"*
- *"Because off campus and online made interaction harder or else would have if on campus still "*
- *"They were always during the day while I was at work."*
- *"Couldn't be bothered"*
- *"I was feeling overwhelmed as it was"*
- *"Attended some sessions"*
- *"Working full time"*
- *"Sessions were mostly during working hours"*

SWOVAC Super Study Day - Attendance and engagement

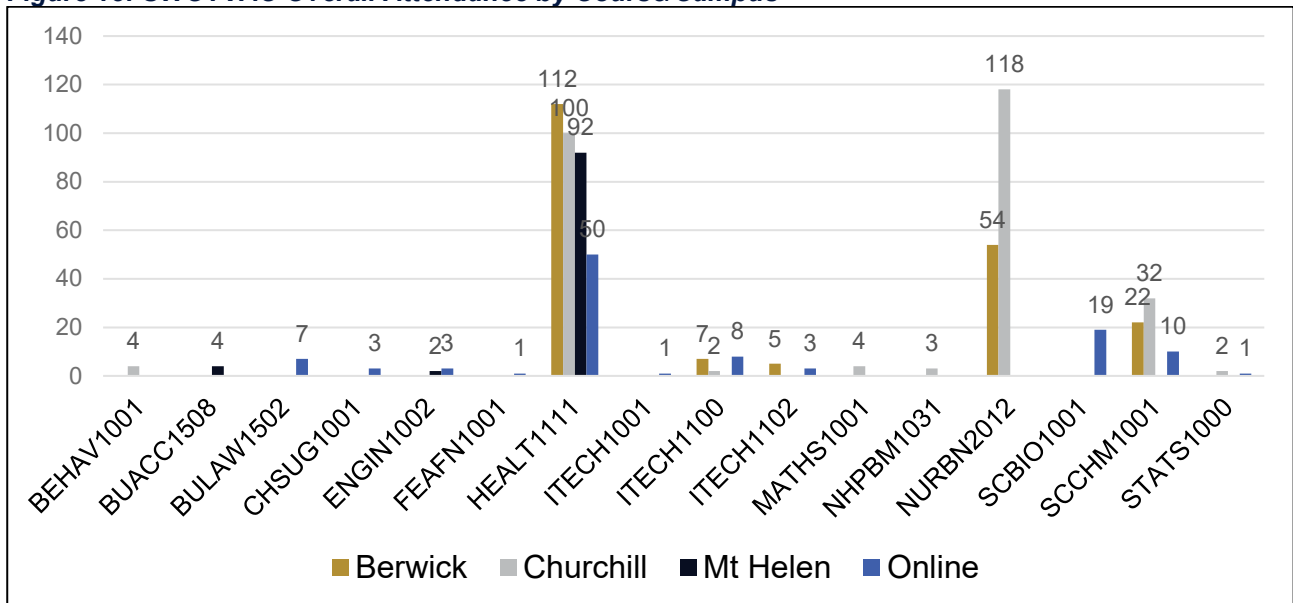
There were a total of 669 students in attendance across sixteen subjects in an online capacity as outlined in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Total PASS Attendees for SWOTVAC



HEALT1112 as the highest attended session on all four campuses, with 354 attendees, a breakdown of attendees per campus can be found in **Figure 13**.

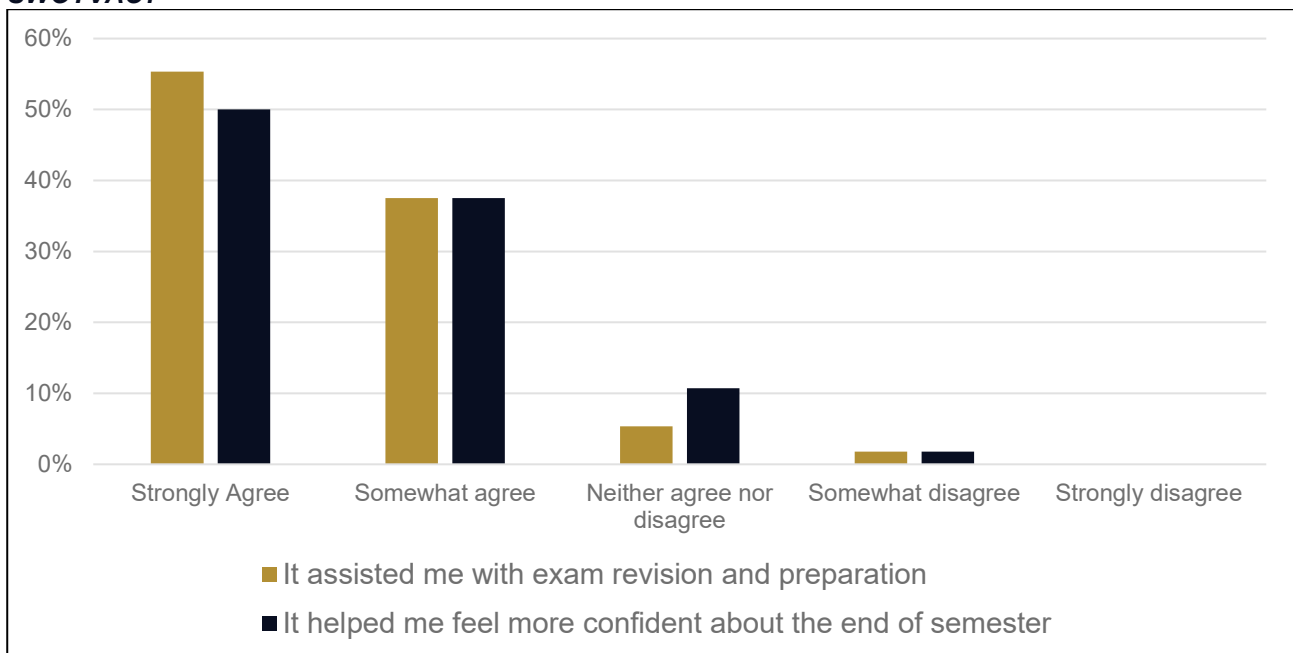
Figure 13: SWOTVAC Overall Attendance by Course/Campus



SWOTVAC Feedback

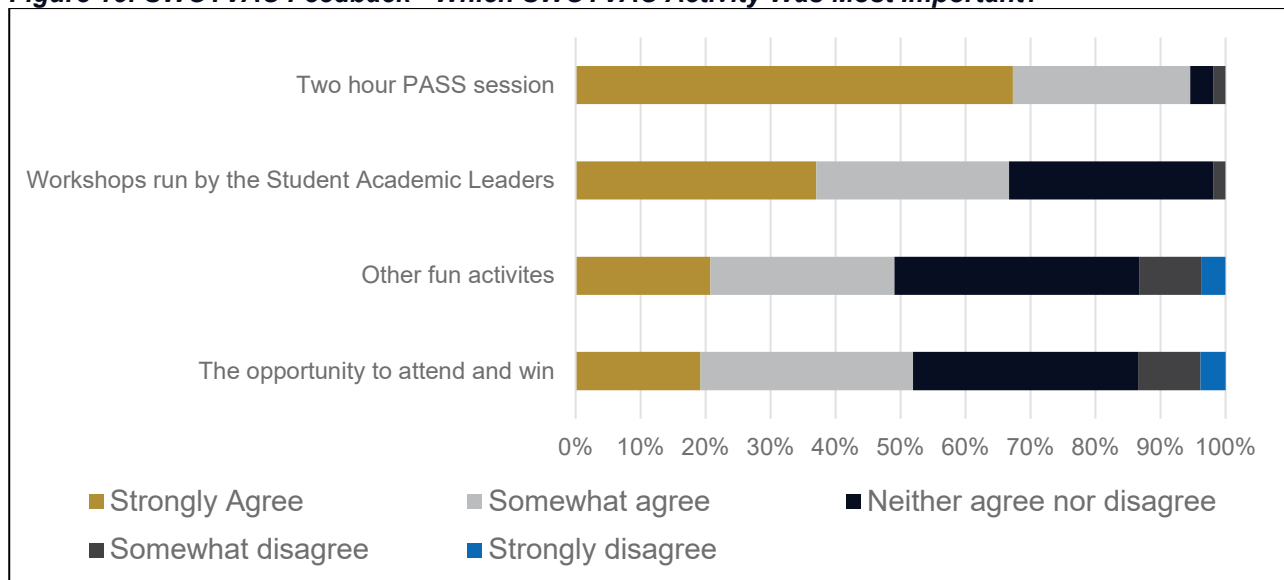
When students were asked about SWOTVAC, 96 per cent of respondents would recommend attending to others. **Figure 14** outlines that **most students strongly agreed to SWOTVAC assisting with exam preparation and feeling more confident about the end of the semester.**

Figure 14: SWOTVAC Feedback = Which of the Following Statements Apply To You After Attending SWOTVAC?



When asked about which aspect of SWOTVAC was most important to students, the two hour PASS sessions and the Student Academic Leader workshops were the most popular. All responses to this question are outlined in **Figure 15**.

Figure 15: SWOTVAC Feedback - Which SWOTVAC Activity Was Most Important?



PASS recommendations

- Work closely with CLIPP School Service teams to further build attendance and connect Student Leaders to Schools
- Implement generic Education PASS
- Continue to liaise with academic staff about suitable PASS Leaders and directly target those students for recruitment
- PASS Coordinator must attend PASS supervisor training in order to be able to more effectively deliver training and program support at a level consistent with the international PASS standards.
- Monitor session times for engagement and adjust accordingly
- Consider more PASS Online offerings in the future, to achieve economies of scale
- Whilst the program continues into Semester 2 online, look at ways to reduce PASS Leaders reporting time by using Adobe Connect data to record session attendance and have leader upload resources into weekly topics. What is saved here could be reallocated to extra weekly sessions.
- Have PASS Leaders work together within PASS Moodle shells, where all communication, such as session times and adjustments are done within the PASS Moodle shell only.
- Ensure PASS Leaders only use course Moodle shells for weekly session reminders and not communications/polls for when sessions are to be held. This will ensure SASS staff can see all communication between PASS Leaders and students and can remain informed on session time changes
- No appointment of PASS Team Leaders in Semester 2 2020. Ensure leaders have the opportunity to maintain open communications with SASS staff.

Mentor program

Recruitment

Of the 533 applications received for the mentor position, 300 were selected for interview based on their written responses to Key Selection Criteria. Student Academic Leaders (SALs) used a rubric to assess the anonymised written applications, effectively reducing the amount of time that professional staff usually need to dedicate to this process.

Interviews

Mentor interviews began in early November. They were conducted in groups of 10 to 15 applicants who participated in two activities that assessed their teamwork and communication skills, their campus knowledge, and their ability to take initiative. Applicants were graded against a rubric, then ranked and recruited according to the pre-determined number of school and campus-based positions. Recruited mentors commented favourably on the low-pressure interview environment that emphasised cooperation between peers:

Qualitative student comments:

- *I really loved the mentor interview as it didn't feel confrontational; it was rather fun and enjoyable.*
- *I really enjoyed the interview stage. It was really nice to meet other applicants and work together as a team.*

Interviews were completed by late December and 209 mentors were recruited. **A total of 201 student mentors took up their roles in the 2020 Semester 1 program.**

Training

In Semester 1, SASS paid the mentors to attend four hours of training which was conducted on all campuses in multi-school groups of 10 – 20, according to individual availability. This method of training proved more effective in increasing the communication, rapport and trust between SASS staff and the mentors, in comparison with the larger-scale single-day model used previously. Small-group training further assisted in the identification of mentors who may require extra support in their role and in reducing the drop-off of mentors between training and the commencement of the program, thereby assisting in maintenance of optimum student to mentor ratios.

Mentor feedback highlighted that engagement with other mentors and the SASS team was the most enjoyable and beneficial part of training, followed by practicing 'ice-breaker' activities and discussion of scenarios faced by experienced mentors:

Qualitative student comments:

- *(I enjoyed) the fact that it was a positive work environment and we were free to ask as many questions as we needed. The training not only provided comprehensive detail of what we should or should not be doing as mentors but it also included hands-on activities for us to perform that personally speaking helped me a lot when it came to ice-breakers or answering various questions that mentees had.*
- *I enjoyed learning new skills...The training was concise and well thought out. It was nice to... attend two sessions and walk out well equipped for the role. I enjoyed the openness of (the staff)- it was*

nice to feel like we are on the same level/page-just one group of people with a common goal. The staff's openness to feedback was very evident.

- *(I enjoyed) the interactivity of it, it wasn't so much listening to the lecture the whole time, it had elements of creativity, thinking and social games like ice breakers.*

In recommendations for future training, mentors noted that they would like to see more faculty involvement in training and implementation, greater emphasis placed on strategies to manage the drop off in communication from students, and more training to meet the administrative requirements of the role.

Suggested modifications for 2021 training include:

- Train Mentor Team Leaders prior to training so that new mentors can meet their team leader on training day, or at least prior to the commencement of the program.
- Offer detailed administrative and support-service specific training online via Moodle. This will allow for more effective focus of face-to-face training time on communication and problem-solving
- Develop a 'mentor role cheat sheet' with key mentor roles and responsibilities. This should include a reminder to CC Mentor Team Leaders into all group email/message communications

Mentors also participated in one hour of 'Respect Now Always' training run by the Equity and Equal Opportunity team. This was a prerequisite for commencing on-campus work, and in its first semester of implementation, mentors expressed appreciation for *"the time dedicated to a sensitive and challenging topic"*.

Mentor Team Leaders

Mentor Team Leaders acted as a liaison between mentors and their school, and hosted meetings in Weeks 1, 3 and 5 with their mentor groups to debrief, troubleshoot and discuss issues relating to the mentor role. Mentor Team Leaders provide an invaluable resource for mentors to ask questions, receive reminders about their responsibilities and communications from SASS as well as to provide reassurance and guidance for mentors through discussion of their own experiences.

The number of team leaders hired per campus is shown in **Table 3**. One Mentor Team Leader per school was hired for the Mount Helen, Berwick and Camp St campuses, while an appropriate Mentor: Team Leader ratio of 1:15 was used to determine leader numbers for Gippsland and Online. While some Gippsland and online Mentors noted challenges associated with not having a Mentor Team Leader from their school, the costs associated with significant additional Team Leader staffing outweigh the benefits of discipline-specific leaders.

Table 3: Number of Team Leaders per Campus

| NUMBER OF TEAM LEADERS PER CAMPUS | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Campus | Number of Team Leaders |
| Mount Helen | 6 |
| Camp St | 1 |
| Online | 2 |
| Berwick | 6 |
| Gippsland | 3 |

Mentor feedback on working with Team Leaders noted that meetings would be better suited to the early weeks of the program, when mentors are “finding their feet”. Online mentors requested that their meetings be conducted via a platform such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom to enable participants to talk directly to one-another rather than to text messaging via the Moodle chat rooms. Feedback on the efficiency and support of the Team Leaders was predominantly positive:

Qualitative student comments:

- *The meetings were useful because it kept mentors connected. It also helped me to realize that other mentors had similar experiences such as mentees not being as engaged as we hoped, and that this was not necessarily a reflection of (us).*
- *...the meeting we had was very helpful in seeing that I was not alone in the few issues I was having. I feel that we could have benefitted from having the meetings sooner in the semester. The first meeting was in week 2, but I feel that having the meeting in week 1 could have assuaged our fears sooner and allowed us to perform better in the position*
- *My mentor team leader was a wonderful support. She always checked on me, making sure I was alright. She met me quite often and listened to every problem that I was facing. The meetings were very useful since the team leaders had answers to most of our queries.*

Recommendations:

- Create a how-to module in the Moodle training that enables mentors to download Microsoft Teams, to be used for online training and online meetings.
- Mentor Team Leaders should CC SASS into all group email communications, and BCC SASS into any communications that may need to be reviewed or discussed with the SASS team, including those related to hours worked and timesheets.
- Mentor Team Leaders should meet with their mentor groups prior to orientation, then again at the start of Weeks 1 and 3. The Week 5 meeting should be a feedback meeting that includes the Mentor Team Leader and SASS.

Orientation

SASS received a high volume of mentor feedback on the sessions, level of student engagement in and the format of orientation, and this has been reported separately. However, it is proposed that SASS make the following adjustments to improve the experience for students and mentors during and immediately prior to Orientation:

- Pair up small mentor groups to enable more vibrant student interaction.
- Provide printout of all mentor group lists to each Mentor Team Leader to enable them to direct 'lost' students to their allotted mentor
- Hire 1 or 2 standby mentors per campus to look after students who arrive late or have not been allocated a mentor
- Provide name tags for all mentors
- Ensure mentors are briefed on information about FLEXI students so they are welcomed and included in on-campus orientation events
- Ensure Foundation Access Studies (FAST) students are paired with a FAST mentor

Student feedback about mentor participation in Orientation was largely positive. They appreciated being able to ask questions of an experienced student who acted as a guide and a person they could trust in the early transition stage.

Qualitative student comments:

- *She... was friendly and supportive and made the whole day a lot less intimidating*
- *I was incredibly nervous arriving on campus, and my mentor made me feel right at home. She answered every question we had with enthusiasm and it really helped me get right on board with uni. She also had us do ice-breakers (which was painful at the time) with our peers, which helped me get to know everyone and even make some new friends.*
- *My mentor... made me confident to navigate the campus and provided very helpful activities. She was...professional but down-to-earth at the same time, so I felt comfortable to ask her any silly questions. I was nervous for orientation but after meeting her I felt calm and ready!*

The challenges of greatest concern involved late-enrolling students who were not allocated a mentor prior to orientation day, and those who struggled to maintain contact with their mentor:

Qualitative student comments:

- *I contacted my mentor about where to go on the day but didn't hear anything back and had to ask people for help.*
- *(My mentor) was absent during ...orientation day. I have never seen my mentor. I was ushered off to another mentor for the day.*

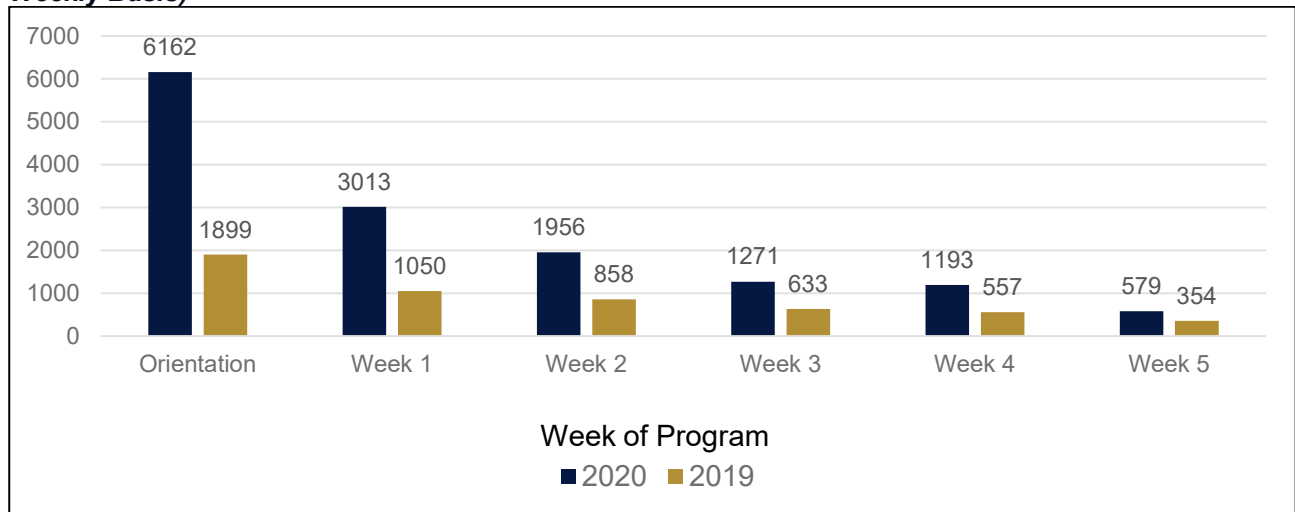
This feedback reflects the difficulty experienced in having one to two SASS staff per campus to recruit and manage over 200 mentors and monitor their quality of service. This is particularly evident during Orientation when strict timetables, large numbers of participants and first-day student nerves highlights any inefficiencies in operations. Please see recommendations below concerning these challenges.

Interactions with the Mentor program

In **Semester 1 2020, 3227 students were allocated a mentor**, of which 2561 (79%) interacted with a mentor at least once.

Figure 16 shows the number of interactions with mentors by week of the program. An ‘interaction’ is an instance where a mentor was contacted by a student with a request for help. It excludes contact initiated by the mentor. Interactions include phone, text, email or face to face enquiries, and are not duration-specific.

Figure 16: Comparison of 2019 and 2020 Interactions with the Mentor Program (Semester 1 by Weekly Basis)



The Mentor Program has seen a **160% increase in interactions between first semesters in 2019 and 2020** (5,351 to 14,174), it is likely the reported figure is lower than the actual figure as the reporting rate was limited at 73%. The increased uptake in Weeks 4 and 5 may be attributed to a rise in the number of questions about transitioning to online study due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however this does not account for the unexpected increase in enquiries seen in Orientation through to Week 3. Numbers of mentors hired in 2020 were comparable to 2019, as were communication processes, allocations and hours allocated to mentors. Some possible factors that may have influenced the rise include:

- Allocations beginning earlier, allowing mentors to contact more students prior to orientation
- A high number of international students in the school of Nursing and Healthcare professions who initiated a larger number of interactions with their mentors
- Smaller training sessions that allowed mentors to engage more deeply with their role and with SASS staff
- Increased training emphasis on the importance of monitoring and reporting student engagement, and being responsive to student needs
- Reduced on-campus orientation hours

Despite the increase in engagement in 2020, trends in this year’s data continue to reflect those seen in 2019: a significant decrease in engagement from Orientation to the end of Week 5, with the most significant drop off seen between orientation and Week 1. While it is expected that students become more familiar with university systems and requirements as the weeks progress, the expenditure required to keep 200 mentors employed during weeks of low student engagement is of concern. The issues created by low interactions in the latter

weeks of the program also extend beyond the financial; students are impacted as they miss out on the benefits of peer interaction and group dynamics, while mentors are impacted by the loss of leadership and professional development that originally motivated them to apply for a mentoring position:

Qualitative student comments:

- *I think next time the mentor groups should be bigger (in schools like Arts where there aren't many students), and that way the students can communicate with others and make friends. For myself, I only had 5 out of 8 attend, and while this is good because it is more personal, students may find this more uncomfortable.*
- *Having zero attendance and minimal replies to my communication with students was pretty hard. I just had to keep thinking that it is a good thing that they don't need help.*
- *It's wasting a mentor's time coming to campus just to meet up with (their) mentee group. The majority of assigned mentees just email and they can't be bothered attending meetings. I even had mentees assigned to me who were in my classes tell me that they can't be bothered going to the meetings.*
- *The most challenging part of the mentor role for me was losing mentees early on and trying to get the most attendance at meetings possible.*
- *Lack of mentee engagement-from day 1, a few didn't attend Orientation and a couple I didn't hear back from at all during the program. [I had] low attendance at meetings. I sensed that many of the mentees in the group only wanted to do what was absolutely compulsory for their course, which was fine. I explained that the program was optional but I'm there to help if they need any support. I think the mentees in my group were all at different stages, e.g. one mentee didn't understand the concept of pre-reading or reading Moodle before class, while another mentee was already getting started on assignments. This made it a bit tricky at group catch-ups, as their questions were on totally different ends of the spectrum.*

Recommendations:

For Semester 1, 2021, SASS propose making structural modifications to the mentor program that will ensure continued high engagement, increase the quality of the service offered, and reduce expenditure on mentor numbers over the six-week period:

- Students recruited to guide students during orientation should maintain the current target mentor to student ratio of 1:15. This will ensure that students are able to participate in activities in small social groups during orientation and that they experience personally satisfying interactions. These Orientation Guides may be volunteers (tying in closely with the Federation Advantage) or compensated with a giftcard, but will not be contracted as casual employees. This arrangement will reduce the administration load on SASS staff, allowing more time for training and monitoring of the quality of the service being delivered.
- Mentors to be recruited using the existing application and interview process; however fewer mentor positions will be offered. This will allow SASS to select applicants that are appropriately skilled for the role. Mentors will have larger student groups and will be allocated more weekly hours to fulfill their role. They will meet their groups at the end of the on-campus Orientation day in a handover from the orientation guides.
- Trial themed mentor meetings on common areas of concern for the entire commencing cohort, and hold weekly group meetings for group-specific concerns.

- SASS to determine a proposed earlier conclusion date of the program in conjunction with the Schools and other stakeholders by the end of 2020.
- Increase program marketing aimed at both students and staff
- Modify the reporting excel spreadsheet to capture total number of enquiries as opposed to enquiries per student to reduce mentor reporting time
- Arrange with Student Comms for a text/email to be sent to all students with the name and contact email of their Week 1 – 5 mentor after Orientation day to ensure all students have a contact immediately for their questions

In Semester 2, 2020, SASS will trial larger mentor groups and will test the plausibility of implementing the above changes in 2021. Further consultation with schools and other stakeholders must take place prior to implementation in Semester 2.

School Engagement with the Mentor Program

The number of mentors hired per school and campus is determined using enrolment estimates and is approved by a school representative prior to recruitment. SASS aims for a mentor-student ratio of 1:13 when estimating position numbers as opposed to the target figure of 1: 15, ensuring that if enrolments are higher than expected mentor groups do not get untenably large. This method of estimation proves effective in schools such as nursing and education, which tend to have high enrolments. However, in schools such as the Federation Business School and School of Science Engineering and Information Technology had lower than expected enrolments this semester, this can result in small mentor groups that impact on the rate of interaction and group dynamics.

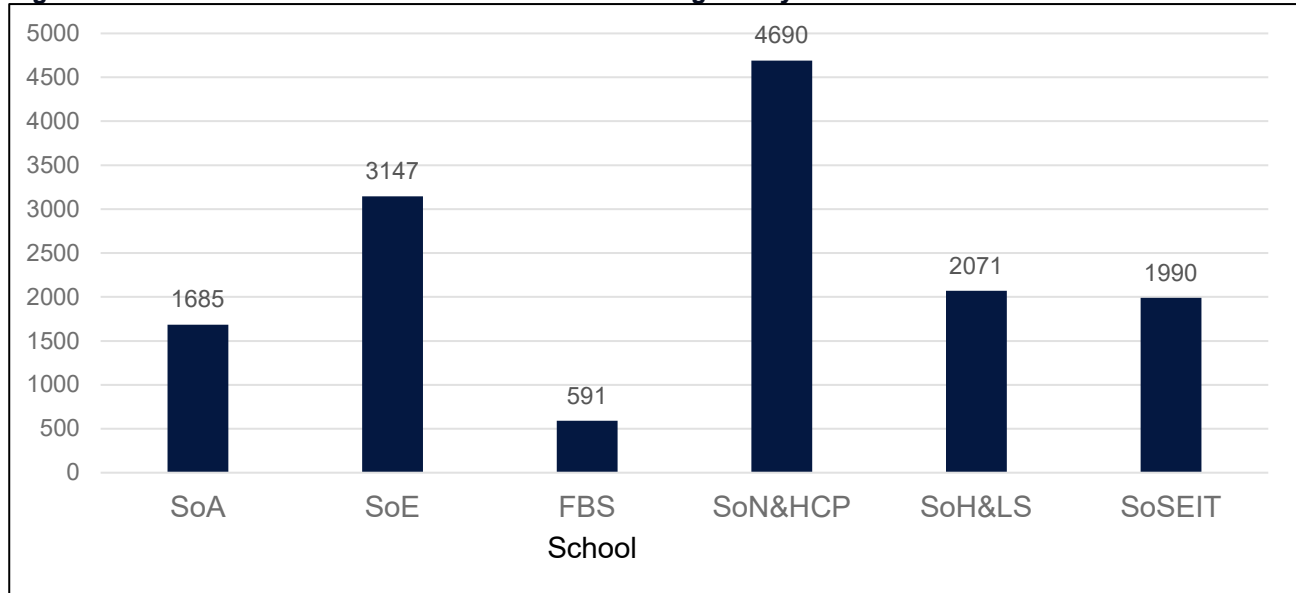
In Semester 1 2020, mentors working with the School of Nursing and Healthcare Professions had the largest group sizes, with an average of 23 students. Mentors with large groups were allocated additional work hours and offered additional training to enable them to mentor more students effectively. All other schools were within the desired mentor to student ratio of 1:15. **Table 4** shows the average mentor group size by school.

Table 4: Average Mentor Group Size

| NUMBER OF TEAM LEADERS PER CAMPUS | |
|---|--------------------|
| School | Average group size |
| School of Nursing and Healthcare Professions | 23 |
| School of Education | 13 |
| School of Arts | 15 |
| Business School | 10 |
| School of Health and Life Science | 11 |
| School of Science, Engineering and Information Technology | 11 |

The School of Nursing and Healthcare Professions reported the largest engagement with the Mentor Program. As shown in **Figure 17**, there were 4690 interactions.

Figure 17: Number of Interactions with the Mentor Program by School



While this trend was expected given the high enrolments and large proportion of international students commencing with the school, it is repeatedly observed in the Mentor Program that nursing students ask more questions, require a more detailed and lengthy orientation and engage more consistently throughout the program than other schools. The high demand for mentors in the School of Nursing and Healthcare Professions is further substantiated by feedback from the mentors, who reported needing more hours to answer all the questions, meeting frequently with students one-to-one and being approached in classes and on-campus with assessment, placement and lab related questions.

The School of Nursing and Healthcare Professions presents a useful example of the effectiveness of larger mentor groups. While it is expected that Nursing will have an above average engagement with the mentor program regardless of groups size, mentors from within this school held meetings with higher attendance, reported higher incidences of feedback and communication, worked more closely with SASS and school staff than other mentors and worked on average 2 – 3 hours per week more than their peers.

Recommendations:

- The school of Nursing and Healthcare Professions provides a useful example of the effectiveness of larger mentor group sizes in increasing engagement, peer interactions and mentor satisfaction.

Mentor Program Weeks 1 to 5

Weeks 1 to 5 of the Mentor Program involve mentors arranging meeting times with their students on-campus, responding to phone, text and email enquiries, meeting with students one-on-one when requested, meeting with SASS and Team Leaders and completing the administrative requirements of the role such as reporting and timesheets. Despite challenges described above relating to attendance at meetings and communication, feedback from students on their experiences is positive:

Qualitative student comments:

- *If I had known there was such a resourceful mentor waiting to settle us in, I would have been less anxious at the start.”*
- *Without it I wouldn't be where I am now, and would not be as comfortable in University as I am.*
- *I felt I had more confidence at the start of studies because I felt incredibly supported.*

While some mentors are challenged by the disparity between their expectations of the role and the reality, the difference made to the students who do require and utilise the support of their mentor is commendable. The majority of feedback survey respondents were satisfied with the level of knowledge, investment and care they received from their mentor (**Figure 18, Figure 19**).

Figure 18: Mentor Feedback - My Mentor was Knowledgeable about the Campus and Associated Services

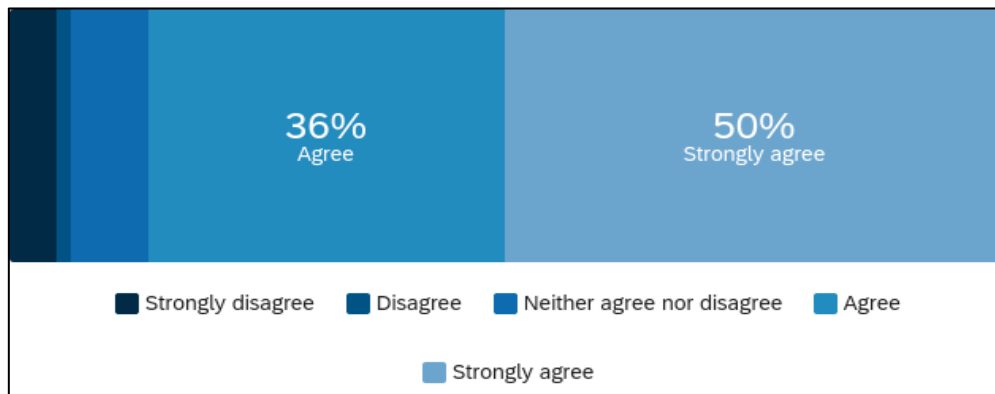
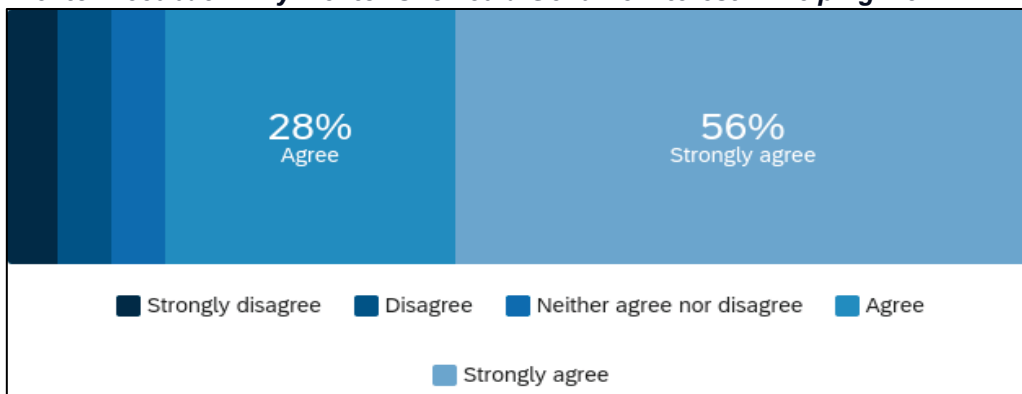


Figure 19: Mentor Feedback - My Mentor Showed a Genuine Interest in Helping Me



Modes of contact

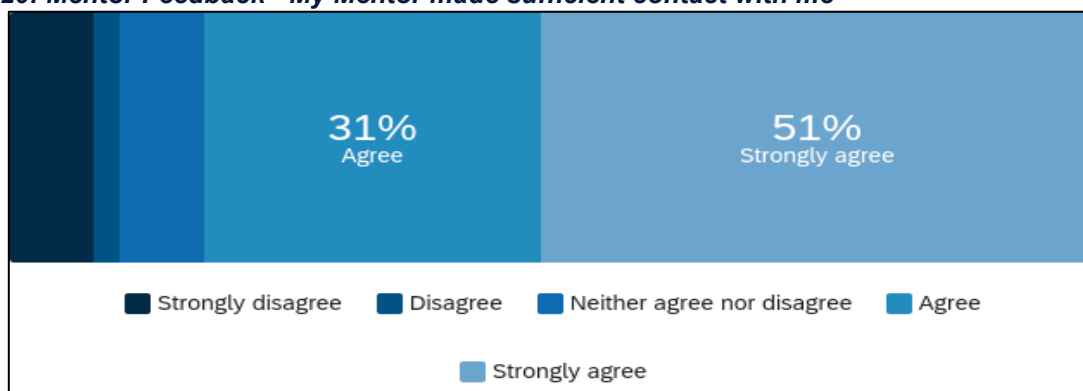
The highest rate of interaction between mentors and their students was via digital platforms, and these modes of communication were preferenced over scheduled or informal on-campus meetings. Email was listed as the most preferred method of contact (50%), followed by text (27%), one-on-one catch ups (8%), phone calls (8%) and group meetings (7%). Respondents to the Mentor Program feedback survey commented on their difficulty in making scheduled meeting times, even when numerous times were offered throughout the week. This feedback was reflected in the mentor reporting, where mentors frequently mentioned the difficulty they faced in finding meeting times that suited the schedules of their student group:

Qualitative student comments:

- *Students don't want to attend the meetings and the major problem is they want to connect only when they are available.*
- *The mentees are overwhelmingly uninterested. It is incredibly difficult (to get)... attendees to meetings.*

As more courses are offered online and demands of work, family and other commitments compete with students' on-campus time, the feasibility of these face-to-face scheduled meetings comes into question. Asked to state the best part about having a mentor, many students said it was their availability to answer questions at any time. It appears, therefore, that students value a mentor who is flexible in terms of accessibility. This is further evidenced by the 1379 students who met with their mentor outside of scheduled meeting times for one-to-one in-depth support. Figure 20 shows despite the disparity between the modes of contact offered to and preferred by students, **83% of students strongly agreed or agreed that their mentor made sufficient contact with them.**

Figure 20: Mentor Feedback - My Mentor made sufficient contact with me



Mentor Communication

Feedback on communication from mentors was largely positive. Students highlighted the benefits of receiving simplified, timely information from a trusted source:

Qualitative student comments:

- *Sometimes you can get an overload of information so it was really helpful to get simplified dot points that still managed to cover everything and have those relayed by someone who still remembers what it is like to be in my position as a first-year, first-semester student.*
- *The first contact email before orientation was informative, friendly and professional, which set the tone for the remainder of my time with my mentor (name removed). All my questions were*

answered before I even knew what to ask. I felt confident in being able to find my way on the very first day from (my mentor's) email.

- *I was completely unsure, but my mentor told me everything I needed to know via email and made sure that I had the opportunities to ask any question or express any concerns to her before I started. It was such a relief to get advice and instruction from a student who was a new student only a couple of years ago. She was also very friendly and personable.*

However, some students professed difficulty in maintaining contact with their mentor, again highlighting the difficulties faced in managing a large workforce who must show initiative in fulfilling their role with limited supervision:

Qualitative student comments:

- *I had difficulty maintaining contact with my mentor, and knowing who that was*
- *She didn't (stay in contact with me). I got an introductory email from her and then I replied and never heard back from her at all.*

University Connectedness

Another common theme in feedback was the connectedness students felt to their mentor peers and the wider university through the program:

Qualitative student comments:

- *I now feel like I belong to Federation University. When I first walked (in) on my first day (which was unfortunately 1 week late) I felt like a stranger. I was so clueless and quiet that I would just sit in a corner looking around. Now that I have had a mentor, I know that the University is always there to support me whenever I need it and that I will always be included at Federation University*
- *I felt encouraged to meet as many people as possible and enjoy social events.*
- *My mentor instantly saw that I was shy, anxious and alone, and talked to me a bit to get to know me, then introduced me to two girls doing my class and I cannot thank her more for that. The people she paired me with on orientation are now close friends of mine!*
- *The group with our mentor is how I've met one of my closest friends at uni so getting us to communicate and hang out for the day was great.*
- *Our whole mentor group sort of bonded and made friends with each other because of our weekly meetings and we were all studying the same course; therefore, we could all help each other out*
- *The program is amazing. It is really helpful because I got the chance to meet new people and talk to someone about any trouble that I had. It was a fantastic experience that I will never forget.*

Recommendations:

Connectedness and friendships formed early on in the Mentoring Program should be factored in when considering any modifications to mentor involvement in orientation. As orientation guide groups will be smaller than mentor groups, students should be grouped within their programs for orientation. These groups can later be combined into mentor groups. For example, if joint degree education students make up three orientation groups, these three groups can later be combined to form one mentor group, increasing the likelihood that these students will be interacting regularly and will connect and support each other.

Mentor experience

Benefits of the Mentor Program extend not only to those commencing students who receive transitional support, but to the 200 plus mentors who gained leadership experience while working in a professional setting within the university. While SASS faces repeated challenges relating to the lack of employment experience of some mentors, the developing maturity, confidence and personal growth demonstrated by many mentors through the application, interview, training and employment process is noteworthy:

Qualitative student comments:

- *(The best part was developing) leadership and coordination skills. It has made me more responsible as a person. This was a great experience in regards to building up my confidence and getting out of my comfort zone.*
- *Being a mentor has given me lots of experiences that have increased my empathy, capacity, problem-solving, resilience and leadership.*
- *The role helped provide me with more self-confidence.*

In addition to this, mentors commented on the value they felt in making a difference to students' experiences and being able to give back to the university community. When questioned about the best part of their role, mentors made the following comments:

Qualitative student comments:

- *Helping new students settle in. Along with that, the fact my mentees trusted me and approached me whenever they had any query or were facing any problem, gave me a sense of professional satisfaction about the fact that I was doing good in my job.*
- *It felt amazing that these people felt comfortable speaking and opening up to me, and then I provided them with the assistance required. It was incredible and felt great*
- *Having the role and responsibility to assist commencing undergraduate students to transition into university by familiarising them with services available, processes and requirements, as well as supporting their engagement and sense of belonging was definitely a rewarding highlight for me.*

The biggest challenges faced by mentors was a lack of interaction and low meeting attendance as discussed above, because these were at odds their expectations:

Qualitative student comments:

- *"Despite having approx. 17 mentees, I only even met or got a response from maybe 7 of them at most. I only had 2 people attend a meeting and that was in week one."*
- *"Having zero attendance and very minimal replies to my communication to students was pretty hard. I just had to keep thinking that it is a good thing that they don't need help."*
- *"Despite my efforts I did not have participation to a single meeting session. I could only go off the schedules I was given and did my best to be present but I understand that some students don't require anything. Just challenging to reach the students at times."*
- *"The lack of responses from my mentees (was challenging). I really struggled sometimes as I felt I was doing something wrong or wasn't good at my job."*

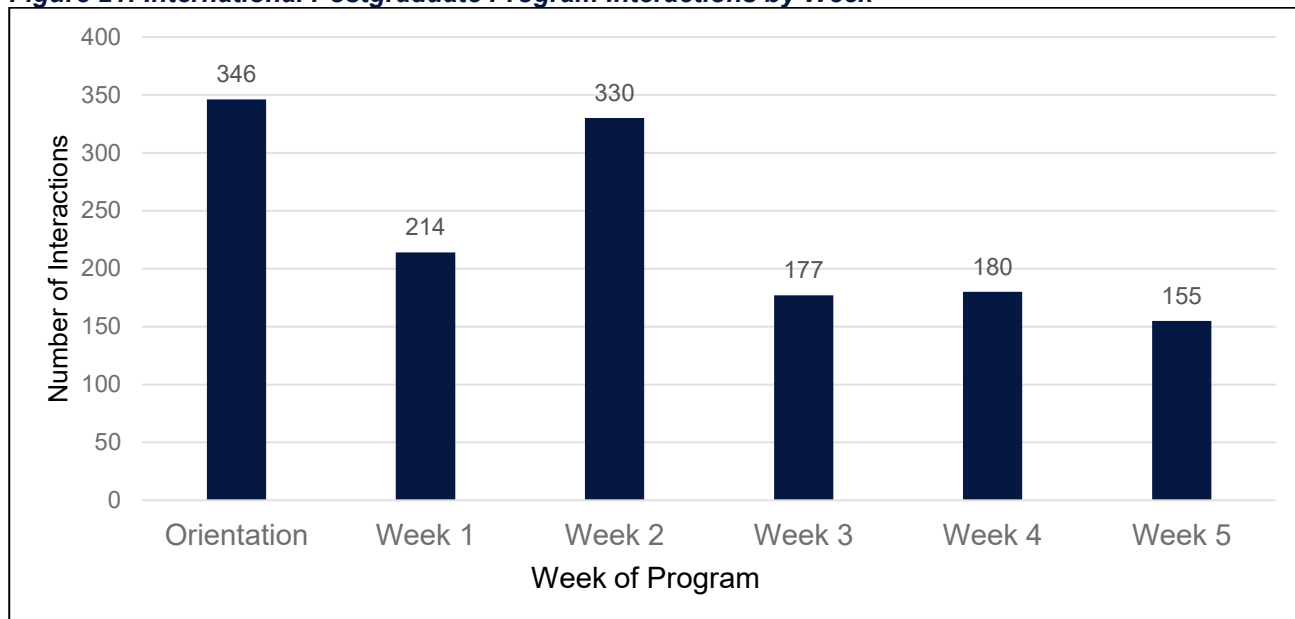
International Postgraduate Mentor Support

In Semester 1 2020, SASS piloted an international postgraduate mentoring program at the Berwick and Mount Helen campuses. The application for additional internal funding was initially prompted by the exclusion of postgraduate students in general from mentor support during orientation, and more specifically of postgraduate international students who have little or no familiarity with the Australian education system.

International postgraduate mentors were recruited using the same process as for the undergraduate program; however, recruitment was based entirely on merit rather than on school affiliation. Nine mentors worked across Federation Business School and School of Science, Engineering and Information Technology at Mount Helen campus, and five worked across Federation Business School and the School Arts at the Berwick campus

A total of 201 (100%) international postgraduate students interacted with their mentor. Interestingly, only 167 postgraduate international students were allocated a mentor, meaning 34 students who interacted with the program were 'picked up' and supported by the postgraduate mentors despite not officially being a part of the pilot student cohort. **Figure 21** shows International postgraduate students interacted with mentors a total of 1402 times. Highest engagement was seen prior to and during orientation, with an unexpected jump in Week 2.

Figure 21: International Postgraduate Program Interactions by Week



Interestingly, as shown in **Figure 21**, engagement in the postgraduate program remained more consistent than in the undergraduate program, with a smaller relative drop off from Week 1 onwards. This, combined with the 100% interaction rate of individuals supported by the program, evidences the high need for transitional support in the international postgraduate student population.

Feedback from mentors participating in the postgraduate program highlighted the importance of an equitable service that did not exist when they commenced their studies with Federation University, and the benefits of mentoring for developing networking and leadership skills:

Qualitative student comments:

- *When I started FedUni, we did not receive this service...and when I (sought) some assistance and support, I have been told many times 'this is not available for postgraduate students' or 'there is not this kind of service for international students'. I am just so glad that this year, international postgraduate students were supported.*
- *It feels great to be able to make a difference in new students' lives, making their transition into their new lives at the university in a foreign country much smoother. It was also a great opportunity for us to expand our networking, and a great chance to develop leadership.*
- *It was a great experience, enabling me to get to know more about the support services provided by the university, expanding networking, learning and improving leadership*
- *This program is a big help for some students in need of support. As an international student, I wish I could have had this chance when I was in my first Semester. Most of "us" feel like we are in University "kindergarten" when we arrive here. So... this program helps us to transition without being in a panic.*
- *(The SASS team) listened to our experiences...they invited international students to become a part of the mentor program which gave many of us (like me) a sense of belonging in the university. I am sure watching their senior international students flourish and hold such positions has instilled confidence in new international students and made them more comfortable.*

Two key challenges faced by the postgraduate mentors were time management, and encouragement of communication between mentors and students from different cultural backgrounds:

Qualitative student comments:

- *...students that were from the same region or part of the country as (their) mentor, were... less hesitant to talk to that mentor. If there was a choice to switch mentor or choose other mentors (from the same country), the students may go with that option...some...(find it) easier to ask questions of someone they know are from the same background.*

Feedback from postgraduate students supported by a mentor emphasised the benefit of having someone to talk to who had been through a similar experience both as a student and individual in a foreign country;

Qualitative student comments:

- *The best thing about having a mentor was being able to talk to someone who has been in your shoes before and knows what you're going through.*
- *Having access to someone to answer questions and clarify what can be overwhelming and confusing information.*
- *She was supportive and open to all kind of questions. She also gave us the liberty to email or contact her at any time, even after hours.*
- *At first I was very confused about what was happening at the campus, but she made me comfortable with the campus environment and told me to feel free to ask her anything when I have any trouble.*
- *Official emails sometimes feel too serious and people don't process that information easily. Finding a friendly casual way of delivering information can improve the level of communication between students and mentors, and hence the university.*
- *My Mentor shared information regarding driving license, contacts of people who could help me practice driving prior to the driving test at VicRoads, and contacts who could help me get a job.*

He shared his experience of accommodation rentals, and how it differs from living on campus. This information was most helpful.

And having someone to connect with on a social level;

- *(The best part was the) feeling of not being alone*
- *Even on the first day, I felt that I had a friend.*
- *The best thing is I never felt alone and was under the care of someone.*
- *She helped me to adjust here, make new friends, get familiar with others, and to know the system of study here*

While the reduction in on-campus presence and the transition to online learning from Week 3 of the program presented challenges to the International Postgraduate Mentor Program in its pilot semester, the impact the program has had in supporting the 201 postgraduate students who interacted with a mentor and in providing an equitable service to the international students who choose Federation University for their postgraduate studies is noteworthy.

Academic Skills and Knowledge Program (ASK)

ASK Executive Summary

In Semester 1 2020, ASK service operating hours and mode of operation changed dramatically in response to the University's transition to online learning in March in response to COVID-19 restrictions. The key changes and outcomes are summarized below.

From March onwards, the ASK Desk service was closed at all campus libraries. The online communication channels with students expanded from phone and email to include: a Library live chat widget adapted to become ASK Chat; weekly Adobe Connect workshops on various study skills topics, and a Student Academic Leader (SAL) booking system integrated into the Learning Skills Adviser (LSA) bookings page to alleviate pressure from the LSA service.

There were **24 SALs employed in Semester 1** with an additional two for emergency backup. One Mt Helen SAL stepped back from her role due to the unforeseen pressures arising from working from home and family responsibilities.

During Semester 1, 2020, up to Week 11, **1786 enquiries were made through the ASK Service** across the university. By comparison, there were 2357 enquiries made during Semester 1, 2019, demonstrating a **24% decrease in service usage compared to the previous year**, which is most likely as a result of the university's transition to online learning. Berwick SALs still experienced the greatest demand (45% of total queries). The most popular method for accessing the ASK Desk for all students was in person on campus, with the desk constituting 48% of all queries and roaming 3% until campus libraries closed. With the introduction of alternative communication channels, live chat (21% of queries) and email (18% of queries) became students'

preferred modes of communication. Ninety-two (92%) of queries were able to be answered at the time representing a substantial level of support for students seeking assistance. Referrals to other services appear to be comparable with the previous year.

The **most common query type related to referencing (15% of all queries)**. This is a dramatic change compared to previous years where computer skills and IT issues represented the highest number. The 'Other' category continues to be over-represented in the data (13% of all queries) and these query types related to some SALs feeling less confident with assigning certain queries, while some queries arose as a result of the transition to online learning or COVID-19 restrictions.

The following recommendations arise from specific issues from this semester:

- The physical ASK desk is still the most popular source of information for students, but it is clear that having a diverse online presence is important. Even when students are returned to campus, the new live chat function (ASK Chat) - as the next most accessed mode of communication - should continue in the future to offer support to online learners, in conjunction with email and phone.
- All SAL meetings should continue in the future as they have contributed to creating a more cohesive and united SAL team. Once students return to campus, it may be necessary to resume campus specific meetings to address issues relevant to that location.
- The SAL Adobe workshops, though not addressed in any great detail in this report, were well attended by students when promoted. These could also continue each semester and be recorded to be made available as a learning resource for students.
- To address the 'Other' data that continues to appear at high levels in LibAnswers, more in-depth training is required to trouble-shoot the types of queries that arise. Also, additional fields may be included as a result of this semester's experiences.

Program Summary

The Academic Skills and Knowledge (ASK) Service gives Federation University students access to peer academic support and service referrals. The service is usually offered at four campuses: Berwick, Camp Street, Churchill, and Mt Helen, as well as via phone and email, from Orientation Week to SWOTVAC. Phone and email enquiries are answered by SALs within the ASK operating hours, and picked up by SASS staff outside of semester time. In March 2020, due to the onset of COVID-19, the ASK Desk service was closed at all campus libraries and delivered using a variety of new and existing online communication channels. The additional communication tools included: a Library live chat widget adapted to become ASK Chat; weekly Adobe Connect workshops on various study skills topics, and a SAL booking system integrated into the Learning Skills Adviser bookings page to alleviate pressure from the LSA service.

Staffing

SALs, who are recruited through other peer-support and Study Support (SASS) programs such as PASS or Mentor programs, staff the service. They are generally expected to have around a 6.0 GPA and experience in a student leadership position. Each year there is a combination of experienced and new SALs to assist with succession and continuity of quality.

In Semester 1, there were 24 SALs recruited across all campuses plus two for emergency back-up; this was a staffing increase of 19% compared to Semester 1 2019. This number decreased to 23 when one SAL withdrew in Week 6 due to the strain of working from home, studying and home-schooling her young children under COVID-19 restrictions. The decision to increase staffing was mainly in response to a projected increase in student enrolments at the Berwick campus and to allow for varied SAL availability due to course placements and SAL departures from the university later in the year. For the first time, a Visual Arts student was recruited for Camp St after requests from Camp St academic staff to support this specific student cohort.

Initially, as per 2019 arrangements, each campus ASK service was managed by campus SASS staff, namely Learning Skills Advisers with support from Program Officers; however, once the service transitioned to 100% online, the weekly campus-based meetings seemed to reinforce divisions within the SAL team. So, from Week 9, the ASK Coordinator organised twice weekly Skype meetings, one of which all SALs were expected to attend, with the aim of building solidarity and better communication within the team. These meetings seem to have improved team morale and connectedness.

ASK desk hours

From Orientation week until mid-March, the ASK Desk days of operation were Monday to Thursday with hours at Churchill and Mt Helen the same (9.30am – 3.30pm), Berwick's hours slightly extended (9.30am – 4pm) and Camp St ASK Desk operating outside of university hours to accommodate not only the SALs' available times, but other students' presence on campus.

All SALs were notified of the ASK Desk moving online in late March with most SALs choosing to work from home. The hours continued as described above, but then were altered to extend from 8am – 6pm from early April. It was recognised that this was essential in an attempt to support all students during the transition to online learning. The ASK Desk also continued to be open during this semester's lecture break, unlike previous years, again in an effort to support students during this period of change.

Unfortunately, by the end of April, the impact of COVID-19 was felt by the University management and, in an effort to respond to requests for financial savings, the ASK Desk rosters were pared back to only four hours per week SAL. For some SALs, this entailed a decrease in work hours of up to 60%.

Training

All SAL training usually occurs over two days prior to Semester 1 and this year was no different, but with changes to service delivery from March 2020, all SALs were required to develop familiarity with additional technologies. These included Skype, ASK Chat - using the Library's LibApps software, and Adobe Connect to run workshops within the Online Transition Moodle shell that had been created for all students transitioning to online learning. Once the SAL booking system was in place, there was a need for SALs to set clear boundaries during appointments due to the confusion some students had between the role of a SAL and a Learning Skills Adviser (LSA). The ASK Coordinator facilitated this additional training by creating videos and writing up detailed explanations in the ASK Moodle shell discussion forum. Adobe Connect sessions were conducted by a SASS program officer to familiarise the SALs with that learning space. Knowledge sharing also occurred regularly among the SALs themselves in the Moodle forum through trouble shooting posts and suggestions for improving practice.

Promotion

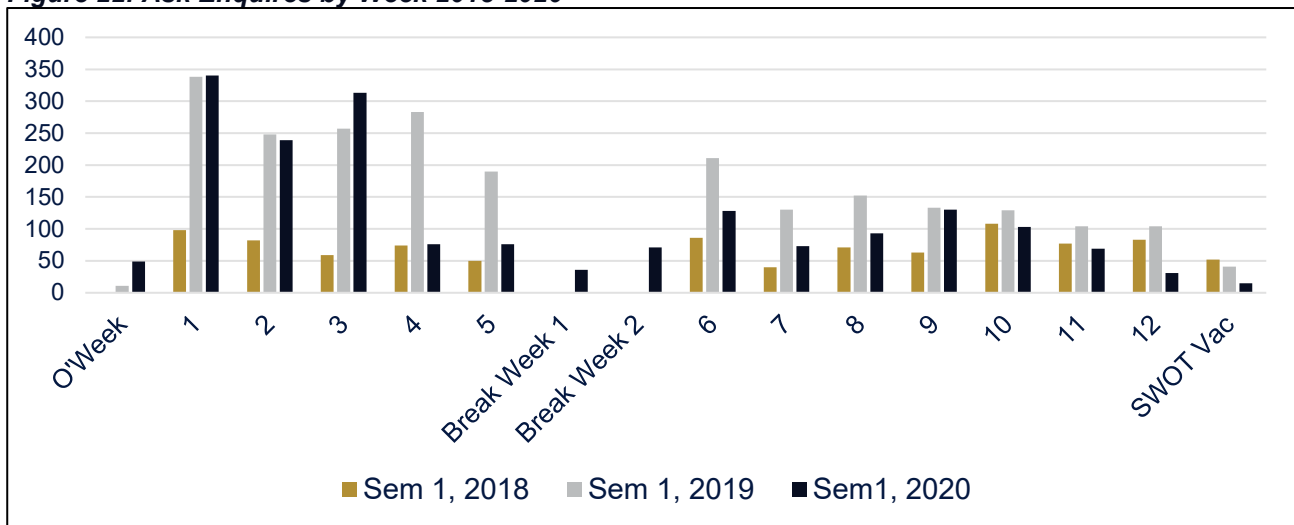
With the onset of 100% online delivery of the ASK Desk, promotion to the university community became essential, so that students were assured of the continuity of service. The ASK and LSA web pages were updated promptly in Week 5, first by embedding the ASK Chat and Library Chat widgets and highlighting the changes to opening hours and new communication channels. These webpages were updated a few times during semester, especially to promote the weekly SAL workshop timetable and, also, the SAL booking system that was introduced in Week 9.

One new promotion strategy implemented by SASS staff included a social media communications plan that included two or three Facebook posts and one SAL Instagram takeover each week. The takeovers included displaying profiles of each individual SAL profiles while also promoting various study tips and links to the ASK Desk.

Service Data Usage by Week

During Semester 1, 2020, up to Week 11 (the point at which we collected data for this report), 1786 enquiries were made through the ASK Service across the university. By comparison, there were 2357 enquiries made during Semester 1, 2019, demonstrating a 24% decrease in service usage compared to the previous year. It is notable that there was a dramatic drop from 302 to 71 enquiries between Weeks 3 and 4 (see Figure 22) and a continued decrease until the second week in the lecture break, which would contribute to the lower data compared to the same time in 2019. This could be explained by the sudden absence of the physical ASK Desk and library closures during this period in the semester as the university was transitioning to online learning and students may have been feeling unsure about how to find the service online. **Figure 22** details that similarly to previous years, the ASK service was most in demand in the first half of semester, based on the engagement data below. This pattern would seem to indicate that students become more self-reliant as they become more familiar with the University.

Figure 22: Ask Enquires by Week 2018-2020



Enquiry Patterns by Campus

Student engagement with the ASK service by location became irrelevant once all SALs were working online from home; however, the LibAnswers database allows for SALs to enter data reflecting their campus. **Figure 23** below illustrates enquiry patterns for the past three years and indicates that the **Berwick service still had the greatest demand with 47% of queries**, which is evident in ASK Desk on-campus data from the first few weeks of semester; this is a reflection of the campus population. Once the service went online, it was also apparent that the Berwick SALs were more efficient than the other SALs at responding to queries. Camp St. enquiries were also fewer overall as the SALs representing this campus were rostered on in the evenings between 6pm and 10pm when the service was used less. Overall, the ASK service was accessed less than in the previous year, most likely as a result of the university's transition to online learning.

Figure 23: ASK Enquiries by Campus 2018 - 2020

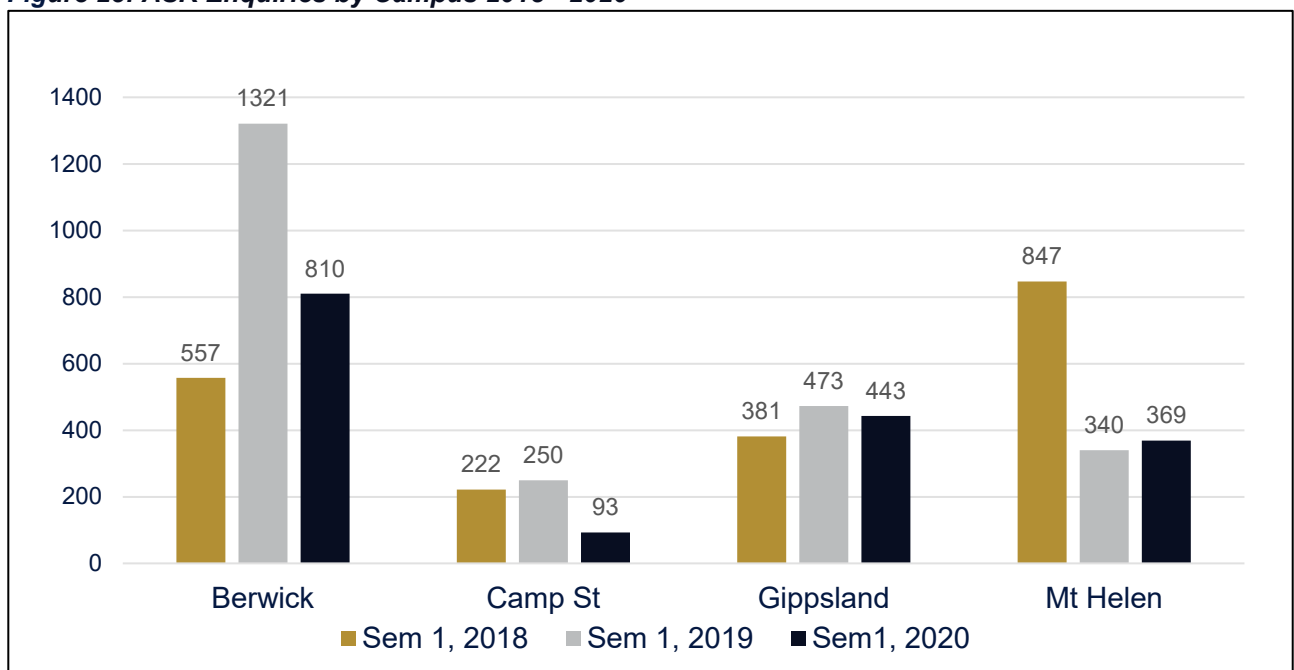


Figure 24 highlights, students' preferred method for accessing the **ASK Desk was on campus and in person constituting 48% of queries**, which includes roaming in the Library (3% of queries) early in the semester. With the introduction of alternative communication channels, such as ASK Chat (LibChat) and the SAL Booking system (an additional email channel), it was clear that email (18% of queries) and live chat (21% of queries) were students' preferred modes of communication once the campus drop-in points were no longer available.

Figure 24: ASK Desk Contact Modes 2018-2020

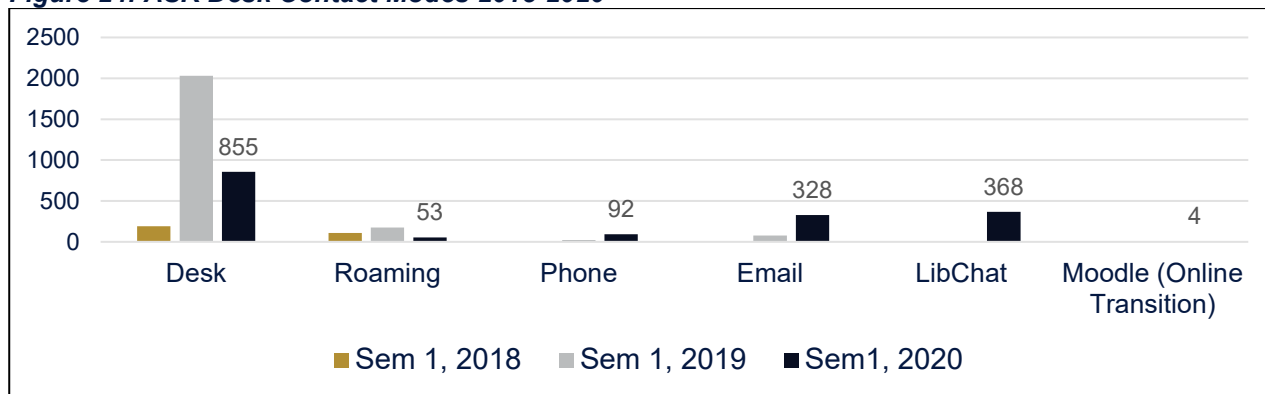
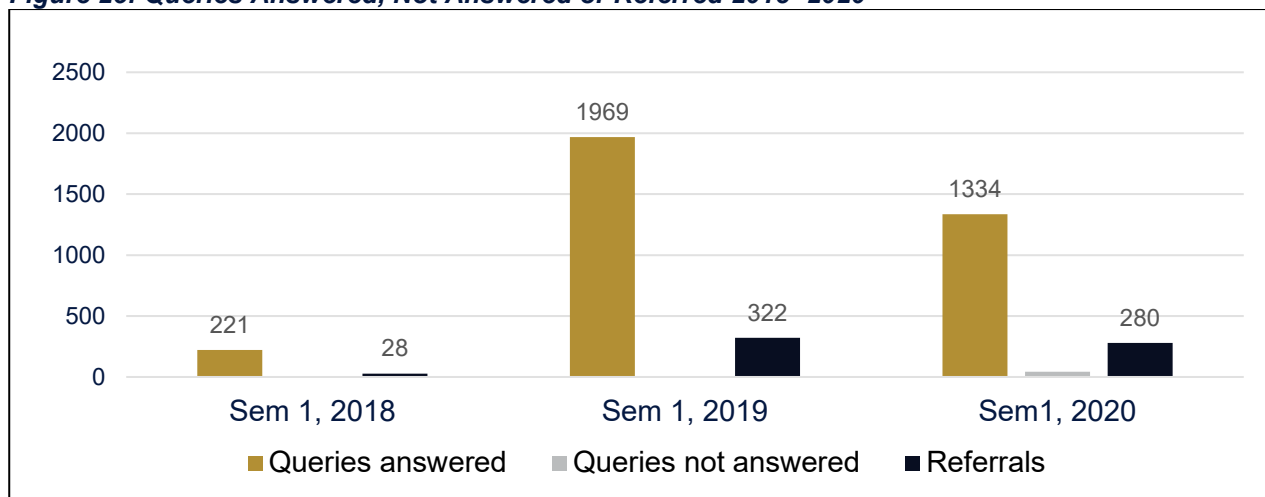


Figure 25 below depicts a high resolution rate of queries; **92% of queries were able to be answered at the time** representing a substantial level of support for students seeking assistance. Referrals to other services appear to be relatively comparable with the previous year. These referrals were mainly academic in nature to Learning Skills Advisers and Studiosity.

Figure 25: Queries Answered, Not Answered or Referred 2018 -2020

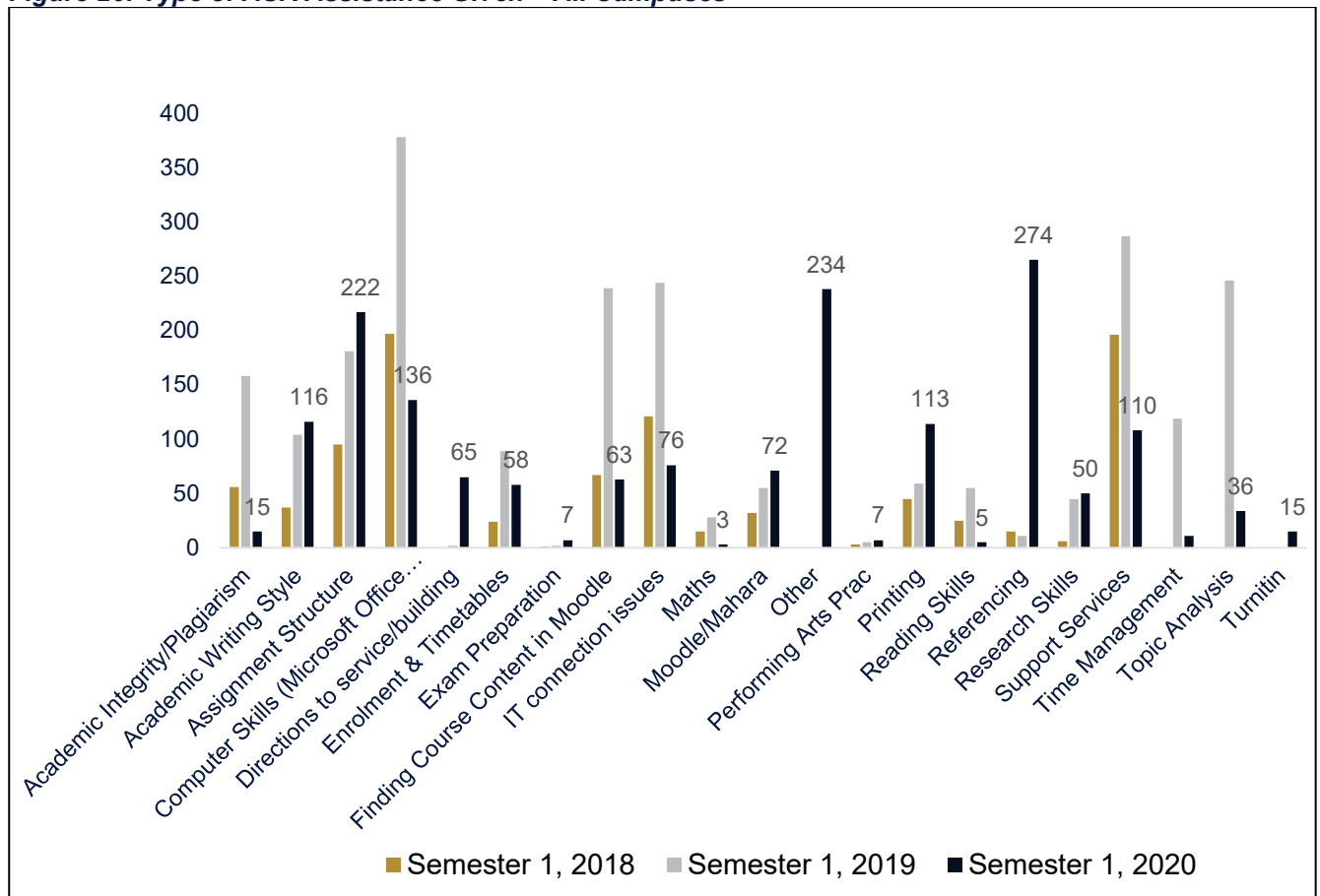


Enquiry Topics

Figure 26 shows that the **most common request at the ASK desk was assistance with referencing at 15% of all queries**. This is a dramatic change compared to previous years where computer skills and IT issues represented the highest number of queries. With students being forced to study online, it is possible that they also became more self-sufficient and accessed other avenues of technical support. Despite additional fields being included in LibAnswers in response to data obtained in 2019 and targeted SAL training explaining the kind of data that should be collected, the 'Other' category continues to be over-represented in the data (13%

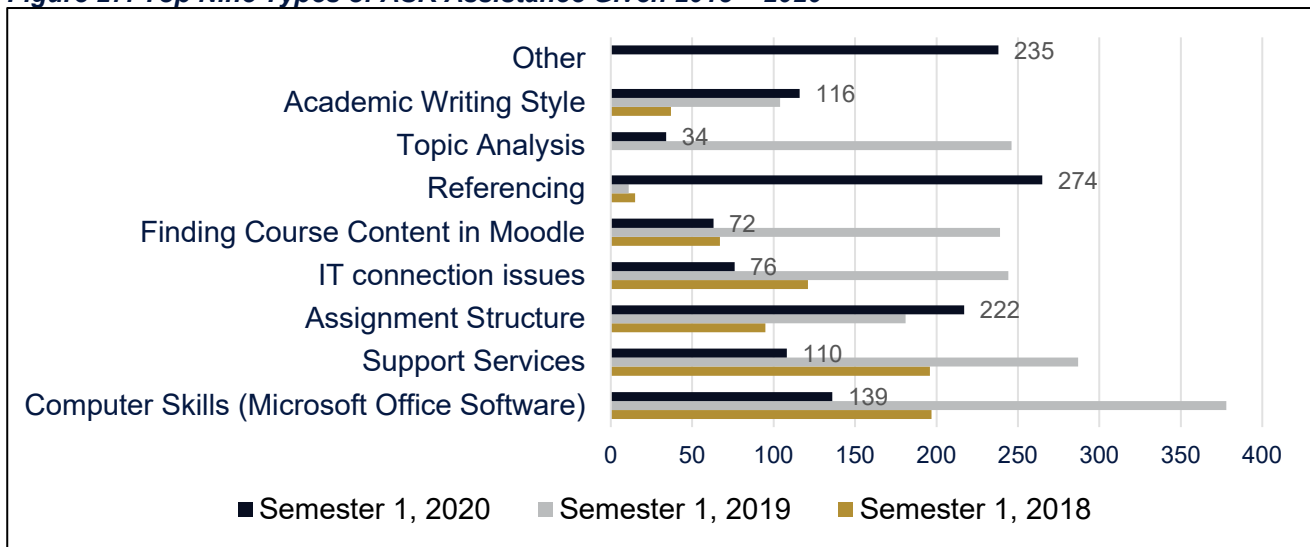
of all queries). These query types were discussed at length during the weekly all SAL meetings this semester to ascertain how they occurred and a forum post was set up to determine whether any could be allocated to existing fields in LibAnswers or if new ones needed to be created. It was apparent that some of the 'Other' data were gathered when some SALs felt less confident assigning certain queries to the designated fields in LibAnswers, while some queries arose as a direct result of the transition to online learning or COVID-19 restrictions, such as how to return Library books or how to access Centrelink.

Figure 26: Type of ASK Assistance Given – All Campuses



As outlined in **Figure 27** below, excluding the "Other" category, the most common ASK Desk queries related to academic issues, such as assignment structure and academic writing style or technology concerns related to computer skills - Kaltura was a common query among the Nursing students.

Figure 27: Top Nine Types of ASK Assistance Given 2018 – 2020



Student Academic Leader Feedback

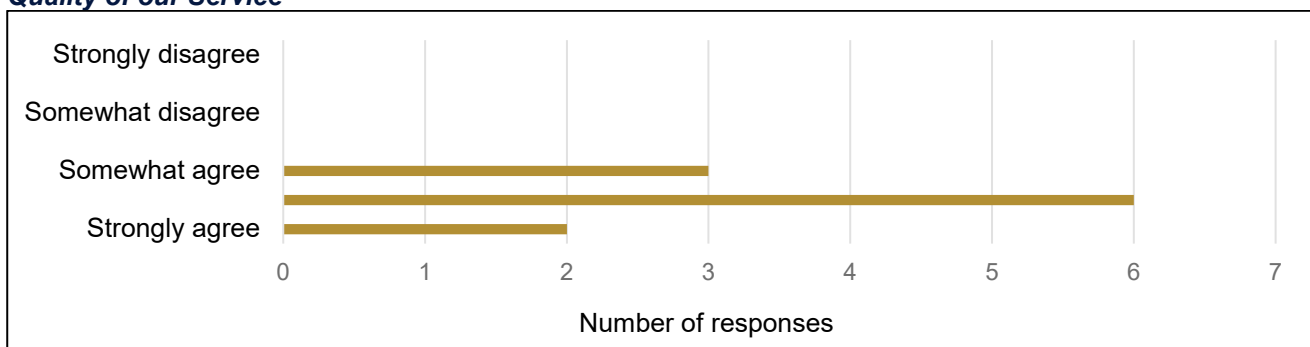
There was limited time to seek feedback from the users of the ASK Desk service this semester, so an alternative approach was needed to gain insight into the effectiveness of the program, especially during this tumultuous period created by COVID-19. So, for the first time in the history of the program, feedback was sought via an anonymous survey on SALs' experiences at the ASK Desk. It should be mentioned that SAL feedback was continually sought on a weekly basis in the online meetings to gauge how they felt they were managing their roles, but to encourage honest and direct input, an anonymous survey would be required, the results of which would be shared with the SALs and, potentially, assist with providing them a greater sense of ownership over the program.

The response rate to this survey was 50% (n=12) and the following themes emerged from the responses:

Online Transition and Impact on ASK Service Quality

Detailed in **Figure 28**, most respondents agreed that the move to online delivery generally did not impact on the service quality, but some comments indicated that certain groups of students may have been disadvantaged, including those with limited computer/technology skills and Camp St students, who benefit more from face-to-face support.

Figure 28: ASK Feedback Q1 - The ASK Desk's Transition to 100% Online has had no Impact on the Quality of our Service



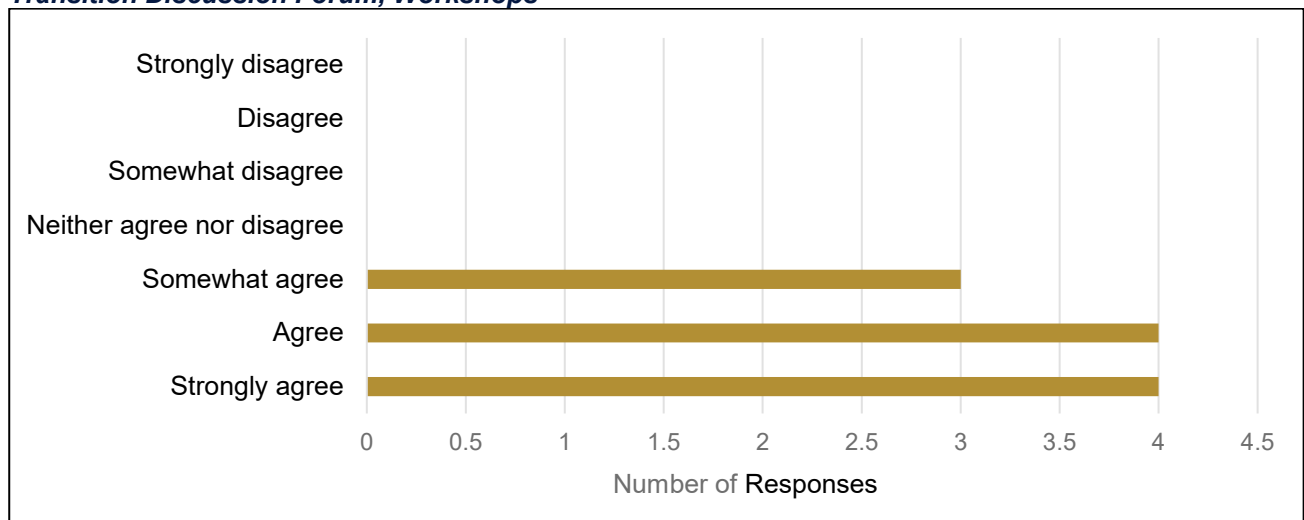
Qualitative student comments:

- *Students with limited technical knowledge benefit from being able to bring a laptop to a physical ASK Desk. Providing software support online to that cohort has been challenging and may have disadvantaged them.*
- *Performing Arts students were not able to get help with practising or face to face advice often required at the Arts Academy.*

ASK Desk Communication Channels

Figure 29 shows that respondents generally agreed that the various modes of communicating with students were enough, especially the introduction of the ASK Chat function. Yet, the comment below and elsewhere in the survey indicate that the physical ASK Desk is perceived as an essential component of the service.

Figure 29: ASK Feedback Q2 =The Range of Online Communication Channels to Access the ASK Desk has Been Sufficient for all Students, e.g. Email, Phone, ASK Chat, SAL Booking System, Online Transition Discussion Forum, Workshops



Qualitative student comments:

- *The Libchat system [ASK Chat] has been well utilised and would be a vast improvement from the previous system of emails or phone calls that never connect for purely online students. Even for students who do have access to a campus, the ability to quickly log in, ask a simple question then continue studying without having to leave their computer must have been beneficial*
- *The email and Libchat system doesn't offer the same ability to talk to a student [compared to the physical ASK Desk] and get them to open up about what they need help with, but unfortunately they are really the only two forms of contact students were interested in [in the online space].*
- *Disadvantages were difficulties in communication where we could not see and read student body language and expression and vice versa.*

Training Needs

Interestingly, the areas that SALs identified for further training did not relate to the technology they were using to deliver the service, but rather improving interpersonal communication and academic support. Unfortunately, what became evident from this survey was that the SALs, who were in reserve for busy times, appeared to have been forgotten altogether. The reason for not engaging these extra SALs was in all likelihood mainly financial.

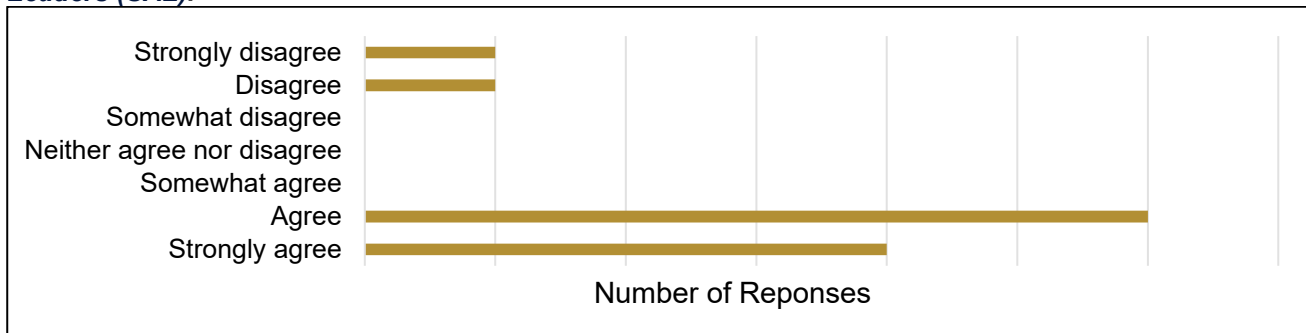
Qualitative student comments:

- *More standardised responses/training for dealing with very difficult questions or harassment.*
- *I think SALs should have a little more training on the extent of the help they are allowed to give on assignments. Some SALs provide lots of feedback on students' assignments and others just link to FedCite and other resources without directly linking them to what needs to be changed in the assignment. Where is the line?*
- *No back up SALS were trained or contacted about the changes. At the start of semester we could see there were gaps in the roster, which is what we were employed to cover, but no one contacted or trained us which is super disappointing, as we were promised to get a chance.*

Support in the ASK Role

Figure 30 indicates that the move to being an online service assisted with increasing cohesion and connectedness within the team. There were some supportive and warm comments that SALs offered in regard to describing their experiences being part of the ASK DESK team, Moreover, despite two SALs who disagreed with the ,the majority of SALs felt they were supported by SASS staff overall.

Figure 30: ASK Feedback Q5 – I Felt Well Supported by SASS Staff in My Role as a Student Academic Leaders (SAL).



Qualitative student comments:

- *The all SAL meetings has (sic) been important to retaining connection and without the ability to put faces to names and hear others being a SAL in an online environment at home could have been an isolating experience*
- *I feel the transition to online provide the imprimatur for greater cross campus SAL cooperation, I think we are a stronger team because of that.*
- *It was a tricky adjustment at first, but it certainly got easier with time. We were well supported in our roles which helped a lot and I know I appreciated it.*
- *Would just like to thank the team for all the support and communication.*
- *It has been a whirlwind semester and I commend my colleagues on their adaptability.*

Suggestions for the Future

There was a range of recommendations for improving the service in the future ranging from keeping the ASK Chat function, ensuring an online and on-campus presence, using the workshops as a resource for students and reviewing the service hours online, particularly in the morning shift.

Qualitative student comments:

- *I think having both an on-campus and an online team would be great. If the number students who are comfortable accessing support online rises - then it may be a valuable option to keep available.*

- *The live chat [ASK Chat] is an amazing option, and we should always have had it. No matter how the desk proceeds, we should not get rid of it.*
- *I think having both an on-campus and an online team would be great. If the number of students who are comfortable accessing support online rises - then it may be a valuable option to keep available.*
- *Record mini workshops that can be used as "just in time" service options for students. Continue the work to streamline and standardise responses advertise/market more*
- *Definitely (sic) keeping the Libchat option for online students in particular. Maybe at a reduced capacity like between 11 and 12 each day... I really don't think the 8am starts were worthwhile...Honestly, I rarely get enquires before 10am most days. It felt like a waste of wages having someone there that early.*

ASK Recommendations

Based on issues that arose this semester with the ASK service, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The physical ASK desk is the most popular source of information for students, but it is clear that having a diverse online presence is important. Even when students are returned to campus, the new live chat function (ASK Chat) - as the next most accessed mode of communication - should continue in the future to offer support to online learners in conjunction with email and phone.
- All SAL meetings should also continue in the future as they have contributed to creating a more cohesive and united SAL team. Once students return to campus, it may be necessary to resume campus specific meetings to address issues relevant to that location.
- The SAL Adobe workshops, though not addressed in any great detail in this report, were well attended by students when promoted. These could also continue each semester and be recorded to be made available as a learning resource for students.

To address the 'Other' data that continues to appear at high levels in LibAnswers, more in-depth training is required to trouble-shoot the types of queries that arise. Also, additional fields may be included as a result of this semester's experiences.

Learning Skills Advisors (LSAs)

Introduction

Prior to the challenges instigated by the threat of coronavirus in Semester 1 2020, LSAs were consistently and effectively providing academic literacy, learning and language support services to staff and students across campuses by phone, online and in face-to-face consultations. In addition, LSAs were also engaged in a range of curriculum development, research-based and other collaborative activities in CLIPP and across the university more broadly, therefore enjoying strong working relationships with students and staff alike. While these core activities were understandably impacted, primarily in terms of the mode of delivery, LSAs nonetheless pivoted in their practice to continue to successfully support undergraduate and postgraduate students, professional, and academic staff online and by phone for the duration of Semester 1.

Reflected in the data outlined below is the extent to which LSA services continued to be effective, valued and impactful even during these unprecedented working conditions. In fact, anecdotal evidence derived directly from the LSA team strongly suggests that the students who engage with LSA services are often those who require significant support to develop their academic skills under ordinary conditions. In Semester 1, after the threat of coronavirus, many in this vulnerable cohort were more stressed and struggled to adapt to the altered study conditions, and thus sought the solace and support of LSA services in greater measures. This surge in usage of LSA services is reflected in the data contained in this report, which demonstrates that LSA appointments *nearly doubled* from approximately 887 in Semester 1 2019 to over 1557 in Semester 1 2020.

Student feedback also reflected the crucial support offered by the LSA team in response to coronavirus. As one student articulated it, ‘I’ve been out of uni for a while and especially with corona virus hitting, I felt it necessary to ensure my assessments were well informed and well written’, while another noted that they needed, ‘help to manage study load once the delivery had been changed.’

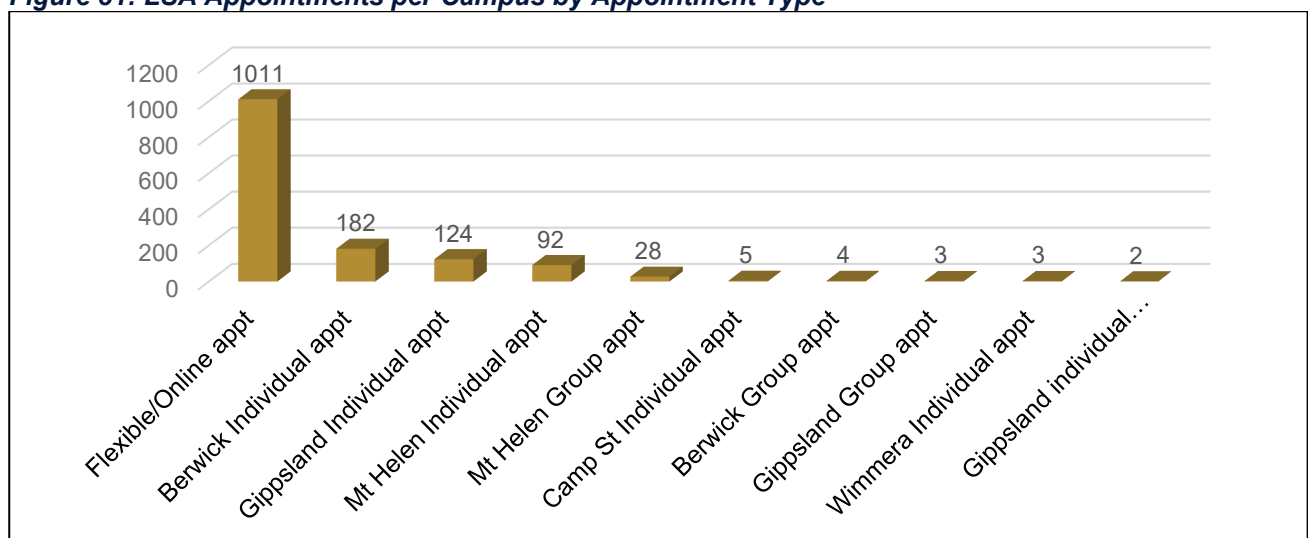
In Semester 1, there were 2.4 (FTE) LSAs at Mount Helen campus, an increase to 1.8 (FTE) LSAs at Gippsland campus, 2.3 (FTE) LSAs at Berwick campus and 1.0 (FTE) in Brisbane. Even so, in peak times, students struggled to find available appointments when they needed them, and the LSA team reported being fully booked for days or even weeks in advance.

Qualitative student comments:

- *Going into Semester 2 still online, there is a huge shortage in access to LSA’s perhaps some emergency appointments could be kept free each day to assist those that have a problem. As I had to book a week in advance and this was not sufficient to actually be as helpful as the system was before online study.*

Figure 31 shows of the 1557 student consultations, 75% took place online. This is a significant increase on previous years and was necessitated by the shift to the online environment. While LSAs were still campus-based, there were 237 consultations at Berwick campus, 149 at Gippsland campus, 135 at Mt Helen (including five at Camp St) and three consultations at Wimmera.

Figure 31: LSA Appointments per Campus by Appointment Type



Student Feedback on LSA Appointments

Of the 87 students who responded to an online survey, the vast majority (87%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their individual consultations were helpful. Furthermore, 92% of respondents stated that LSAs had taught them strategies that would be useful in other assignments and courses. Finally, 89% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that they would recommend this service to other students.

When asked what students liked most about their LSA appointments, responses focused on the LSAs' ability to be supportive, friendly and approachable, while giving them the confidence to proceed with their studies.

Qualitative student comments:

- *I liked how approachable my LSA was during the consultation, if my work did not hit the marking criteria he would point out good things and bad things then give me advice and ask me what do you think he would deliver his message in a nice way and not just focus on what I did not quite hit in my marking criteria he said what I did right as well which increased my confidence. I liked how helpful my consultation was and I liked how it helped me improve.*
- *The praise I received and the acknowledgment that I was on the right track. Also, paragraphs that required changing around as they seemed a little jumpy. The LSAs are very friendly and approachable and I think this is what I liked the most".*
- *They are very helpful and supportive.*
- *The LSA was able to help me to clarify my drafts and guided me on how to answer the essay. The LSA helped with resources should I encounter this issue again.*
- *I liked most that it was adaptable - although I would meet with them in person or call if I could at the moment ... it was great and the LSA's understood and adapted to emails even though I know it's not the easiest and I never explained my situation! (It was also very thorough feedback, the effort that was put into providing help was great).*

When asked whether they had any comments regarding their experience with an LSA, many students commented on how they found phone appointments more challenging than face-to-face appointments but still useful. Many also commented that having phone/online appointments were beneficial as it meant they did not have to travel, especially for Flexi students. Finally, a significant number of students reported that they were unable book an appointment at busier times of semester due to a shortage in appointment availability.

Qualitative student comments:

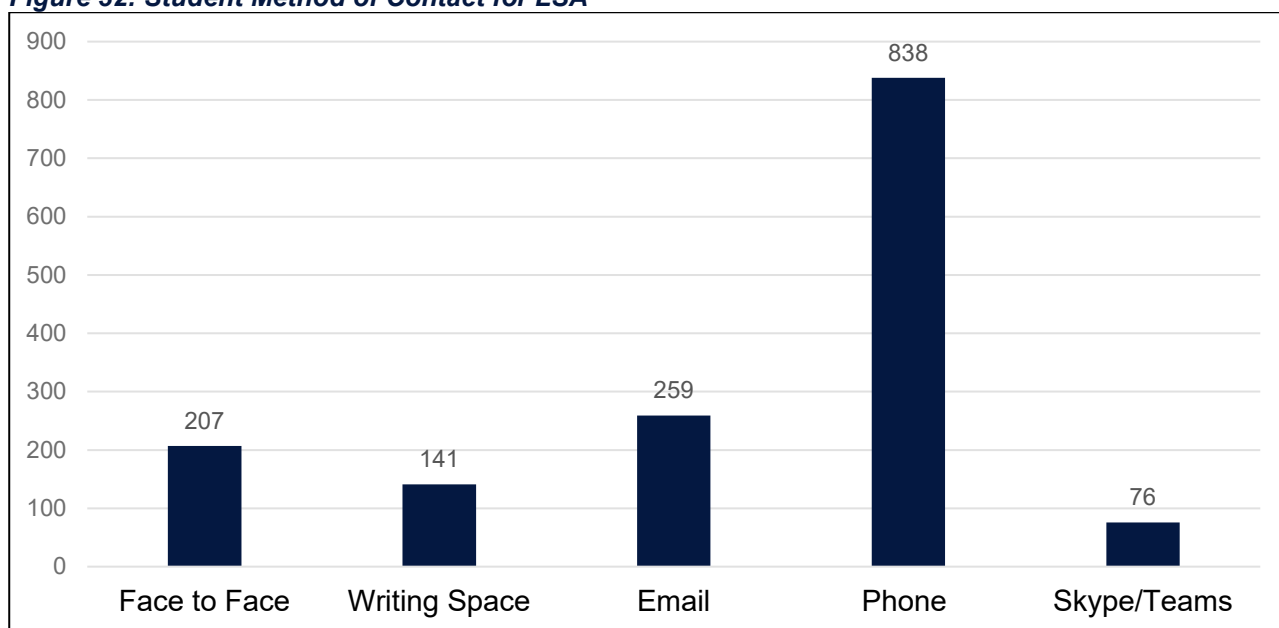
- *As I study as a flexible student it is comforting to know I can access help when I need it. Thank you*
- *When I tried to book appointment for a 2nd time a couple of weeks ago, they were all booked out.*
- *Meeting via skype worked very well, as I did not need to travel and could work with people in my field rather than my geographic area.*
- *It is an invaluable opportunity and resource that all students should use to unlock their academic potential and improve their studies and they are so nice. I am so grateful to this service.*
- *Thank you so much to the LSA's without you I would have no clue how to write and construct an essay.*

Writing Space

Writing Space is a drop-in academic support service operating in the libraries across campuses. It is a key component of LSA work as it enables us to reach a greater number of students than is otherwise possible through one-to-one appointments. Writing Space is popular amongst students as its flexible nature makes it easier for them to access LSA expertise without the requirement of making a formal appointment. It also provides an opportunity for students to seek help on an ongoing basis and develop their academic skills in a supportive and communal environment with their peers.

The overall attendance at Writing Space was small this semester due to the restrictions caused by coronavirus. In the three weeks that Writing Space was offered 141 students used the service. These students were predominantly from the Berwick campus. Under normal circumstances, these numbers would have continued to grow significantly at all campuses throughout the semester. However, when we moved to the online environment, some students commented in their phone appointments how much they missed Writing Space and were looking forward to it starting again. It remains to be seen whether this is possible in Semester 2 with social distancing measures remaining in place. See Figure 32.

Figure 32: Student Method of Contact for LSA



Berwick campus:

Writing Space normally runs daily for two hours (excluding Fridays). All three Berwick LSAs work in the Writing Space alongside liaison librarians to create a one-stop space for assistance with academic skills and research. This not only provides a good model for collaborative practice but means that it is very easy for LSAs and librarians to refer students to each other as necessary. The Berwick LSAs promoted Writing Space strongly during FedReady and it can be seen that this was successful in the growth in numbers in the first few weeks of semester. On the last day Writing Space was open, we observed thirty students in the room over the two-hour period.

Gippsland:

Writing Space at Gippsland was scheduled to run daily for four hours (excluding Fridays) throughout semester, staffed by the two LSAs on campus. It ran online from April in Semester 1 due to the need for LSAs to self-isolate early due to COVID-19.

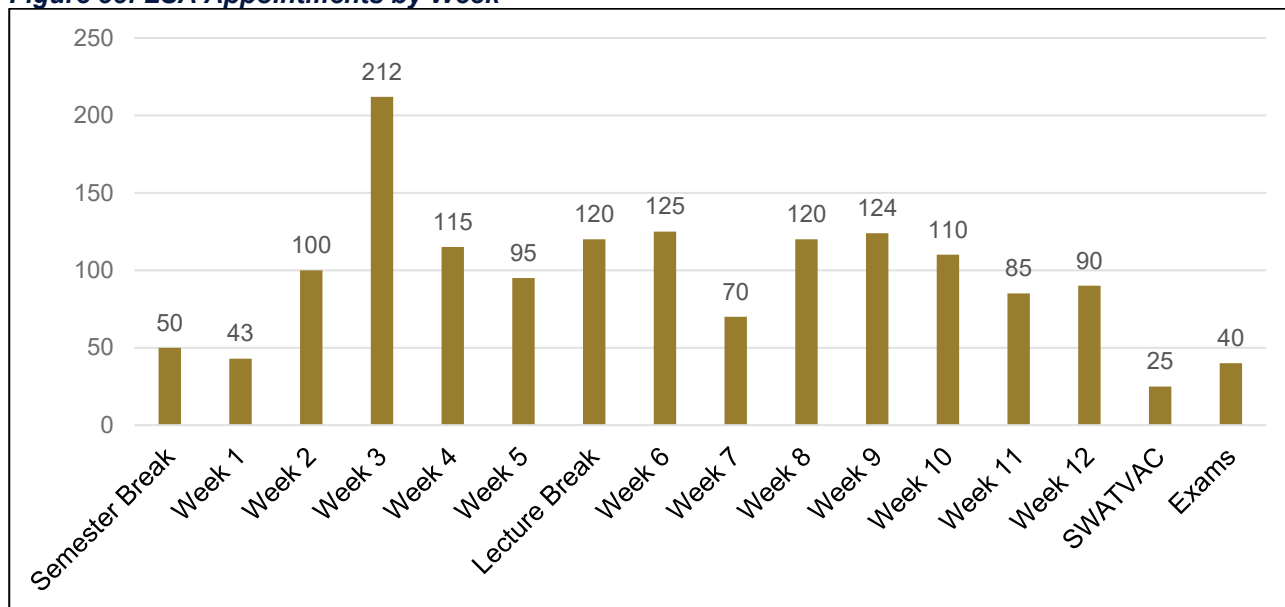
Mt Helen:

Writing Space at Mt Helen normally runs daily for four hours (excluding Fridays) throughout semester and is staffed by the three LSAs on campus. In Semester 1, it was run on an ad hoc basis due to low numbers until the University shifted to online operations.

Number of LSA Appointments per Week

It is important to note that in Week 4, the LSAs started working in an online capacity. This contributed to the closure of the Writing Space across campuses and therefore prevented students from accessing the service. Additionally, in previous years there has been another spike in appointments between Weeks 8 and 11 because of the due dates of major assignments. However, this is not evident from this semester of data. The reason for this could be attributed to student appointments taking longer in an online setting and therefore less LSA availability. In addition, the closure of the Writing Space meant that students were unable to attain LSA assistance without appointments. **Figure 33** showcases the demand for LSA support as reflected in appointment bookings across the semester (campuses combined). It is clear that Week 3 was significantly busier than other weeks. This could be attributed to the first assessment deadlines of a number of units, particularly NURBN1001.

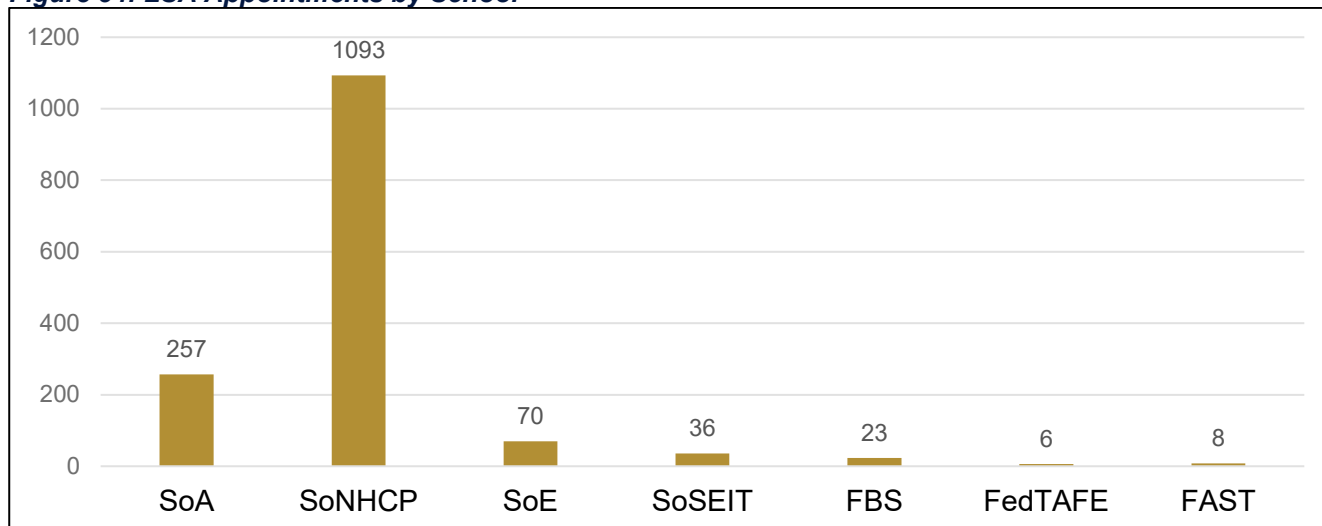
Figure 33: LSA Appointments by Week



Program representation in LSA consultations

As shown in **Figure 34**, the majority of students who accessed support directly from LSAs were from the School of Nursing & Healthcare Professions, and mainly nursing (1093 consultations). These made up 70% of total LSA consultations. The remainder were from Arts (257 consultations), Education (70), Science and Engineering, (36), Business (23), the FAST program (6), and FedTAFE (8 consultations).

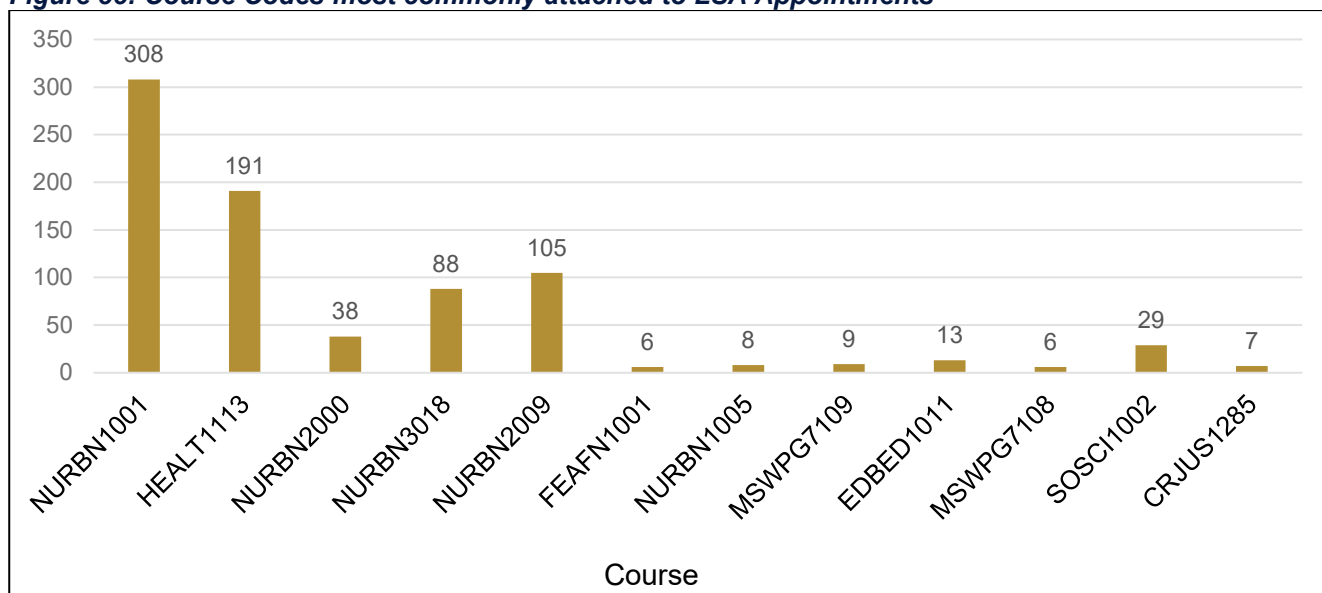
Figure 34: LSA Appointments by School



Nursing students are a large cohort. Many nursing students are either coming to university for the first time or returning to study after a long absence. They often lack confidence and need support to develop academic skills. This can be seen in the high number of consultations in particular for two first year courses: 308 consultations for NURBN1001 (which introduces students to legal and ethical principles and was challenging for many students) and 191 consultations for HEALT1113, a communications subject. Other nursing subjects which had a high number of consultations were NURBN2009 (105 consultations) and NURBN3018 (88 consultations).

Figure 35 below shows the course codes most commonly attached to LSA appointments across all campuses. As expected, nursing makes up a significant proportion of students seen by LSAs.

Figure 35: Course Codes most commonly attached to LSA Appointments



Student demographics

Figure 36 shows in Semester 1 in 2020, a total of 1557 student consultations took place. These numbers are significantly higher than last year Semester 1 in 2019 wherein the total number of consultations was 887.

Figure 36: New Students vs Continuing Students for LSA Consultations

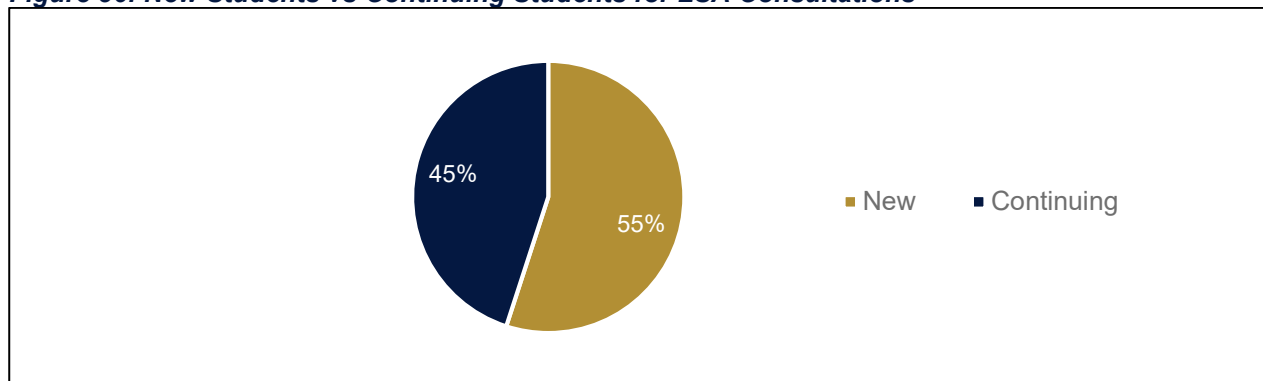
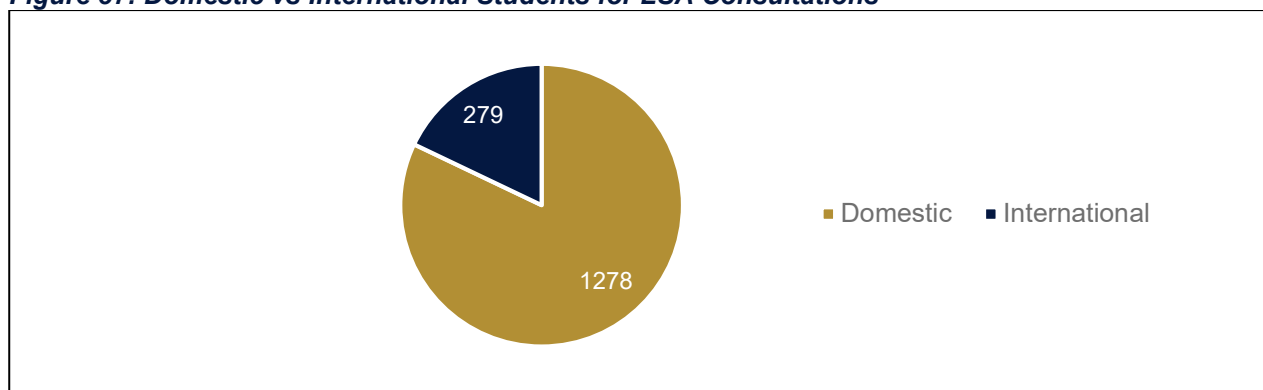


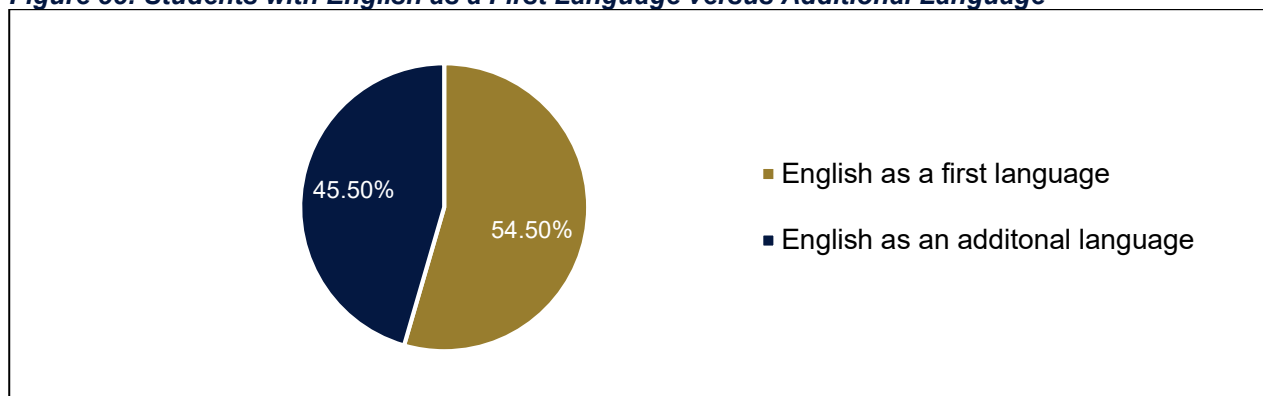
Figure 37 shows of 1557 consultations, 82% were with domestic students while international students made up 18% of consultations.

Figure 37: Domestic vs International Students for LSA Consultations



As per Figure 38, 54.5% LSA consultations were with students who speak English as a first language (EFL) and 45.5 % LSA consultations were with students who speak English as an additional language (EAL).

Figure 38: Students with English as a First Language versus Additional Language



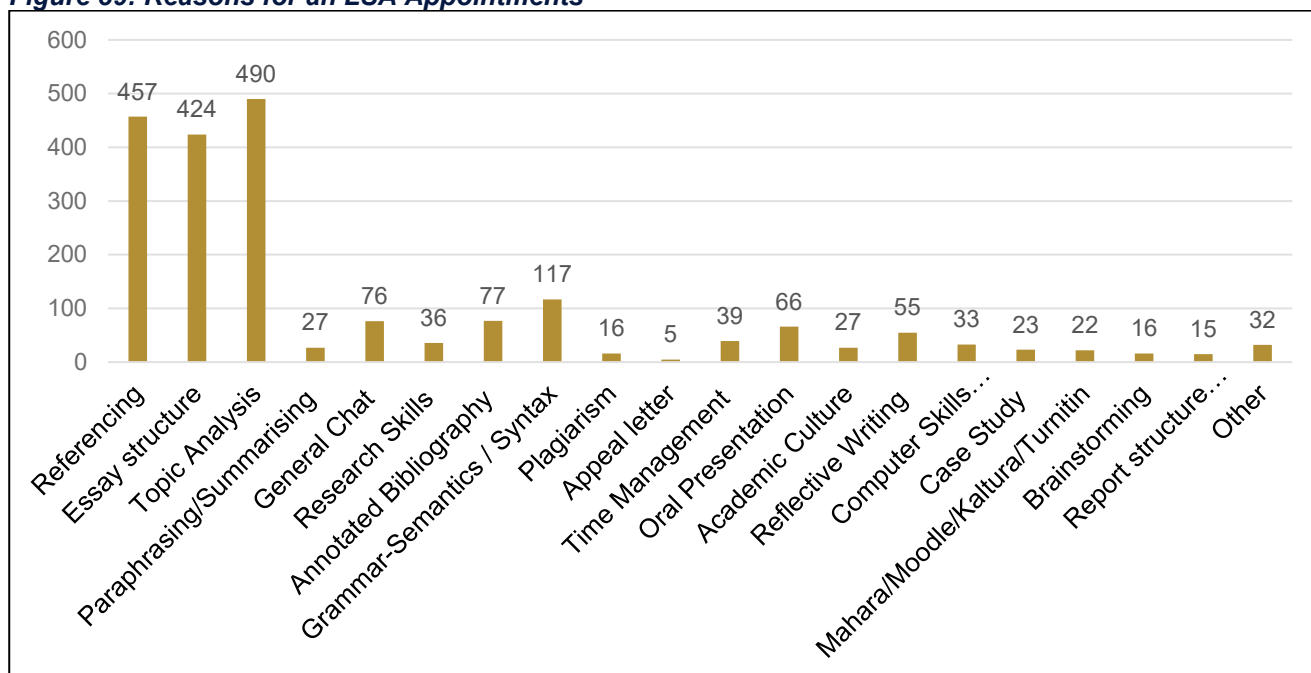
These statistics can be explained by the fact that a significant number of domestic students at Federation University do not speak English as a first language. It is harder for us to determine this semester which campus these students attend as we are not able to compare campuses as we did in the last report (Semester 2, 2019). Due to COVID-19, the majority of our appointments this semester were online and our database does not currently record campus details for online students (although in the future, this will be incorporated as we are changing our record keeping system). Of the three campuses, **Berwick has the highest number of students for whom English is an additional language (near 40%)**, as it draws on the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne, a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) area. LSAs working at the Mt Helen campus have also noticed increasing diversity amongst their domestic student cohort, particularly students who live in the Wyndham region (western area of Melbourne) or who have recently moved to Ballarat.

The EAL needs of domestic students and international students need to be given equal consideration by the university. The English ability of domestic CALD students can range widely. They may be Australian born and/or schooled, fully bi-lingual and with writing of a similar standard to native English speakers, or adult migrants or students with a refugee background whose spoken and written English needs significant development. The language issues for refugee background students, in particular, are complex and are also often linked to low digital literacy. It is therefore imperative that the English Language Support Service continues to meet the language needs of domestic students.

Reasons for LSA Appointments

Figure 39 shows the various reasons student sought out LSA support in Semester 1, 2020. The main reasons for consultations reflect particular units that students sought assistance for, namely NURBN1001 and HEALT1113. For many first-year students, this was their first time writing an essay at university level and for this reason, essay structure, referencing and topic analysis were the most common reasons for appointments.

Figure 39: Reasons for an LSA Appointments



Qualitative student feedback:

- *I sought advice to know if I was on the right track with my assignments and if there was something the learning advisor could see in the criteria that I had not considered to put into my work and also to ensure all my work met university standards and to know if my work met all the marking criteria of the class to ensure I achieved the maximum potential of marks. Sometimes the course descriptor and questions were confusing so it was good to have a sound board to break down the question with me. It was super helpful.*
- *I'm a first year uni student and its been a while since I studied. I needed help in essay writing and to get my confidence back.*
- *I've been out of uni for a while and especially with corona virus hitting, I felt it necessary to ensure my assessments were well informed and well written.*
- *Help to manage study load once the delivery had been changed, and help with an assignment”.*

Embedded Academic Literacy - FedReady February 2020

The LSA team continued its responsibility for coordination of FedReady on-campus and online with administrative support from Student Academic Leaders and Program Coordinators in the SASS team. The FedReady semester report is published as a separate document and available from CLIPP.

Embedded Academic Literacy - Face-to-Face Workshops

LSA workshops were predominantly initiated on the basis of LSA relationship-building with academic staff. They were also instigated by lecturers who identified a need among their student cohort based on the quality of assignment submissions in previous semesters. The LSA team tried to ensure parity across campuses as much as possible so that all students enrolled in the same course received the same level of support. **Table 5** details the workshops conducted which also include Academic Writing Circles run by the LSA team throughout semester at all three campuses for postgraduate students undertaking MA and PhD programs. It is important to underscore that the campus-by-campus breakdown is included here only to Week 4, because after that workshops were shifted online as a result of the university's response to coronavirus.

Table 5: LSA Face to Face Workshops in Semester 1 by Campus

| Face to Face Workshops in Semester 1 (Break – Week 4) by Campus | | | |
|---|---------|-----------|----------|
| | Berwick | Gippsland | Mt Helen |
| Break – Week 4 | 30 | 17 | 40 |

The impact of the changes in response to corona virus on LSA workshop activity is perhaps most notable in the context of activity at Berwick campus, where LSAs were to be involved *weekly* throughout semester in the newly established Nursing 'Block Model', wherein LSAs would have had the opportunity to engage with second and third year nursing students in a regular and sustained capacity. See Table 6.0.

Table 6: LSA face to Face Workshops in Semester 1 by Discipline

| Breakdown Workshops in Semester 1 (Break – Week 4) by Discipline | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|-----|--------|--------------|-------------------------|----------|-----|
| | Nursing | SoA | SoSEIT | Arts Academy | Academic Writing Circle | Fed TAFE | SoE |
| Number of Workshops | 41 | 17 | 17 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 |

After Week 4, LSAs worked to deliver online workshops and online resources for:

- the **Diploma** course HLT54115
- the **Associate Degree** course EDTAS2001
- for **Degree** courses ENGIN1001; NURBN1001; BAXDC1002 and SOSCI1002 at undergraduate level
- and for **Masters** courses MSWPG7211 and MSPG7210

In addition, LSAs contributed five videos, which were uploaded to the Federation Business School Resources for Online teaching Moodle, part of the Right Click Program, a collaboration between LSAs, the Library and FBS.

LSAs also ran two Adobe Connect sessions for Bairnsdale Hub; an Adobe Connect session for prospective students and families; and an Adobe Connect Session for international students on exam preparation.

Academic Writing Circles

In Semester 1, Academic Writing Circles ran fortnightly throughout semester at Berwick and Mt Helen campuses attracting participation from HDR students as well as from staff undertaking HDR programs. Meanwhile, MA and PhD students at Gippsland continued to be supported one-to-one by the LSA team.

For the first time in 2020, a more formal relationship between LSAs and the HDR Skills Development Program was initiated. This relationship was most notably exemplified by the joint planning of the inaugural ‘Thesis Writing Bootcamp’, slated to be held at Berwick Campus over three days (24th – 26th June), before the response to coronavirus unfortunately required the bootcamp’s indefinite postponement.

Nonetheless, even after staff were moved to work from home, Academic Writing Circles were still relatively well attended in the online setting. At Berwick, nine students enrolled, with an average of three students attending the workshop each fortnight. At Mt Helen, eleven students enrolled, with an average of six students attending each fortnight.

Staff feedback on LSA work with postgraduate students:

Staff feedback:

- [My HDR students LOVED the information you provided. I can see an improvement in some of the students’ writing”](#)

- I am so excited about all of these resources and to learn that there are three doctoral LSAs...there hasn't been anything that I've seen which lets HDR supervisors know about this LSA support, and the amazing resources you've just sent me...Having the sort of resources that you have just provided is golden for me!

LSA staff support - Curriculum development

In addition to working closely with other CLIPP staff, LSAs develop independent relationships with academic staff. In Semester 1, the LSA team collaborated with academics (see Table 7) to develop curriculum, review assessment tasks and marking guides and to create Moodle resources.

Table 7: Courses or Programs that LSA's were involved in at the Curriculum Level

| Courses or programs at curriculum level in Semester 1 with LSA Participation: | |
|---|------------------------|
| Program/Course | Level of involvement |
| SOSCI1002 | Curriculum development |
| BAXDC1012 | Curriculum development |
| NURBN1001 | Curriculum development |
| NURBN2000 | Curriculum development |
| MSWPG7109 | Curriculum development |

LSA Recommendations

Increased LSA availability:

- Arising from the student feedback are strong themes around lack of LSA availability during peak times this semester. This is likely a particular condition of the online environment, and can be connected to three main contributors:
 - That the process of reading and responding to student work, and meeting with students virtually, tends to take longer than when done face-to-face.
 - That the closure of writing spaces has placed additional pressure on LSA availability given that LSAs can see fewer students at a time (and tend, on the whole, to meet with students individually rather than in groups).
 - That the shift to online study has conspired to add to the stress of our most vulnerable students (for example, students with low academic literacy and students from EAL backgrounds).

EAL student needs:

- As in previous semesters, the data shows that close to half of all students who accessed LSA services in Semester 1 were from EAL backgrounds. The complex needs of these students – a large majority

of whom are *not international students*, but domestic – should be seriously addressed by the university in conjunction with the LSA team moving forward.

Support for Nursing students:

- The overwhelming prevalence of nursing student usage of LSA services illustrates the ongoing need for LSA involvement and support of this cohort. This should be undertaken via LSA involvement in:
 - in curriculum development and support with nursing academic staff
 - in the delivery of embedded academic skills workshops in nursing courses
 - engaging with nursing students in writing spaces and via group and one-to-one appointments.

FedReady

Program Summary

FedReady has been helping students transition to the tertiary academic environment since 2012. In Semester 1, 2020 the program ran at Berwick, Gippsland and Mount Helen campuses, as well as Online (targeting online, flexi and Wimmera campus students).

Of important note:

- In Semester 1, there were 858 registrants across all campuses and online. Despite a dramatic decline by 59% in on-campus registrations compared to Semester 1 2019, FedReady Online had a 226% increase in registrations, while Federation University continuing-student registrations increased by 19%.
- Participation rates across both versions of FedReady reflected completion rates of assessment tasks have increased this year in both programs although there was a consistent decline in participation throughout the duration of program delivery. This is mainly due to the completion of tasks being included in the timetables, rather than as non-compulsory tasks.
- Program evaluation indicated students' satisfaction with the content. Pre- and post-surveys for FedReady On-campus depicted improved self-efficacy related to academic writing and research skills especially: 'I recommend FedReady because I was very nervous before starting uni and didn't know what to expect. It was a good opportunity for me to meet people in my course and I learnt heaps that I didn't know already. If I didn't attend FedReady I would not be prepared like I am now'

Recommendations

These recommendations relate to immediate mid-year 2020 adjustments due to COVID19 as well as longer term for 2021:

- Improving program promotion strategies for effective Online enrolment, taking into account there being no FedReady on-campus mid-year
- Increasing participation of FedReady Online mid-year to include automatic enrolment of all commencing students with an 'opt-out' as supported by the Schools

- Increasing participation and retention by contacting registrants with a reminder email just prior to FedReady commencement;
- Improve feedback response rates, especially in FedReady Online, through regular prompts from the tutors and LSAs
- Planning for longer-term evaluation of FedReady to determine if student perceptions of preparedness have a tangible effect on student success post-FedReady

Studiosity Report: Semester 1, 2020

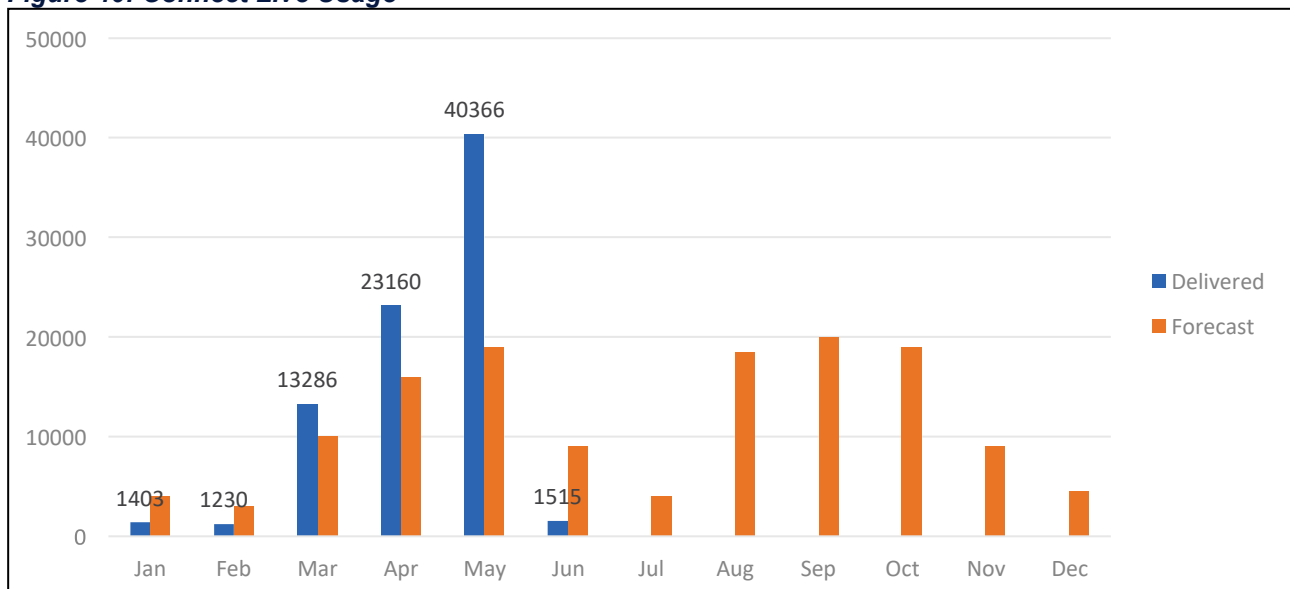
Summary

The shift to online learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant overall increase in usage of the Studiosity service by students at Federation University.

This includes:

- Studiosity tutors responded to 3,153 requests for support predominately from undergraduate students in Semester 1. This figure is just shy of the entire service usage for all of 2019. Of these requests, 91% sought Writing Feedback (n=2,881). The remainder engaged with Connect Live (n=272), in which students communicate with a tutor via an online typed chat session.
- The number of students seeking Connect Live (2020 n=272) was more than double the same period last year (2019 n=128), an increase made more significant by the fact that this method of support has been in steady decline since 2017. Figure 40 illustrates the steep monthly increase in service usage over Semester 1, 2020 coinciding with the COVID-19 shutdown and the shift to online learning.

Figure 40: Connect Live Usage



- Students in the Health disciplines were the biggest users of both kinds of Studiosity service modes, as shown in Figures 2 and 3 below. Of the students who sought writing feedback, 65.3% were enrolled in programs from the School of Health and Life Sciences (7.7%) or the School of Nursing and

Healthcare Professions (57.6%) combined. Students enrolled in School of Arts programs were the next largest cohort seeking support (12.5%), followed by the School of Education (9.7%).

- Essay Writing and Referencing were the most frequently sought subject areas, and Chemistry (Bridging) ranked third. There is a clear need from students for feedback on their written tasks, a phenomenon that is also reflected in data from Learning Skills Advisors. Students for whom English is a second language, and mature-age students who have not received guidance on their written expression since secondary school, repeatedly seek high levels of reassurance and guidance on their academic language.
- Most students who accessed Studiosity in Semester 1 were 1st year undergraduates, with a greater proportion being 1st year students using the Connect Live service. Second and third-year students are also well-represented in the Writing Feedback data.
- Student experience is measured through an online survey, delivered via email after the engagement. User satisfaction with Studiosity is high, with 96% of respondents being either 'extremely satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with the help provided by Studiosity.

Recommendations

It is evident, from service usage data and feedback from students, that the Studiosity service is beneficial. A deeper exploration of the high level of need amongst students for feedback on their written expression may reveal potential areas for resource development to address the specific needs of our diverse cohort. In Semester 2 it is recommended:

- To continue to develop a process of supporting students who are identified by Studiosity as being at-risk, while ensuring student privacy.
- Seek clarification/expansion of area/s in which support is requested, e.g., define parts of 'Essay Writing' to distil more meaningful data about the reasons for seeking help.
- Examine the potential of determining how students found out about Studiosity, as a measure of the effectiveness of University promotion

End of Report

Tables and Figures Index

| REPORT SECTION | TABLE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---------|---|
| Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Program | Table 1 | PASS Course Offerings (Based on Campus) |
| | Table 2 | PASS Course Distribution across Schools for 2020 (Semester 1) |
| Mentor Program | Table 3 | Number of Team Leaders per Campus |
| | Table 4 | Average Mentor Group Size |
| Learning Skills Advisors (LSAs) | Table 5 | LSA Face to Face Workshops in Semester 1 by Campus |
| | Table 6 | LSA face to Face Workshops in Semester 1 by Discipline |
| | Table 7 | Courses or Programs that LSA's were Involved in at the Curriculum Level |

| REPORT SECTION | FIGURE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|-----------|---|
| Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Program | Figure 1 | Comparison of PASS Positions per Campus for Semester 1 2019 & Semester 2 2020 |
| | Figure 2 | Weekly Engagement Comparison by Semester (excluding SWOTVAC) |
| | Figure 3 | Weekly Attendance Comparison by Semester (including SWOTVAC) |
| | Figure 4 | Percentage of Enrolled Students Who Engaged with PASS (includes SWOTVAC and Semester Break) |
| | Figure 5 | Total Number of Sessions Attended (excluding SWOTVAC) |
| | Figure 6 | Domestic vs International Student Attendance |
| | Figure 7 | Overall Mid-Semester Break Engagement |
| | Figure 8 | Engagement per Campus |
| | Figure 9 | Breakdown of All the Ways Students Heard About PASS |
| | Figure 10 | Ranking Statements Aligned to PASS Participation |
| | Figure 11 | Reasons for Not Attending PASS |
| | Figure 12 | Total PASS Attendees for SWOTVAC |
| | Figure 13 | SWOTVAC Overall Attendance by Course/Campus |
| | Figure 14 | SWOTVAC Feedback = Which of the Following Statements Apply To You After Attending SWOTVAC? |
| | Figure 15 | SWOTVAC Feedback - Which SWOTVAC Activity Was Most Important? |
| Mentor Program | Figure 16 | Comparison of 2019 and 2020 Interactions with the Mentor Program (Semester 1 by Weekly Basis) |
| | Figure 17 | Number of Interactions with the Mentor Program by School |
| | Figure 18 | Mentor Feedback - My Mentor was Knowledgeable about the Campus and Associated Services |

| REPORT SECTION | FIGURE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Mentor Program (continued) | Figure 19 | Mentor Feedback - My Mentor Showed a Genuine Interest in Helping Me |
| | Figure 20 | Figure 20: Mentor Feedback - My Mentor made sufficient contact with me |
| | Figure 21 | International Postgraduate Program Interactions by Week |
| Academic Skills and Knowledge Program (ASK) | Figure 22 | Ask Enquires by Week 2018-2020 |
| | Figure 23 | ASK Enquiries by Campus 2018 -2020 |
| | Figure 24 | ASK Desk Contact Modes 2018-2020 |
| | Figure 25 | Queries Answered, Not Answered or Referred 2018 -2020 |
| | Figure 26 | Type of ASK Assistance Given – All Campuses |
| | Figure 27 | Top Nine Types of ASK Assistance Given 2018 – 2020 |
| | Figure 28 | ASK Feedback Q1- <i>The ASK Desk's Transition to 100% Online has had no Impact on the Quality of our Service</i> |
| | Figure 29 | ASK Feedback Q2 = <i>The Range of Online Communication Channels to Access the ASK Desk has Been Sufficient for all Students, e.g. Email, Phone, ASK Chat, SAL Booking System, Online Transition Discussion Forum, Workshops</i> |
| | Figure 30 | ASK Feedback Q5 – <i>I Felt Well Supported by SASS Staff in My Role as a Student Academic Leaders (SAL).</i> |
| | Figure 31 | LSA Appointments per Campus by Appointment Type |
| | Figure 32 | Student Method of Contact for LSA |
| | Figure 33 | LSA Appointments by Week |
| | Figure 34 | LSA Appointments by School |
| | Figure 35 | Course Codes most commonly attached to LSA Appointments |
| | Figure 36 | New Students vs Continuing Students for LSA Consultations |
| | Figure 37 | Domestic vs International Students for LSA Consultations |
| | Figure 38 | Students with English as a First Language versus Additional Language |
| Figure 39 | Reasons for an LSA Appointments | |
| Figure 40 | Connect Live Usage | |

End Document