

Media Release:

UQU calls for mandatory placements to be paid and included in the 2024 Federal Budget

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, where students continue to experience financial stress and food insecurity, placement poverty continues to be a systemic issue that many university students are experiencing and urgently needs to be addressed.

UQ Union (UQU), the student union, calls for the federal government to put an end to placement poverty and to ensure that all students who are required to complete mandatory placements as part of their studies are paid for the work that they are undertaking and to be paid at least minimum wage.

UQU President Angus McRae says, "With the University Accords earlier this year recommending the introduction of payments for unpaid placements, it is time that the federal government takes action now rather than later and addresses the issue of poverty on placement within this year's federal budget."

"Failure to take action on this issue continues to neglect the significant financial burden that is placed on students who are required to complete mandatory placements in their chosen profession, putting them at a greater risk of experiencing placement poverty."

The requirements of mandatory placements continue to place financial burden on students often requiring out of pocket expenses whilst also impacting their ability to study, earn an income, and their health – this continues to be an ongoing issue with the increased demand of placement hours as students progress in their studies.

Third year Nursing and Midwifery Student, Marni Tavener says, "Throughout our degree, the requirement of placement hours not only increases with each year but is on different days each week – making it difficult for us to find jobs that are either extremely flexible or okay with us not working for 4 or more weeks at a time if we are on a full-time block placement (4+ weeks of full time work hours unpaid). Fitting study and placement into a week leaves limited time and availability for work, there is next to no work/placement/study to life ratio."

"It's important that students who are going on placement are provided with financial support from the government – mandatory placements continue to impact our ability to work alongside our chosen career path and we still have living expenses to pay whilst we are on placement. Current and future students deserve to have financial support as they undertake their mandatory placement as part of their studies to set them up for success and aid them in graduating and working in the important careers they are studying."

The UQ Union offers a placement bursary program that provides financial assistance and support to students going on placement as part of their studies. The program runs once every semester, and this semester saw the largest number of bursaries disbursed since the introduction of the program in 2021.

UQU Vice President (Student Rights) Jordy Duffey says, "We provide these bursaries to offer financial aid and to alleviate the financial stress that is often experienced by students going on placement, many who go on placement for significantly long periods as part of their studies or do not have the time to be able to work and financially support themselves whilst they are studying."

"Whilst these bursaries are a band-aid solution to the overwhelming issue of poverty on placement and students receiving these bursaries are thankful for this financial support, it is clear that more needs to be done towards ensuring that students going on placement are provided with the necessary financial support they need."

The UQ Union is supporting the National Week of Action by Students Against Placement Poverty, happening this week (April 8 – 12) calling for the federal government to address poverty placement and include paid placements within this year's federal budget which is due to be delivered in May.

UQU Vice President (Student Rights) Jeryn Chang says, "We are getting involved with the National Week of Action because there is an urgent need for the federal government to act and address the issue of placement poverty. This issue is a barrier for students to access opportunities to pursue their desired profession and receive quality education."

The UQ Union has been receiving countless stories from students who have gone on placement and are struggling financially, which has adversely affected their mental health and living conditions. It is imperative that the issue of placement poverty is addressed urgently, and proper financial assistance is provided to students who are obligated to undertake mandatory placements as part of their studies. We are committed to advocating for the rights of students and fighting against placement poverty, as no student should have to undergo such hardships while studying.