

Student Voice at Charles Sturt University: Student Services and Amenities Fee

August 2021

Prepared for CSU: Shawn Walker, Melanie Edgar, Sue Faulkner

DBM Consultants: Angela Baker PhD, Adam Bottle, Rhiannon Anscombe



Background & Methodology

The SSAF survey is conducted as part of the Student Voice survey.

The Student Voice Survey is an online survey of current Charles Sturt University Students conducted eight times per year. The SSAF questions are included for one wave of the survey each year. The SSAF questions were included in September 2020 and July 2021.

Who?

- Random sample* of Domestic and International students studying either Online, on Campus or at an Australian Study Centre
- Eight online survey waves per year, with different students given an opportunity to respond each wave

When?

- SSAF questions in field (Sep-20: 8-14 September, Jul-21: 19-25 July)
- Total invitations (Sep-20: 6,086; Jul-21: 7,526)
- Total completed surveys (Sep-20: 556; Jul-21: 575)

	SSAF Questionnaire flow
1.	SSAF awareness
2.	Preferences for SSAF spending
3.	SSAF proposal submission awareness
4.	Comments / feedback (open-ended)

Research Context

September 2020

July 2021

Some courses (those with a high practical component) had returned to campus in Session 2, 2020.

Lectures, tutorials, and other classes that could be delivered online remained online where possible.

- 19 July - Survey launched
- 21 July - Orange campus closed
- 25 July - Survey closed
- 27 July - Orange campus re-opened

All other CSU campuses open and operating with face masks mandatory in all indoor settings and the 'one person per four square metres' rule in all indoor and outdoor settings.

*Excluded from the sample were: TAFE students from CY Northam, Holmesglen and Northern Sydney Institute; United Theological College; Goulburn Policing; and Offshore Partner / International students from overseas Study Centres.

Student Services and Amenities Fee

While awareness of the SSAF remained stable at 74% year-on-year, awareness that spending proposals can be submitted has declined.

Executive summary

Awareness of the SSAF is stable at 74% of students aware

- Overall **awareness** of the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) **remained stable** year-on-year.
- **Students just beginning their degree were less likely to be aware of the SSAF than a year ago**, while those part way through or nearly finished were more aware.
- **Promoting the SSAF among the student subsets that have low awareness should be a priority** to increase awareness overall, especially among those that **declined year-on-year** (e.g. Science Faculty students).

Awareness of the SSAF spending proposal system is down

- Of those aware of the SSAF, **17% were aware they could submit proposals for SSAF funding**, while **27% were aware last year**.
- **Increasing awareness of the proposal system, particularly among Online students**, may help increase student understanding of the fee and help minimise student frustration with paying the fee.

Improving communications about the SSAF and where it is spent is essential

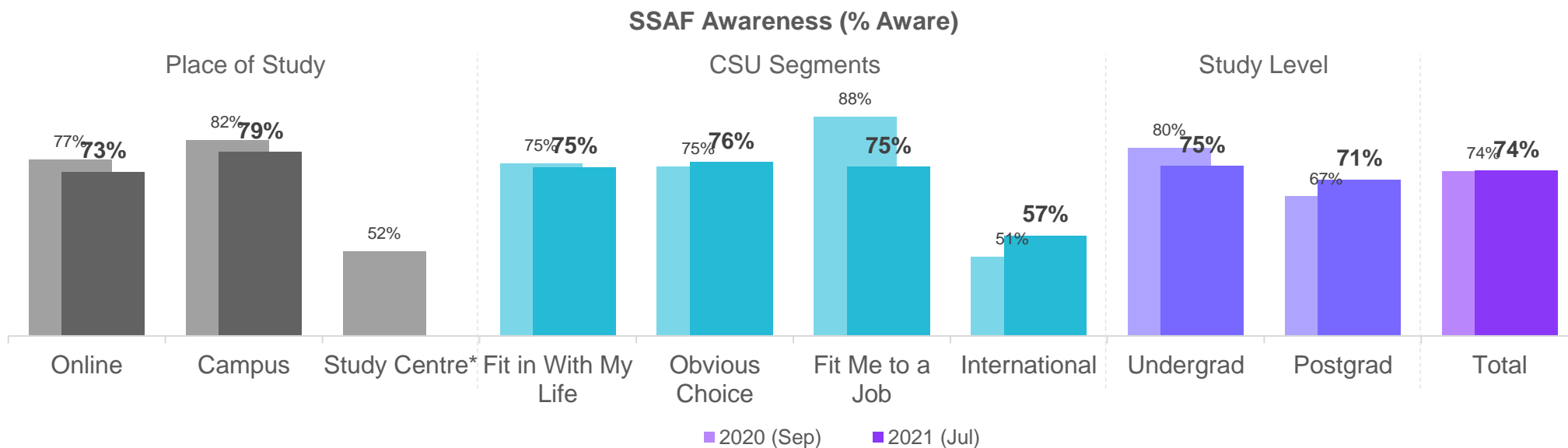
- Students continue to request **more clarity concerning the SSAF and where the funds are allocated**.
- **Online students remain concerned that they are paying the SSAF without receiving any benefit in return**, with some believing the fee goes towards facilities they are unable to access.
- Among campus students, the NPS of those aware of the fee is low, and preferences for funding to be directed towards campus facilities and activities have increased. This, coupled with the decline in satisfaction with campus facilities observed in the Session 1 2021 Student Voice report*, suggests that **campus student perceptions of the SSAF may be affected by their view of the facilities and services they believe it funds**.
- Increasing student knowledge of the **breadth of areas that the SSAF funds** may help alleviate concerns across both cohorts.

Overall awareness of the SSAF remained at 74%.

Awareness decreased in the Fit Me to a Job segment and among Undergrads but increased for Postgrad students.

Respondents were shown the following definition of the SSAF:

The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) is an annual fee charged to most Charles Sturt University students which funds non-academic services and facilities such as careers and advice programs, online and on-campus orientation, and student communications so you can have a great experience at Charles Sturt University.



Base: Charles Sturt University students (Fit in With My Life; 2020: n=226, 2021: n=291; Obvious Choice; 2020: n=52, 2021: n=69; Fit Me to a Job; 2020: n=150, 2021: n=184; International; 2020: n=128, 2021: n=31; Online; 2020: n=260, 2021: n=400; Campus; 2020: n=182, 2021: n=153; Study Centre; 2020: n=114, 2021: n=22; Undergrad; 2020: n=298, 2021: n=383; Postgrad; 2020: n=258, 2021: n=192; Total; 2020: n=556, 2021: n=575)

SSAF1. The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) is an annual fee charged to most Charles Sturt University students which funds non-academic services and facilities such as careers and advice programs, online and on-campus orientation, and student communications so you can have a great experience at Charles Sturt University. Before today, were you aware of the SSAF?

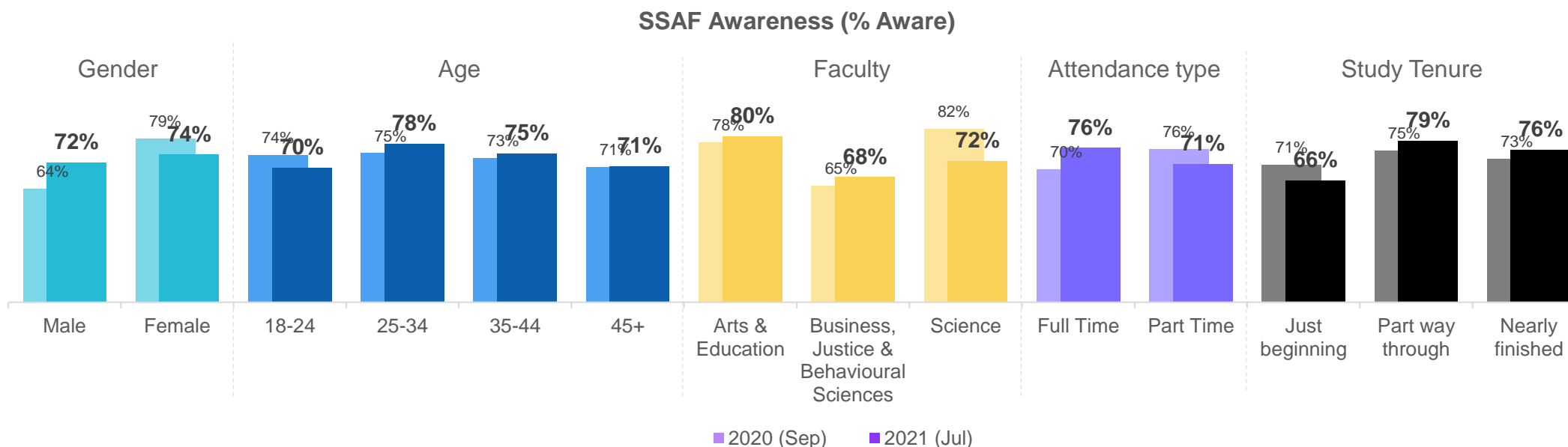
Note: Small sample size (n<30) for July 2021, data not shown

Student Services & Amenities Fee

SSAF awareness increased in some segments.

Students just beginning their degree were less likely to be aware of the SSAF than a year ago, while those part way through or nearly finished were more aware. Awareness also fell among Science students while increasing in other faculties.

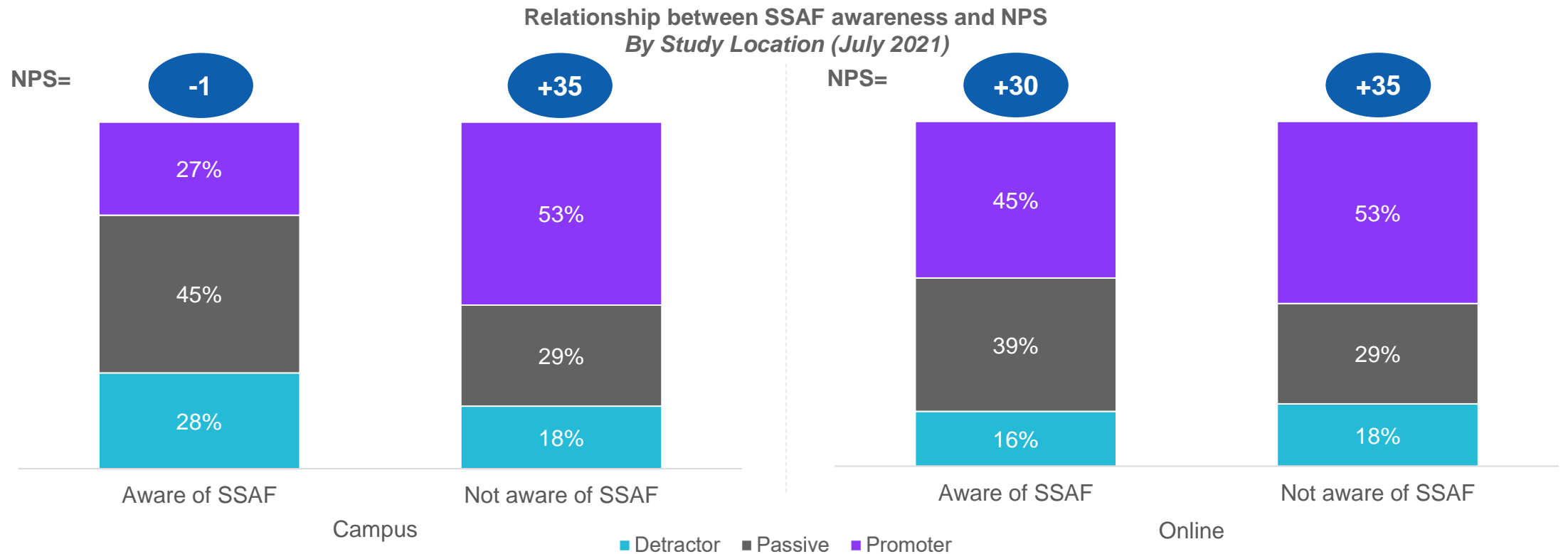
Respondents were shown the following definition of the SSAF:
The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) is an annual fee charged to most Charles Sturt University students which funds non-academic services and facilities such as careers and advice programs, online and on-campus orientation, and student communications so you can have a great experience at Charles Sturt University.



Base: Charles Sturt University students (Male; 2020: n=177, 2021: n=134; Female; 2020: n=379, 2021: n=441; 18-24; 2020: n=161, 2021: n=170; 25-34; 2020: n=207, 2021: n=168; 35-44; 2020: n=96, 2021: n=120; 45+; 2020: n=92, 2021: n=116; Arts & Education; 2020: n=166, 2021: n=214; Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences; 2020: n=242, 2021: n=145; Science; 2020: n=147, 2021: n=213; Full time; 2020: n=240, 2021: n=265; Part time; 2020: n=316, 2021: n=310; Just beginning; 2020: n=160, 2021: n=199; Part way through; 2020: n=231, 2021: n=224; Nearly finished; 2020: n=165; 2021: n=152) SSAF1. The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) is an annual fee charged to most Charles Sturt University students which funds non-academic services and facilities such as careers and advice programs, online and on-campus orientation, and student communications so you can have a great experience at Charles Sturt University. Before today, were you aware of the SSAF?

Campus NPS is lower than Online NPS for those aware of the SSAF.

Campus students who are aware of the fee may feel they are paying for services and facilities they are not currently receiving (due to COVID restrictions and cuts). See the Session 1 2021 Student Voice report for more information on Campus students declining attitudes towards campus facilities and activities.



Preferences for how the SSAF is used shifted for Campus students.

Health and wellbeing remains the top priority for both Online and Campus students.

The preferences of Online students have remained largely stable.

The importance of *careers advice* and *study skills* have declined for Campus students in favour of on-campus activities (*social* and *sporting/recreational*). *Providing food and drink* also emerged as the 2nd most preferred area for support this year. This shift likely represents a 'return to normal' with students again prioritising areas relevant to the on-campus experience. However, the increased preference for funding in these areas could also be related to campus facility cuts and post-COVID campus life not meeting students' expectations.

Online Support preferences Top 6 (Total % ranked 1-3)		Campus Support preferences Top 6 (Total % ranked 1-3)	
2020 (Sep)	2021 (Jul)	2020 (Sep)	2021 (Jul)
Health & wellbeing support (36%)	Health & wellbeing support (34%)	Health & wellbeing support (37%)	Health & wellbeing support (37%)
Careers advice & programs (31%)	Helping students develop study skills (33%)	Helping students develop study skills (27%)	Providing food or drink to students on a campus (36%)
Helping students develop study skills (29%)	Prepaid postage library book service (31%)	Careers advice & programs (24%)	Social activities and events (27%)
Prepaid postage library book service (27%)	Careers advice & programs (26%)	IT support (21%)	Sporting and recreational activities (26%)
IT support (21%)	IT support (25%)	Sporting and recreational activities (21%)	Careers advice & programs (22%)
Student advocacy (17%)	Student advocacy (16%)	Social activities and events (20%)	Helping students develop study skills (21%)

Base: Charles Sturt University Students (Online; 2020: n=260, 2021: n=400; Campus; 2020: n=182, 2021: n=153)

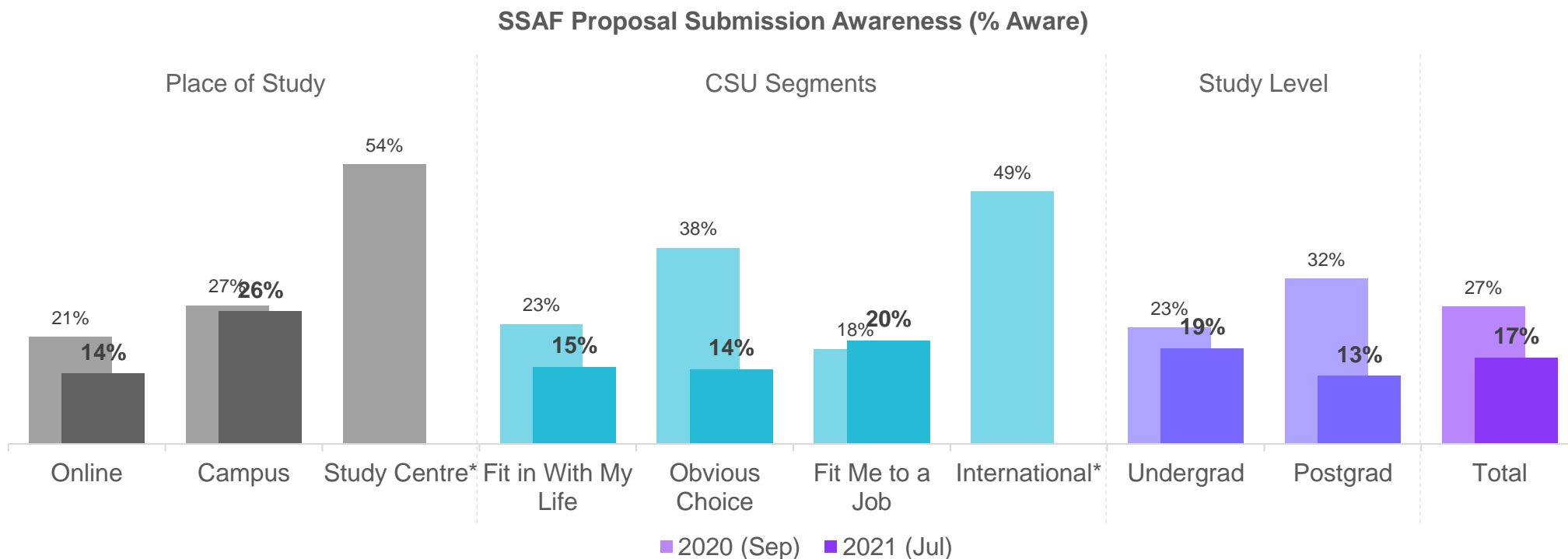
SSAF2. What would you like to see supported by the Student Services and Amenities Fee? Please rank your top 5 preferences, with 1 being the service you most think deserves funding.

Results shown for the items ranked 1, 2 or 3.

Student Services & Amenities Fee

Compared to last year, fewer students were aware they can submit a SSAF funding proposal.

Awareness was down across all segments except Fit Me to a Job (despite the decrease in awareness of the SSAF in general among this segment). The decline was marginal among Campus students, while Online student awareness fell considerably.



Base: Charles Sturt University students aware of the SSAF (Fit in With My Life; 2020: n=173, 2021: n=217; Obvious Choice; 2020: n=39, 2021: n=52; Fit Me to a Job; 2020: n=133, 2021: n=138; International; 2020: n=66, 2021: n=18; Online; 2020: n=201, 2021: n=294; Campus; 2020: n=150, 2021: n=119; Study Centre; 2020: n=60, 2021: n=12; Undergrad; 2020: n=238, 2021: n=286; Postgrad; 2020: n=173, 2021: n=139; Total; 2020: n=411, 2021: n=425)

SSAF3. Before today, were you aware that students who pay the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) are eligible to submit proposals for SSAF funding?

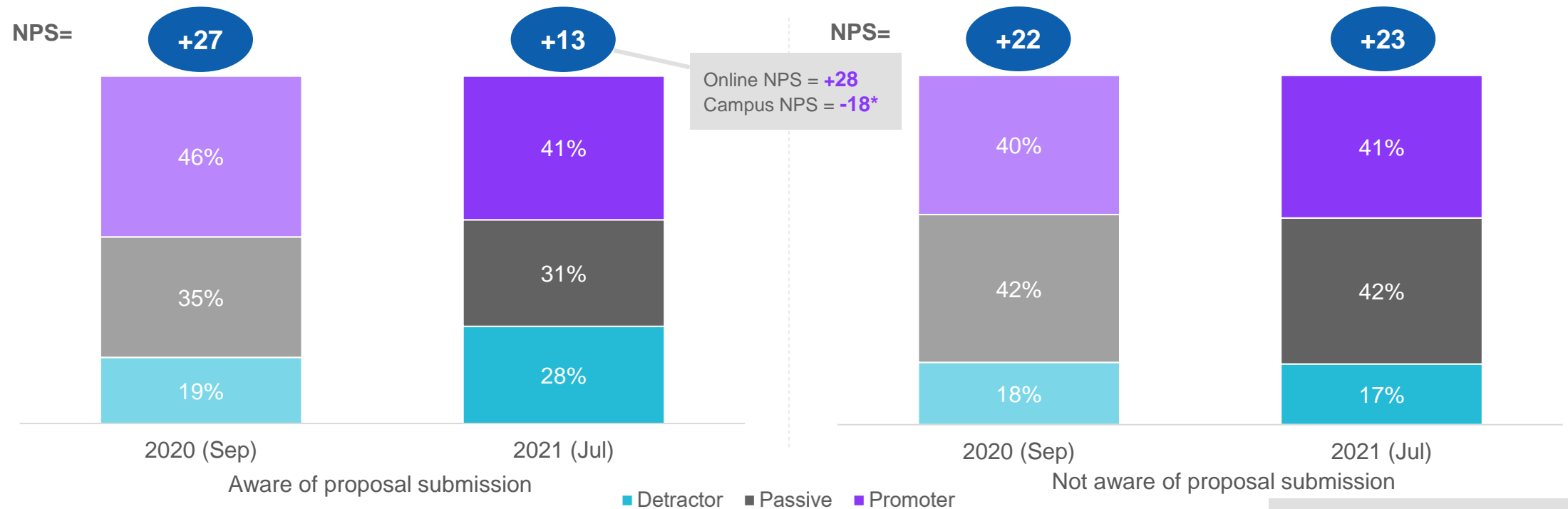
Note: Small sample size (n<30) for July 2021, data not shown

Student Services & Amenities Fee

Awareness of the proposal submission process was associated with lower NPS in 2021.

While NPS remained stable among students not aware they can submit spending proposals, advocacy has declined for those who are aware compared to last year. This decline appears to be driven by Campus students.

Relationship between proposal submission awareness and NPS



Overall NPS in September 2020 = +23

Overall NPS in July 2021 = +25

Base: Charles Sturt University students aware of the SSAF (Aware of proposal submission; 2020: n=113, 2021: n=70; Not aware of proposal submission; 2020: n=298, 2021: n=355) (Aware of proposal submission 2021; Online: n=39, Campus: n=29)

Q2a. Thinking about your experience with Charles Sturt University, how likely would you be to recommend Charles Sturt University to a friend, family member or colleague?

* Small sample size (n<30), use indicatively

Student Services & Amenities Fee

The top themes among Online student comments are that they get no benefits from the SSAF.

- Requests for more / better communication about the fee and the proposal submission process are also frequent among online students.
- Ensuring that information about the SSAF and how to submit a funding proposal reach this cohort is essential.
- A focus on communicating how the fee is spent and especially how it is used for services and resources relevant to online students would be beneficial.

Online Student SSAF thoughts (July 2021) Top 10 most common comments



Base: Charles Sturt University students who provided additional thoughts about the SSAF (Online; n=76)

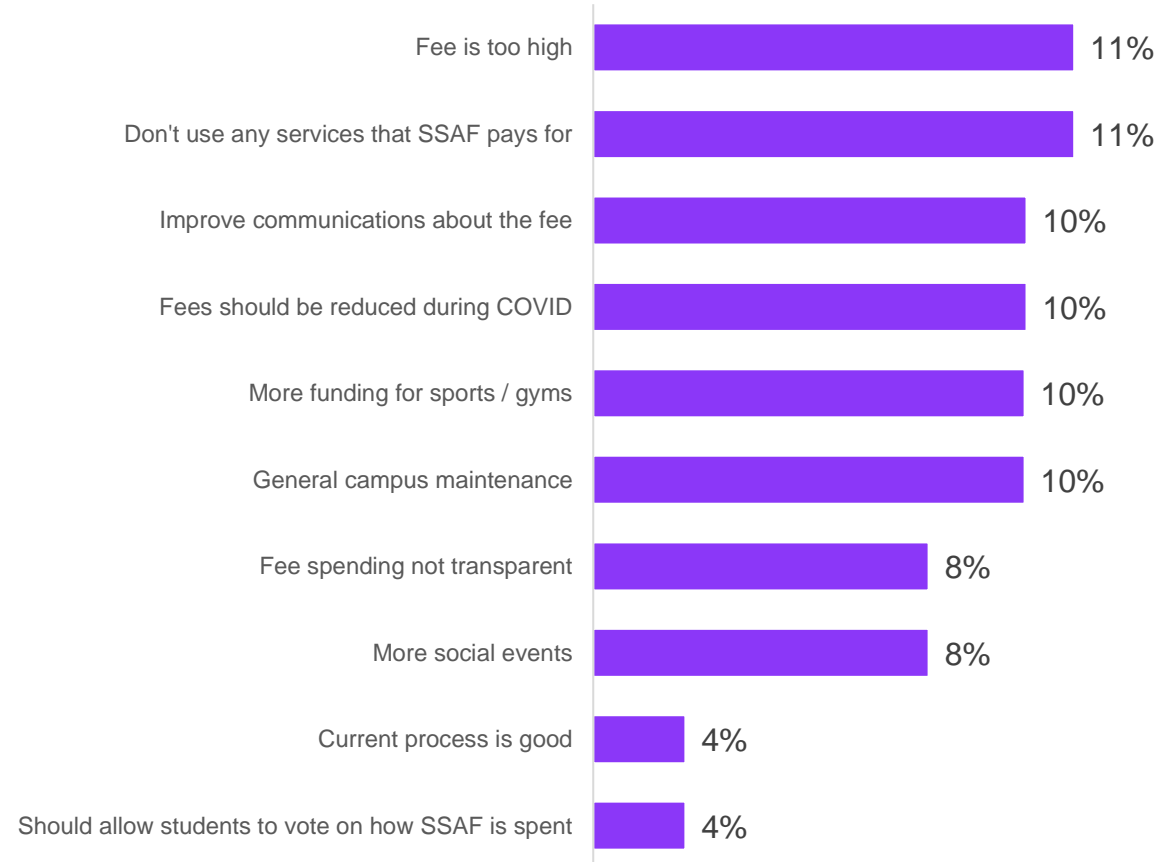
SSAF4. Do you have any other comments or feedback about the Student Services and Amenities Fee, including the areas that are currently funded or should be funded, the process around submitting a proposal, and the transparency of the application process?

Student Services & Amenities Fee

Campus students frequently remarked that the fee was too high, especially during COVID.

- The sentiment that students do not need or want the services that the SSAF pays for emerged as a common theme.
- Campus students also requested improved communication about the fee and where it is spent.
- Improvements to campus facilities and events (*sports / gyms, social events, general maintenance*) were also common requests among campus students.

Campus Student SSAF thoughts (July 2021)
Top 10 most common comments



Base: Charles Sturt University students who provided additional thoughts about the SSAF (Campus; n=46)

SSAF4. Do you have any other comments or feedback about the Student Services and Amenities Fee, including the areas that are currently funded or should be funded, the process around submitting a proposal, and the transparency of the application process?

Students requested more information about the SSAF.

There remains a high demand for increased communications about the fee, the submission process for spending proposals, and where the funds are spent. Some students believe that they do not use any of the resources funded by the SSAF.

Improve communications about the fee

- “there **wasn't any detail about it in orientation** or communications and **hard to find information on the site for it**” (Online, 25-34, Arts & Education, Advocacy=9)
- “it **wasn't clear that this could be added to hecs**, this would be helpful info for new students” (Online, 18-24, Arts & Education, Advocacy=10)
- “**make students aware from the start of study** about all of this information” (Campus, 25-34, Science, Advocacy=6)
- “Nothing really, i think **there should be a clearer way of letting students know that there is a ssaf, and how to defer it**, possibly in their online checklist- i work at student central and the number of students that call asking why theyre being charged is high” (Campus, 18-24, Arts & Education, Advocacy=9)

Better advertise proposal submission

- “**i was completely unaware that students can submit funding proposals. maybe raise that awareness more?**” (Online, 25-34, Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Advocacy=7)
- “Perhaps **more transparency around the fact that people can submit ideas to the university for consideration.**” (Online, 25-34, Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Advocacy=10)
- “while i have not actively sought out information around where ssaf goes, **i would love to have been proactively offered information** about where the money is used and **how students can submit proposals** etc in regards to this funding.” (Online, 25-34, Arts & Education, Advocacy=9)

Fee spending not transparent

- “i would appreciate if the process could be **more transparent regarding what are the areas the funds are being used at.**” (Study Centre, 25-34, Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Advocacy=8)
- “i am not sure if there is a regular report published on this front but some semester or even **yearly info graphics on ssaf funding distribution would be great**” (Online, 25-34, Arts & Education, Advocacy=10)
- “it would be great if it was **outlined somewhere** (or somewhere easy to find) **where exactly the money was going to?**” (Campus, 25-34, Science, Advocacy=9)
- “i pay for the fee but unsure why i pay it. **i don't know if i even use the faculties i am paying for**” (Online, 25-34, Arts & Education, Advocacy=9)

Don't use what SSAF pays for

- “**i have not ever interacted with their services** and do not feel i should have to pay the fee.” (Campus, 18-24, Science, Advocacy=7)
- “**remove it - waste of money dont use any of those services rip off**” (Online, 45-54, Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Advocacy=2)
- “Personally, I get annoyed having to pay this fee as **i feel as though i never use the services or really feel a need to.** I ticked events in the question before because it would be great to have a ball or something like that.” (Campus, 18-24, Arts & Education, Advocacy=8)
- “Has always seemed like a huge waste of money. **Many services i have never and will never need.** They really should be using the SSAF to provide free flu vaccinations for all staff and students.” (Campus, 25-34, Science, Advocacy=4)

SSAF4. Do you have any other comments or feedback about the Student Services and Amenities Fee, including the areas that are currently funded or should be funded, the process around submitting a proposal, and the transparency of the application process?

Comments un-edited. In some cases, only part of the full comment has been shown

Students expect their fee to go towards their place of study.

In the case of Online students, they expect that the fee will fund resources available to them or that they should not pay it. Campus students requested that the funds be spent on campus activities and facilities, or that the lack of access to these due to COVID should be taken into consideration.

Spending should be more 'place of study' relevant

- “i do not find it fair if students who pay the fee are studying via online are paying for improvements for students on campus. **fees from students on campus should improve for on campus related activities. and online students pay for improvements for other areas not internal.**” (Online, 18-24, Arts & Education, Advocacy=6)
- “i think it would be good to have a very detailed explanation of ways that the ssaf supports your online students. **i feel like a lot of the ammenities and things available are catered for on campus students** (understandably) but **i don't utilise as much of the students services and amenities as an on campus student.**” (Online, 24-35, Arts & Education, Advocacy=9)

Online students shouldn't pay the fee/ the full fee

- “**i think online students should not pay it**, since university pays all the staff and teacher salary. **online student do not use on campus facilities as much as onsite campus.**” (Online, 35-44, Business, Justice, & Behavioural Sciences, Advocacy=8)
- “**it's hard to understand the cost of the fee when totally online** being the same cost as those who use the facilities provided on campus. **there should be two prices**” (Online, 35-44, Arts & Education, Advocacy=9)
- “**i don't see that online students get anything from this fee.**” (Online, 55+, Arts & Education, Advocacy=6)

Fee should be reduced during COVID

- “there was confusion from a number of students as to **why they were paying this fee when we were not on campus.**” (Campus, 18-24, Science, Advocacy=8)
- “i would like to pose the question of **why we were made to pay the fee during covid when we were not allowed on campus**” (Campus, 18-24, Arts & Education, Advocacy=0)
- “in order to have students willingly pay this fee **the uni needs to do more especially in covid to make it seem worthwhile.**” (Campus, 18-24, Science, Advocacy=4)

Campus facilities / events / activities

- “i feel beside orientation in my first year i have not seen this money being spent and **would love to see more infrastructure upgraded and student events activities on campus getting assistance**” (Campus, 18-24, Arts & Education, Advocacy=8)
- “**more money should be spent on social events and creating a community**” (Campus, 18-24, Arts & Education, Advocacy=7)
- “**the sporting teams should be announced and funded more**” (Campus, 18-24, Science, Advocacy=9)
- “i think the student services amenities fee should be used **more for on campus facilities for the students** as that is where csu can set itself apart from the other universities.” (Campus, 18-24, Science, Advocacy=9)

SSAF4. Do you have any other comments or feedback about the Student Services and Amenities Fee, including the areas that are currently funded or should be funded, the process around submitting a proposal, and the transparency of the application process?

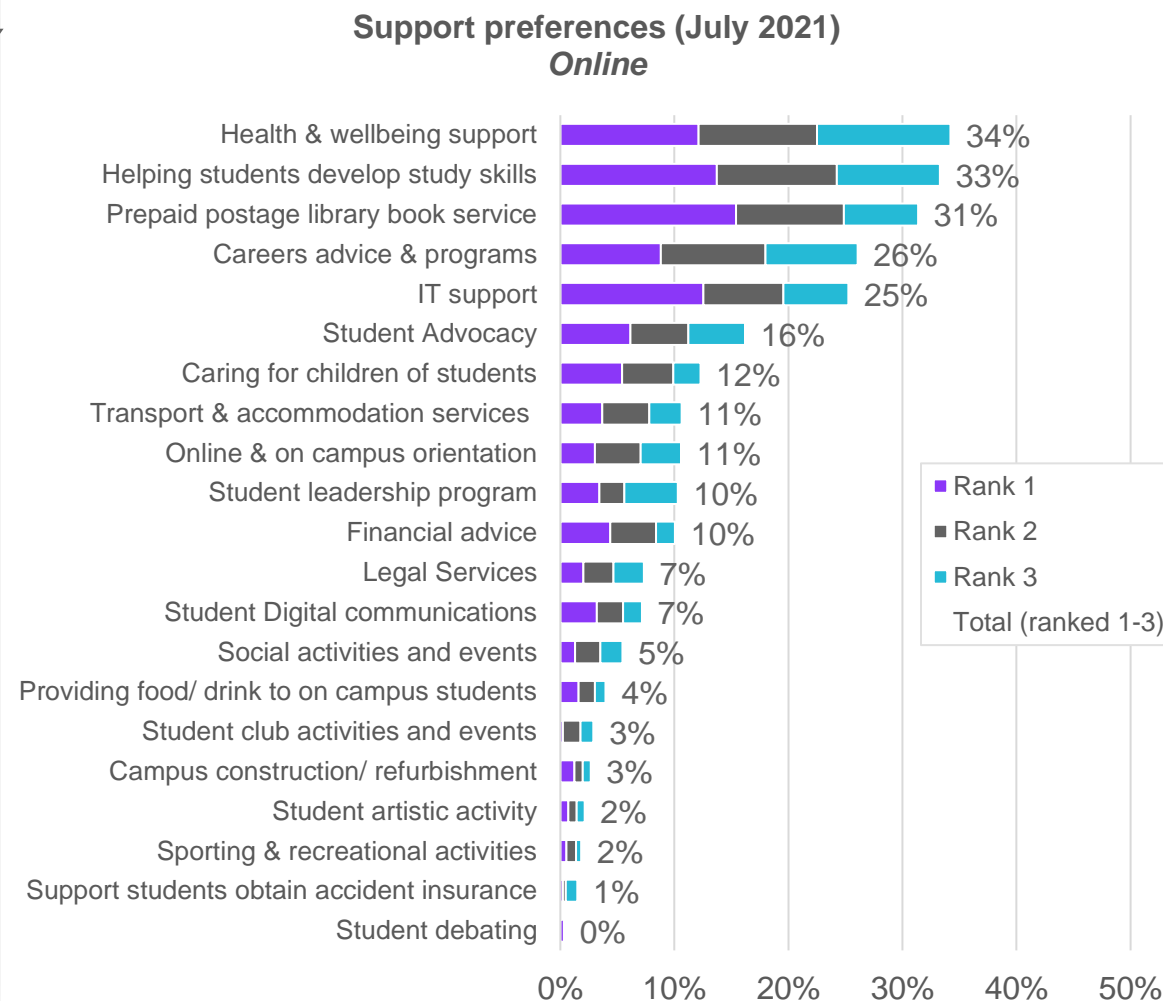
Comments un-edited. In some cases, only part of the full comment has been shown

Appendix

SSAF Support Preferences Breakdown

Health & wellbeing, study skills and career support were funding priorities for Online students.

The highest ranked options for Online students were practical academic resources as well as personal and careers support. The most common first preference for funding was the *Prepaid postage library book service*, with *developing study skills* and *IT support* in 2nd and 3rd place.

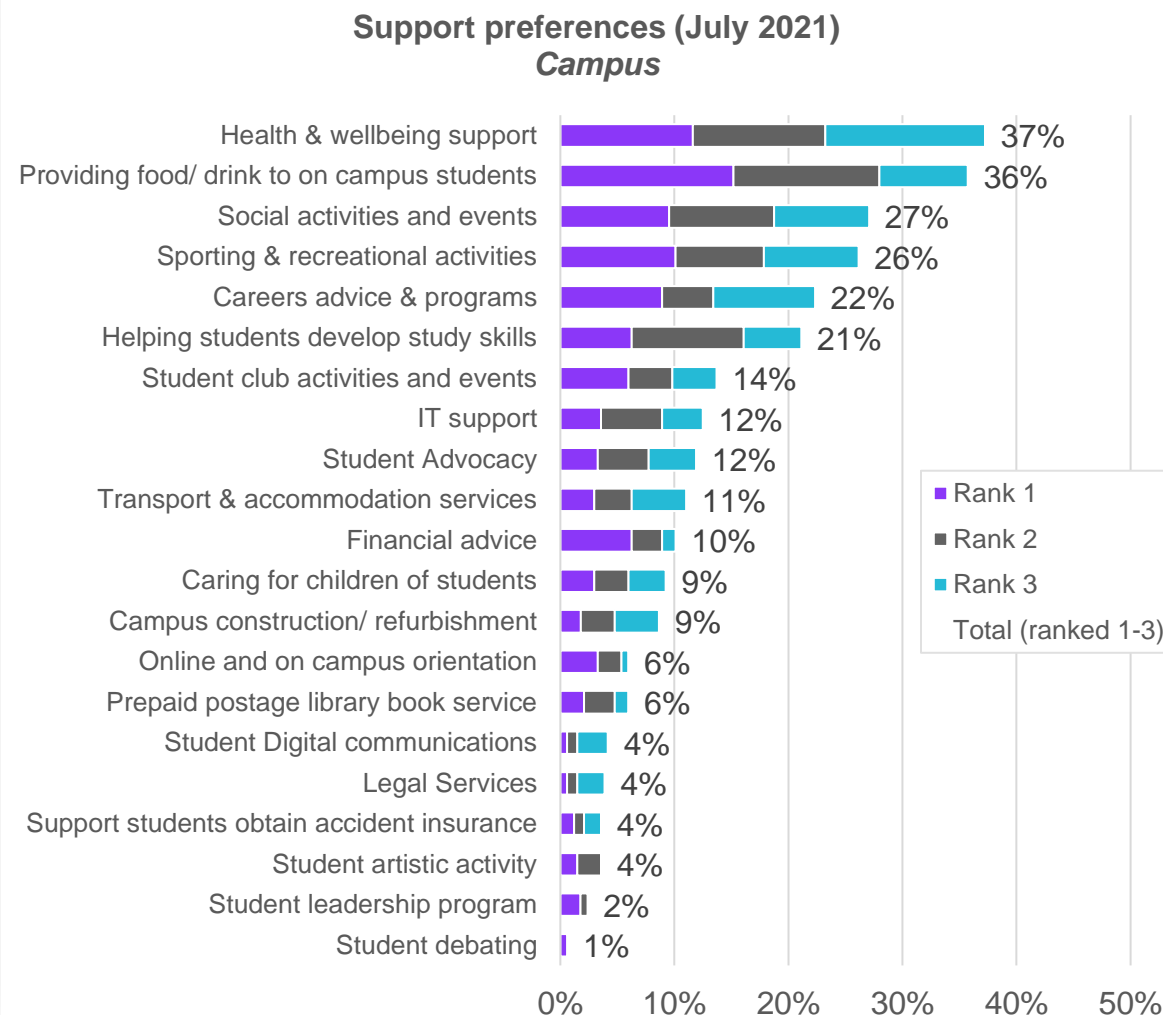


Base: Charles Sturt University Online Students (2021: n=400)

SSAF2. What would you like to see supported by the Student Services and Amenities Fee? Please rank your top 5 preferences, with 1 being the service you most think deserves funding.

Campus students rated campus facilities and events as priorities for SSAF spending.

Health and wellbeing support was the most common Top 3 option overall. However, looking just at first preferences, *Providing food/ drink* is the most important area for funding for Campus students, with *Social activities and events* and *Sporting & recreational activities* also ranked highly.



Base: Charles Sturt University Campus Students (2021: n=153)

SSAF2. What would you like to see supported by the Student Services and Amenities Fee? Please rank your top 5 preferences, with 1 being the service you most think deserves funding.

Thank you



Contact us

Angela Baker, PhD

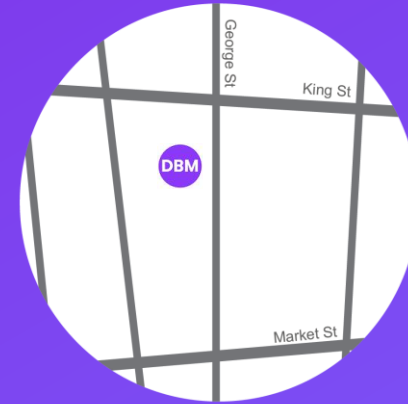
P. 0421 732 120

E. abaker@dbmcons.com.au

Adam Bottle

P. 0425 353 836

E. abottle@dbmcons.com.au



DBM Consultants Sydney

383 George Street,
Sydney, NSW, 2000
Australia

Follow
us on

