



Student Council
UNESC

UNE Student Council
2024 Annual Report on the Student SSAF Survey
June 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Background	1
Student Response Demographic	1
Results	3
Promotion and Awareness	3
Online Students	5
Focus Areas	5
Use of Services	6
Suggested Improvements	7
Themes and Recommendations	8
1. Promotion and Transparency	8
2. Online Students	9
3. Health and Wellbeing	9
4. Intensive Schools	9
5. Positive Experiences	10
Conclusion	10

2024 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 2024 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.

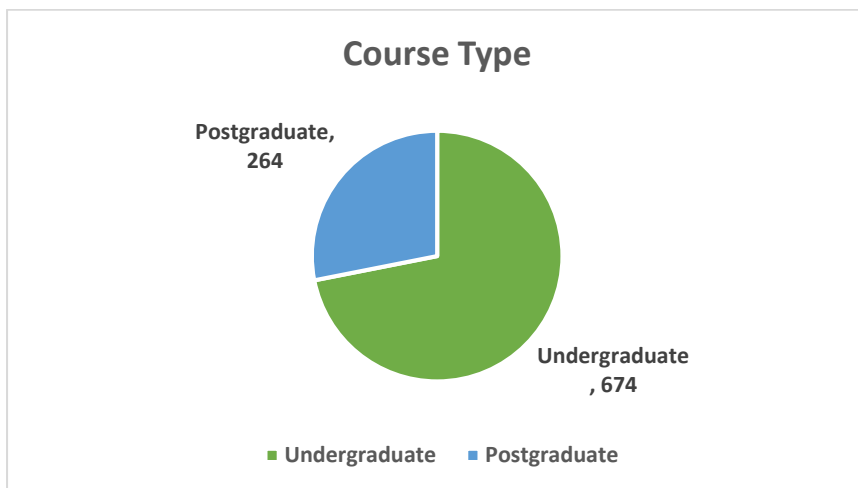
Universities are required by law to provide students with access to several programs and services that are funded by SSAF, such as employment and career advice, counselling and support services, orientation programs, financial advice, and recreational and food services.

In May 2024, 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.

Student Response Demographic

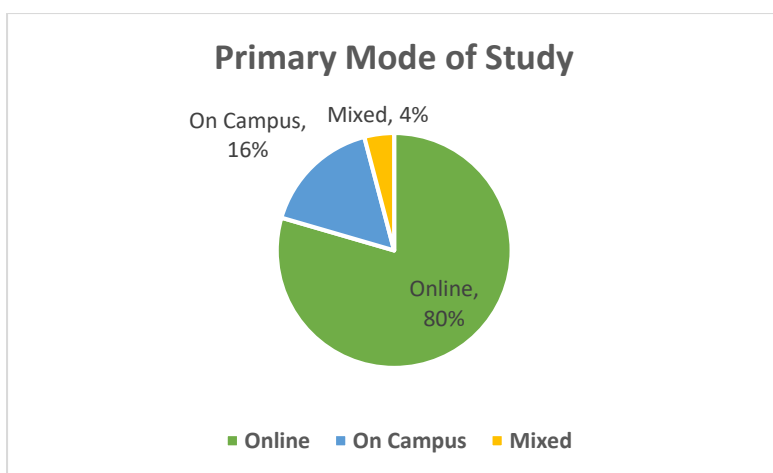
In 2024, the UNESC SSAF Survey received 957 responses from students, which is a steady decrease in response rate over the last 3 years (2023: 1,301; 2022: 1,031; 2021: 1,733).

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.



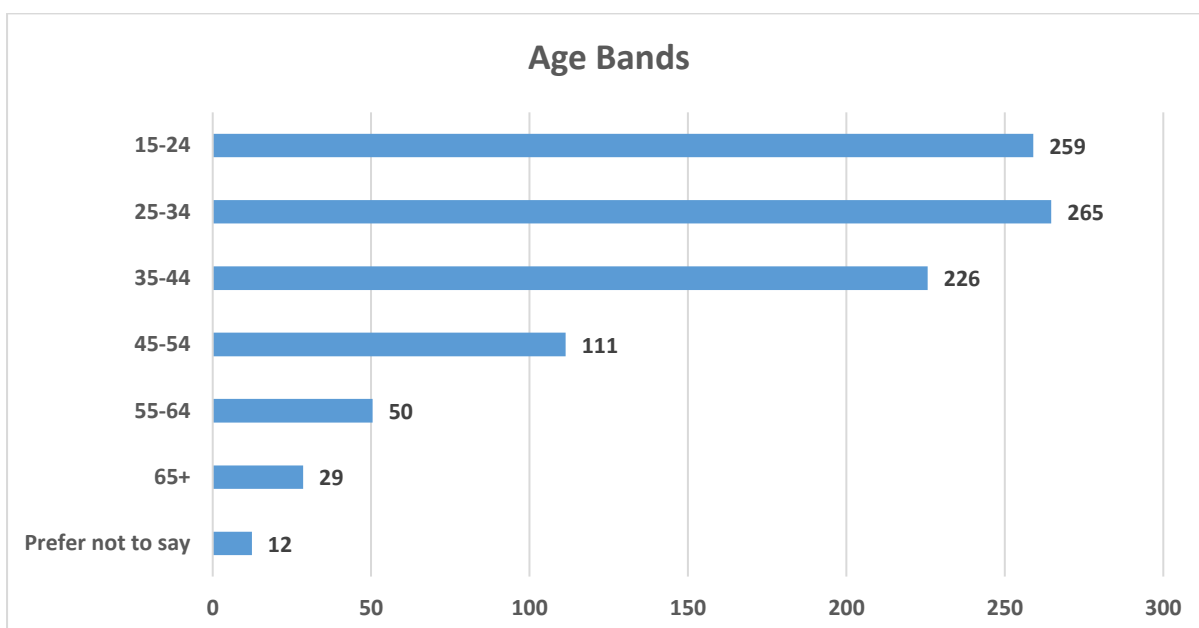
92% 🏠🏠🏠🏠🏠
 Domestic students (871 Domestic, 78 International)

73% 👤👤👤👤
 Continuing UNE Students (670 continuing, 249 Commencing)



20% 👤👤👤👤👤
 1st Year University (190 1st year University; 746 >1st year University)

4% 👤👤👤👤👤
 Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (4% yes, 94% no, 2% prefer not to)

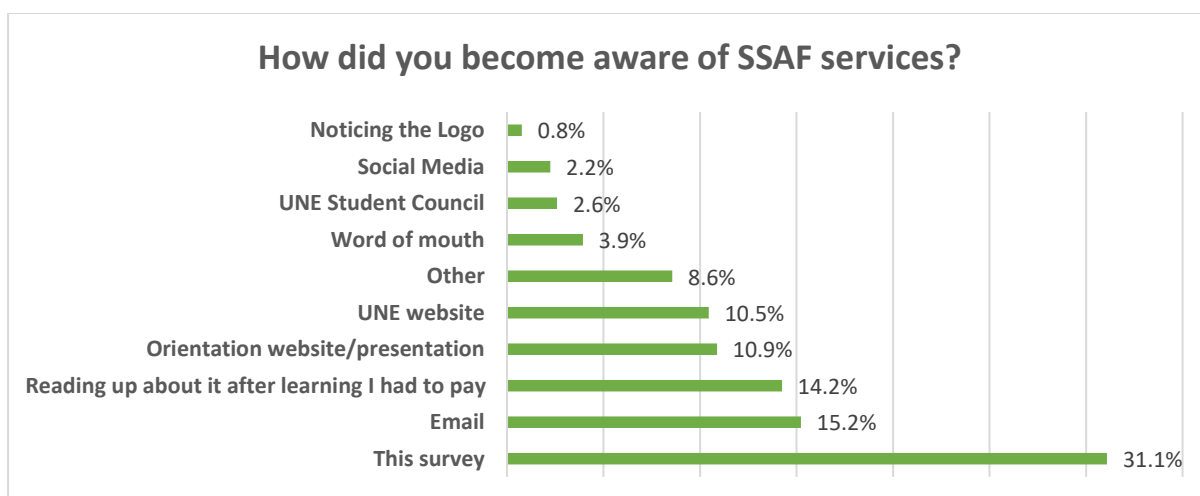
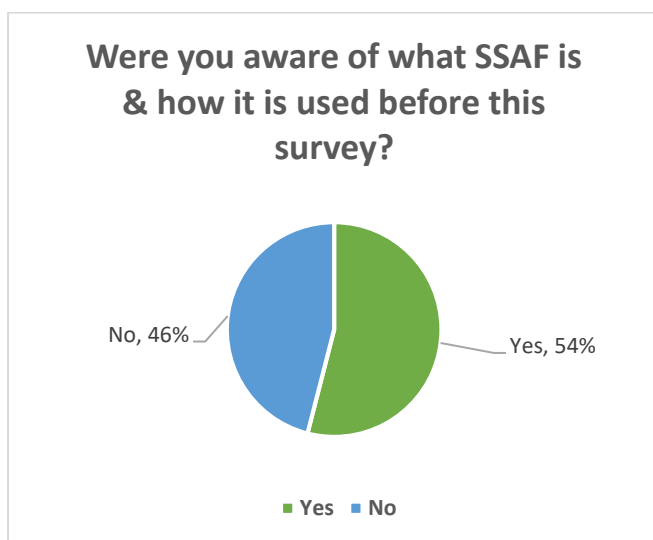


Results

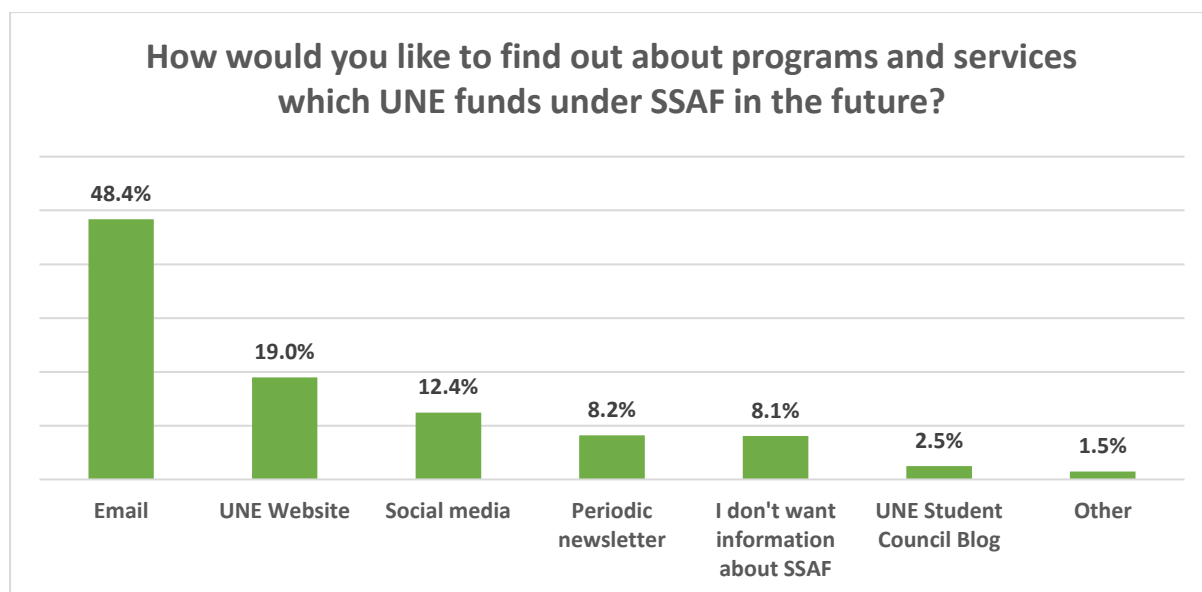
The results of the 2024 Survey are divided across the following main areas: Promotion and Awareness, Online Students, SSAF Focus Areas and Use of Services.

Promotion and Awareness

Despite a low survey response rate, the lack of awareness by students continues to be a recurring theme. Nearly half of respondents indicated that, before taking the survey, they were unaware of what SSAF is and how it is used. Improved communication is an area that needs more work done, by both UNE and the UNESCO, to promote and raise awareness of available SSAF services. Suggestions for improvements included tailored services for online students via email or the MyLearn portal, communication by unit co-ordinators, and increased visibility during orientation.



Students also indicated that email (48.4%) continued to be the preferred method of finding out about programs and services which UNE funds under SSAF.



Representative comments:

- *"I completed a very similar survey to this previously... don't know what happened from that and note the questions are basically the same."*
- *"It would be great to advertise the opportunities in the MyLearn website... Navigating all the different websites as an online student means accessing these services can be challenging."*
- *"As an online student in Tamworth, I have very little access to any of the resources... If I want to utilise the Tamworth centre to study, I have to pay for parking with no reimbursement available."*
- *"I didn't even realize we paid fees and that they were utilized in this way... I utilize a number of funded programs and services and didn't understand how they were funded."*
- *"As an off-campus online student, I gain little benefit from SSAF... The total fees are around \$263, over the full degree it's >\$1000 for services I have so far used once and for 5 minutes at that."*
- *"What am I paying these fees for? I find it ridiculous that online students have to pay these fees and not be able to use any of them? Where is the fairness in that? Especially in this economy!"*

Online Students

A significant number of online students continue to feel that SSAF does not benefit them directly, as many of the services provided by UNE are 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.

Given the current economic environment, students emphasized the need for affordable accommodation and food options, especially for those attending intensives. They requested clearer communication about what SSAF funds are and how it benefits them. Access to mental health services and financial aid were also seen as priorities for students at UNE. Enhancing career services, study skills workshops and employment advice is also seen as crucial for student success.

Representative comments:

- *“As an online student, I do not access the majority of these services... It would be great if the fees were different for students not using any of the on-campus facilities.”*
- *“Supporting the health and welfare of students through access and availability to medical and psychological care is highly beneficial...”*
- *“It seems the services are skewed towards internal students... Online students should be offered a different contribution level.”*

Value for Money Ranking	%	Total of Respondents
1 – Zero value	20%	188
2 – Very little value	20%	186
3 – Some value	34%	313
4 – Good value	20%	184
5 – Exceptional value	6%	58

Focus Areas

Based on the survey results, students were asked to choose up to five categories from the 19 Government defined SSAF categories, highlighting their preferences for SSAF funding. Again, there was a notable emphasis on health, welfare and employment support, as shown in the following table:

Government Category	%	Number of students
Promoting the health or welfare of students	13.42%	578
Helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled	11.99%	517
Helping students obtain employment or advice on careers	11.97%	516
Helping students with their financial affairs	8.15%	351
Helping students secure accommodation	6.69%	288
Providing libraries and reading rooms (other than those provided for academic purposes) for students	6.37%	275
Advocating students' interests in matters arising from under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	6.06%	261
Giving students information to help them in their orientation	5.80%	250
Providing food or drink to students on campus of the higher education provider	4.69%	202
Providing legal services to students	4.55%	196
Caring for children of students	4.31%	186
Advising on matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	3.82%	165
Helping meet the specific needs of overseas students relating to their welfare, accommodation and employment	3.42%	147
Supporting a sporting or other recreational activity by students	3.20%	138
Supporting the administration of a club most of whose members are students	1.91%	82
Supporting an artistic activity by students	1.20%	52
Helping students obtain insurance against personal accidents	1.04%	45
Supporting the production and dissemination to students of media whose content is provided by students	0.87%	37
Supporting debating by students	0.54%	23
Total	100.00%	4309

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 over 10% were dissatisfied.

Service Satisfaction	%	Number of students
Very satisfied	37.4%	331
Somewhat satisfied	25.2%	223
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25.3%	224
Somewhat dissatisfied	5.4%	48
Very dissatisfied	6.8%	60

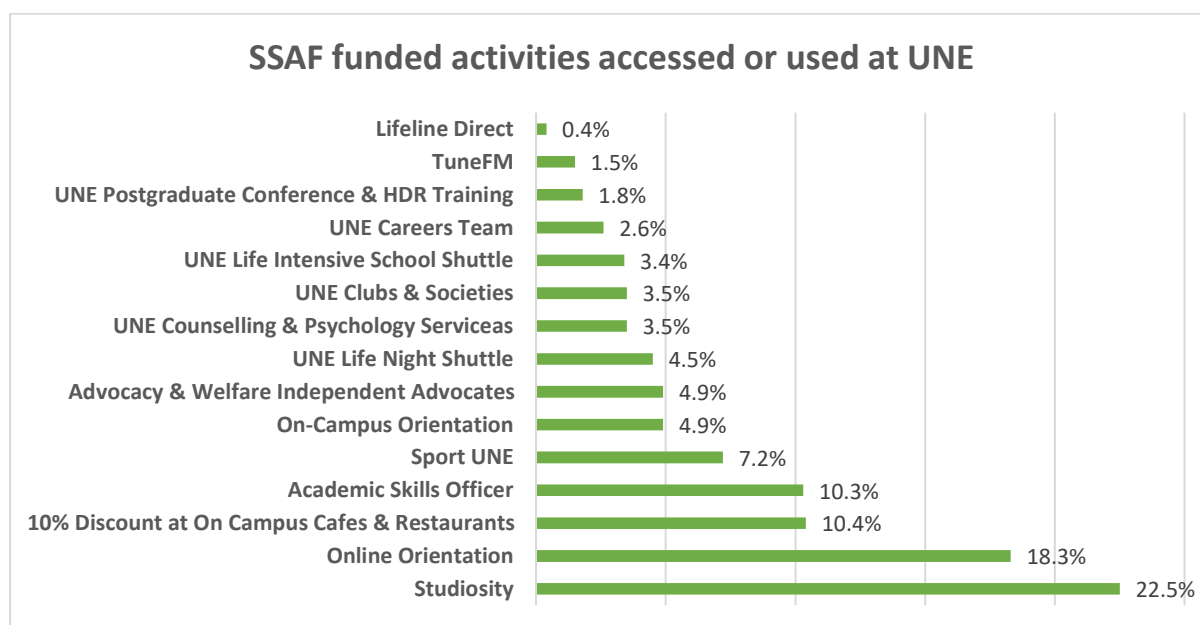
Many online students still feel disconnected from the University and believe that the services provided by SSAF do not cater for their needs. Online students and part-time students requested that the SSAF fee structure should reflect actual usage. Students indicated a need for counselling and wellbeing services, however feedback highlighted there was a long wait time to access these services.

Positive feedback was received regarding the newly introduced intensive school shuttle, the 10% discount at campus cafes, the Advocacy team, along with Studiosity, and the Academic Skills Support team.

Representative comments:

- *“As an online student, I can't access some of these activities... It seems unfair that I have to pay the SSAF.”*
- *“I have greatly benefited from the exceptional support and guidance provided by Advocacy & Welfare Independent Advocates, the Wellness Centre, and UNE's Counselling & Psychology Services... These services helped guide me through unexpected and challenging life events.”*
- *“Being an online student means I don't get access to the majority of services... Yet the fees are the same?”*
- *“Studiosity is a fantastic service and has helped me greatly improve my academic writing skills....”*
- *“The online orientation was very beneficial in helping me understand what would be required of me in the upcoming trimester...”*

The four highest priorities which students selected included accessing Studiosity (22.5%), Online Orientation (18.3%), 10% Discount at on-campus cafes (10.4%) and support by the Academic Skills Officer (10.3%).



Suggested Improvements

Students suggested potential options for future SSAF expenditure, including financial assistance with discounted textbooks the most popular response (16.98%), followed closely by free postage from the UNE bookstore (14.08%). Suggestions of coffee or transport

vouchers which could be enjoyed by both on-campus and online students were raised. Some students suggested that assistance for accommodation, especially for placements and residential schools would help make attending residential more feasible. Investment in Study Centres, the extension of library hours, and free parking during intensives was also mentioned.

Preference for other options for SSAF Expenditure	%	Number of students
Discounts for all students to purchase textbooks & study material from UNE bookshop	16.98%	621
Free postage with books borrowed from UNE Library	14.08%	515
Expand mental health services - online and on-campus support	11.64%	426
Coffee or transport vouchers to online students for use in local area	11.36%	415
Assistance with accommodation for intensive schools	11.36%	415
Assistance with accommodation for students travelling for placements	10.54%	386
Free postage with books purchased from UNE bookshop	10.18%	372
Shuttle and feed services extended to weekends over intensive schools	5.63%	206
Investment in services at regional study centres	4.78%	175
Providing snacks to students sitting exams	3.45%	126

Themes and Recommendations

1. Promotion and Transparency

Out of the 957 students who responded, 298 indicated that they were not aware of SSAF services until completing the survey. Whilst strictly on the data there appears to be a 15% reduction to the 2023 results, we must be conscious that there was also a reduction in participation in 2024. On balance, it is suspected that the vast majority of students still remain uneducated in this subject and when they are made aware of a requirement to pay, only at this time they seem to be making the relevant enquiries. For those utilising government assistance to pay the fee, then it is likely they will have no, or little, knowledge of the subject.

To enhance to the understanding of SSAF and the services it funds, online communications are recommended to be the primary vehicle to drive this. Whether it be an email, utilising the various online newsletters produced by UNE and their associated clubs (where applicable) or announcements through MyLearn. We appreciate nearly 50% suggested future communications by email only, but we caution this, as an email can be dismissed and the likely affect resulting in similar results in the 2025 survey. This is why we recommend utilising all available vehicles in the promotion of SSAF and its services.

In addition, we continue to support of making the results of the survey available to the student community. This will continue to promote trust and transparency between the student body and UNE.

2. Online Students

The subject of balancing the needs between on campus and online students continues to be prevalent. From the 2024 survey there is a clear trend of the online students knowing that their SSAF payments are unable to be utilised as the majority of services the SSAF funds benefit the on-campus students.

Whilst the online students do not appear, in the majority, to be calling for a reform or addition of services they can access, they are however questioning why they bear the responsibilities of paying the full amount of SSAF when they are unable to recoup the benefits. Furthermore, they seek a reduction, if not complete exclusion, from paying the amount. Understandably the cost of living crisis has a direct impact on students.

We understand seeking payment of SSAF funds is discretionary to the individual institution and there are many considerations that are taken into account regarding same.

It would seem there are also issues of balance when it comes to promoting the university as a number 1 provider in online education. Why are we in a position where the majority of online students feel disconnected when over 80% of the students study online? In order for UNE to remain at the forefront it is imperative that this issue be properly addressed so the students feel they are gaining value for money.

Previously we made the recommendation to conduct benchmarking with other universities regarding the services available to online students, and consider a reduction in SSAF fees for online students. We raise these recommendations again so they can be properly considered.

3. Health and Wellbeing

Students are voicing their concerns regarding a lack of accessible services with a primary focus on mental health. The feedback given reflects long waiting times and students being reallocated to multiple providers after they access a service.

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 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 have 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.

Those students who stayed at the colleges noted the conditions were unsatisfactory with some of the buildings run down and not accessibility friendly.

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

1. Ensure students have access to food and drink facilities, including the Cafe 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 for the students who are primary/only carers of children and those having to navigate accessibility issues around campus.
4. Providing free parking for students whilst on campus for intensive schools.
5. Funding a shuttle bus to/from the airport and train station.

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 Studiosity, the UNE Shuttle Bus, Academic Skills officers and PASS tutoring.

We continue to recommend the ongoing funding, promotion, and expansion of these areas.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, this year there was a reduction in participation with only 957 students completing the survey. This could be attributed to a number of reasons such as survey fatigue, timing of release (exam and intensive periods) and no mandatory requirement to complete. Further, it may also result from a perceived lack of change to SSAF administration, where continuing students who had previously participated are yet to see a meaningful difference.

Out of those who completed the survey, well considered and balanced commentary was provided which is encouraging. It is suspected as the survey was anonymous students felt more comfortable and empowered to provide their feedback without fear of retribution.

With a continued focus on education around SSAF and keeping the survey anonymous we believe this will assist driving an increased response rate for the 2025 review. Additionally, if UNE are in a position to deliver on producing some viable returns on the issues of inclusion of online students and financial assistance concerning intensive school attendance, this will also drive increased numbers to participate in the survey.

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.