



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

2025 HAVE YOUR SAY STUDENT SURVEY



STUDENT VOICE REPORT

Summarised analysis of the open-text comments
provided by survey respondents

NOVEMBER 2025

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Introduction

Throughout the 2025 Have Your Say Student Survey there were five questions where students were invited to respond in their own words. These included a final catch-all feedback question at the end of the survey and four questions where they were asked to provide comments or suggestions that would help the university improve or enhance;

- the overall academic experience
- the digital learning environment
- the student community
- the services and facilities.

Across these questions we received 4,000 comments, varying greatly in length and detail.

These open-text comments are a great opportunity to hear directly from students, unfiltered and in their own words. We can gain unique insights and better understand their perspectives through these.

Methodology

A dual methodology was used to analyse the open-text comments this year. After the comments had been deidentified (a process where any details or names that might indicate who the respondent was, are removed), the comments were coded manually by a researcher and at the same time the Microsoft artificial intelligence tool Copilot was used to code and summarise themes.

For the manual coding, the coding framework used for this exercise in previous years was used as a starting point, with new codes added as necessary throughout the process. For coding with Copilot, prompts were used and adjusted until the themes produced appeared to be consistent and distinct.

Limitations

While there is rich information contained in the open-text comments provided by students responding to the survey, and great value in contemplating this feedback, it is worth noting the limitations of such information.

Open-text comments are only provided by a small sub-group of survey respondents. And survey respondents are only a small sub-group of all students. The response rate for the 2025 survey was 26% (just over 5,000 students), and only 37% (around 1,800) of these respondents provided open-text comments. So, the feedback provided is only from a small group of students and may not be representative of what students think more generally.

Additionally, the open-text questions are asking for feedback to help improve things, so by the very nature of the questions, they are likely to elicit responses that could be seen as negative or highlighting problems or issues. Seen in isolation and out of this context, the open-text comments can be disheartening to read.

Because of these factors there is limited value in using the open-text responses to assess the quality or performance of an aspect of the university or to comment generally about student sentiment or satisfaction with a service. Therefore, this report does not include any sentiment analysis.

Academic Experience

Most students rated their academic experience very highly. 83% of students responding to the survey were satisfied or very satisfied with their academic experience in 2025. 63% of taught students responding were satisfied with their access to lecturers outside of class and 82% of research students responding were satisfied with their supervisor. Overall, 88% of respondents agreed that staff were helpful and 90% agreed that staff were knowledgeable.

The open-text comments provided by survey respondents provided lots of positive feedback as well as feedback highlighting some areas for potential improvement. Within the overarching theme of 'Academic Experience' there were three sub-themes that stood out: 'Feedback on Staff', 'Course Availability and Planning' and 'Assessments and Feedback'.

Feedback on Staff

The academic staff are central to the academic experience for students. This theme reflects how staff influence learning, wellbeing, and inclusion through their teaching, support, and conduct.

There were comments praising staff and highlighting good experiences and relationships. Students clearly value staff who are kind, welcoming, and accessible. These types of positive relationships can help students feel seen, encouraged, and more confident which helps to improve their academic experience.

"I've appreciated the passion and expertise of my lecturers, and the opportunities to engage in diverse learning experiences."

"I have engaged with a lot of brilliant scholars while studying at Te Herenga Waka... My most empowering and supportive moments have been when my lecturers and professors could share freely by speaking on their experiences."

Supportive staff are especially appreciated during times of personal or academic difficulty. Many students also look to staff for guidance and help. For example, students often rely on staff for help navigating course requirements, selecting papers, and understanding expectations. When there are gaps in guidance, especially for part-time, online, or postgraduate students, this can lead to confusion and stress.

"I hope all teachers can give students the maximum encouragement and avoid harsh criticism. I think most teachers have achieved this."

"I acknowledge that the lecturers are highly knowledgeable. However, this depth of expertise can sometimes feel intimidating, particularly when content is unclear and open to interpretation."

Comments highlighted the importance of passionate, well-prepared lecturers who make learning engaging. Conversely, disengaged or poorly organized teaching can undermine motivation and negatively impact a student's learning experience.

"Professors should only teach if they want to - so many bad courses as a result of people not having a passion for teaching but being required to do so."

Students want staff to be genuinely culturally aware and inclusive, particularly in relation to Māori and Pasifika values. Some comments called for more representation and diversity in the academic staff. Better pronunciation of names, and integration of diverse perspectives in teaching were highlighted. Inclusive practices help students feel respected and safe, especially those from underrepresented groups.

“While the use of te reo Māori leans towards authenticity and integration, the practice of it in my course feels tacked on and tickbox.”

A small but significant number of comments raised concerns about staff behaviour, including disrespect, bullying, or dismissiveness. Students expect staff to model professionalism and treat them with dignity, when this isn't experienced then the trust is broken, and this can create barriers to learning.

“I’ve heard some of the lecturers in the [subject] department making racist and transphobic comments and not taking action to change their behaviour.”

Course Availability and Planning

There was some frustration expressed by students about the availability of courses, how course offerings were communicated, and barriers to being able to plan ahead.

When desired courses were changed, unavailable, discontinued, or offered only in limited trimesters students felt they were negatively impacted, not able to complete degrees on time or pursue specific interests.

“I understand that we are in a difficult setting economically, but I have found it frustrating that many of the courses I have looked forward to take over my whole degree have been cancelled or will be cancelled before I have a chance to take them.”

“I would be happier if some courses were offered across different trimesters, not just one trimester per year.”

Issues with course scheduling and timing were highlighted with comments about timetable clashes, late announcements of course times, and lack of advance notice. These all prevented students from being able to plan around work or personal commitments.

“I have ended up with very busy schedules due to a lack of alternative options e.g. no availability of trimester 3 courses. I was also not advised that I was missing a required course when I selected my subjects and have now had to pick up said paper and take a trimester 3 course that I am not really interested in just to meet requirements.”

Poor communication from course coordinators and advisers was called out. Students want clearer, more consistent information about course content, expectations, and updates. Being able to plan ahead was very important to students.

“I wish the future courses' time and date (both on-campus and online) are announced much earlier to allow me to make plans for the coming terms.”

Overall, students want better tools and guidance to plan their course pathways. They often feel confused about prerequisites, course sequences, and how to meet degree requirements efficiently.

“It'd be great if we have a tool to support students in choosing courses other than the current MyDegree, like seeing all preferred courses in the timetable and deciding which one to choose.”

Assessments and Feedback

Undertaking assessments, exams and assignments and gaining feedback from academic staff was highlighted as a significant issue for some students.

Students mentioned wanting clear instructions from teaching staff, more consistent and transparent marking criteria and more timely feedback. Many comments highlight confusion around expectations,

vague marking criteria, and lack of exemplars. Delays in marking and obtaining grades was a frustration for some and some students complained of little or no personal feedback from teaching staff. These issues made it hard for some students to improve or feel confident in their progress.

“Many (but not all) of my courses’ assignment outlines are vague and up for interpretation. I feel that it would be beneficial to my academic career to have a more rigid outline/an exemplar accessible.”

“Getting quicker and more detailed feedback on assignments through online platforms would help me understand how to improve and stay on track academically.”

Having better and more consistent access to support when it comes to assessments, exams and assignments was highlighted as something that would improve the academic experience. Some comments noted that tutorials are essential for clarifying assignments, building skills, and getting help. Students appreciated drop-in sessions, academic advisers, and workshops, but it was noted that access was often inconsistent. Some students felt unsupported, especially when tutorials were poorly run, not recorded, or lacked structure.

“One suggestion to improve the overall academic experience is to increase opportunities for more personalised feedback and interaction, particularly in larger courses. While lectures and tutorials are valuable, it can sometimes be difficult to feel academically supported when class sizes are large or when assignment feedback is minimal. Additional drop-in hours, more peer-to-peer mentoring, or regular Q&A sessions with tutors and lecturers could help bridge that gap.”

“Individual feedback on assignments and exams, rather than general cohort feedback – even just a sentence or two! This would enable students to understand where they went wrong and learn from any mistakes.”

Community and Connection

The sense of a student and a wider university community and the ability for students to connect socially with staff and peers are fundamental to a positive, healthy university. This is an area where students have faced challenges in recent years. Only 47% of students responding to the survey agreed with the statement 'Fitting into the social scene and finding where I can comfortably socialise is easy' and only 43% felt connected with the student community.

This lack of community and connection was a strong theme coming out of the survey comments. Within the overarching theme of 'Community and Connection' there were two sub-themes that really stood out: 'Desire for Belonging' and 'Events and Clubs'.

Desire for Belonging

It was clear that many students are struggling to find their place at university and are feeling isolated. Comments highlighted feelings of loneliness and disconnection from the student and/or university community. However, the comments showed a strong desire for support to do something about this, to find this sense of belonging, connection and community.

Students who are not living in halls, who are studying part-time or connecting remotely felt this sense of isolation most. But the lack of connection and belonging existed for a wide range of students.

"I think student life can sometimes feel isolating, especially in later years when classes become more specialised and independent."

"I've never been involved with much of the student community. I work almost full-time as well as full-time study."

Many students expressed that university life can feel fragmented, especially after the first year when structured social environments (like halls or orientation events) fade. There's a clear call for low-pressure, welcoming spaces where students can connect without needing to be extroverted or already part of a group.

"It was unclear where I fit into the student community. I felt very disconnected and wasn't ever sure what comms were meant for the undergraduate student crowd vs. everyone."

"I have never known how or where to sign up for clubs and groups which has made uni feel very isolating for me."

Connections were made to social anxiety and the impact of loneliness on mental health. This theme highlights the emotional undercurrent of student life; the need to feel seen, supported, and part of something bigger than just academia.

"I wasn't in halls and found undergraduate to be a very lonely experience, because of my social anxiety."

Events and Clubs

Feedback provided by students suggested that the best solutions to the lack of connection and belonging would be to put more resources and effort into supporting student-led clubs and societies and university-organised events and activities.

Students see clubs as essential for building friendships and networks, but they often struggle with finding and joining clubs (especially after the initial few weeks of university). Poor advertising and visibility of clubs and societies was called out as an issue, as were the issues of cliquishness and a frequent lack of follow-up when contact has been made. Limited meeting times or inaccessible formats

were also highlighted as a barrier. There was a strong desire for more informal social clubs, not just ones focused on leadership or niche interests.

“Sometimes making it easier to join clubs/putting on more events for everyone may help? Some people just don’t take to the social events too much but there must be a way of making it more inviting.”

“I want clubs that meet weekly. I want the ability to talk to people in clubs that aren’t just events. I want there to be lunchtime meetings. I want there to be clubs more dedicated to just socialising.”

“More fun, low-pressure events where students can simply show up, snack, and connect. Sometimes, a free cookie and a good conversation can build stronger bonds than formal programs ever could.”

Students want more frequent, diverse, and inclusive university-organised events, such as casual mixers, cultural nights, sports, and arts-based gatherings. Comments also highlighted the need for events that connected people across all campuses (not just Kelburn), and across faculties and year groups. Comments also emphasized the need for better promotion and scheduling, free or low-cost events and accessible formats for shy, neurodivergent, or time-constrained students.

“To enhance the student community, I think the University could focus on creating more low pressure, inclusive events that foster connection across faculties, especially for students who may not live in halls or who commute.”

“Host more social student events to help interconnectedness and spirit.”

“I think ways to connect and make friends in uni (for the shy people that don’t live in the city or go to the halls).”

This theme really reflects students’ craving for vibrant, inclusive, and well-supported social infrastructure, not just one-off events, but a consistent rhythm of opportunities to connect.

Technology and Platforms

Most students (82%) responding to the survey agreed that technology helps them to achieve their academic outcomes. Through the open-text comments, students provided a great deal of feedback about the wide range of digital tools and platforms used across the university. Four main sub-themes were identified: ‘Digital Tools and Platforms’, ‘Technology in Teaching’, ‘Accessibility and Support’ and ‘Infrastructure’.

Digital Tools and Platforms

This sub-theme captures concerns about the usability and consistency of use of platforms like Nuku, Puaha, ECS Wiki, and Canvas. While most students didn’t raise concerns, some students find it difficult to navigate these systems, especially when different lecturers use them in inconsistent ways. Students requested more standardization, training and better user interfaces.

“Nuku interface can be confusing and different courses put things in different sections. It would be nice if it was more standardised across courses.”

“If everyone got on the same page about how to use canvas – it’s used so drastically differently in between courses it gets very confusing.”

“When I first started it was confusing navigating Nuku and the ECS system. It would be good to have some sort of intro to these tools, especially when you must use both for class.”

Students highlighted the need for better access to essential software like Adobe Creative Cloud, Microsoft Excel, and Office 365. Many expressed frustrations over having to pay for tools required for coursework, and some requested training or workshops to learn how to use them effectively.

“A proper tutorial or tour through Office365 and/or OneDrive would be very useful.”

“A learning course to go over things like Microsoft Excel etc – all the things employers look for.”

Technology in Teaching

Students commented on how lecturers use technology in teaching. Some praised innovative approaches, while others noted gaps in digital literacy among staff. Requests included better training for lecturers and more interactive digital teaching methods.

“I find lecturers’ knowledge/usage of NUKU differs widely across the faculty – it would help if NUKU use for courses and placement of information was more standardized.”

Students consistently emphasized the importance of having timely, reliable access to lecture recordings and live-streamed sessions. Many rely on VStream or Zoom to catch up due to illness, work, or other commitments. Delays in uploads, poor audio quality, and inconsistent availability were common frustrations.

“One improvement that could really help is making recorded lectures available more consistently and in a timely manner.”

“Without the lecture recordings, I would likely have trouble completing my courses.”

Students shared mixed views on digital assessments. Some prefer online exams for accessibility and flexibility, while others find them stressful or prone to technical issues. There were calls for clearer policies and more consistent formats across courses.

“I think more online tests rather than in person tests would be helpful – I find it easier to type rather than write.”

“Provide both online and in person option for exams.”

Accessibility and Support

This sub-theme includes comments about the need for captioning, screen readers, and inclusive design. Students with disabilities or neurodivergent needs asked for better support and more accessible digital environments.

“The University should be more open around Disabled students completing assessments and exams digitally.”

“Making accessibility software commonly available for dyslexic students, increased understanding from university staff that neurodivergent students may be overwhelmed by too much digital interaction.”

The experiences of online and distance learners were also highlighted. These students asked for more Zoom tutorials, better communication, and consistent online delivery. Some felt disconnected or unsupported, especially when courses lacked synchronous engagement or clear online structures.

“More culturally responsive and personalised support systems in the digital learning environment, e.g. live chat with tutors or academic mentors familiar with diverse cultural backgrounds.”

Infrastructure

Students raised issues with Wi-Fi reliability, internet speed, and connectivity across campus. Poor infrastructure was seen as a barrier to accessing digital learning tools and participating in online classes.

“Better Wi-Fi maybe, blocks lots of useful teaching tools in my opinion too.”

“Wi-Fi is a bit unreliable, drops often.”

Artificial Intelligence

The two questions in the survey about Artificial Intelligence (AI) saw the biggest increases in agreement in 2025, compared to 2024. 74% of respondents agreed that they have clear and helpful guidelines from staff on using AI (up from 64% in 2024), and 53% agreed that the university has helped them understand AI in ways to support their future work and study (up from 44% in 2024).

AI and its use within the university context was a hot topic within the open-text comments in the survey. It was quite a divisive topic with a wide range of views including those very much against its use and those very supportive of it. Three main sub-themes were identified: 'Guidance and Policy', 'Training' and 'Ethics'.

Guidance and Policy

Feedback from students is that they are currently experiencing a lot of inconsistency in the guidance they are receiving from academic staff regarding the use of AI. Students are asking for clearer, more consistent policies and guidance around AI use. Many felt confused by the lack of standardization across courses and faculties. Some lecturers allow AI tools for certain tasks, while others ban them entirely, even within the same discipline. This inconsistency leads to uncertainty about what is acceptable. How AI use affects grading, and whether students are being treated fairly is also an issue being raised.

"AI use should be clearly defined for faculties. I go into one class under the same subject, and they have different definition of what is allowed for AI use, or some don't list if you can or can't."

"Lectures differ in views on AI making it confusing on what is appropriate what is not."

"AI policy mandate across courses."

Students are calling for course-wide or university-wide AI policies, clear declarations about its use at the start of each course, transparent grading criteria when AI is used and consistent messaging across faculties.

This theme reflects a strong desire for structure and clarity to reduce confusion and ensure fairness.

Training

While some students don't want to see AI become commonplace at university, many students see AI as an inevitable part of the future workplace. They want the university to be proactive in this space and help them build skills to use it effectively. They're asking for tutorials and workshops on AI tools, course content that teaches responsible AI use, examples of how AI can support learning and the training of academic staff to help them better support students in this space.

"AI is an inevitable part of learning going forward; however, it is taboo in the university... It is beneficial, and even necessary, that we are given guidance on how to use AI to support our learning going forward."

"AI needs to be embraced more... I think you need to educate [lecturers] more on how to use AI as a tool for their subject."

Students believe AI can enhance learning when used appropriately and want to be prepared for real-world applications. This theme reflects a proactive attitude toward AI and a desire for the university to embrace it as a learning tool, and not just see it as a threat.

Ethics

Students are concerned about the ethics of AI use and about how it affects learning and academic integrity. Students express ethical worries about plagiarism and some feel that AI undermines genuine learning and critical thinking, while others are frustrated by peers who use AI to gain unfair advantages. Other concerns include AI's role in diminishing academic rigour and original work, the environmental cost of generative AI tools, the unequal access to AI tools, and the need for ethical guidelines and responsible use.

“Quite a few students do not use critical thinking and common sense to understand an assignment and it would be better if there was more emphasis on reducing the use of AI as it stunts students' ability to learn and comprehend.”

“Generative AI, in its current form, has too many ethical issues that I do not feel are addressed by the University. For example, the energy requirements of AI directly contradict VUW's sustainability initiatives...”

“AI is poisoning students; they're losing their critical thinking and reasoning skills. They're not learning, they're simply passing their courses.”

Some students advocate for banning AI entirely, while others want better education on its ethical use. This theme reflects both resistance and a call for thoughtful integration.

Student Services

The university has a wide range of student services aimed to support all aspects of a student's experience while they are at university. Overall students responding to the survey were very satisfied with the services and facilities, 82% rated them good or very good (up from 77% in 2024).

Some of the services received lots of specific feedback through the open-text comments in the survey, such as the Mauri Ora services and the library. Bespoke reports summarising the feedback for these services have been provided directly to these services for their consideration. This section focuses on the general feedback related to 'student services' more broadly.

Student Experiences

The direct experiences of students with the university's support services, as seen through the open-text comments, were often positive. There were frequent comments about how the student services were helpful, responsive, and well-resourced. However, there were some issues raised. While some students praised individual staff members for being kind, supportive, and going above and beyond, others described staff as dismissive, slow to respond, or lacking empathy.

"The student services have been incredibly helpful! Specifically, Mauri Ora student counselling and disability services have made a significant difference in my life."

"Some support services have been a bit slack and dismissive, when I have asked for help, they just respond with a generic email and basically tell you to figure it out yourself."

Students mentioned inconsistent experiences; some had excellent support, while others felt shuffled between departments or received conflicting advice. A recurring concern was a perception of underfunding and understaffing, especially in disability services and student advising. Students felt this impacted the quality and availability of support.

"Careers support is fantastic!"

"Disability Services are amazing and deserve more praise... Student Success has been incredibly poor... staff numbers have been slashed, and it has had a very real and very detrimental effect on the service."

Mature students, part-time students, and those with complex needs felt underserved or overlooked. They asked for more personalized services that reflect their life circumstances. Comments also included praise for well-designed spaces like the library, but also criticism of outdated buildings, broken equipment, and lack of quiet or collaborative study areas.

Visibility and Awareness

The main issue identified through the open-text comments for the support services was around visibility and awareness.

Some students reported a general lack of awareness, saying they didn't know certain services existed until late in their studies, or only found out through peers. This includes academic support, mental health services, and even basic facilities.

"One area for improvement is making student support services more visible and accessible. Many students don't realise what help is available, whether it's academic skills support, mental health services, or financial assistance, until they're in crisis. A more proactive approach, like regular briefings at the start of the trimester or built in Canvas/Nuku reminders, could help ensure students are aware early on."

Feedback suggested that better advertising and communication would help. Students felt that services weren't promoted enough, especially to first-years, remote learners, and those not in halls. They suggested more visible campaigns, better signage, and proactive outreach.

"It would be great if student support services were more visible and easier to access. Sometimes it's hard to know where to go or who to contact when you need help, especially during stressful times. Clearer communication and better promotion of available services would really help."

"More on-campus advertising of the available services and their purpose/function for students (e.g. what services/facilities are available, and who they're available to)."

Several comments mentioned how difficult it is to find information online. Students described the university's digital platforms as fragmented, outdated, or confusing. Students proposed centralized hubs (both physical and digital), guidebooks, orientation tours, and automated emails tailored to student profiles. They also asked for clearer explanations of what services do and who they're for.

"Maybe create a guidebook or search engine for university services/facilities that includes detailed information on each service."

"Centralized Student Support Hub: Create a single, easily accessible physical and digital hub where students can find information and access key support services (e.g., academic advising, mental health counselling, disability services, financial aid, career services, housing). This reduces the frustration of navigating multiple departments and websites."

Campus Facilities

Campus facilities covers a wide range of buildings, spaces and services across the university. There were four main sub-themes identified: 'Study Spaces', 'Food', 'Accessibility and Inclusivity' and 'Maintenance'.

Study Spaces

This was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme. Many of the comments mentioned the need for more study spaces specifically within the libraries so it is also covered as a theme within the library feedback, but a lot of the comments were just calling for more study spaces in general across the whole university.

Students reported issues with the current availability of study spaces, they described difficulty finding seats in libraries and study areas, especially during peak times and exam periods. Many comments mentioned uncomfortable seating, cramped desks, and poor lighting in older lecture theatres and study rooms. There appears to be a strong desire for more and better quiet zones, group-work spaces, and individual booths across all campuses.

"Allow students to book study rooms for 2hrs+ for examinations. Currently the room booking portal does not allow this."

Some students also noted that study spaces are not well advertised or easy to locate, especially for new or part-time students. Neurodivergent students requested more sensory-friendly environments, such as dimmer lighting and quieter zones.

Food

Affordability

This theme captures concerns about the high cost of food on campus. Some students mentioned that food on campus was too expensive, not student-friendly and unjustified for the quality. Many called for discounts, subsidized options, or meal plans to make food more accessible. The issue was especially pronounced among full-time students, those living in halls, and international students balancing tight budgets. Students mentioned skipping meals due to cost, relying on external food sources, or feeling forced to leave campus to eat affordably. Some suggested partnerships with supermarkets or co-ops to offer basic groceries at student rates. Others proposed student-run food shops, daily specials, or price caps on campus food.

"The food prices are too high. Please try to bring it down."

"Need a cheaper affordable food shop run by students on campus, can't afford a \$15 sandwich!"

"The cafés and food outlets are genuinely too expensive... Having more affordable options or student-friendly pricing would go a long way."

Variety

This theme reflects comments on the range and nutritional value of food with concerns about dietary inclusivity. Some students expressed frustration with limited options, especially for vegetarian, vegan, halal, and gluten-free diets. Many described food offerings as bland, unhealthy, or not filling, and called for more fresh, nutritious, and culturally diverse meals. Comments highlighted the need for salad bars, rice and bean bowls, and clear labelling to avoid cross-contamination. Students with allergies or dietary restrictions felt underserved and sometimes unsafe eating on campus.

“More affordable and accessible gluten-free food options... a simple, low-cost salad bar would be hugely beneficial.”

“Would like to see more nutritious food and fresh food. Not loving the options around campus.”

Facilities

This theme focuses on the physical infrastructure and availability of food services across campuses. Some students requested more microwaves, toasters, and kitchen spaces to prepare their own meals. There were repeated mentions of broken appliances, limited vending machines, and lack of cafes at smaller campuses like Te Aro and Pipitea. Students noted that some cafes close too early or don't operate during evenings, leaving few options for late study sessions. Others asked for student-only spaces to eat and relax, and for more seating in food areas. The absence of food facilities at certain campuses was seen as a barrier to staying on-site and engaging with university life.

“Need more microwaves at Kelburn to heat up our own food.”

“Te Aro campus should have at least a cafe or canteen... We can't always go to the other campus.”

Accessibility and Inclusivity

This theme highlighted both physical and social access issues with accessibility and inclusivity of facilities across campus.

Students mentioned broken elevators, heavy doors, lack of ramps, and poor signage for those with mobility impairments. Neurodivergent students asked for more sensory-safe spaces beyond the existing 'Bubble' room, including quieter classrooms and better lighting control. Comments emphasized the need for spaces that support older students, disabled students, and those from minority backgrounds to feel welcome and connected.

“Would be REALLY nice to see some accessibility tools/features in spaces that are beyond dedicated accessibility areas (e.g. the disability suite on bottom floor of the Kelburn library). Such as a couple standing desks, dynamic seating, booths. Accessibility is for everyone, and it would be really lovely to see this in common spaces, rather than sequestered away. It's more welcoming and inclusive.”

Maintenance

Some students provided feedback focussed on the upkeep of physical infrastructure across the university. Students noted dirty bathrooms, broken furniture, and lack of cleaning in study areas and lecture theatres. There were frequent mentions of broken desks, chairs, heating systems, and outdated equipment in older buildings. Concerns were raised about empty hand sanitizer dispensers, poor lighting, and ventilation in crowded spaces. Some students felt that maintenance issues were reported but not addressed promptly.

“Frequent fire alarms and malfunctioning or insufficient equipment in the facilities disrupt my studies significantly.”

“There are off-putting stains on most of the chairs in the fourth and fifth floors of library.”

“Some practice room chairs are unfortunately in very poor condition, with a few no longer usable.”

Other Issues

Parking

This feedback came mostly from students commuting to campus. Students reported a lack of parking spaces near campus, especially at Kelburn. Many felt that parking fees were too high and suggested free or subsidized parking for students. Students with mobility challenges or temporary injuries requested designated parking closer to building entrances. Some students said they avoided coming to campus due to parking difficulties, which affected their engagement and study habits.

“Parking situation is horrific.”

“Hard to feel valued when the university removes all student parking halfway through the year...”

Wi-Fi and Connectivity

Some students raised issues with the reliability of internet access across the university. Students reported weak or inconsistent Wi-Fi in specific buildings, including lecture theatres and practice rooms. Some areas of campus, especially Te Aro and Pipitea, were noted as having poor connectivity. Unreliable Wi-Fi disrupted access to online resources, lecture recordings, and live tutorials. Students asked for better infrastructure and more consistent internet access across all campuses.

“Wi-Fi is a bit unreliable, drops often.”

“Better Wi-Fi connection in areas of Kelburn campus such as the memorial theatre.”

Power Outlets and Charging

Students mentioned struggling to find power outlets in libraries, lecture theatres, and common areas. Requests included multi-functional power outlets, especially in Kelburn and Te Aro libraries. Limited charging options forced students to leave campus early or study elsewhere. Some students noted that newer buildings had better access, while older ones lacked basic charging infrastructure.

“Places with charger ports I find hard to come by – my laptop battery is about as small as my social battery.”

“More power outlets... ideally multi-functional outlets with three-pin sockets, USB ports, and Type-C ports.”

Student Voice

The Student Voice theme reflects a vibrant, politically aware student body that wants to be heard, respected, and involved. Students are not just passive recipients of education, they are active participants in shaping the university's culture, policies, and public stance.

From the survey results we saw that only 56% of students responding to the survey felt that their opinions were valued at the university, but 79% were satisfied with their class representatives. Students also had high levels of agreement that they were respected based on their religious beliefs, political beliefs, immigration background, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender. And 86% of survey respondents agreed that sustainability was important to them.

Governance and Representation

This theme includes feedback on how students are (or aren't) consulted in university decisions, especially those affecting their academic experience. Students want more meaningful consultation, not just token representation. There's a push for co-designing policies, especially around assessment, sustainability, and equity.

"It seems like many faculty decisions are made without student voice, particularly ones regarding assessment policies."

Students express concerns about the effectiveness, transparency, and inclusivity of student governance bodies like VUWSA. Comments range from calls for better leadership and engagement to critiques of how decisions are made without sufficient student input. Some students feel excluded from decision-making, especially around assessments and policy changes. Others advocate for more democratic processes and greater accountability in student organizations.

"Have better student leadership in VUWSA and other associated groups."

"Acquire funding so that there can be more student led initiatives! That VUWSA could do more, that the Student Bubble could get more food."

Politics and Freedom of Expression

There's a recurring tension between students who want the university to take a stand on political issues and those who feel it should remain neutral. Some students feel the university leans too far left politically and marginalizes conservative or religious viewpoints. Others argue that neutrality can be a form of complicity, especially in times of social injustice.

Some students call on the university to take clear positions on global and local political issues, including divestment from fossil fuels and Israeli institutions. These comments are often linked to broader sustainability and human rights concerns. These comments reflect a desire for the university to act as a moral and ethical leader, not just an academic institution.

"Create a neutral social and political position... the university is far left wing leaning politically, and not inclusive of those with different interests, opinions, experiences, ideas and viewpoints."

Salient, the student magazine, is frequently mentioned, both praised and criticized. Students comment on editorial bias, lack of diversity in perspectives, and perceived political leanings. The importance of media is highlighted as a platform for student voice, but also the need for balanced and inclusive storytelling.

"I hate to say it, but the Salient has not been good this year... ONLY political stories make it boring, and general takes from people on certain issues that seem insensitive/not their opinions to give."

Students advocate for their right to protest, form political organizations, and express dissent. There are calls for the university to protect and promote student activism, not suppress it. Some comments highlight barriers to free expression, especially for marginalized groups.

"Proactively uphold and support students' right to protest and form political organisations."

Financial Hardship

Just over half (54%) of survey respondents reported that they worried about their financial circumstances often or very often and only 42% agreed that studying at university and covering costs of living was manageable.

In the open-text responses, respondents frequently mentioned the financial stress they were under while at university. Three main themes were identified here: 'Cost of Living', 'Funding and Scholarships' and 'Work and Study Balance'.

Cost of Living

This theme reflects the widespread concern among students about the rising costs of university life. Some students feel that fees are disproportionately high compared to the value they receive, especially when services are limited or inaccessible. Cafés and food outlets on campus are frequently described as overpriced, with students requesting cheaper, healthier options. Halls of residence and private rentals in Wellington are seen as unaffordable, especially for students without financial support. Students mention expensive public transport and parking fees as barriers to attending classes. Some students report skipping meals, working long hours, or considering dropping out due to financial pressure.

"With the current cost of living crisis, some of the costs for services and facilities are expensive."

"One thing I would really love to see improved is the affordability of food and drink on campus. The cafés and food outlets are genuinely too expensive for many students, especially those who are already trying to balance study with part-time work or living on a tight budget. It can be disheartening to be on campus all day and feel like you have to skip meals or leave to find something cheaper elsewhere."

Funding and Scholarships

This theme captures student feedback about the availability, accessibility, and fairness of financial aid. Some feel excluded from scholarship opportunities due to eligibility criteria or lack of awareness. While appreciated, hardship support is seen as insufficient or difficult to access. Students in advanced degrees express frustration over inadequate funding, especially when research takes longer than expected. Students want clearer information about what funding is available and how to apply. Some students feel that funding is unevenly distributed across faculties or demographic groups.

"Despite my student fees going towards a variety of groups, I actually can't access most of them because I don't fit into their demographic or required criteria."

"Our fees should not be funding a student hardship fund. I struggle enough to pay my own fees let alone fund something that there are plenty of scholarships those people could be eligible for. I on the other hand wasn't eligible for any as my parents earn too much yet I receive no help from them financially."

Work and Study Balance

This theme highlights the struggle students face in trying to balance paid work with full-time study, often driven by financial necessity. Students report missing lectures or falling behind academically due to work commitments. The stress of juggling jobs and study contributes to burnout and poor wellbeing. Course structures and timetables are often rigid, making it hard for working students to keep up. Students suggest more paid internships, on-campus jobs, and career support to ease financial strain. Some students struggle to find part-time work, especially international students or those with limited experience.

“I have found balancing having a job and attending all of my lectures and tutorials quite hard, having to skip some lectures to be able to make my shifts. I also haven’t been able to find a job closer to my hall of residence and now have to bus about 50 minutes for every shift. Despite using student job search, the job market right now is extremely hard, and I would appreciate some more help in finding employment.”

Culture, Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are clearly important to the student population, 87% of students responding to the survey agreed that diversity and inclusivity was important to them. 85% of students agreed that diversity and inclusivity was also important to the university.

Students provided a diverse range of feedback related to how they saw the university respond to issues around culture, diversity, inclusion and accessibility. There was a lot of praise for positive and accommodating policies and practices across the university, but also a lot of calls for improvements to be made.

Cultural Competency

Student feedback reveals a strong desire for the university to engage more meaningfully with cultural practices and values, particularly those rooted in Māori and Pasifika traditions. Many students praised initiatives that incorporate te reo Māori, tikanga, and kaupapa Māori into teaching and campus life, but others noted that these efforts can feel tokenistic or inconsistently applied across faculties. There were calls for more authentic integration of indigenous knowledge, better pronunciation of Māori names, and increased visibility of Māori and Pasifika staff in leadership and teaching roles. Some students also highlighted the importance of cultural safety, such as beginning classes with karakia and creating spaces that reflect and respect diverse cultural identities.

“I love the inclusion of culture at VUW and the importance of upholding Māori values, it is a good reflection of Māori culture and New Zealand when it comes to everlasting impressions on our Exchange students.”

“While the university may have sufficient support groups for Māori and Pasifika students, many initiatives feel tokenistic rather than inclusive... the majority of students, including Pākehā, use ignorant or racist rhetoric in Māori courses.”

International students and those from minority ethnic backgrounds often expressed feeling overlooked or underrepresented. While the university is seen as multicultural, several comments pointed out that cultural competency tends to focus narrowly on Māori and Pasifika, leaving other groups, especially international students, feeling excluded. Suggestions included offering te reo Māori workshops for newcomers, improving intercultural communication training for staff, and ensuring that cultural events are held across all campuses. Students emphasized that cultural competency should be a shared responsibility across the university, not siloed into specific departments or weeks of celebration.

“Maybe just holding big social events for everyone of every background, ethnicity, etc. For example, Pasifika week celebration happening this week (however, this is only for Pasifika students).”

“The intention to show respect and acceptance is there but it often feels like people don't know how to recognize differences and how to respond to them, unless the person is Māori or Pasifika. That often leaves international students feeling a little dismissed or having to do extra effort to be seen and taken seriously.”

Diversity and Inclusion

Students shared a wide range of experiences related to inclusion, with many highlighting the need for better support for disabled and neurodivergent learners. There were frequent mentions of inaccessible buildings, inadequate accommodations, and under-resourced disability services. Students with ADHD, autism, and other learning needs described feeling overwhelmed by digital platforms, excluded from group work, or unsupported in assessments. Others called for more sensory-friendly spaces, flexible

learning options, and staff training to better understand invisible disabilities. Despite these challenges, many praised individual staff members who went above and beyond to provide compassionate support.

“Making accessibility software commonly available for dyslexic students, increased understanding from university staff that neurodivergent students may be overwhelmed by too much digital interaction.”

Gender and sexuality inclusion also featured prominently. Students advocated for stronger support for LGBTQ+ communities, especially trans and non-binary individuals, both in campus life and academic settings. Some felt judged or misunderstood by peers and staff, while others appreciated the visibility of pride events and rainbow clubs. There were also concerns about age diversity, with older students feeling isolated or overlooked. A few comments raised the issue of ideological bias, suggesting that inclusion efforts sometimes exclude conservative or religious viewpoints. Overall, students want a university environment where everyone, regardless of background, identity, or ability, feels seen, respected, and supported.

“The University should work hard to ensure LGBTQ+ students, particularly trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming students, are supported and represented... especially with the increased global pushback against diversity and inclusion.”

“I would appreciate it if the University was more inclusive about a broader range of views on gender and sexuality, not just the far-left view. In an attempt to be inclusive, they have excluded the significant number of people who think differently on these issues and don't allow for friendly, non-hateful disagreement.”

Student Sub-Groups

Many of the general themes identified were prominent within different student sub-groups. This next section focusses on some student sub-groups and summarises the main themes relevant to these groups. This helps to highlight issues faced by certain sub-groups.

International Students

Many international students highlighted challenges with **academic support and communication**. Comments frequently mentioned the need for recorded lectures, clearer guidance on university systems, and more accessible information about course requirements and facilities. Several students expressed frustration with slow or inconsistent responses from the international admissions team and student services, which led to anxiety and confusion, especially around enrolment and visa processes. There were also calls for more academic workshops, orientation activities, and motivational support (such as welcome packs) to help international students feel more prepared and valued during their transition.

“One improvement that could really help is making recorded lectures available more consistently and in a timely manner. Sometimes, due to time zone differences or personal challenges, it’s difficult to attend live sessions, especially for international students.”

“One suggestion I have is to provide more support for international students, especially in the early weeks of the trimester. Clearer guidance on how to navigate university systems and more academic support workshops would be helpful.”

Financial pressures and scholarship concerns were a recurring theme. International students described the high cost of tuition and living expenses as a significant burden, with many requesting more scholarships, emergency grants, and discounts. Some postgraduate students, especially those self-funded or on limited scholarships, felt that their financial challenges were underestimated by the university. The lack of flexible funding options and the pressure to complete degrees within strict timeframes added to their stress, sometimes impacting mental health and academic quality.

“I believe offering more accessible financial support or small emergency grants would make a big difference for many students, especially international ones.”

“As an international student, it is very difficult to keep up for the cost of university, I wish there were more international scholarships or support.”

A strong desire for greater **social integration and community** was evident. Students called for more cross-cultural engagement initiatives, peer-led support programs, and inclusive events that foster connections between domestic and international students. The need for dedicated spaces, clubs, and networking opportunities was emphasized. Some felt isolated due to limited social opportunities, lack of awareness about existing programs, or events primarily targeted at undergraduates.

“Expanding initiatives like the International Buddy Programme, peer mentoring, or casual weekly meetups could help build a stronger sense of belonging. It would also be great to see more promotion of these opportunities across campus and online—sometimes they exist, but students don’t know about them.”

“I think having more social events or group activities would help students connect with each other. It would make the university feel more friendly and supportive, especially for new or international students.”

Several comments addressed issues of **equity and inclusion**. International students sometimes felt less valued than domestic students, citing experiences of privilege, bias, or insufficient representation in student councils and university decision-making. Concerns about racial discrimination, language barriers, and lack of tailored support for mental health and housing were raised. Students advocated for more professional training for staff, better communication, and a more equitable approach to supporting all members of the university community.

“Listen to international student voice is far from enough for enhancing their experience here. Treat them equally important as domestic students.”

“We have observed what appears to be a significant privilege extended to domestic students over international students at the university.”

Finally, international students expressed a need for more practical support related to **career development** and life in New Zealand. Suggestions included more volunteer activities, on-campus job opportunities, internships, and guidance for graduating students seeking employment. There were also requests for better access to health services, family support, and clearer procedures for navigating university life. Some students appreciated the inclusive and supportive environment, but some felt improvements were needed to help international students thrive both academically and personally.

“It would be great to have more volunteer activities that combine different fields of study, as well as events and guidance to support international students who are about to graduate in finding employment.”

“I would request the career management team to work on supporting job placements. For international students, learning about the NZ job market is quite a challenge.”

Mature Students

A recurring theme for mature students is the sense of **social isolation and lack of community**. Many comments describe difficulty connecting with peers of similar age, with the student community perceived as geared toward younger, school-leaver cohorts. Mature students often feel out of place in tutorials, lectures, and social events, and express a desire for dedicated spaces, support groups, or regular meetups specifically for older students. Some note that while staff are accommodating, the lack of targeted social engagement leaves them feeling disconnected and alienated from the broader university culture.

“It is difficult to find spaces where students in my age group can fit in, connect and socialise. There must be other older students, but I can't find them. And I don't feel I fit with younger people.”

“There really needs to be some social activities for mature students. I feel completely isolated. While this doesn't impact on my studies, I would love to meet older students to listen to and share their/my university journey.”

The **balancing of study, work, and family responsibilities** are frequently mentioned by mature students. The structure of assessments, term breaks, and course schedules often clashes with family responsibilities, especially for those with children. There are calls for more flexible learning options, such as online courses, lecture recordings, and adaptable timetables. Some mature students appreciate the flexibility offered by certain courses, but many feel that more could be done to accommodate their unique circumstances and life priorities.

“Obviously the vast majority of students are young school leavers, attending as a returning/mature student is quite alienating. While the staff are very accommodating, the structure of assessments and coursework does not combine well with family responsibilities, particularly children. Studying as a

parent is extremely difficult. The difference in term breaks between school and university can be challenging.”

Several comments highlight the difficulties mature students face in **navigating university systems, platforms, and administrative processes**. Many report a lack of clear guidance, poor communication, and insufficient orientation for those not fresh out of high school. Mature students often feel that available support services are not well-promoted or tailored to their needs, especially for postgraduates or those studying part-time or remotely. There is a strong desire for better information, more accessible resources, and targeted support for mature learners.

“As a mature student returning to complete post-graduate study after a long period away from academic studies, I found it challenging to understand the university systems and platforms such as Nuku/Canvas. I am now aware that there is support available in relation to these things for undergraduate students, but I was not made aware of anything similar for post-graduate students in my situation. This would have been helpful.”

Mature students express a need for **greater recognition of their life experience** and perspectives within the academic community. Some feel undervalued or overlooked, with career advice and extracurricular activities primarily aimed at younger students. There are suggestions for more inclusive policies, expanded scholarship options for mature doctoral candidates, and greater flexibility in tuition payment plans. Mature students want their contributions and unique challenges to be acknowledged and supported by the university.

“I am a mature student, and there is not really much focused on us. There is a token 'mature students meet up' and that's it. All of the career advice is aimed at young people looking to secure their first job after university. There is a really missed opportunity here to target and appeal to this group of people.”

“The university is geared to the younger generations and as a mature student, I don't feel that there is a lot that caters to my generation.”

Despite the challenges, some mature students report rewarding experiences and appreciation for the learning environment and flexibility provided by the university. Positive relationships with supervisors and staff are noted, as well as the value of online learning and self-directed study.

“I'm a mature student so a little outside the more youthful identity of the student culture. Despite that it has been a very inclusive experience. I wish there were more mature students in my cohort.”

“I am loving being a mature returning student at VUW. It has been a highly rewarding experience for me.”

Māori Students and Māori Culture

Many students appreciate the visible **inclusion of Māori culture and values** at the university, noting that it creates a welcoming environment and leaves a positive impression on both local and international students. Initiatives such as Māori Studies, whānau rooms, and the integration of mātauranga Māori in certain programmes are highlighted as strengths. However, some students feel that Māori content is inconsistently embedded across faculties, with certain campuses or courses offering only tokenistic or superficial engagement with Māori perspectives. There is a call for more authentic, sustained integration of Māori values and practices throughout the curriculum and campus life.

“I love the inclusion of culture at VUW and the importance of upholding Māori values, it is a good reflection of Māori culture and New Zealand when it comes to everlasting impressions on our Exchange students.”

“As a Māori student I love the whānau rooms and support in the science school.”

Support structures like Āwhina, Mauri Ora, and **dedicated spaces** are valued by Māori students, especially when facing marginalisation or cultural challenges. Several comments describe experiences of exclusion, ignorance, or racism from staff or peers, which can impact wellbeing and learning. Students emphasize the importance of culturally safe environments, regular karakia, and spaces for whānau and minority groups to foster connection and maintain mana. There is also a desire for more Māori and Pasifika counsellors, peer mentoring, and targeted support at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

“Having a karakia pre-class would make me feel more culturally safe and prepared for a session. ... Just something to think about to help students bond well and implement that sense of whanaungatanga and work well together.”

Tokenism, representation, and equity are issues that were surfaced in some comments. A recurring concern is that some Māori initiatives and support structures feel tokenistic rather than genuinely inclusive. Students note that while diversity is often promoted in advertising and orientation, it is not always reflected in staffing, teaching, or decision-making. The lack of Māori and Pasifika representation among lecturers and university leadership is seen as a barrier to true equity and empowerment. Students advocate for more Māori voices in governance, curriculum development, and teaching, as well as easier pathways to submit assignments in te reo Māori and practical examples relevant to Māori and Pasifika learners.

“While the university may have sufficient support groups for Māori and Pasifika students, many initiatives feel tokenistic rather than inclusive.”

“Less Māori tokenism – be a real treaty partner not the one that has good outward optics.”

“Proper diversity is important. Not just preaching about it all the time. Not just taking photos of kids who look like they will diversify the uni's image. It means giving jobs to Māori & Pasifika people.”

Students express mixed experiences with the integration of Māori content in the **curriculum** and in their courses. While some programmes are praised for collaborative and accurate representation of indigenous topics, others are criticized for treating Māori content as an afterthought or for setting unrealistic expectations around te reo Māori proficiency. The need for scaffolded learning, more accessible te reo Māori resources, and practical, culturally relevant examples is emphasized. Some students also highlight the importance of decolonizing teaching methods and ensuring that Māori perspectives are woven into the backbone of academic life, not just added for diversity points.

“The curriculum also seems have Māori inclusivity in a small segment taught at the end of class when it could be taught throughout. This makes us feel excluded in our own country.”

Across the comments, there is a strong desire for ongoing improvement in Māori initiatives, including increased **funding**, more interdisciplinary **collaboration**, and broader opportunities for non-Māori students to engage with Māori culture. Suggestions include free te reo Māori workshops, more culturally diverse counsellors, and activities to help non-local students understand Māori practices. Students also advocate for more practical support, clearer communication, and genuine partnership in upholding the Treaty of Waitangi and Māori values at all levels of the university.

“More Māori initiatives/support and funding for the Māori initiatives already here.”

“Increase te reo Māori usage and engage with mana whenua Taranaki Whānui more closely.”

“Free opportunities to learn te reo...?”

Pasifika Students

Many Pasifika students do feel a sense of **belonging and community**, some express appreciation for dedicated support structures such as the Pasifika Student Success team and Pasifika associations. These groups are described as creating a “village” or “family” atmosphere, providing spaces to connect, study, and receive practical help. Students value having advisers who understand their cultural background and can guide them through academic decisions. Events like Pasifika Week and Loto Aho study sessions are highlighted as important opportunities for connection, peer support, and academic engagement.

“I really like how Pasifika Student Success creates a village for students, and it is like a family. I think more services and areas of the university should be like that.”

“Pasifika Student Success is incredible, definitely the best service I’ve used at Te Herenga Waka. The staff make me feel seen and cared for, and I can actually get help that I need (food, a place to connect and study).”

“As a Pasifika student, the Pasifika Student Success team has had a major positive impact on my academic journey. Within my own academic journey, I feel confident approaching my Pasifika adviser if I have any uncertainty with my academics whether it’s changing my major or making changes to the courses I am taking.”

Representation, diversity, and inclusion is also an issue for Pasifika students, like with Māori students. While there is praise for the university’s efforts to celebrate Pasifika culture, some students feel that diversity is not always reflected in faculty staffing or decision-making. Comments note that diversity in advertising and events does not necessarily translate into meaningful representation among lecturers or leadership. There is a desire for more Pasifika voices in teaching, curriculum development, and university governance, as well as for more practical examples and content relevant to Pasifika students in courses.

“Pacific students are often still treated as members of a monolithic culture outside of lecturers of similar cultures or the Pacific Studies department.”

Some students also raise concerns about **tokenism**, noting that while support groups exist, initiatives can feel superficial or exclusive. There are calls for more inclusive events that bring together students from all backgrounds, rather than limiting celebrations to specific groups. Comments also highlight the need for respectful and equitable treatment of all students, regardless of ethnicity, and for university representatives to provide inclusive answers and support.

“Maybe just holding big social events for everyone of every background, ethnicity, etc. for example, Pasifika week celebration happening this week (however, this is only for Pasifika students).”

Pasifika students mention both positive and challenging experiences with **academic support**. Dedicated advisers and study sessions are praised for helping students navigate course changes and build confidence. However, some students report difficulties with assessment formats, lack of clarity in course requirements, and limited access to relevant elective courses such as Pacific Health. There is a call for more practical, culturally relevant examples in teaching and for better academic advising tailored to Pasifika needs.

“The Loto Aho study sessions in first year was an awesome opportunity to reach out for help with my courses and connect with my other Pasifika peers. I was able to get help directly from some of my lecturers, I otherwise wouldn’t have approached my lecturers outside of these study sessions.”

Suggestions for improvement include more **financial support** for Pasifika and postgraduate students, increased interdisciplinary collaboration, and the creation of clubs to promote awareness and outreach. Students advocate for integrating community interactions into the curriculum, emphasizing Pacific perspectives in health and policy subjects, and expanding mental health support with more culturally diverse counsellors. There is also a desire for more opportunities for Pasifika students to thrive and for the university to move beyond surface-level diversity towards genuine inclusion and empowerment.

“More financial support for Pacific students and post graduate students.”

“Pasifika stem club - there is not one currently, but it would definitely be a driving force to increase awareness of stem programs and outreach for different jobs.”

“Integrate community interactions into the curriculum more. Emphasis on Pacific People in Health and Policy Related Subjects.”

Disabled Students

Many disabled students highlight ongoing challenges with physical **accessibility** on campus, such as inadequate rest spaces, unreliable elevators, and buildings that are difficult to navigate. There are frequent calls for more sensory-friendly and quiet study areas, better signage, and improvements to facilities like restrooms and recreation spaces.

“Disability accessibility is quite shocking. Elevators need to be working at all times, or you need more options.”

In the digital realm, students appreciate accessibility software and digital tools that support neurodivergent learning but also note that online platforms and course pages can be confusing or poorly organized. The need for clear, consistent access to lecture recordings and digital resources is emphasized, as these are crucial for students who cannot always attend in person.

“Making accessibility software commonly available for dyslexic students, increased understanding from university staff that neurodivergent students may be overwhelmed by too much digital interaction.”

Disability Services are widely praised for their compassion and practical support, but many students report that these services are **understaffed and underfunded**. Long wait times, inconsistent accommodations, and limited access to diagnostic resources (such as educational psychologists for dyslexia or ADHD) are common concerns. Students advocate for more funding, additional staff, and expanded services to meet the growing and diverse needs of disabled and neurodivergent learners. There is also a desire for better coordination between Disability Services, Student Success, and other support teams.

“Disability services need more funding. There are not enough staff to run this department.”

“I feel that the disability service is severely understaffed and often unable to provide adequate support; the experience can be hit or miss, which adds to my anxiety and leaves me feeling unsupported.”

“Disability Services are amazing and deserve more praise and support for the incredible work they do.”

Disabled students describe mixed experiences with **academic inclusion**. While some lecturers are understanding and accommodating, others are perceived as dismissive or lacking awareness of diverse learning needs. Comments highlight the importance of patience, flexibility, and compassion from teaching staff, especially regarding assignment extensions, group work, and the use of technology in assessments. There are calls for universal standards and training for lecturers to ensure consistent

support and to avoid subtle ableism, such as reluctance to release lecture content or accommodate less visible disabilities.

“Some teachers still don't acknowledge some disabilities and won't comply with what is needed/modify teaching to accommodate these students.”

Social isolation is a recurring theme, particularly for students with invisible disabilities, neurodivergence, or those studying part-time or remotely. Many express difficulties connecting with peers, accessing community spaces, or participating in campus life due to physical, sensory, or scheduling barriers. Suggestions include creating online clubs, dedicated communities for ADHD and neurodivergent students, and more inclusive events and spaces. Students value opportunities to connect with others who understand their experiences and advocate for broader recognition of diverse needs across the university.

“As someone on the ASD spectrum I don't really find that neurodivergent needs are well considered and although I'm not in often we somehow seem to find each other due to seating selection for tests and all have this concern when we chat, we all mask and find our own solutions. ... maybe an online space to connect would be a nice start as sometimes just having someone who understands to chat to, or vent is hugely helpful.”

Students offer a range of **recommendations** for improving the disabled student experience, including more accessible facilities, expanded online learning options, better communication about available services, and streamlined processes for accommodations. There is a strong desire for the university to invest in core support areas, prioritize wellbeing, and foster a culture of respect and inclusion. Many students note that while individual staff often go above and beyond, structural and resource limitations hinder the university's ability to fully support disabled learners.

“There needs to be more thought into the wellbeing of students who have sensory needs – it's not enough to have just one 'bubble', just one sensory friendly space – the whole campus, including every room should be sensory safe, if you want disabled/neurodivergent students to attend lectures in person.”

“Take into account neurodivergence, such as ADHD and provide specific support.”

Rainbow or Takatāpui Students

Many Rainbow and Takatāpui students emphasize the importance of **visible support and representation** for LGBTQ+ communities, especially trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse students. Comments highlight the need for the university to actively support these students, particularly in the face of global pushback against diversity and inclusion. There are calls for more awareness initiatives, dedicated liaisons in faculties (such as health), and staff training on gender diversity to ensure all students feel seen and supported.

“The University should work hard to ensure LGBTQ+ students, particularly trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming students, are supported and represented in the University. This is particularly critical with the increased global pushback against diversity and inclusion and increased transphobia and hatred towards gender diverse people.”

“A rainbow liaison in the school of health, especially midwifery would be great.”

Several students describe mixed experiences regarding **campus climate and safety**. While some feel safe, others report discomfort due to judgment or prejudice from peers, especially around gender expression. There is a desire for the university to tackle specific prejudices, promote acceptance, and

create a more comfortable environment for Rainbow students. Suggestions include surveys to assess campus attitudes and visible initiatives like posters to challenge stereotypes and foster inclusion.

“A stronger focus on supporting the trans community in Hall life and on campus, tackling specific prejudices held by other students. I often get judged for presenting the way I want on campus. And while I still feel safe, I do not feel comfortable. Queerness is still looked down upon unless it is sanitised for the masses.”

“Encourage more staff to be aware of gender diversity!! Some training on it might be useful.”

“Maybe finding ways to tackle these prejudices with initiatives, even something simple like putting up posters.”

Comments reflect a desire for **genuine inclusion** that goes beyond surface-level diversity. Some students feel that support groups for Rainbow, Māori, and Pasifika students are valuable, but others note that these can feel separate from everyday academic life or exclusive. There is interest in bridging gaps between student groups, fostering intersectional communities, and ensuring that all students, regardless of background, feel they belong and can connect across demographic lines.

Academic and social engagement issues were raised. Some students mention that Rainbow clubs and services are sometimes hard to approach or feel disconnected from their classes. There is a call for more integration of Rainbow support into academic and social spaces, as well as for initiatives that address the needs of international students and those in specific faculties. Some comments highlight the importance of including alternative perspectives on gender and sexuality in the curriculum, rather than relegating them to secondary status.

Some comments called for **broader inclusion** and respect for more diverse views. A few students express concern that the university’s approach to inclusion can feel one-sided, with limited room for differing views on gender and sexuality. They advocate for respectful dialogue and recognition that disagreement can exist without hate. There is also a desire for broader engagement with other social categories, such as religion and politics, to ensure that inclusion and diversity efforts encompass all aspects of student identity.

“I would appreciate it if the University was more inclusive about a broader range of views on gender and sexuality, not just the far-left view. In an attempt to be inclusive, they have excluded the significant number of people who think differently on these issues and don't allow for friendly, non-hateful disagreement.”

“I also feel that the University values inclusion and diversity regarding sexuality and diversity but not so much for political and religious beliefs – it feels very one sided sometimes so it would be nice to facilitate engagement for a broader range of these social categories.”

Part-Time Students

Social connection and community engagement is an issue raised by part-time students. Many part-time students report feeling disconnected from the wider university community. Because their schedules are often shaped by work, family, or other commitments, they find it difficult to participate in social events, clubs, or networking opportunities. Several comments mention that university life feels transactional, with limited chances to build meaningful relationships beyond acquaintances. This sense of isolation is especially pronounced for those studying remotely, living outside Wellington, or balancing part-time study with full-time work.

“As a part-time post-grad student, I feel very disconnected with other students. I expected to make connections, but I didn't make anything better than acquaintances. My university experience feels transactional rather than wholesome.”

“Being an older student, living outside of Wellington and part-time makes it hard for me to be part of the student community and attend other social gatherings. These reasons also do not make me feel valued as part of the school community.”

Part-time students frequently express frustration with the lack of tailored support and **access to university services**. Some feel uninformed about available resources, such as hot desking, student email accounts, or mature student groups. Others note that they pay full student levies for services they rarely use, especially when studying remotely. There are calls for better communication, more flexible access to facilities (like quiet study spaces or weekend campus access), and improvements to administrative processes, such as updating identity information and issuing student ID cards.

Balancing study with work and personal life is a major challenge for part-time students. Many appreciate the flexibility of online lectures and recorded content, which enables them to keep up with coursework despite health or scheduling issues. However, some report difficulties with course planning, unclear enrolment processes, and limited options for online or evening classes. There is a desire for more practical support, such as clearer course overviews, expanded online learning, and better academic advising tailored to part-time students.

“Continue lecture recording and review the quality of recordings. Being full-time working to support myself through study and studying part-time meant it was pretty hard to attend a course that was only delivered in-person, and it was very stressful (considering it would have been easier with recordings).”

“The lack of online courses is somewhat concerning, particularly as a part-time student who works full-time, but would like to see more options. It's not impossible, but there does seem to be a lack of willingness to adapt from a course coordinator perspective.”

Financial stress is a recurring theme. Part-time students often struggle with the high cost of living, tuition fees, and limited access to government assistance or scholarships. Some mention the challenge of finding part-time work or internships relevant to their studies, and the difficulty of transitioning from university to the job market. There are suggestions for more affordable food options on campus, expanded scholarship opportunities for part-time and mature students, and greater flexibility in tuition payment plans.

“It seems that I've committed so much time and money to this, only to have it come to nothing. There's a surplus of students, and very few jobs in my field. I tutor but only managed to get one tutoring role. It's not enough to cover even my rent, let alone groceries. I can't afford to buy anything else right now. So I will have to study part-time, tutor part-time, and work a second job part-time. It's not very sustainable and so therefore I've associated studying with a stressful time of my life.”

“There should be an option for students in my position to pay tuition fees in instalments spread across the duration of the degree. When I explored this, I was told that being eligible for a student loan meant I could not use an instalment plan.”

Students offer a range of **suggestions** to enhance the part-time student experience, including more inclusive community events, dedicated support groups, improved visibility of resources, and better communication about the consequences of switching between part-time and full-time study. They advocate for practical changes, such as more online courses, flexible study spaces, and targeted career support, to help part-time students feel more supported, connected, and able to succeed academically and personally.

Remote, Online and Distance Students

Remote and online students consistently emphasize the importance of **reliable access** to digital learning resources. Many comments call for every course to offer Zoom tutorials, timely lecture recordings, and online modules. Students note that technical issues, such as poor audio, lack of cameras, or delayed uploads, can hinder their ability to engage with course content. There is a strong desire for universal guidelines ensuring that remote learners have equal access to lectures, seminars, and assessments, regardless of their location.

“Ensuring there is at least one Zoom tutorial option for distance students in every course.”

“Please equip professors with cameras and better mics. Nothing worse than just staring at lecture slides and seeing no movement on screen. The cameras help build a relationship for distance students.”

A recurring theme is the need for **clearer communication and more tailored support** for remote students. Some students report feeling forgotten or like second-class citizens, especially when changes to course delivery or exam policies are not well communicated. Others mention difficulties with administrative processes, such as updating student status, accessing services, or resolving technical issues. There are calls for dedicated online support, better student advising, and more proactive outreach to ensure remote learners feel valued and included.

“I would love to see more support for distance students. It means more online support that students can drop in to talk to someone or some online learning skills.”

Many remote students experience **social isolation and a lack of connection** to the wider university community. Comments highlight the absence of online clubs, group chats, or spaces for distance learners to interact casually and support each other. Some students have created their own informal networks, but there is a desire for the university to facilitate online communities, events, and opportunities for remote students to build relationships and feel part of campus life.

“Remote students miss out on so much. It would be great to have a hub where we could connect and support each other and be better acknowledged and being valued students.”

“I feel if I hadn't found the group I might have felt very alone studying remotely. It would be awesome to create a space where distance students could join and meet others who are taking the same courses as them online!”

Flexibility is a major concern for remote and online students. They appreciate the ability to learn at their own pace and balance study with work or family commitments, but express frustration when courses require unexpected in-person attendance or when online options are reduced mid-degree. Students advocate for consistent policies, more online course offerings, and equitable treatment in terms of access to resources, assessments, and support services. Some also mention financial pressures, such as paying full student levies for services they cannot use.

“I believe there needs to be a LOT more flexibility when it comes to distance learning. Victoria is the only university that has offered the EXACT Major I want to pursue both in study and professionally, but because it requires in-person attendance for some second-year courses and all third-year courses, I have had to apply to a different University going forward.”

“I feel a little let down by the change to the course programme, I enrolled expecting to be able to do the entire course remotely, now there has been a policy change to make final exams in person only.”

Students offer a range of **suggestions** to enhance the remote learning experience, including better training for staff in online teaching tools, more transparent communication about course changes, and expanded online support services. There is a call for the university to recognize and value remote students, integrate them more fully into the academic and social fabric, and ensure that online learning remains a viable and respected option for diverse learners.

“Ensuring all teachers know how to use zoom classroom and other tools effectively e.g. lapel mics so they can still be heard when they walk around the room and remembering to put online students into breakout rooms for group discussions.”

“Please try to integrate online/distance students more into the UVic community.”

Postgraduate Students

Postgraduate students frequently mention the need for improved **academic support and resources**. Many comments highlight the importance of reliable access to lecture recordings, modern teaching technology, and well-equipped study spaces. Some students note that postgraduate courses often lack consistent recording policies, and that staff sometimes struggle with digital tools. There are calls for better facilities—such as permanent desks, upgraded classrooms, and postgraduate-only spaces in libraries—to support advanced study and research. Students also appreciate smaller class sizes and more focused learning environments, which foster deeper engagement and peer connections.

“Ensuring postgraduate students have the resources they need access to across faculties (i.e., a permanent desk, pc, printing access). Postgraduate students are most likely to suffer from things like depression and anxiety so more access to counselling (longer term) also more financial aid.”

A sense of **community and connection** is valued but sometimes lacking among postgraduates. While organizations like the PGSA and thesis writing bootcamps are praised for fostering connection, many students report feelings of isolation, especially in research-focused programmes or when there is limited overlap with peers. There are suggestions for more cross-departmental networking, targeted events, and communal spaces to help postgraduates build relationships and support networks. Mental health and pastoral care are recurring concerns, with students advocating for easier access to counselling and longer-term support.

“I love the PGSA and all the activities they organise. It is great to connect with other students in that space. Tutorials were the main place I made friends. I have found it much easier to make friends in postgrad than in undergrad. I have many more friends at university now than I did as an undergraduate student.”

“More pastoral care for postgrad students (particularly those doing thesis work).”

“Creating more opportunities for cross-departmental networking and cultural exchange, such as regular social events, workshops, or interest groups, would help strengthen the sense of community, especially for international and postgraduate students.”

Several comments highlight challenges with university **administration and communication**. Students describe frustration with unclear course requirements, sudden changes to programme structures, and inconsistent information about services and resources. There is a desire for more transparent communication, streamlined processes, and better orientation for those new to postgraduate study or returning from other institutions. Some students suggest a “mystery shopper” approach to regularly review and improve the postgraduate experience.

“I was quite frustrated with the changes in my postgraduate course over the last two years, as these were not communicated and often seemed to come out of the blue – for example requirements changed on the website without any notification.”

“The university should implement a robust user feedback loop specifically focused on the postgraduate experience.”

“Tell postgraduate/ mature students what services they may benefit from, as I feel I pay fees but don't really get the benefits of all the other things the university gives money to.”

Financial stress is a significant issue for many postgraduates, particularly international students and those pursuing research degrees. Comments mention high tuition fees, limited scholarships, and the pressure to complete degrees within strict timeframes. Some students feel that postgraduate needs are overlooked compared to undergraduates, and advocate for more funding, flexible payment options, and expanded scholarship opportunities. There are also calls for more affordable food options and practical support for students balancing study with work or family commitments.

“Lower costs of the university; provide further scholarships for postgraduate students.”

Students offer a range of **suggestions** to enhance the postgraduate experience, including more targeted events, better academic advising, improved facilities, and expanded support services. There is a call for greater recognition of postgraduate contributions, more staff dedicated to postgraduate issues, and clearer pathways for networking and career development. Many students note that while individual staff and supervisors are often supportive, institutional structures and resources need to evolve to better meet the diverse needs of the postgraduate community.

“There needs to be a real focus, especially at the postgraduate level, on bringing people together – especially those from the same faculties.”

“There should be at least three full-time staff members specifically designated to support the postgraduate community.”