



Student Council
UNESC

UNE Student Council
2026 Annual Report on the Student SSAF Survey
May 2026

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2026 Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) Survey Report



Introduction

This report has been prepared by the UNE Student Council (UNESC) in conjunction with UNE Office of Strategy Management (OSM) 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 2026 SSAF Survey, including students' feedback therein.

Background

The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) 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.

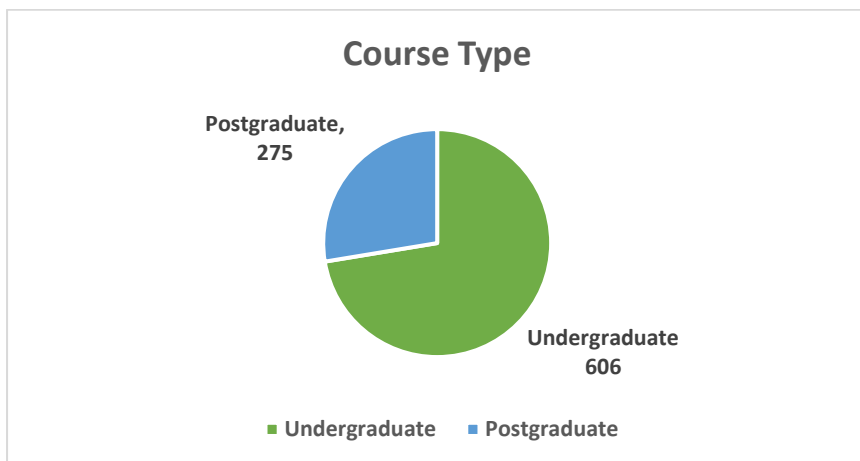
In late April 2026, UNE students received an invitation from the UNESC to respond to a survey about the use of SSAF. The survey was designed to seek student opinion in relation to how UNE currently manages and administers SSAF funding and to understand what students feel should be considered in future for the allocation of SSAF funding at UNE.

New legislation was introduced on 1 January 2025 requiring SSAF funding allocations be made to student led organisation (SLO). Transition arrangements include a SSAF allocation of 10% to an SLO for 2025, and a 20% allocation in 2026. In order to identify consistent trends and enable targeted SSAF funding allocations for 2027 and beyond, the 2026 survey questions have remained the same as 2024 and 2025.

Student Response Demographic

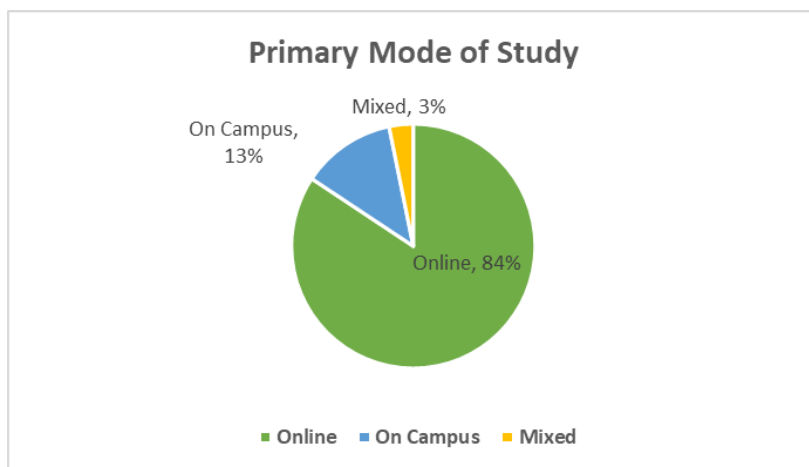
In 2026, the UNESC SSAF Survey received 881 responses (6.3%) from students, which is a similar response rate compared to 2025 (2025: 883; 2024: 957).

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 reflecting the diverse cohorts of UNE. It should be noted that the 2026 survey has had similar response rate from online students compared to 2025 (87% in 2025).



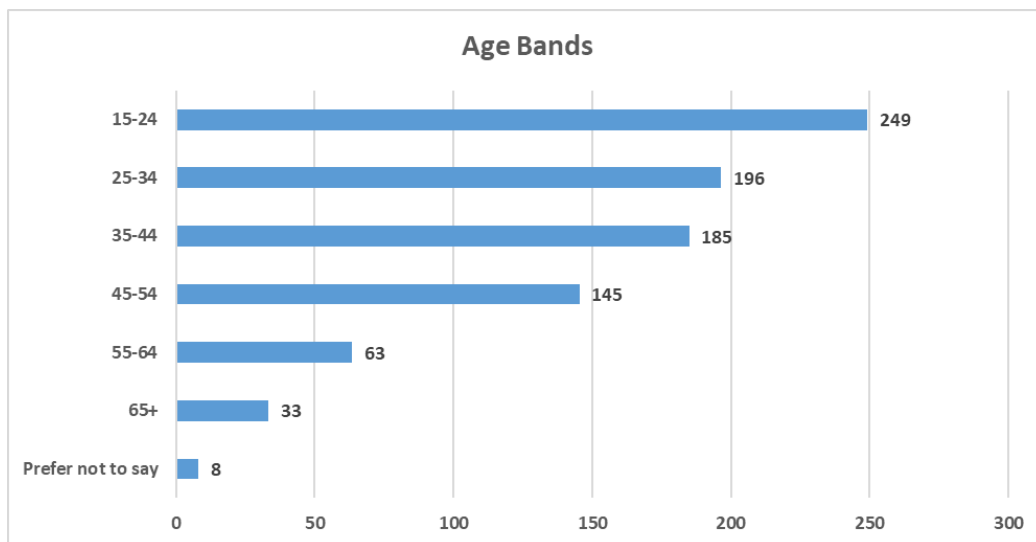
95% 🏠🏠🏠🏠🏠
 Domestic students (839 Domestic, 42 International)

69% 👤👤👤👤
 Continuing UNE Students (651 continuing, 230 Commencing)



26% 👤👤👤👤
 1st Year University (230 1st year University; 651 >1st year University)

5% 👤👤👤👤👤
 Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (5% yes, 92% no, 3% prefer not to say)

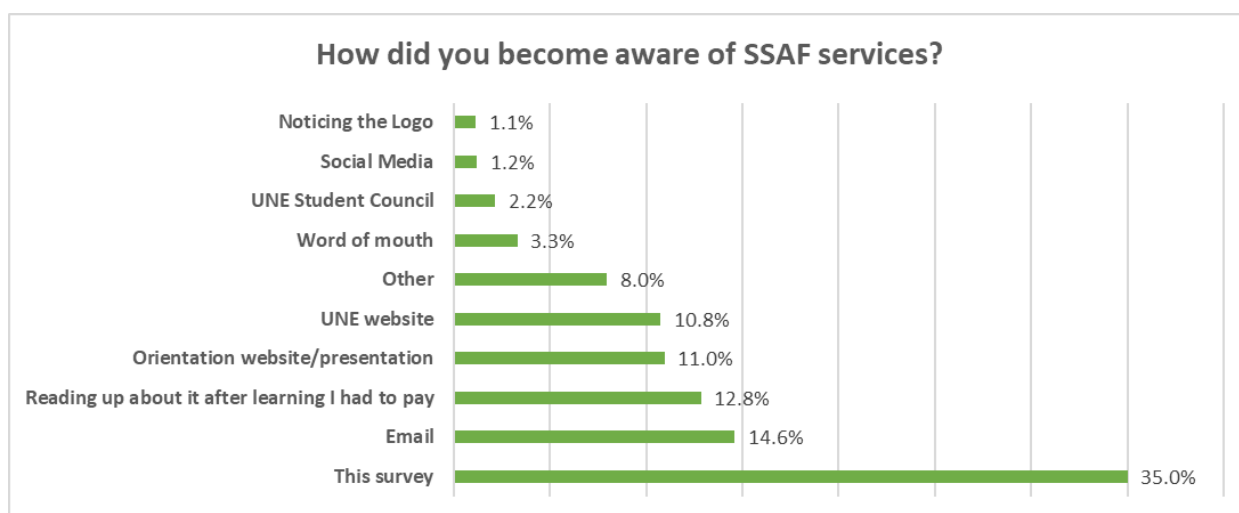
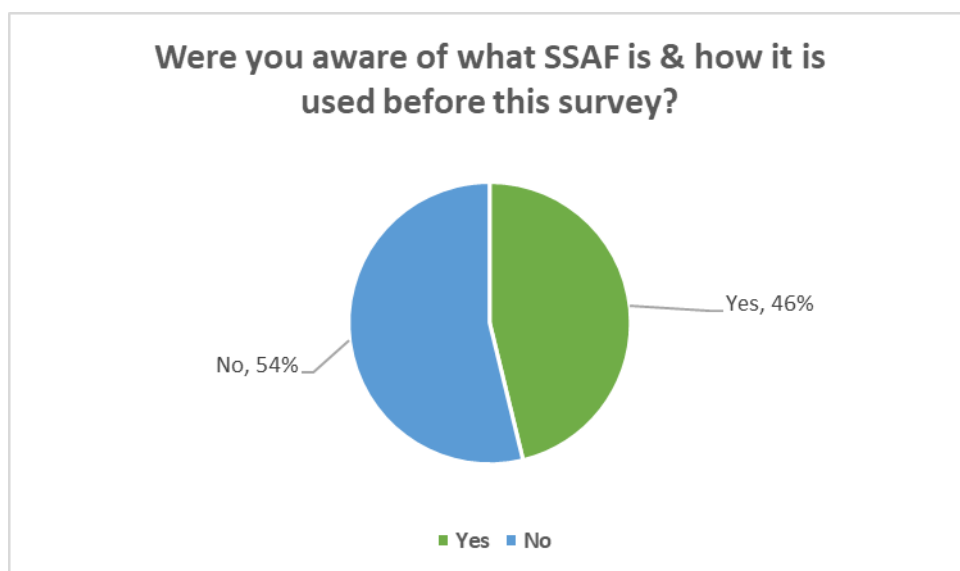


Results

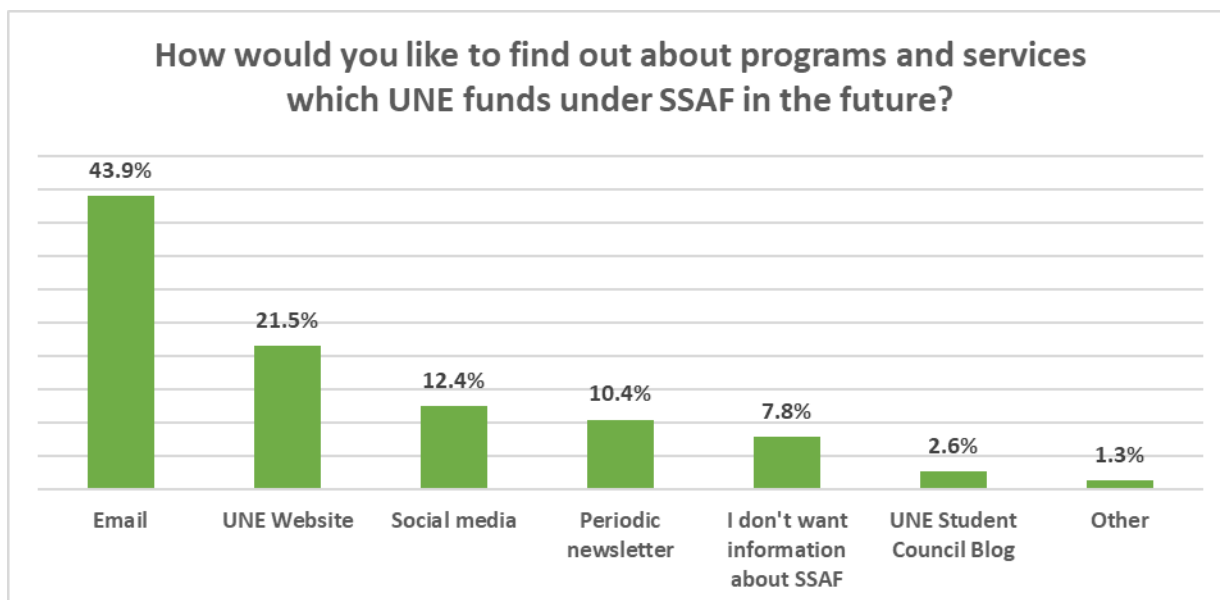
The results of the 2026 Survey are divided across the following main areas: Promotion and Awareness, Online Students, SSAF Focus Areas and Use of Services.

Promotion and Awareness

There continues to be a significant gap with regards to student awareness of SSAF. As in previous years, more than half of respondents indicated that, before taking the survey, they were unaware of what SSAF is and what services are offered. This survey indicates that UNE and UNESCO need to continue promoting awareness of available SSAF services, particularly for online students. There needs to be continued tailoring of services for online students and increasing the visibility of SSAF during orientation, with improved communication via email or MyLearn providing clear, regular information about available services and how to access them is



There was a clear preference for students to receive direct, targeted email communication over other channels, with over forty percent of students indicating that email continues to be the preferred method of finding out about programs and services which UNE funds under SSAF. However, students highlight that they struggle to navigate and process the volume of information via email. Students also questioned whether survey feedback is being actioned, which possibly suggests that promotion efforts may also need to highlight implemented changes.



Representative comments:

- *“... this is the first time I have heard of this program. It needs to be better promoted so students understand what’s available to them.”*
- *“I actually forgot all these services were funded by SSAF...”*
- *“As an online student, it would be good to promote these services more so they can be utilized more.”*
- *“Emails are fine, but they are easily overlooked...amongst higher profile Module content.”*
- *“Further promotion of how online students can access resources would be good.”*
- *“I was not fully aware of what SSAF funded before this survey...”*

Online Students

A significant number of online students again feel that SSAF does not benefit them directly, with many of the services provided by UNE geared towards on-campus students. The University needs to continue towards ensuring that there is a more equitable distribution of SSAF between on-campus and online students.

Students again prioritised the need to access to online mental health services as the number one SSAF service. Online students attending intensives, again highlighted the need for affordable accommodation, however they appreciated improved access to food services and shuttle buses throughout the intensive period. Clearer information regarding SSAF services was again requested to be provided to online students. Other SSAF priorities identified included employment and career advice provided by the careers team, with study skills also providing crucial positive student outcomes.

Representative comments:

- *“...running student online support groups would have been so great.”*
- *“Is it possible to get more activities for online only students?”*
- *“As an online student the benefit of SSAF is limited for me.”*
- *“Promoting services which can be used remotely would help.”*
- *“...many of the services seem more relevant to on-campus students.”*
- *“SSAF funded services could be promoted more clearly to online students...”*
- *“...very little value from these services.”*
- *“...mental health support...an invaluable resource...”*
- *“...more access to tutoring and mentoring support.”*

Value for Money Ranking	%	Total of Respondents
1 – Zero value	18.2%	160
2 – Very little value	21.8%	193
3 – Some value	30.6%	270
4 – Good value	22.4%	197
5 – Exceptional value	7.0%	61

Focus Areas

Based on the survey results, students were asked to choose up to five of the 19 Government defined SSAF categories, highlighting their preferences for SSAF funding. Again, health, welfare, employment support and study skills, as shown in the following table, were identified as the main priorities:

Government Category	%	Number of students
Promoting the health or welfare of students	13.38%	544
Helping students obtain employment or advice on careers	12.36%	502
Helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled	12.31%	500
Helping students with their financial affairs	8.56%	348
Advocating students' interests in matters arising from under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	6.22%	253
Helping students secure accommodation	6.35%	258
Giving students information to help them in their orientation	6.57%	267
Providing libraries and reading rooms (other than those provided for academic purposes) for students	5.98%	243
Providing legal services to students	4.60%	187
Providing food or drink to students on campus of the higher education provider	4.90%	199
Caring for children of students	3.51%	143
Advising on matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	3.86%	157
Helping meet the specific needs of overseas students relating to their welfare, accommodation and employment	2.58%	105
Supporting a sporting or other recreational activity by students	2.75%	112
Supporting the administration of a club most of whose members are students	2.19%	89
Supporting an artistic activity by students	1.32%	54
Helping students obtain insurance against personal accidents	1.08%	44
Supporting the production and dissemination to students of media whose content is provided by students	0.78%	32
Supporting debating by students	0.69%	28
Total	100.00%	4,064

Use of Services

The survey shows that nearly two-thirds of students that accessed services funded by SSAF at UNE were either somewhat or very satisfied with the use of services, whilst just under 10% were dissatisfied.

Service Satisfaction	%	Number of students
Very satisfied	30.0%	264
Somewhat satisfied	29.9%	263
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	30.5%	270
Somewhat dissatisfied	4.0%	35
Very dissatisfied	5.6%	49

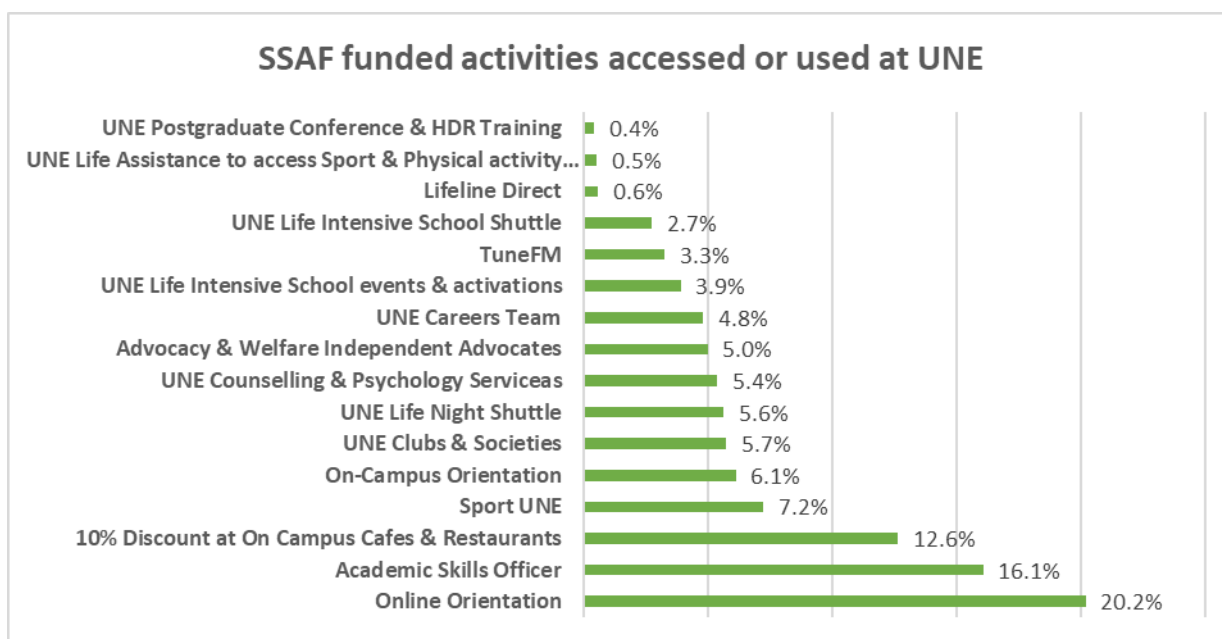
The survey again indicates that many online students feel that there needs to be a better balance of the SSAF service delivery between online and on-campus students, and that the fee structure should reflect this. Students indicated an increasing need for counselling and wellbeing services, with a number of students unable to access these services due to a lack of appointment availability by providers.

Positive feedback was received regarding Gather Town, intensive school shuttle, the 10% discount at campus cafes, the Advocacy team, and the Academic Skills Support team.

Representative comments:

- *“Gather Town is a good resource, so perhaps expansion could happen there.”*
- *“I don’t see the relevance of this for most external students, yet we still have to pay.”*
- *“...continued focus on services linked to intensive schools.”*
- *“...biased towards on-campus students.”*
- *“...difficult to justify the cost as an online student.”*
- *“...have been unable to book in for appointments for sometimes months.”*

The three highest priorities which students selected included accessing Online Orientation (20.2%), support by the Academic Skills Office (16.1%) and 10% discount at on-campus cafes (12.6%).



Suggested Improvements

Potential options for future funding of SSAF expenditure suggested by students included discounted textbooks being the most popular response (16.91%), followed by free postage from the UNE bookstore (13.97%). Suggestions to expand mental health support, and coffee or transport vouchers which could be enjoyed by both on-campus and online students were again raised.

Preference for other options for SSAF Expenditure	%	Number of students
Discounts for all students to purchase textbooks & study material from UNE bookshop	16.91%	149
Free postage with books purchased from UNE bookshop	13.97%	123
Expand mental health services - online and on-campus support	11.30%	100
Coffee or transport vouchers to online students for use in local area	11.63%	102
Assistance with accommodation for intensive schools	10.44%	92
Free postage with books borrowed from UNE Library	10.17%	90
Assistance with accommodation for students travelling for placements	10.49%	92
Shuttle and feed services extended to weekends over intensive schools	6.39%	56
Investment in services at regional study centres	4.71%	41
Providing snacks to students sitting exams	4.00%	35

Themes and Recommendations

1. Promotion and Transparency

Out of the 881 students who responded, 407 indicated that they were not aware of SSAF services until completing the survey, which is a decrease of 8% compared to 2025. Both online and on-campus students are generally unaware of SSAF activities offered by UNE and would like more targeted communication outlining available services. A number of students are only made aware of SSAF when making payment, with those students utilising government assistance more than likely having little to no knowledge of SSAF.

To improve student's understanding of SSAF's services provided by UNE, it is recommended to continue to improve online communication and increase SSAF's profile during orientation for new students. Over 40% of students would prefer future communication via email, however due to the volume of emails, this may not result in improved awareness outcomes due to the volume of emails students receive.

To promote transparency between the student body and UNE, we continue to advocate that the results of the survey be made available to the student community. This is especially important due to the new SSAF legislation requiring funding allocations to student led organisations from 1 January 2025.

2. Online Students

The 2026 survey continues to identify the need to balance the needs of on-campus and online students at UNE. While UNE acknowledges that all SSAF services are available to online students, not all online students are able to utilise and benefit from the majority of these services. As a result, a number of online students question why they are required to pay the same amount of SSAF as on-campus students. This is especially relevant during cost-of-living pressures.

Research and relevant enquiries will be made regarding how to support the online cohort. As a starting point consideration of an online discount portal (similar to that used at TAFE) is being looked into to determine the viability of the service. Further it is recommended to enquire as to whether it would be viable to subsidise any items for the online students.

Many online students also raised the need for more online networking and community programs – this should be an integral part of the UNE experience. Gather town has been a great advancement to the online experience, however further options should be considered.

3. Health and Wellbeing

Students continue to voice their concerns regarding the long waiting times to access mental health services. We would like to reiterate the importance of the need to institute viable counselling and psychological services. Additional funding for the CAPS program or an equivalent service is recommended so that they are able to expand their staff and provision of service for both online and on campus students.

4. Intensive Schools

A continuing theme from last year's survey was students' attendance on campus for intensive schools. Students again raised issues with accommodation, travel costs, and transportation. The free meals during the intensive schools were greatly appreciated and requests for this to continue have been made.

We acknowledge the recent refurbishment of parts of the residential colleges and would support ongoing improvements in support of the students who travel for intensives.

We thank UNE for implementing free parking from 1 May 2025.

We again suggest research, and subsequent actions be taken, relating to the following:

1. Investigate ways to make accommodation for intensive schools more accessible to students in terms of availability, booking, and costs.
2. Make enquiries to provide better supports for students travelling with a family, and/or living with a disability. This is particularly important for the students who are primary/only carers of children and those having to navigate accessibility issues around campus.
3. Funding a shuttle bus to/from the airport and train station for those students attending without transportation.

5. Positive Experiences

On a positive note, survey responses indicated success with, and ongoing support for, services currently being used. Of note, respondents were particularly thankful for online orientation service, Academic Skills officers and the 10% discount from the onsite café and restaurant.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, we continue to see low participation rates every year and we continue to make enquiries to ascertain the root cause and see if we can drive improvements for the coming year.

We acknowledge the efforts made by UNE regarding implementation of some new initiatives and a continued focus of increasing awareness of SSAF and its intended purpose. We had hoped that due to these initiatives being implemented that this would drive a better participation in the survey but unfortunately this was not the end result.

The UNESC will continue to investigate further options regarding promoting SSAF and the 2027 SSAF survey in the coming year.

The survey highlighted a strong perception among online students that current SSAF-funded services are weighted towards on-campus experiences. As online students make up the majority of UNE enrolments, there is an opportunity to improve the visibility, accessibility, and relevance of SSAF-funded initiatives for this group, while maintaining investment in wellbeing, career development, and financial support services that were consistently identified as high priorities.