

Media Release:

UQ Union's Welfare Programs Usage Reaches All-Time High

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Usage of the University of Queensland Union's (UQU) welfare programs has reached an unprecedented level of student usage. As the cost of living crisis continues to impact students, these essential programs have become a lifeline for many.

Program Highlights:

1. Kampus Kitchen and Morning Marmalade: A Record-Breaking Week

Last week (26/02/2024 – 01/03/2024), Kampus Kitchen served a staggering **1499 servings**, providing meals to **817 unique students** on the St Lucia campus alone. This marks the highest number of students served in the program's history.

"This marks a major milestone for us, but not a good one. UQU has become a lifeline for many students who are under significant financial strain," says UQU President Angus McRae, "But this speaks to a much broader issue surrounding the rising cost of living in Australia."

On Monday 4th March, UQU, unfortunately, had to turn away more than 100 students due to limited food supply.

Kampus Kitchen is also served on the Herston campus every Thursday.

Morning Marmalade, UQU's free breakfast program, distributed **850 servings** to **584 unique students** during the same period. Here, Morning Marmalade provides students with a simple breakfast so that students don't go to their research or class hungry. The program often runs out of bread due to its increasing popularity.

2. Food Co-Op and Gatton pantry: Addressing food insecurity

In addition to our meal programs, UQ Union's Food Co-Op offers affordable groceries and donations from our partner, SecondBite. We are seeing a record number of students accessing our Food Co-Op and pantry programs.

"Stock is always scarce, and we are constantly turning away students due to the limited supply of groceries and household goods," says Vice President (Student Rights) Jeryn Chang, "It goes to show the prevalence of food insecurity amongst students these days."

3. Bursaries: Addressing Student Poverty for UQ's Most Vulnerable Students

UQU provides bursaries for students for welfare purposes, and to support students who are on placement. We welcome the recommendation put forward in the University Accord Final Report to introduce payments for unpaid placements. UQU strongly advocates for students on mandatory unpaid placements to be paid at least minimum wage. Placement poverty is a systemic issue that works against the interest of the tertiary sector.

"It is unacceptable students are plunged into poverty when going on mandatory placements," says Vice President (Student Rights) Jordy Duffey, "The Accord recommendation is only a first step, and we must do better to ensure students have enough financial support to live while on placement."

The Cost of Living Crisis Persists

Despite these impressive numbers, it is critical to recognise that these programs are only a **stop-gap solution**. The rising cost of living continues to burden students, affecting their ability to focus on their studies and overall wellbeing. While we celebrate the success of Kampus Kitchen and Morning Marmalade, we must also advocate for broader systemic changes to address the root causes of financial hardship among students.

"Our welfare programs are only a temporary solution that can't help everyone in need," McRae said, "Students should be better supported while they study to better contribute to society, not find themselves struggling to afford food or rent."

McRae also raised concerns about the proposed Higher Education Future Fund (HEFF). "The tertiary sector in Australia is absolutely in need of reform, and the HEFF can be a key part of that. But how do we ensure that students, especially our international students, don't bear the brunt of it? The tertiary sector needs to come together and have a frank discussion on how we can fund the future without disadvantaging one of the most vulnerable cohorts of students."

For media enquiries, please contact: student.rights@uqu.com.au



Students waiting in line for Kampus Kitchen. The line stretches beyond the UQ Union Complex towards the iconic Great Court.