

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE**  
**SUMMARY REPORT: 2021 SSAF STUDENT SURVEY**

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## **BACKGROUND**

The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) is a compulsory fee that contributes to the non-academic services at the University, such as health and wellbeing support services, employment and career advice, sporting and recreational activities and campus life activities.

Each year, the University consults with students and student representatives to inform decision making on spending SSAF funds for the following year and beyond. In doing so, we ensure that we receive direct feedback from all student cohorts, across all campuses and study modes to get insight into student preferences for particular services.

In 2020, the SSAF survey was incorporated into the Student Feedback on the University of Newcastle (SFUN). The survey was launched on Wednesday, 19 August 2020 and closed on Sunday 13 September 2020.

Survey snapshot:

- SFUN survey sent to 36,033 enrolled students
- 31,663 of these students pay the SSAF fee
- Only eligible students were asked the questions relating to SSAF
- 7,623 eligible responses received

There are two distinct questions relating to SSAF in the SFUN survey:

- The first asks students to rank their top 3 preferences of the 19 approved categories
- The second identifies capital projects or proposals for student amenity, which students can select or propose another project

The second question included an Open Comments section where students can provide further detail or ideas for services. Students are also invited to provide feedback through the year to [ssafeedback@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:ssafeedback@newcastle.edu.au).

## **GENERAL SURVEY DATA**

The total number of respondents to the survey this year was 7,623 or 24.1% of eligible students. In last year's survey, 3,689 students responded (13.3%).

Responses by gender, campus, faculty and academic level (ie. UG and PG) were generally representative of the proportion of students in each case.

Commencing students	41.4%	Continuing students	58.6%
Female	62.4%	Male	37.4%
Undergraduate	76.5%	Postgraduate & HDR	23.5%

*Percentage of responses by campus:*

Campus	% of total	response rate	Campus	% of total	response rate
Callaghan	63.6%	26.5%	City	14.8%	22.4%
Central Coast	10.3%	23.1%	Online <sup>1</sup>	9.9%	16.7%
Sydney	0.8%	19.9%	Port Macquarie	0.6%	22.3%

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<sup>1</sup> Online includes students enrolled and undertaking a program by distance

*Percentage of responses by Faculty:*

Campus	% of total	response rate	Campus	% of total	response rate
Education & Arts	25.4%	22.9%	Health & Medicine	28.2%	25.9%
Business & Law	14.6%	21.5%	Engineering & Built Env	17.3%	23.8%
Science	14.4%	27.0%	Academic Division	0.2%	13.7%

## THE 19 ALLOWABLE SSAF CATEGORIES

The SSAF legislation defines 19 categories of allowable, non-academic expenditure.

In the first question, students were asked to identify the three categories most important to them, to receive funding in 2021. These were weighted to provide an overall level of preferences across the 19 categories. The top five categories, which attracted 66.1% of all preferences from all students, are the same as those identified in last year's survey with a similar total percentage of preferences (last year 67.2%).

**Table 1: 2021 SSAF Questions in the SFUN Survey – ranking of the 19 allowable categories:**

SSAF allowable category of expenditure <sup>2</sup>	Rank	%	N
Promoting the health and welfare of students	1	21.6%	1641
Helping students obtain employment or advice on careers	2	17.3%	1313
Providing food or drink to students on a campus of the higher education provider	3	10.2%	774
Helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled	4	9.3%	709
Helping students with their financial affairs	5	7.8%	596
Providing libraries and reading rooms (other than those provided for academic purposes) for students	6	6.6%	502
Caring for children of students	7	3.9%	294
Supporting a sporting or other recreational activity by students	8	3.7%	282
Helping students secure accommodation	9	3.7%	281
Helping meet the specific needs of overseas students relating to their welfare, accommodation and employment	10	3.5%	265
Advocating students' interests in matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	11	3.0%	226
Giving students information to help them in their orientation	12	2.5%	187
Providing legal services to students	13	2.4%	182
Supporting the administration of a club most of whose members are students	14	1.6%	122
Supporting an artistic activity by students	15	1.3%	96
Advising on matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described)	16	0.8%	60
Supporting the production and dissemination to students of media whose content is provided by students	17	0.5%	35
Helping students obtain insurance against personal accidents	18	0.4%	28
Supporting debating by students	19	0.2%	18

<sup>2</sup> Wording as per legislation

## Variations by cohort

Across the top ranked 5 categories, there were no significant variations in ranking or response by academic level with only the “Food and drink on campus” and “Helping students develop skills for study” ranking orders reversed between the two cohorts.

**Table 2:** Variations by student cohort

	UG	PG
Promoting the health and welfare of students	22.0%	20.1%
Employment and careers advice	17.9%	15.1%
Food and drink on campus	10.7%	8.3%
Helping students develop skills for study	9.1%	10.0%
Helping students with their financial affairs	8.3%	6.4%

## Variations by campus

There were a number of areas where there were variations in rankings or response by campus. In the case of Sydney and Port Macquarie campuses, the sample sizes are 60 students or less, which has resulted in skewed percentages in some areas.

**Table 3:** Variations by campus

Category	Central Coast	City	Callagh	Online	Port Macq	Sydney
Promoting the health and welfare of students	21.9%	19.6%	21.9%	23.0%	16.4%	11.2%
Employment and careers advice	16.9%	19.3%	16.8%	17.2%	16.1%	22.2%
Helping meet the specific needs of overseas students*	2.2%	5.1%	3.5%	2.1%	2.1%	9.3%
Helping students with their financial affairs	7.5%	7.9%	8.0%	6.7%	9.8%	10.8%
Caring for children of students**	5.7%	2.5%	3.7%	5.1%	5.7%	3.5%
Helping students secure accommodation	2.4%	4.3%	4.0%	2.0%	9.5%	4.8%
Advocating students interests	1.5%	2.5%	2.9%	5.1%	7.7%	0.3%
Providing libraries and reading rooms	7.5%	5.1%	6.9%	5.7%	10.9%	5.0%

\*Overseas students have full access to all SSAF-funded services including welfare, accommodation and employment services. This particular category relates only to specific additional services required for overseas students. An example would be visa advice in the context of employment either during the student’s study, or upon graduation.

\*\*Since the introduction of the SSAF, the University has not provided any direct SSAF funding for childcare services. In 2016, with assistance of an external consultant, investigations occurred regarding potential support for students-as parents or carers, but with no clear strategies identified. Complications arise in terms of potential overlap in Commonwealth subsidies or payments to parents/carers for child care, or prohibitive administrative costs would arise for the University to process a student refund or subsidy request, for minimal benefit paid. Historically around 5% of students have indicated that they have caring responsibilities for children. Childcare services will remain an area that is monitored for what may be relevant and equitable from a funding perspective.

There were no other significant variations by campus.

## SSAF-FUNDED CAPITAL WORKS FOR 2021

Students could select one only of the five proposed 2021 SSAF-funded capital projects as their preference. Students could also select “other” and include a suggestion.

**Table 4:** Capital work proposals for student amenity

Project	Student cohort - % of preferences				
	All students	Callaghan	City	Central Coast	Online
Upgrades to student facilities and social spaces at Callaghan (including at the CT Building, Shortland Hub and Richardson Wing)	<b>3,963</b>	<b>66.3%</b>	32.7%	6.3%	<b>41.2%</b>
Bar on the Hill – improvements to student spaces	<b>1,168</b>	15.9%	17.2%	6.1%	22.7%
NUspace clubs and societies space	<b>969</b>	8.3%	<b>38.4%</b>	2.0%	13.4%
Other	<b>591</b>	5.9%	7.6%	7.1%	38.6%
Upgrade to the Millery outdoor seating area, Ourimbah	<b>557</b>	1.5%	2.2%	<b>50.4%</b>	7.0%
Upgrades to clubs and societies spaces at Ourimbah	<b>386</b>	2.0%	1.8%	28.0%	4.5%

The focus of all projects was on renewal or development of student-centred social spaces on the larger campuses, including designated space for the student association. For students at smaller campuses, there were no projects identified in this year's survey that were focused on those locations.

The selection of 'Other' should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of support for use of SSAF funds for capital works. Students had an opportunity to provide input through the 'Other' section, with 591 students doing so this year (1714 in last year's survey). At this stage the open comments have not been fully reviewed or categorised. Initial review of the comments identify similar themes to prior years, including a large number of non-SSAF issues such as security and car parking issues on campus, or access to public transport. Comments also included a number of suggested capital projects for consideration.

Based on this survey response, the UON Infrastructure and Facilities Services (IFS) team will include planning for renewal of these student spaces over the next three years, as part of the overall redevelopment planned across the campuses.

There are several general comments from students at campuses other than Callaghan-City, regarding lack of comparable facilities or amenity, or no options to select a capital works project at their campus. There are a number related to upgrade of teaching and learning spaces, which are non-SSAF compliant matters.

## **ACTIONS AND DECISION MAKING ARISING FROM THE SURVEY**

A copy of the key data tables included in this paper, has been made available to the UNSA, NUSport and key internal areas responsible for delivery of services compliant with SSAF. The data therein will assist those entities in identifying any material changes in student preferences that would require a commensurate shift in the funding through SSAF in 2021.

Matters identified in Open Comments that are not SSAF-compliant nonetheless identify key issues of concern to students will be communicated to the relevant internal area responsible (eg. IFS for infrastructure and safety & security issues).

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**22 September 2020**