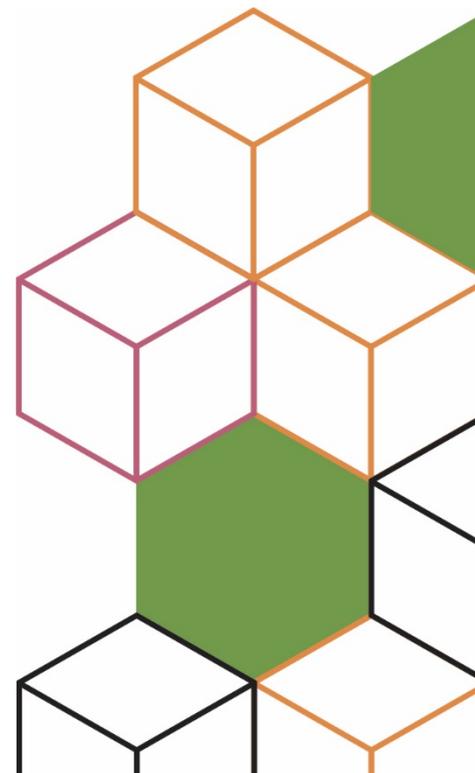


April  
**2021**

University of Melbourne  
Graduate Student

# **Subject Cancellation Survey – Report**



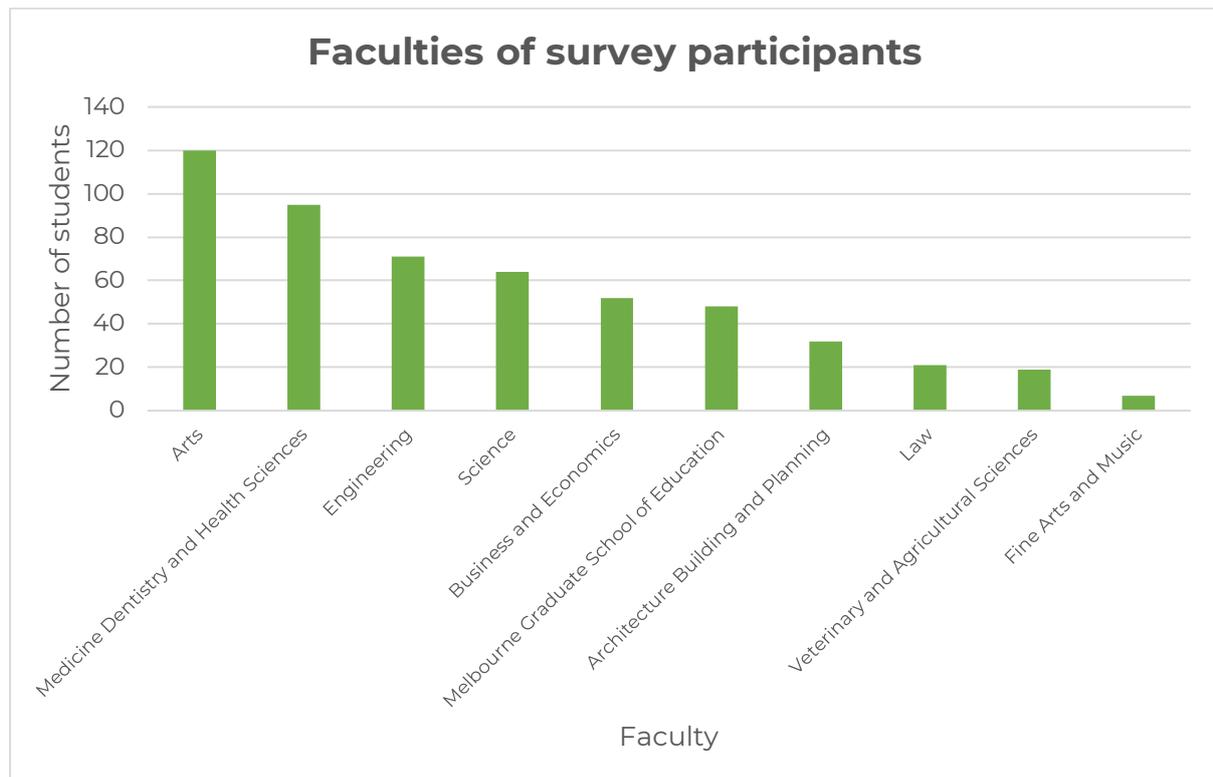
## Background

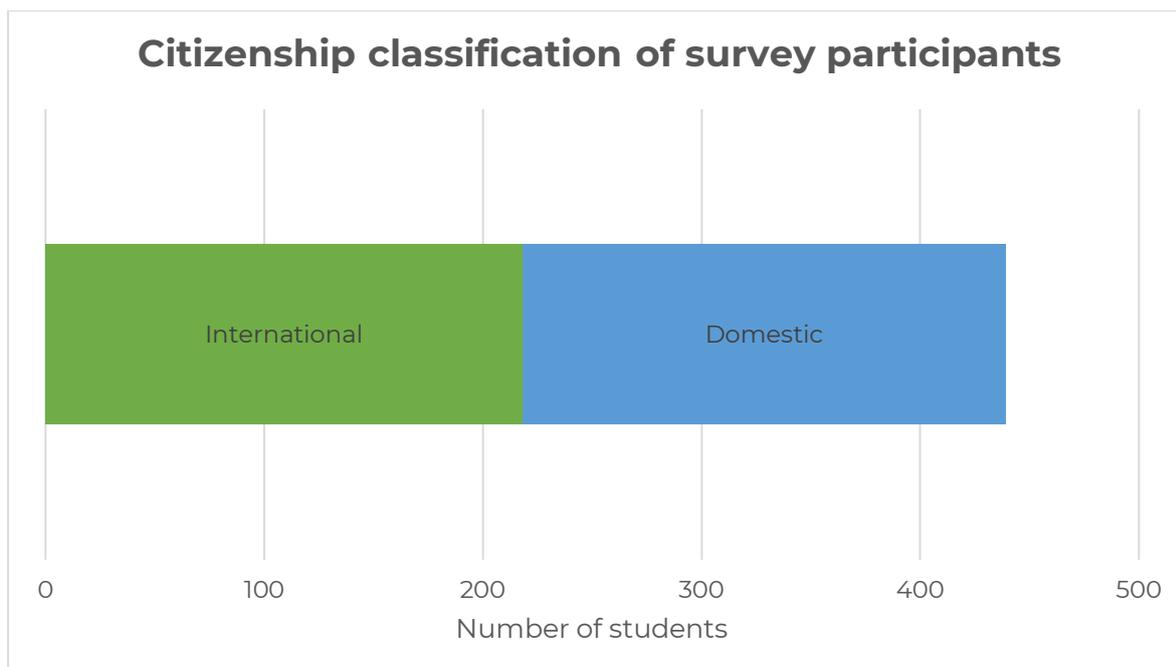
GSA ran an online survey to collect information on the delivery mode and availability of subjects offered for graduate coursework degrees. This was in response to concerns raised about 2021 subjects being offered in an online-only format.

The survey ran from Thursday 10 December 2020 until Friday 15 January 2021. The survey was distributed via GSA's social media, mailing lists, and graduate representatives. An incentive was offered, with participants given the option to enter a prize draw for one of five \$20 supermarket vouchers.

A total of 558 survey responses were received. Data was analysed using Qualtrics reports, Excel, and NVivo. Not all participants answered all questions; skipped answers are not included in the below figures unless otherwise specified.

## Demographics





There were survey participants from all faculties. There were roughly equal numbers of international and domestic survey participants (49.7% international, 50.3% domestic).

The survey was aimed at graduate coursework students. However, 38 participants specified that they were PhD students, some of whom were completing coursework as part of their PhD. A small number of students indicated that they were undergraduate students.

### Course completion date

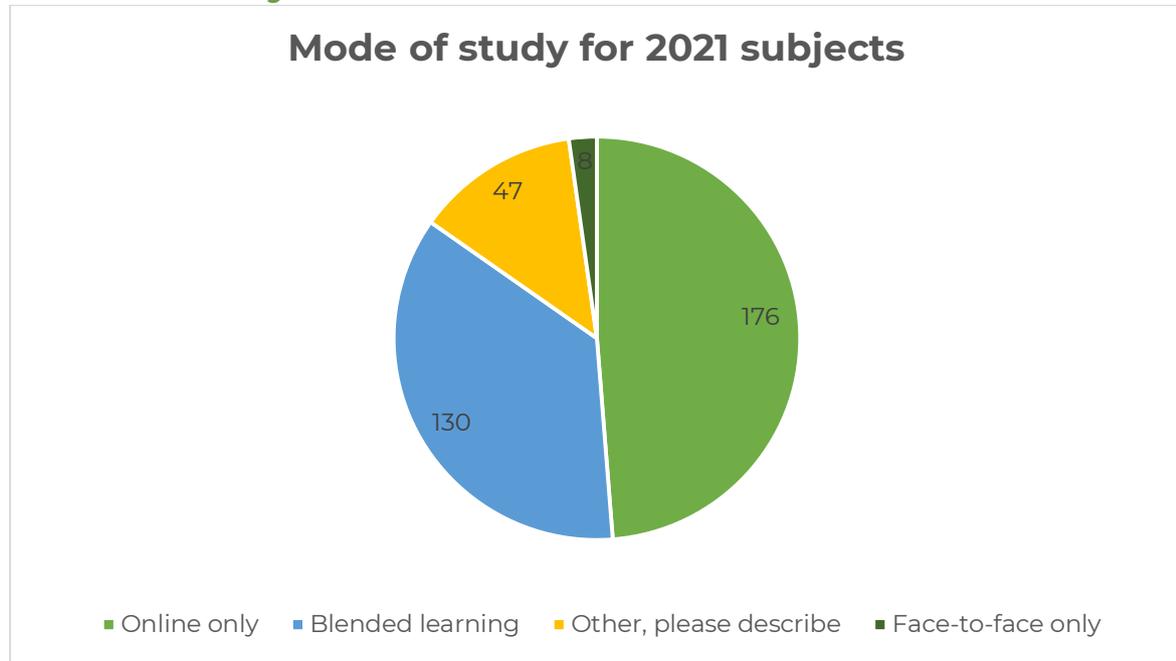
Over half of survey participants were due to complete their course in 2021 (27.7% mid-2021, 35.2% end-2021). For students due to graduate this year, there is a greater impact of subject cancellations and changes to study mode as this may impact their completion date.

### Subject cancellations

Just over one-third (33.6%) reported that their course has cancelled subjects for 2021.

Some students provided details of their cancelled subjects, many of which were research, fieldwork, or practical subjects.

## Mode of study



Most students (48.8%) reported that their 2021 subjects are offered in an online-only format, and 36% reported their subjects are in a blended learning format. Only 2.2% had face-to-face only subjects.

Of those who answered 'other' and specified further, most were a combination of online and blended learning, or they did not know. While the survey was targeted at coursework students, some respondents were graduate researchers whose candidature continues to elapse despite limited access to campus.

## Sentiment analysis<sup>1</sup>

There was a high frequency of individuals expressing some level of displeasure or negativity regarding subject cuts and online learning, at 74% of valid responses. Only 10% expressed any positive view, and 17% expressed a neutral view on subject cuts and/or online learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Sentiment scoring was based on narrative analysis by the principal researcher, where responses were assigned a binary classified based on positive, negative and neutral commentary, across valid response entries. The classification method to determine positive, negative and neutral commentary was based on statement fragments or assertions evidencing either positive, negative or both positive and negative commentary. Where comment was neither positive or negative the comment was assigned a neutral rating. The assigned ratings were employed to generate dummy/binary variables to facilitate the frequency analysis. Where uncertainty existed pertaining to a plausible classification, a secondary reviewer validated the entry.

This level of negativity was high across both domestic and international cohorts: 72% of domestic students, and 75% of international students expressed negative sentiments. Students due to graduate in 2021 had a higher frequency of dissatisfaction at 78%.

This significant frequency of respondents indicates that students were largely disappointed with the subject discontinuations. This dissatisfaction was evident in many students' declarations asserting the impact of the decisions having significant and material consequences for their course completion and causing them some personal distress.

This has potentially negative consequences for student welfare. Similarly, the subject discontinuations may have potentially negative impacts student perceptions of degree quality and institutional quality, that may have ramifications for graduate quality assessments of the designations post completion.

### **Key issues**

This significant frequency of respondents indicates that students were largely disappointed with the subject discontinuations. This dissatisfaction was evident in many students' declarations asserting the impact of the decisions having significant and material consequences for their course completion and causing them some personal distress.

#### **Lack of choices**

Many students have found that subjects they had planned to study had been cancelled. In the open comment section, 32 students raised the issue of lack of subject choices. For some students, this had severe impacts such as changing their area of specialisation or career goals.

Some students noted that there are limited subjects available for Semester 1, and that their subjects were expected to run in Semester 2. As a result, some have chosen irrelevant subjects to fulfil enrolment requirements, and others anticipate intense study loads in Semester 2. Several part-time students commented on the difficulties this would cause with managing their other responsibilities.

Eight students reported extending their degree by one or two semesters due to subject cancellations; some by choice to study subjects of interest, and others by necessity as there were no subjects available.

*"The subject selection is absolutely woeful. I've got one subject to go and I'm being forced to defer because I'm not going to pay \$3300 for an online teaching of a subject I'm not interested in. It's a joke." – Domestic Master of International Relations student*

Students extending their degree may have to contend with financial issues relating to supporting an extra semester of study, or delays in finding employment. Financial support has not been offered for students in this position.

#### **Quality**

Overwhelmingly, students feel that they are receiving an experience of lesser quality in online subjects. Almost all comments received expressed disappointment about the quality of learning and missing out on networking and social opportunities. Students expressed concerns about missing out or having reduced experience of essential practical learning opportunities, including clinical placements and laboratory access. In addition to grievances around missing out and paying full tuition fees, students were also worried about not being disadvantaged or under-prepared for their professions.

*“If I could, I would have deferred next year and waited until on-campus lectures and seminars resumed. Financial pressures precluded that. The core subjects didn’t translate well to an online environment. The year felt like a box-ticking exercise rather than a genuine way to learn how to be a teacher.” – Domestic Master of Teaching student*

Some students regretting choosing the University for subjects and networking opportunities that were now absent.

*“The major reason I chose Melbourne law school for my LLM amongst many world class Universities was because of the great number of electives it offered. Had that not been the case, I would’ve definitely chosen some other law school. Very disappointed that so many electives have been cancelled.” – International Master of Laws student*

### **Poor information provision**

There is some confusion around if certain subjects are running. Six students commented on inconsistencies between information provided (such as through the handbook or Stop One) and what subjects are being delivered.

*“When contacting Stop 1 I was told that chances are there would be more and newer summer courses but there were no new course and instead they cancelled the few they used to offer.” – International Master of Science (Computer Science) student*

One student had raised concerns about subject choices to their department and was informed there was a variety of subjects to choose from – but when they went through the handbook, they found most of these subjects had been cancelled or postponed. Other students have sought to change to different course streams or take subjects from other departments to finish their degrees – but have been denied these options.

Furthermore, there have been some unexpected changes. Some subjects have been cancelled or postponed with limited notice provided. Four students commented on the difficulties they encountered due to last-minute subject cancellations.

### **Dual-delivery**

The University is offering three delivery modes for Semester 1 subjects: online, campus-based, and dual-delivery. The University website states that dual-delivery

subjects are taught in both a blended format (online and campus-based) for students who can attend campus, and online delivery for students who are unable to attend campus<sup>2</sup>.

However, several survey participants raised the concern that their dual-delivery subjects are comprised of only online activities. Two students found that their dual-delivery subjects had no classroom allocated or options for on-campus activity, and one student reported that their dual-delivery subject had no campus-based activities, with the only in-person activity being off-campus data collection.

### **Benefits of online study**

Despite the quality and experience issues raised by most participants, six communicated that they benefitted from online study, and a further four expressed worries about returning to campus. This included students who are unable to return to Australia, have work or family responsibilities, or who have health concerns.

*“I am quite happy to learn online, it provides me as a young mother with needed flexibility and control over my learning but I acknowledge I am in the minority.” – Domestic Master of Teaching student*

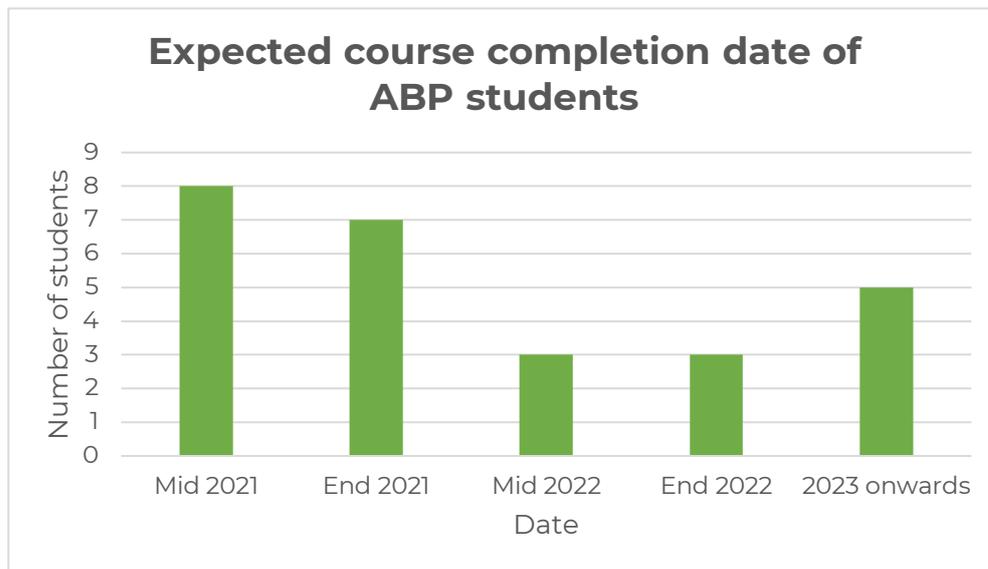
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<sup>2</sup> <https://students.unimelb.edu.au/student-support/coronavirus/return-to-campus/subjects>

## Appendix: Faculty data

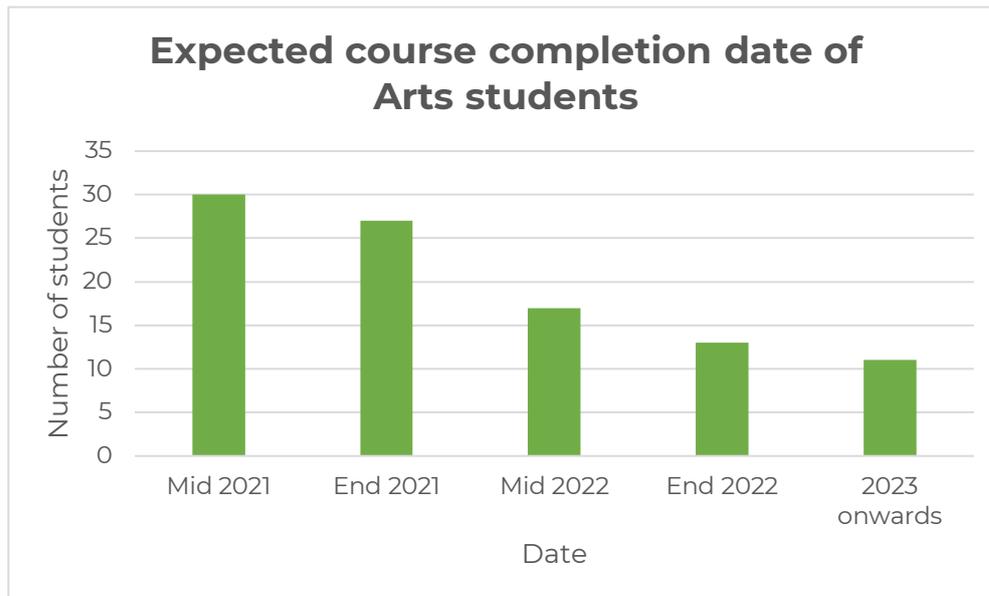
### Architecture, Building and Planning

- Responses received: 32
- Citizenship classification: 34.3% (n = 11) domestic, 43.8% (n = 14) international, 22.9% (n = 7) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 18.8% (n = 6) online only, 6.3% (n = 2) face-to-face only, 37.5% (n = 12) blended learning, 37.5% (n = 12) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 34.3% (n = 11) yes, 43.8% (n = 14) no, 22.9% (n = 7) did not answer



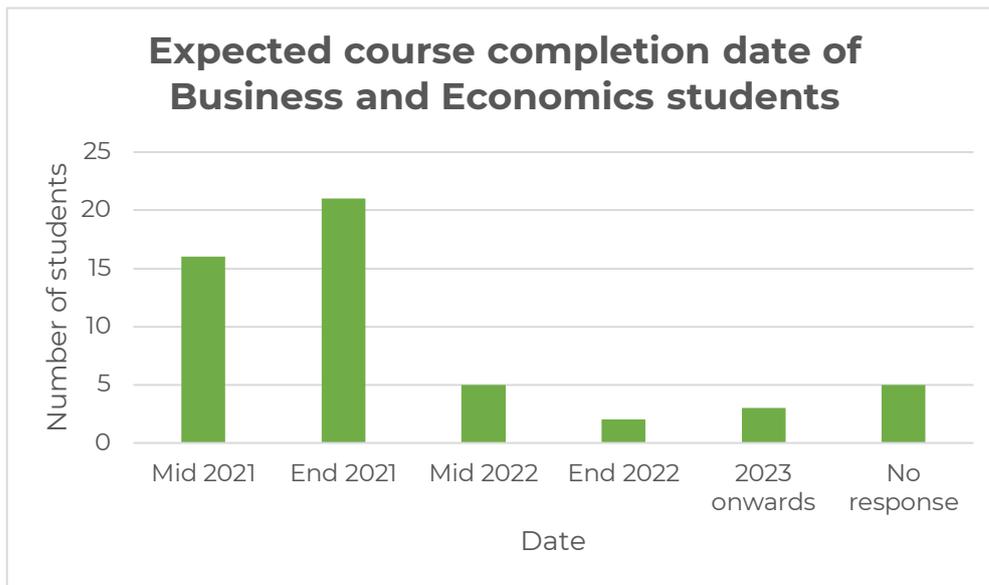
## Arts

- Responses received: 120
- Citizenship classification: 51.7% (n = 62) domestic, 32.5% (n = 39) international, 15.8% (n = 19) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 35.8% (n = 43) online only, 25% (n = 30) blended, 6.7% (n = 8) other, 32.5% (n = 39) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 43.3% (n = 52) yes, 34.2% (n = 41) no, 22.5% (n = 27) did not answer



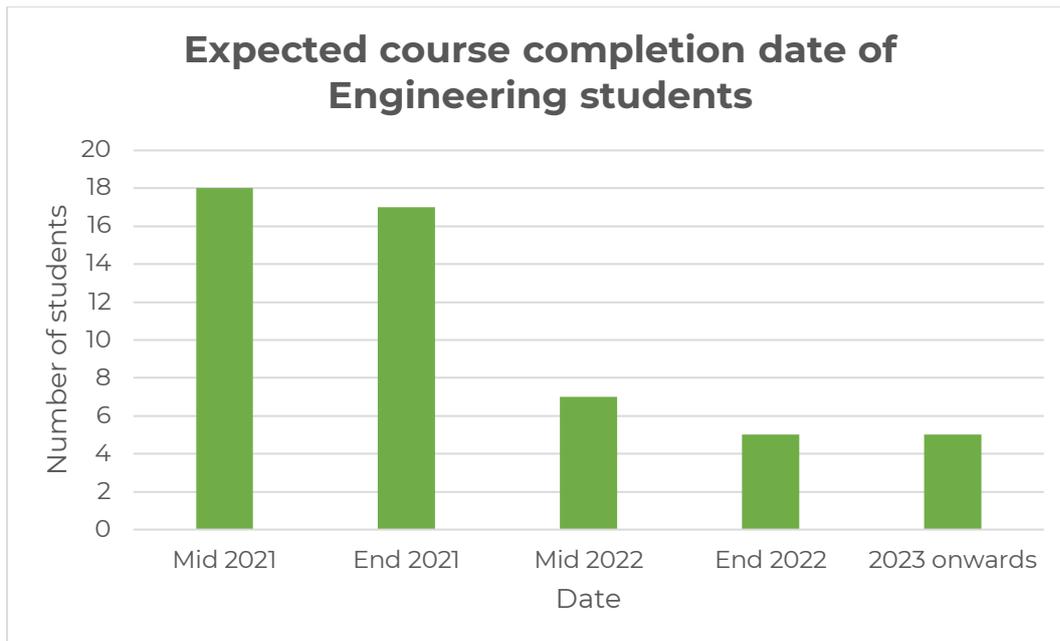
## Business and Economics

- Responses received: 52
- Citizenship classification: 21.2% (n = 11) domestic, 71.2% (n = 37) international, 7.7% (n = 4) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 55.8% (n = 29) online only, 21.2% (n = 11) blended, 1.9% (n = 1) other, 21.2% (n = 11) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 32.7% (n = 17) yes, 55.8% (n = 29) no, 11.5% (n = 6) did not answer



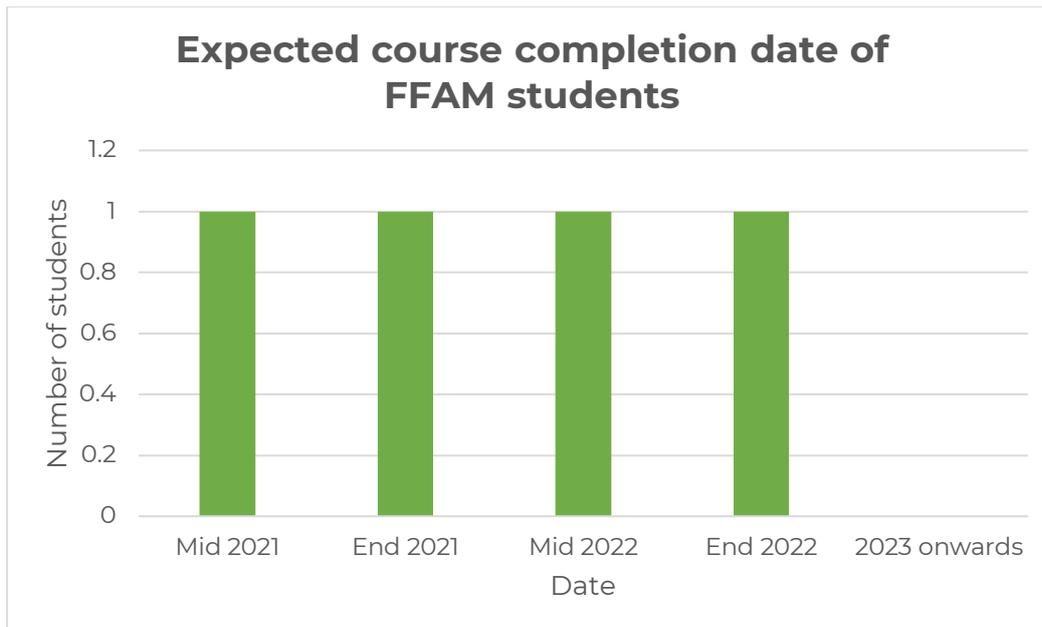
## Engineering

- Responses received: 71
- Citizenship classification: 18.3% (n = 13) domestic, 59.2% (n = 42) international, 22.5% (n = 16) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 43.7% (n = 31) online only, 1.4% (n = 1) face-to-face only, 15.5% (n = 11) blended, 7% (n = 5) other, 31.4% (n = 23) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 23.9% (n = 17) yes, 49.3% (n = 35) no, 26.8% (n = 19) did not answer



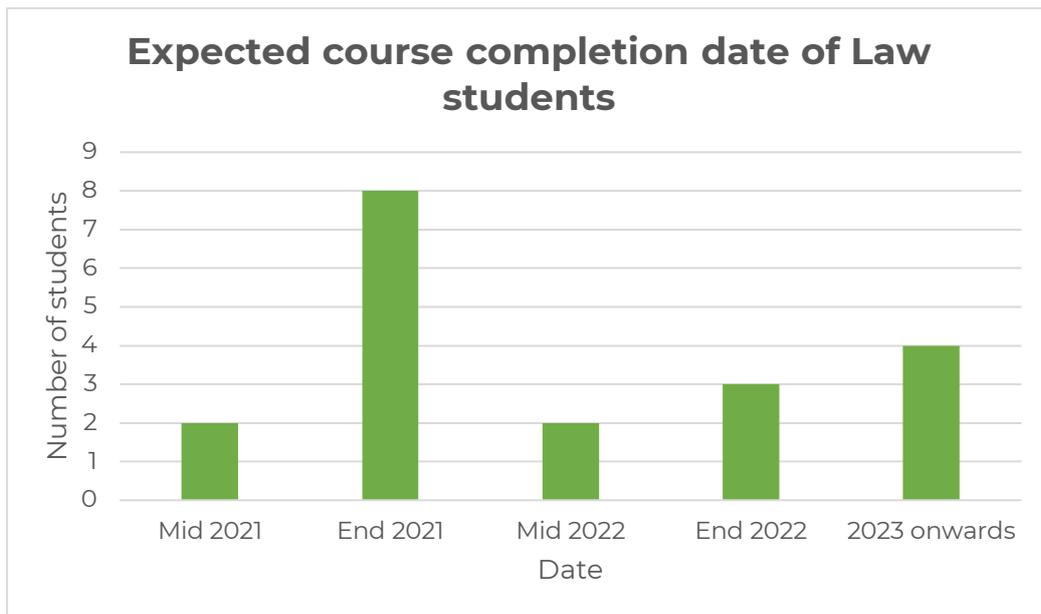
## Fine Arts and Music

- Responses received: 7
- Citizenship classification: 57% (n = 4) domestic, 14.3% (n = 1) international, 28.6% (n = 2) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 14.3% (n = 1) online only, 28.6% (n = 2) blended, 14.3% (n = 1) other, 42.9% (n = 3) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 71.4% (n = 5) no, 28.6% (n = 2) did not answer



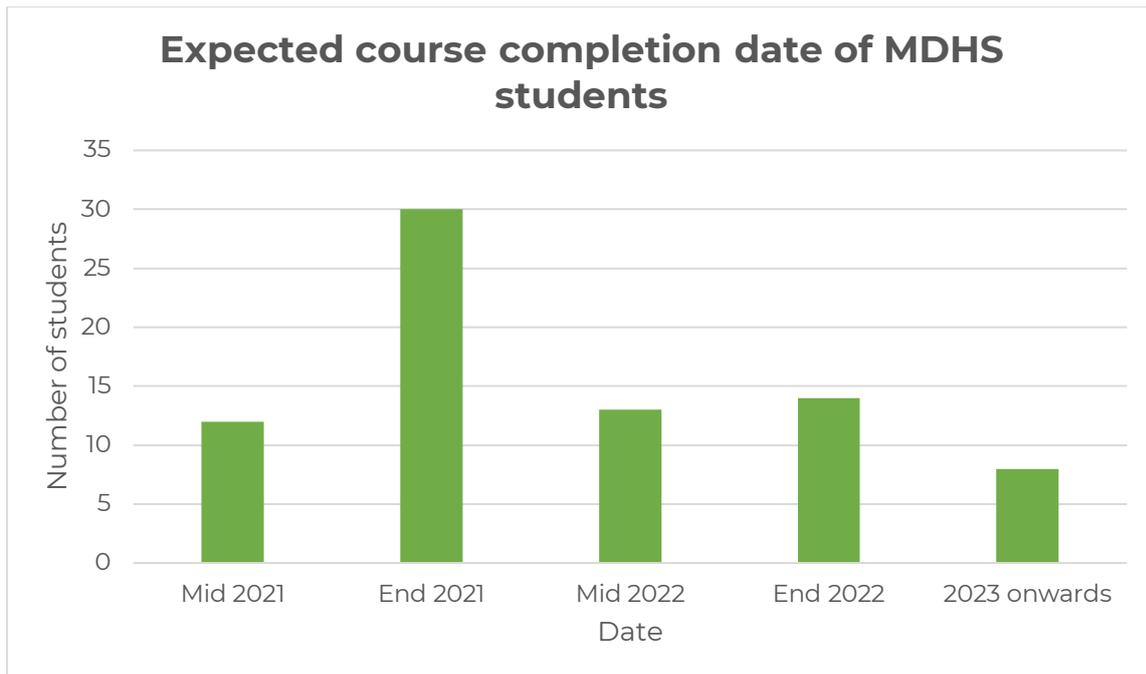
## Law

- Responses received: 21
- Citizenship classification: 66.7% (n = 14) domestic, 28.8% (n = 5) international, 9.5% (n = 2) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 47.6% (n = 10) online only, 19% (n = 4) blended, 14.2% (n = 3) other, 19% (n = 4) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 33.3% (n = 7) yes, 47.6% (n = 10) no, 19% (n = 4) did not answer



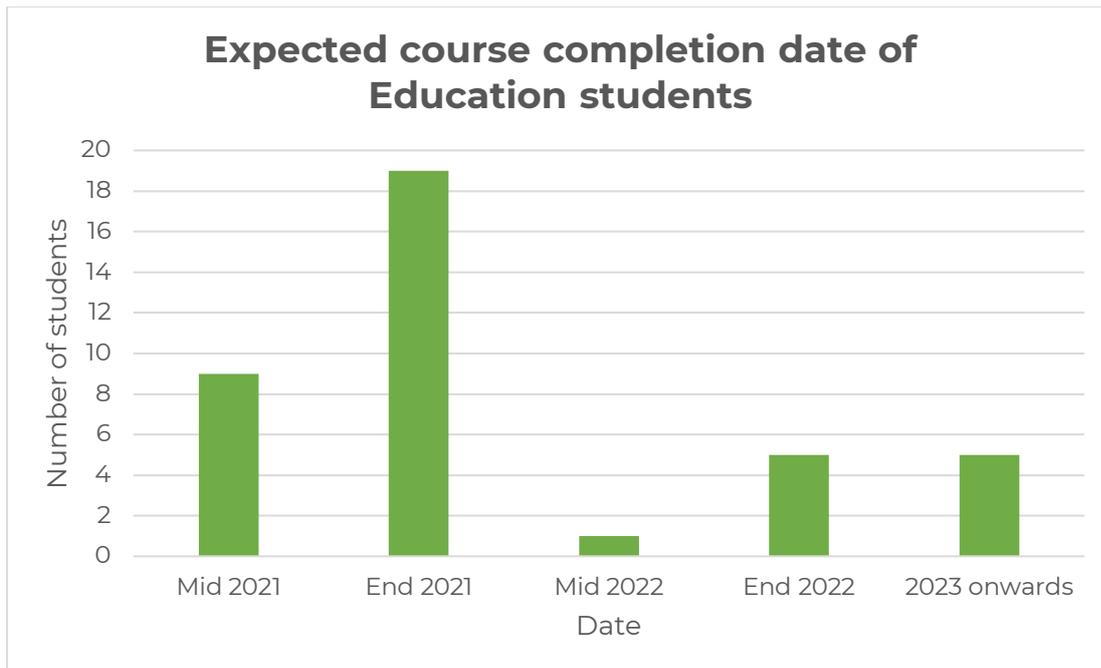
## Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences

- Responses received: 95
- Citizenship classification: 52.6% (n = 50) domestic, 30.5% (n = 29) international, 16.8% (n = 16) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 17.9% (n = 17) online only, 2.1% (n = 2) face-to-face only, 34.7% (n = 33) blended, 12.6% (n = 12) other, 32.6% (n = 31) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 16.8% (n = 16) yes, 61.1% (n = 58) no, 22.1% (n = 21) did not answer



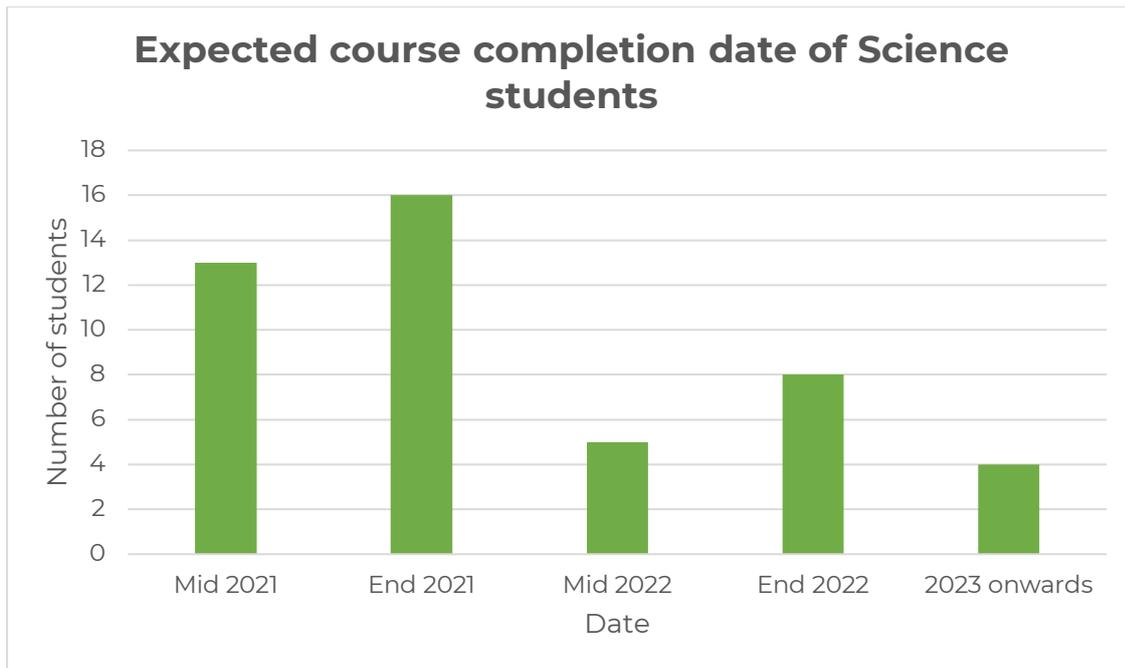
## Education

- Responses received: 48
- Citizenship classification: 60.4% (n = 29) domestic, 25% (n = 12) international, 14.6% (n = 7) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 50% (n = 24) online only, 2.1% (n = 1) face-to-face only, 8.3% (n = 4) blended, 12.5% (n = 6) other, 27.1% (n = 13) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 10.4% (n = 5) yes, 64.6% (n = 31) no, 22.9% (n = 11) did not answer



## Science

- Responses received: 64
- Citizenship classification: 29.7% (n = 19) domestic, 46.9% (n = 30) international, 23.4% (n = 15) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 18.8% (n = 12) online only, 1.5% (n = 1) face-to-face only, 26.6% (n = 17) blended, 12.5% (n = 8) other, 40.6% (n = 26) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 23.4% (n = 15) yes, 46.9% (n = 30) no, 29.7% (n = 19) did not answer



## Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences

- Responses received: 19
- Citizenship classification: 42.1% (n = 8) domestic, 47.4% (n = 9) international, 10.5% (n = 2) did not answer
- Mode of 2021 subjects: 14.8% (n = 3) online only, 5.3% (n = 1) face-to-face only, 31.2% (n = 6) blended, 15.8% (n = 3) other, 31.2% (n = 6) did not answer
- Students with cancelled subjects: 52.6% (n = 10) yes, 31.2% (n = 6) no, 14.8% (n = 3) did not answer

