



Student Council
UNESC

UNE Student Council
Annual Report on the Student SSAF Survey
August 2023

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2023 Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) Survey Report



Introduction

This report has been prepared by the UNE Student Council (UNESC) in conjunction with UNE Education Quality Directorate (EQD) for presentation to the UNE SSAF Committee (SSAFC).

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations to the UNE SSAF Committee on the expenditure of SSAF funds, based on the results of the 2023 SSAF Survey, including students feedback therein.

Background

SSAF (Student Services and Amenities Fee) is charged to university students for services and amenities of a non-academic nature with guidelines set by the Australian Government Department of Education.

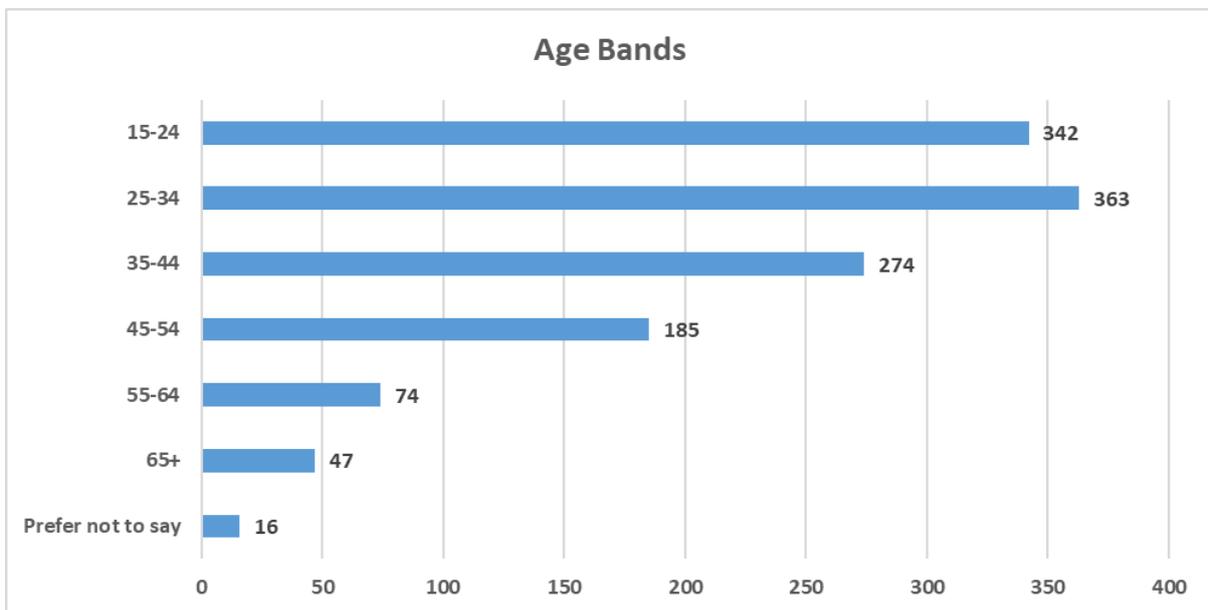
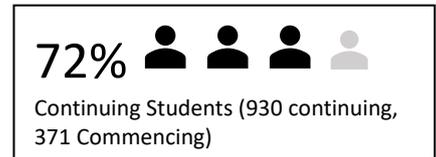
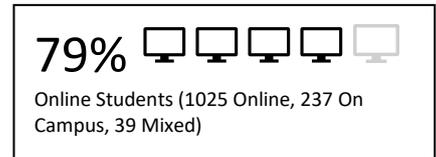
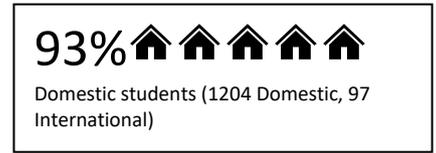
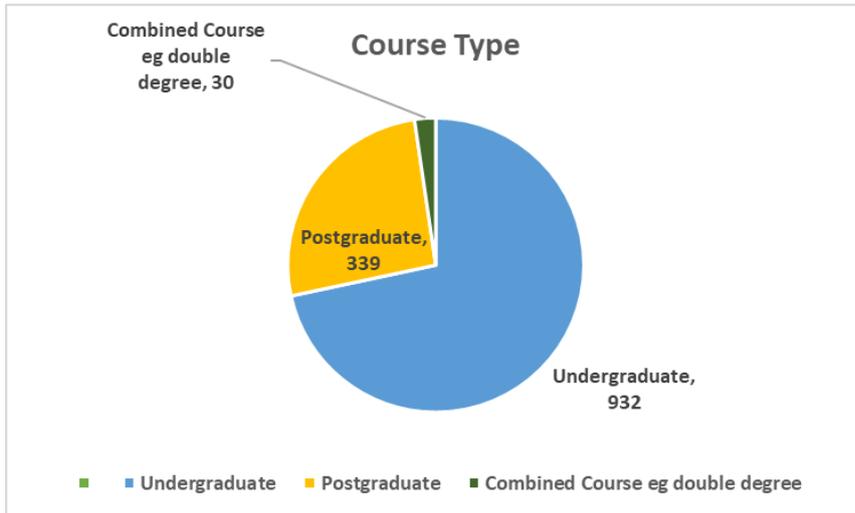
Universities are required by law to provide students with access to several programs and services that are funded by SSAF, such as employment and career advice, counselling and support services, orientation programs, financial advice, and recreational and food services.

In June 2023, UNE students received an invitation from the Student Consultative Committee (SCC) to respond to a survey about the use of the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). The survey was designed to seek student opinion in relation to how UNE currently manages and administers SSAF funding and to understand what students feel should be considered in future for the allocation of SSAF funding at UNE.

Student Response Demographic

In 2023, the UNESC SSAF Survey received 1,301 responses from students, accounting for approximately 6% of the UNE student cohort. This has increased since 2022 (1,031 responses), however decreased since 2021 (1,733 responses).

Students were asked to provide basic demographic information to help identify different needs for different cohorts. As displayed below, the responses came from a broad cross-section of students reflective of the diverse cohorts of UNE.



Results

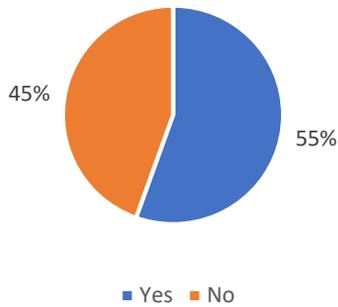
The results of the 2023 Survey are divided across four main areas: Promotion and Awareness, Online Students, SSAF Focus Areas, and Use of Services.

Promotion and Awareness

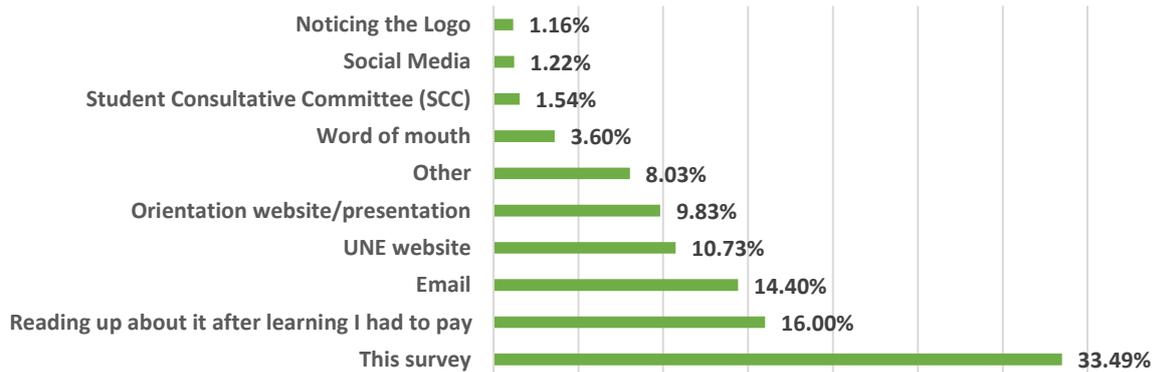
Despite a low survey response rate, the completed responses overall indicated that many students continue to be unaware of what their SSAF payments are used for, and of the services available to them through SSAF spending.

45% of respondents indicated that, before taking the survey, they were unaware of what SSAF is and how it is used. This is deeply concerning and indicates there is still much work to be done by UNE and the SSAFC on the promotion and elucidation of SSAF services

Were you aware of what SSAF is and how it is used before this survey?



How did you become aware of SSAF services?



Online Students

The survey asked students to rate on a scale of 1-5 the value for money they feel they get from their SSAF contributions. The ratings are shown in the table below. Given that 79% of survey respondents study online, these results highlight the belief of online student that SSAF provides little or no value to their UNE online experience, or that the majority of SSAF money is spent on services and supports that only benefit on-campus students. The University needs to ensure that SSAF is more properly promoted to, and targeted towards, to its largest student cohort, those studying online. This should be undertaken as a matter of urgency if online students should continue to pay an equivalent fee to on-campus students yet receive fewer benefits for the same cost.

Ranking	%	No. Students
1 – Zero value	15%	183
2 – Very little value	24%	287
3 – Some value	33%	400
4 – Good value	23%	272
5 – Exceptional value	5%	57

Focus Areas

From the 19 Government defined SSAF categories, students were asked to nominate at least 1 and up to 5 areas for their preference for SSAF expenditure.

The top response, with nearly 15% of students selecting as one of their top 5 preferences, was ‘Promoting the health or welfare of students’.

Other categories which ranked highly were ‘Helping students obtain employment or advice on careers’ (12.61%), ‘Helping students develop skills for study by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled’ (10.58%) and ‘Helping students with their financial affairs’ (8.39%).

The full table is provided below:

Government Category	%	Number of students
Promoting the health or welfare of students	14.38%	806
Helping students obtain employment or advice on careers	12.61%	707
Helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled	10.58%	593
Helping students with their financial affairs	8.39%	470
Helping students secure accommodation	7.17%	402
Advocating students' interests in matters arising from under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	5.99%	336
Providing libraries and reading rooms (other than those provided for academic purposes) for students	5.57%	312
Providing legal services to students	5.53%	310
Caring for children of students	5.07%	284
Providing food or drink to students on campus of the higher education provider	4.71%	264
Giving students information to help them in their orientation	4.35%	244
Helping meet the specific needs of overseas students relating to their welfare, accommodation and employment	3.34%	187
Advising on matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	3.30%	185
Supporting a sporting or other recreational activity by students	2.93%	164
Supporting the administration of a club most of whose members are students	2.34%	131
Supporting an artistic activity by students	1.28%	72
Helping students obtain insurance against personal accidents	1.03%	58
Supporting the production and dissemination to students of media whose content is provided by students	0.82%	46
Supporting debating by students	0.61%	34

Use of Services

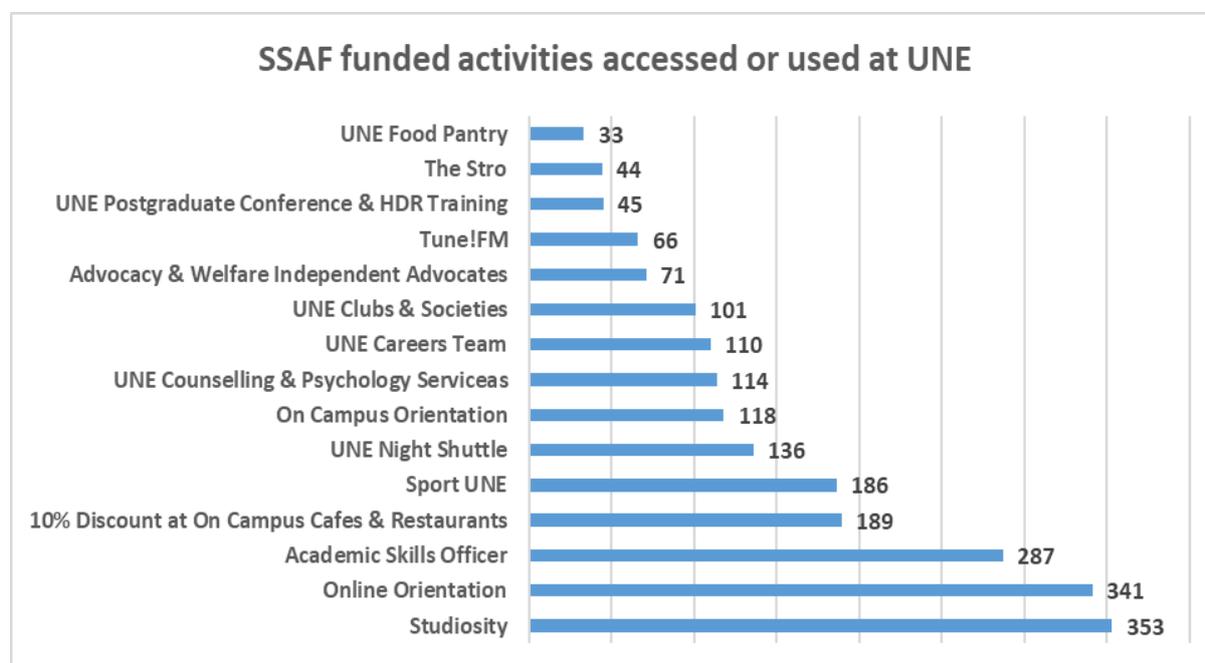
Students were provided with a list of activities UNE offers under the SSAF program, and were asked to select each of the services they had accessed or used at UNE. For each service they used, they were asked to rate their overall satisfaction on a Likert scale of 1 to 5:

- 5 – Very satisfied
- 4 – Somewhat satisfied
- 3 – Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 2 – Somewhat satisfied
- 1 – Very dissatisfied

Those students who accessed the services funded by SSAF have given them a very high rating, with nearly two-thirds of users either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied

The survey shows that those students who accessed the services that UNE currently offer under SSAF were reasonably satisfied with the support they received. The uptake of SSAF services by students overall, however, was relatively low. In alignment with recommendation 1 below, the University needs to do more to ensure that all students have access to the services and support on offer and that all are aware of what they can get and how they can access the support they need.

The three highest priorities which students selected included accessing Studiosity (16.09%), Online Orientation (15.54%) and support by the Academic Skills Officer (13.08%).



Other options were put forward as potential targets for SSAF expenditure. The number of students who selected each option is below, with the greatest response being providing discounts for all students to purchase textbooks and study material from the UNE Bookshop (15.18%) followed closely by free postage from the UNE bookstore (12.50%).

Preference for other options for SSAF Expenditure	%	Number of students
Discounts for all students to purchase textbooks & study material from UNE bookshop	15.18%	747
Free postage with books purchased from UNE bookshop	12.50%	615
Expand mental health services - online and on-campus support	10.67%	525
Coffee or transport vouchers to online students for use in local area	10.14%	495
Assistance with accommodation for intensive schools	9.57%	471
Free postage with books borrowed from UNE Library	8.56%	421
Parking vouchers for intensive schools	8.09%	398
Assistance with accommodation for students travelling for placements	7.74%	381
Shuttle and feed services extended to weekends over intensive schools	5.45%	268
Providing snacks to students attending intensive schools	5.42%	267
Investment in services at regional study centres	3.67%	181
Providing snacks to students sitting exams	3.01%	148

Themes and Recommendations

1. Promotion and Transparency

Evidently, there has been little change in the last 12 months regarding the awareness of SSAF funds and funded services. 46% of respondents indicated that, before taking the survey, they were unaware of what SSAF is and how it is used.

The UNESCO recommends an online information portal that both lists and explains all of the services available under SSAF, how and where to access them, and how fund allocation occurs. We recommend the results and outcomes of the survey and related reports to be communicated to students in plain terms and with comprehensive data. We feel that transparency, particularly with regard to SSAF spending and subsequent survey feedback, is imperative.

The UNESCO is dedicated to ensuring relevant, high quality, readily accessible and equally available support services for all UNE students and aims to increase promotion and awareness of the SSAF through various channels.

2. Online Students

By far the most common theme from the survey short answer responses was the lack of services accessible to online students. An overwhelming majority of comments reflected SSAF perception to be “highly skewed to on campus students”. This is a common theme throughout many of the responses and highlights the continued lack of consideration of, and provision and promotion of SSAF services to online students.

The UNESCO would also like to again stress the importance of ensuring that SSAF helps to benefit UNE’s online cohort, and that these are adequately promoted and easily accessible. Of UNE’s 22,000 students, more than 83% study online. It is imperative that this cohort is more fairly represented in SSAF spending, that funds are used to provide meaningful, relevant benefits.

The UNESCO recommends that the SSAFC make efforts to provide more services to online students, to conduct benchmarking with other universities regarding the services available to online students, and consider a reduction in SSAF fees for online students.

In addition to the promotion proposals above, the UNESCO also recommends that a section of the SSAF information portal to be dedicated to online students, plainly setting out the resources they can access remotely and during intensives.

3. Health and Wellbeing

Among survey responses there was an emphasis for more services targeted towards 'Health and Wellbeing'. The UNESCO would like to reiterate the importance of UNE Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and the UNE Medical Centre in the physical and psychological wellbeing of students. Many responses highlighted the ongoing need for these services.

The UNESCO recommends increased funding to Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) so that it may expand its staffing capabilities and service provision to both on-campus and online students.

4. Intensive Schools

A surprising theme was the experience of on-campus Intensive Periods, and the facilities available. Responses indicate food and accommodation provision to be difficult, and an area many would like to see increased support provided.

The UNESCO recommends the University investigate the services available during intensive periods, and that during these times:

1. Ensure students have access to food and drink facilities, including the Café and Stro, throughout the entirety of Intensive schools.
2. Investigate ways to make accommodation for intensive schools more accessible to students in terms of availability, booking, and costs.
3. Anticipate and provide better supports for students travelling with a family, and/or living with a disability. This is particularly important, given the experiences and feedback received by the UNESCO regarding UNE's repeated lack of supports for those living with disability or limited mobility.
4. Consider extended opening hours for the library.
5. Consider a shuttle bus to/from the airport and train station.

5. Positive Experiences

Finally, many survey responses indicated success with, and ongoing support for, services currently being used. Of note, respondents were particularly thankful for CAPS, the UNE Shuttle Bus, Careers Advice, Oorala services, College JCR funding, and PASS tutoring.

The UNESCO thanks the University for these services, and recommends the ongoing funding, promotion, and expansion of these areas.

Conclusion

There was a marked increase in responses to the 2023 survey, with 270 more than the previous year. This is encouraging as the survey guides the administration of SSAF funds. We strongly encourage students to continue to participate and have their say.

The increase in responses, however, is contrasted with the decline from 1,733 in 2021. The UNESCO considered that this could be attributed to several factors, including the release of the survey leading into the intensive and exam periods, survey fatigue, and the situational changes from 2021 during which more people were studying online due to COVID restrictions.

We further suggest that the reduced response rate may result from a perceived lack of change to SSAF administration, where students who had previously participated are yet to see a meaningful difference. Survey responses for 2023 largely mirror those of 2022 and 2021, and accordingly many of the UNESCO recommendations to the SSAF committee remain the same.

We welcome every opportunity to partner with UNE staff and students. We would like to thank both the Education Quality Directorate (EQD) team and the SSAF Committee for assisting in the creation of this report and providing the means through which students can play an important part and have their voices heard. Most of all, we thank those students who took the time to provide this invaluable feedback on the SSAF and look forward to continuing to engage with you on these important issues.