

## Media Release:

# UQU calls for better on campus accessibility for disabled students

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Disabled students have once again been disregarded and disadvantaged due to the inaction of the University of Queensland (UQ). For over a week in March 2024, a lift vital to disabled students' access to facilities at UQ's St Lucia campus – lift 21C – was broken. This is an ongoing occurrence that has continued over the last decade.

*Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* section 22 subsection 2a outlines that: "It is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a student on the ground of the student's disability by denying the student access, or limiting the student's access, to any benefit provided by the educational authority". Disabled students at UQ are having their access limited due to the malfunctioning lift in 21C.

UQU (UQU), the student union, calls for the University to put an end to their purely reactive approach to the maintenance of accessibility on campus, and to proactively make accessibility considerations a priority.

UQU President Angus McRae says, "The lift in 21C, near the Redroom, is the main lift used to transport students from the UQ Lakes Bus Station to the main sector of the St Lucia campus. This is one of the busiest lifts on campus and it frequently breaks down because of overheating. This lift has been recorded to have broken down 39 times since recording started in 2015."

At the time of writing, UQ has made no official notice to students about the lift being broken or when it is likely to be repaired. Students are left without answers on crucial accessibility information and are given no comparable alternatives for access.

UQU Disability Officer Sol Willian says, "UQ treats the maintenance of lifts as a financial 'is it worth it?' scenario, and students with disabilities are the ones who bear the consequences. This is not a new issue. The highest levels of the University's administration are aware of it. There is no good reason why so many students, who pay a per-semester services and amenities fee, should have their accessibility put last."

A troubling trend emerges with higher rates of lift breakdowns during the first couple weeks of classes as students are getting adjusted to their studies, and in the final few weeks of each semester just prior to and during exams. During these essential periods of learning, disabled students are being forced to either forgo attending or put themselves under undue physical strain, and in many cases excessive pain, to simply access the St Lucia campus.

UQU Disability Officer Sophy Barlow says, "I have heard the same story from different students over and over again, about how they are being forced to choose between enduring significant physical pain using the alternative routes to lift 21C, or simply missing out on class. Disabled students have a right to education and UQ's failure to properly fix the lift is negatively impacting their ability to access this."

University of Queensland Union  
27 March, 2024

There is an ongoing trend of the University to postpone or ignore issues relating to lifts. Notably there was an incident concerning lift 122, between UQ Lakes and Building 21C, which resulted in students becoming trapped within it. The University had been notified of potential issues with that lift over a week prior to the incident.

UQ's inaction regarding proactive lift maintenance has resulted in disabled students being barred access to UQU Collective rooms, such as the International, Women's, and Queer rooms which are all located on level 2 of 21C. Students with disabilities have a right to be able to access community and learning spaces without difficulty or disadvantage.

UQU will continue to advocate for the rights of all students and ensure that no students right to education is denied.