

7 September 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA RELEASE

Fostering undergraduates' sense of belonging is still a challenge post-pandemic

Undergraduate students are still not rating their overall experience of higher education as well as they did before 2020.

In particular, ratings for 'sense of belonging' are still below pre-pandemic levels for undergraduates, with only 48% giving a positive rating.

However, ratings by international students continue to improve; they are now at the highest level since 2017 and exceed ratings by domestic students.

These are among the findings of the latest Student Experience Survey (SES) – an annual survey conducted by the Social Research Centre on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education.

The 2025 survey heard from more than 324,000 students from 153 higher education institutions, including 43 universities.¹

The 2025 SES National Report, released today, notes how on-campus participation seems to play a key role in boosting students' experience ratings.

Online learning, a necessity during COVID, remains widespread, with many institutions offering hybrid delivery modes, combining online and on-campus classes.

However, students enrolled in 'internal courses' (expected to undertake at least some of their studies on campus) reported higher positive ratings of their student experience the more they participate in classes on campus.

When asked about the best aspects of their course, one student said it was "the engagement you get when learning on campus, such as lecturers posing questions and answering ones from students, tutors making sure to explain more difficult to grasp concepts".

The student added "The ability to interact with other students has been a huge bonus."

"Students tell us that meaningful connections with their peers, academics and campus communities matter," said Dr Angela Baker from the Social Research Centre. "Higher education is

¹ As of January 2026, the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia have merged to form Adelaide University. Data for the 2025 SES were collected when the institutions operated separately as the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia.

about more than course content alone. Participation in on-campus learning creates opportunities for collaboration, networking and belonging.”

The SES found that the proportion of students who had considered dropping out of their degree was at an all-time low.

Dr Baker said, “As higher education providers continue to evolve their delivery models, these findings provide valuable insight into how they can combine flexibility with the on-campus experiences that contribute to stronger and positive student experience.”

About the 2025 SES

The SES provides a national framework for collecting data on five focus areas relating to students’ experiences at Australian higher education institutions: Teaching Quality and Engagement, Skills Development, Learning Resources, Student Support and Services, and Peer Engagement. It also includes a standalone measure of Overall Educational Experience.

The SES is one of four surveys that make up the Quality Indicators for Teaching and Learning (QILT) suite, conducted by the Social Research Centre and funded by the Australian Government Department of Education.

Key findings

- 76.5% of undergraduate students gave a positive rating for their overall educational experience – similar to the previous two years, but lower than ratings every year from 2017 to 2020.
- Among postgraduate coursework students, overall experience ratings rose slightly, to 77.8%. They continue to exceed pre-pandemic levels and ratings at the undergraduate level.
- Ratings of sense of belonging for postgraduate coursework students now exceed pre-pandemic levels, but undergraduate student ratings remain below pre-pandemic levels.
- As with overall educational experience and the focus area ratings, those who participated in their classes on campus were more likely to provide positive ratings for sense of belonging.
- The proportion of students who considered leaving their institution continued to fall in 2025 and is at an all-time low since the survey began – at around 18% for domestic students and 12% for international students.
- Stress was the reason most cited by those who said they had considered leaving their institution (40.0% undergraduate; 33.3% postgraduate coursework).
- About a quarter of students at both study levels reported that financial circumstances negatively impacted their studies, while one third reported that paid work negatively impacted their studies.
- More than 4 out of 5 international students used an agent to assist with their visa application, and more than 3 out of 4 used an agent to assist with enrolment at their institution. But 11.9% of undergraduate students and 13% of postgraduate coursework students reported receiving incorrect information from their agent: these students were less likely to give a positive overall rating for educational experience.

Media contact and further information

For further information, interviews, or media enquiries, please contact:

Anne Gerritsen
Communications Manager
Social Research Centre

E: anne.gerritsen@srcentre.com.au
M: 0403 017 762
srcentre.com.au or gilt.edu.au

The full 2025 SES report and additional materials are available on the QILT website:

[https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/student-experience-survey-\(ses\)](https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/student-experience-survey-(ses))

About the Social Research Centre

The Social Research Centre is a leading Australian provider of social research and evaluation services, with deep expertise in education research. We work with government, education providers and institutions to deliver high-quality research that informs education policy, improves learning experiences and supports better outcomes for students and educators.