Student Representative Council

GUPSA
GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

WHERE IS THE SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR STUDENTS?

EXPERIENCES OF POVERTY ON PLACEMENT

An advocacy report by the Student Representative Council (SRC) and Postgraduate Student Association (GUPSA)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the numerous Griffith University students who took the time to complete the Poverty on Placement survey. We value the personal stories and opinions you have shared. We encourage you to continue making your voices heard so, together, we can continuously improve the student experience.

Many thanks to Professor Christine Morley from the Queensland University of Technology, for graciously sharing a survey instrument and reflections from a 2022 national survey commissioned by the Australian Council of Heads of Social Work Education (ACHSWE). This survey instrument was invaluable in drafting our survey.

Our appreciation also goes to the student focus group members and Griffith University academic and professional staff who provided valuable input. Your feedback was vital in the development and refinement of our survey questions. We are committed to working and learning together in partnership, and greatly appreciate your contributions.

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SUMMARY

The Poverty on Placement online survey was open from late September to mid-October 2023.

1,141 GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS RESPONDED IN FULL

Significant proportions of students identified with one or more equity target groups, including **mature aged, being in the first generation in their family to study at university, from a low income background**, and **having parental and/or carer responsibilities.**

A significant majority of respondents identified as **female**, with representation across Griffith's campuses.

AROUND 75% of respondents had participated in at least one unpaid practicum or placement, with most having done so full-time (5 days/week).

Overall satisfaction of being on placement was rated an average of **3.5 out of 5.**

Whilst most students recognised benefits such as opportunities to develop skills and confidence and to put theory into practice, over 95% identified impact on financial wellbeing as a major disadvantage of placements.

ADDITIONALLY, **80%** of students reported significant increases in expenses during placement,including fuel, parking and tolls.

OVER 30% of respondents said they'd needed to move house to undertake a placement.

OVER 98% of students reported being adversely affected by financial difficulties during placement.

93% OF RESPONDENTS reported that unpaid placements were detrimental to their stress levels.

81% SAID IT AFFECTED THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

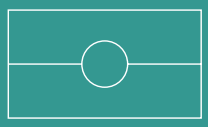
76% SAID IT AFFECTED THEIR SLEEP

Zzz

66% SAID IT IMPACTED THEIR GENERAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

with a range of other adverse effects also identified between 35-55% of respondents reported difficulty meeting basic living costs during periods of coursework, with 77-87% experiencing difficulty during periods of placement.

71% OF STUDENTS REPORTED



being unaware of the Equity and First Peoples Scholarships available through Griffith University, and reported they did not think they would be eligible or 'deserving.'

OVER 99%

of students called for paid placements and/or financial support for students on placement to help address student poverty, wellbeing and attrition.

Students were also largely in favour of being allowed to take sick or personal leave (in line with paid workers), an emphasis on demonstrating learning outcomes rather than meeting set hours, and greater recognition of prior learning (RPL).

96.5%

of students reported loss of regular income during unpaid placement, with the average being a 78% reduction and almost half of students reporting a complete loss of income.

"I'M CURRENTLY ON MY FINAL BLOCK PLACEMENT AND IT HAS BEEN THE MOST DIFFICULT TIME IN MY LIFE – IT HAS BEEN A WORSE EXPERIENCE THAN WHEN MY FATHER DIED WHEN I WAS A CHILD... I LITERALLY HAVE NO MENTAL CAPACITY FOR ANYTHING ELSE. I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO HIT BURNOUT VERY HARD ONCE THIS COURSE IS OVER AND I WORRY ABOUT MY HEALTH AND WHETHER I CAN PICK MYSELF UP AGAIN. THIS IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH. **LIFE SHOULD NOT BE LIKE THIS.**"

GRIFFITH STUDENT

BACKGROUND

The Griffith University Student Representative Council (SRC) and Postgraduate Students Association (GUPSA) are independent associations proudly representing students at Griffith University's Nathan, Mt Gravatt, Logan, South Bank and Digital campuses. We aim to enhance the student experience through the provision of a range of events and services as well as advocating for the interests of our undergraduate, postgraduate coursework, and HDR students.

Staff from Griffith University, SRC and GUPSA as well as student leaders who work in student support have heard countless stories over the years about financial hardship and the adverse effects of compulsory unpaid placements and practicums. Students in allied health and education fields are commonly required to complete extensive and/or frequent unpaid field or clinical placements. For example, education students need to complete at least 80 days of professional experience, nursing students must complete 800 hours of clinical placement, and social work students must complete 1,000 hours (approx. 130 days) of field placement. Student cohorts in these fields are also largely mature-aged and have additional responsibilities and expenses, including caregiving, which places them at even greater risk of poverty.

The financial pressure on students has now reached breaking point due to the cost-of-living crisis, coupled with the inadequacy of Government student payments such Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY. Current data from ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality studies reveals that poverty is deepest in households where the main income-earner receives Youth Allowance, with significant poverty gaps also experienced in Parenting Payment and Carer Payment households. The SRC and GUPSA currently provide limited cost-of-living support to students in the forms of grocery vouchers, fuel or go card vouchers, a small food pantry on each campus, and a free weekly fresh fruit and vegetable market. Some discretionary funds are also available to provide limited assistance to students experiencing housing crises. Additionally, the University has a suite of First Peoples and Equity Scholarships available for students experiencing educational and financial disadvantage. Financial support bursaries, which aim to help eligible students meet education-related expenses, are also available on a case-by-case basis through the Student Financial Support and Scholarships website. These bursaries are generally one-off and limited to $1,000 per student.

The impacts of lengthy and/or frequent, unpaid, compulsory placements in Australia have studied by several researchers, particularly in the field of social work (see, for example, Baglow & Gair, 2019; Gair & Baglow, 2018; Hodge et al., 2021).

In 2022, the Australian Council of Heads of Social Work Education (ACHSWE) also commissioned a study focused on re-imagining field education, but Griffith University students were not represented in these findings.

It is apparent that there is growing concern – amongst students, university academic and professional staff, and field and clinical placement supervisors alike – about the implications of unpaid placements. There is also growing awareness that the hardships students face may often be detrimental to their learning outcomes and degree completion. The Poverty on Placement project was developed to gather quantitative and qualitative data about Griffith University students':

- Experiences of being on unpaid professional practice placements, and any adverse effects they experienced.
- General opinions on unpaid placements (whether they had participated in a placement at the time of the survey or not).
- Thoughts on strategies that may help to address student poverty, wellbeing and attrition.

METHODOLOGY

Following a review of recent literature and media reports, the author contacted Prof Christine Morley from the ACHSWE to seek assistance with the implementation of a placement-focused survey at Griffith University. Dr Morley shared a research instrument and reflections on a recent ACHSWE survey.

In the spirit of partnership and with the goal of ensuring the project was relevant, input was sought from Griffith University Heads of School, academic leads, and placement and field education professional staff working across health and education disciplines. Many staff responded in support of the project and shared their observations and experiences in their respective fields. Staff were also instrumental in helping disseminate the final survey through email and posts to course LMS sites.

It was vital that the student voice informed this project. Ten students participated in hour-long focus group discussions to refine and finalise the questionnaire, helping ensure it was as accessible and pertinent to the target audience as possible. Focus group participants were current undergraduate and postgraduate students in the fields of social work, human services, and education. Each participant was compensated for their time with a $50 grocery e-voucher.

The Poverty on Placement survey was conducted online, administered through SurveyMonkey to Griffith University undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students. The survey targeted students enrolled in a program (degree) with one or more unpaid placements that are compulsory for registration or admission to their profession. Results therefore do not reflect the experiences of students who have work-integrated learning experiences that are short, optional, and/or paid in some capacity. A screening question was built into the start of the online survey to ensure only relevant student responses were captured. The survey was able to be accessed by all Griffith University students, including those currently on leave of absence from their studies.

The survey was open and promoted from late September to mid-October 2023. During this time, a total of 1,319 students responded to the survey, with 1, 141 of these completing it fully (an 86.5% completion rate). The average time taken to complete the survey was seven minutes. The high response rate indicates a keen interest in the topic and suggests Griffith University students want to have their voices heard and experiences acknowledged.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The first page of the survey collected demographic information, with questions set as 'compulsory' to help categorise the students represented in this report. Respondents overwhelmingly identified as female, domestic students, with representation across campuses consistent with student enrolment numbers in these fields of study. Students were asked, in an open-ended question, to identify the degree they were enrolled in or on leave from. Of the valid responses received, over half (n=623) identified as nursing and/or midwifery students and almost one quarter (n=271) identified as studying social work. Other disciplines included education and teaching, human services, child, youth and family practice, counselling, psychological science, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech pathology, paramedicine, and health services management.

Definitions of equity target groups were discussed throughout the drafting of the survey, and the decision was made to allow students to self-identify rather than strictly delineating terms such as 'mature aged'. Significant numbers of students identified with one or more equity target groups. Almost half of respondents (n=543) identified as having been mature aged at the commencement of their degree, and around one-third identified as being in the first generation in their family to study at university and/or from a low-income background (n=392 and 353, respectively).

The high representation of students from equity groups corresponds with the Griffith student body more broadly and may reflect the attraction of the 'helping professions' to those who have experienced challenging circumstances in their own lives.

Table 1 on the next page summarises the demographic information of respondents.

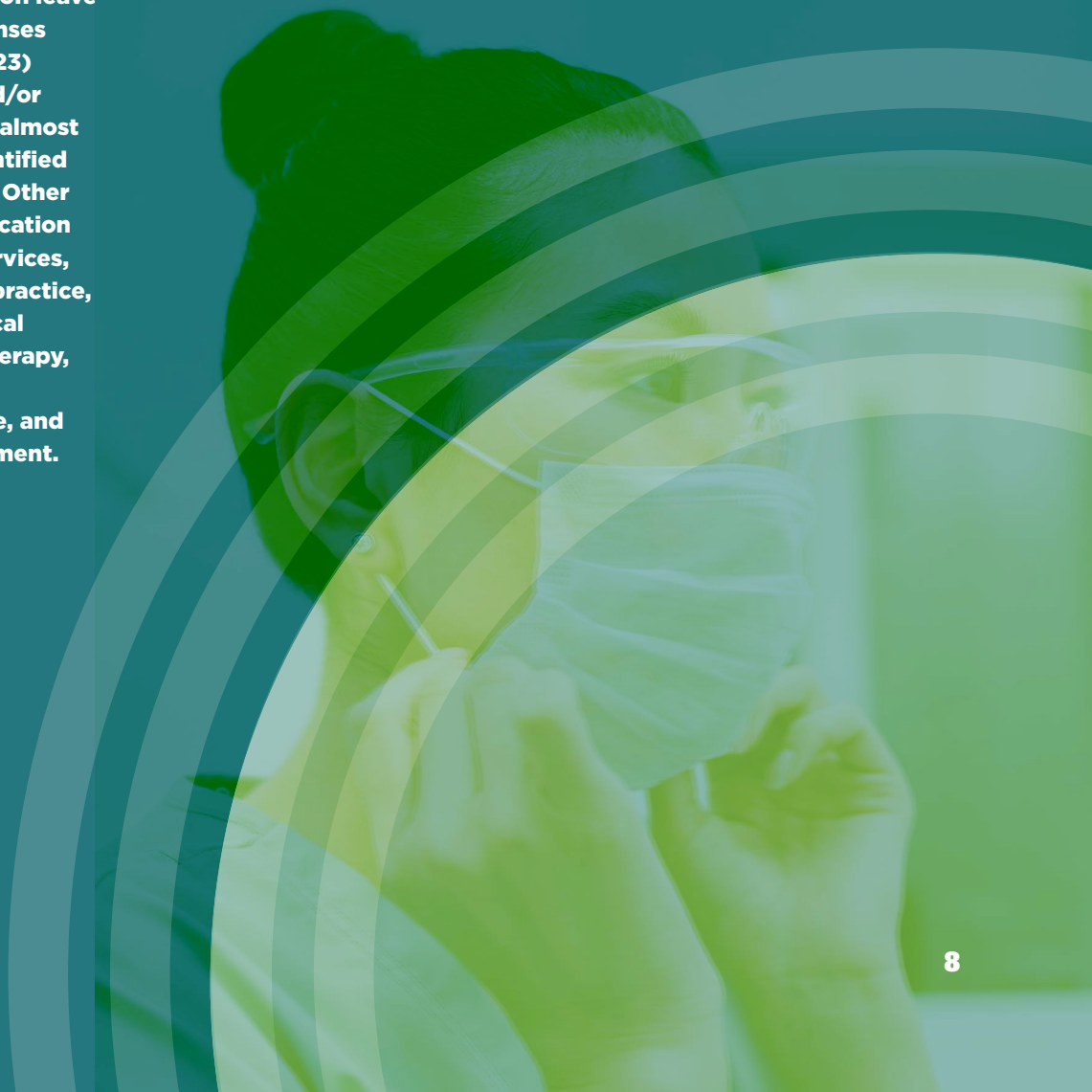


TABLE 1.
DEMOGRAPHICS (N= 1141)

Campus of enrolment	Number (%)
Gold Coast	474 (41.5%)
Logan	239 (21%)
Mt Gravatt	40 (3.5%)
Nathan	277 (24%)
Online	111 (10%)
Enrolment load	
Full-time	941(82%)
Part-time	178 (16%)
Currently taking a break from study (on leave of absence)	22 (2%)
Length of time studying in this program	
Up to 1 year	215 (19%)
1-2 years	341 (30%)
2-3 years	324 (28%)
3-4 years	193 (17%)
Over 4 years	68 (6%)
Fee status	
Domestic student	1014 (89%)
International student	127 (11%)
Gender	
Female	978 (86%)
Male	142 (12.5%)
Non-binary	12 (1%)
Prefer not to say	8 (<1%)
Other	1 (<1%)
Self-identification with equity group/s*	
Mature-aged at commencement of degree	543 (47.5%)
First generation in family to study at university	392 (34%)
Low-income background	353 (31%)
Parent or carer for child(ren)	257 (22.5%)
Culturally and/or linguistically diverse	211 (18.5%)
From a regional, rural, or remote area	165 (14.5%)
Living with a disability	99 (9%)
Carer for someone with a disability or frail aged	56 (5%)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	36 (3%)
None of the above	200 (17.5%)

* Percentage of total responses; students were invited to select as many as applicable

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF PLACEMENT

Following the collection of demographic information, students were asked how many field / clinical / professional practice placements they had completed so far as part of their degree. Logic was incorporated so students who had not yet completed a placement would skip the survey section titled 'Experiences of placement'. A large portion of students (n=541; 44%) had completed three or more placements, which is consistent with the experiences of nursing students who are highly represented in these results. Many respondents had completed two placements (n=185; 16%) or one placement (n=163; 14%). Just over one-quarter of respondents (n=292) had not yet completed a placement.

The responses in this section reflect the experiences of the 850 Griffith students who said they had completed at least one unpaid practicum. When asked about their overall satisfaction of being on placement, students rated their experiences an average of 3.5 out of 5. The range of responses received is provided below in Table 2.

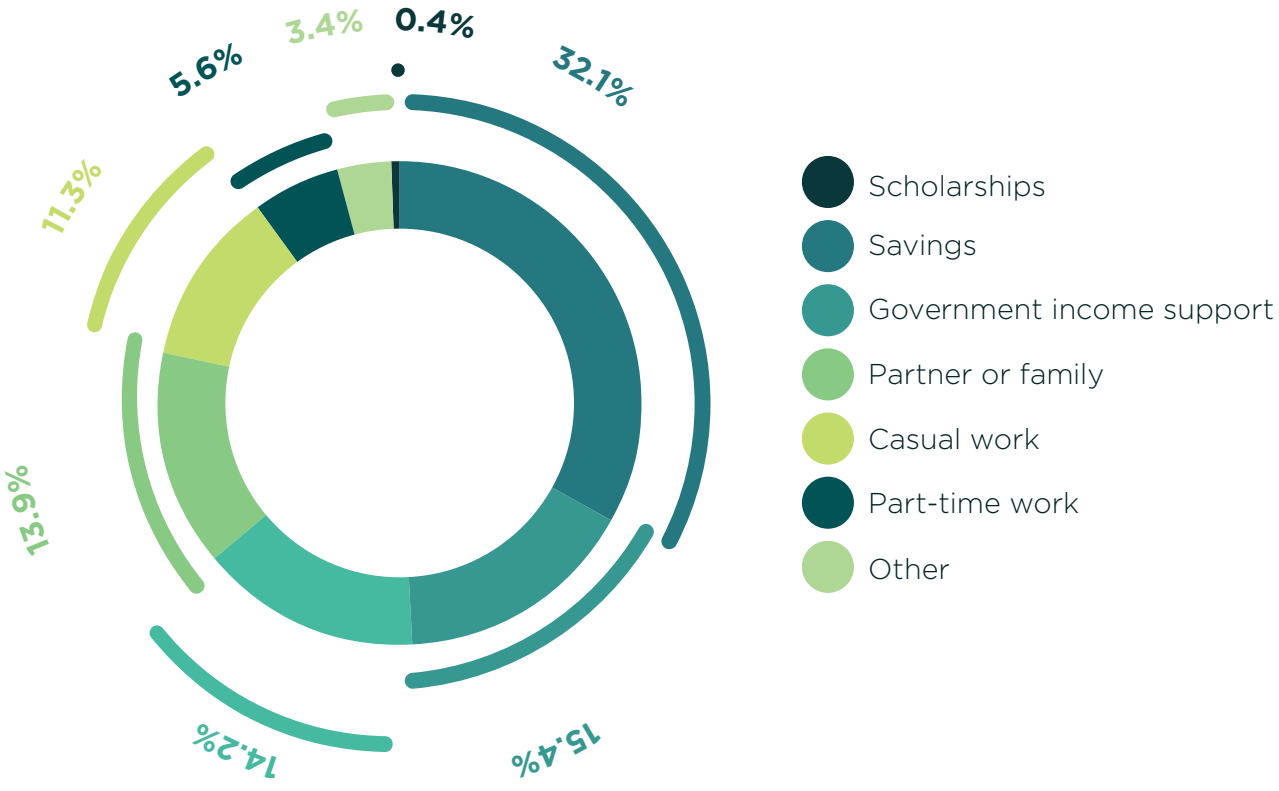
TABLE 2.
OVERALL PLACEMENT SATISFACTION (N= 850)

Rating	Number (%)
Utterly dissatisfied (1)	43 (5%)
Somewhat dissatisfied (2)	117 (14%)
Unsure / indifferent (3)	119 (14%)
Somewhat satisfied (4)	482 (56.5%)
Completely satisfied (5)	89 (10.5%)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF UNPAID PLACEMENTS

MANY QUALITATIVE RESPONSES ON THE TOPIC OF FULL-TIME PLACEMENT REQUIREMENTS WERE PROVIDED BY STUDENTS LATER IN THE SURVEY, WITH COMMENTS FOCUSSING ON STUDENTS DIMINISHED CAPACITY TO UNDERTAKE PAID WORK DURING THESE PLACEMENT PERIODS. LOSS OF INCOME IS ALSO REFLECTED IN RESPONSES TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

GRAPH 1.
MAIN SOURCE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT DURING PLACEMENT (N= 850)



Students who reported having 'other' sources of financial support said they'd had to complete placement whilst on paid annual leave or parental leave, or had to utilise support from multiple sources in order to meet living expenses during placement blocks. Alarmingly, these 850 students reported a 78% average loss of regular income, with 417 students (49%) reporting a complete loss of income during unpaid placement and a further 221 (26%) reporting a 75% loss of income. Only 32 students (3.5%) reported that they had not experienced a reduction in income.

Student financial hardship was compounded by having additional placement-related costs. Most students (n=683; 80%) said they'd experienced significant increases in expenses, with the most commonly reported items being travel-related costs such as fuel, parking and tolls.

Several students commented on having additional childcare and after-school care expenses, whilst others commented on having to purchase uniforms, pay for pre-placement requirements such as first aid courses, or buy materials to make teaching resources.

Surprisingly, close to one-third of respondents (n=260; 30.5%) said they'd needed to move out of home or to a different residence to undertake a placement. This is likely to place additional financial strain on students, whilst also removing them from established support networks such as friends or extended family. When explaining their increased expenses, several students said theyld had to pay additional accommodation costs due to placement location. One student said they "paid $2,000 in accommodation alone for just one placement."

A significant outcome of this survey was identifying the ways in which placement-related financial difficulties affect students' lives. There is reason for serious concern and an institutional response to the impacts of unpaid placements on our students' mental health and overall wellbeing. A staggering 93% of respondents (n=788) reported that placement-related financial difficulty adversely affected their stress levels, whilst 81% (n=690) said it affected their mental health, 76% (n=644) said it affected their sleep, and 66% (n=563) said it impacted their general health and wellbeing. Only 15 students (less than 2%) reported that their lives were not adversely impacted. Some students who reported 'other' impacts mentioned inability to meet unexpected costs (such as car repairs), decline of fitness and having to give up sporting activities, and impacts on other family members including children. The full range of responses is provided below. Note that students were able to select as many responses as applicable.

GRAPH 2.

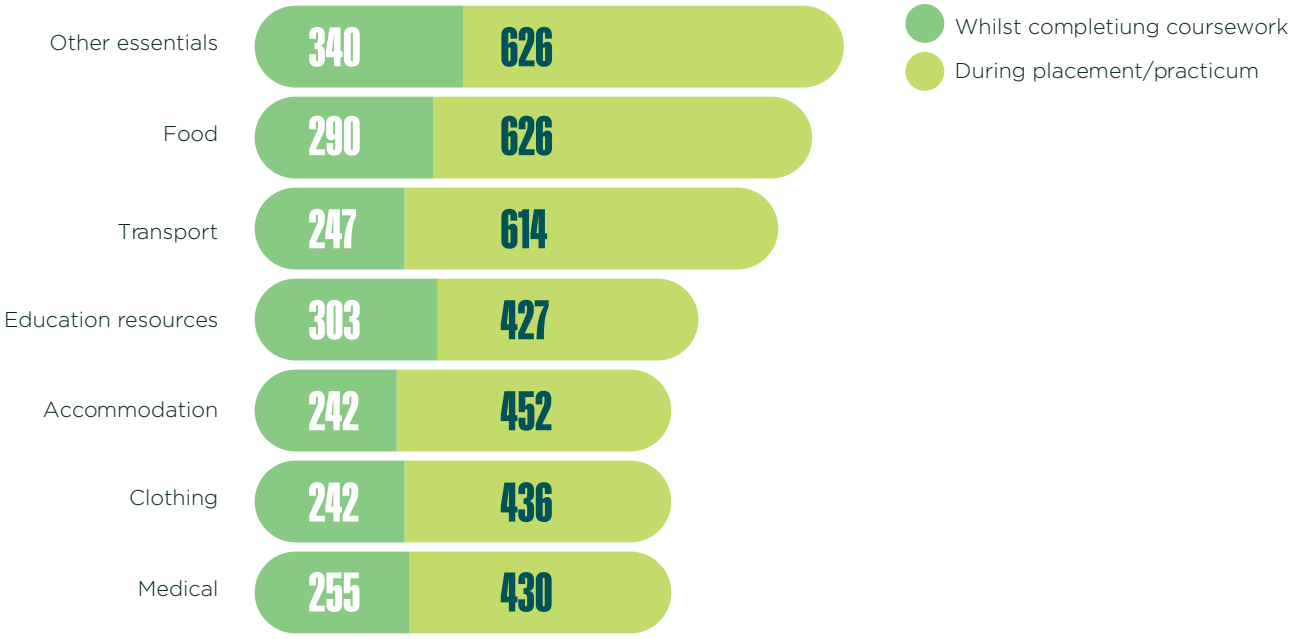
ADVERSE EFFECTS OF FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY DURING PLACEMENT (N= 850)

THE GENERAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

THE FOLLOWING SECTION OF THE SURVEY TARGETED ALL RESPONDENTS, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY UNDERTAKEN PLACEMENT. THIS SECTION STARTED WITH AN OPTIONAL QUESTION, WHICH QUERIED STUDENTS' CAPACITY TO MEET A RANGE OF BASIC LIVING COSTS. THE RESPONSES PROVIDE A COMPARISON BETWEEN STUDENTS' LEVELS OF FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY WHILST COMPLETING COURSEWORK AND WHILST ON PLACEMENT. MANY STUDENTS REPORTED COST-OF-LIVING DIFFICULTIES, WITH SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED HARDSHIP DURING PLACEMENT.

GRAPH 3.

EXPERIENCES OF HAVING INSUFFICIENT MONEY AS A STUDENT



Despite high levels of financial difficulty, generally and during placement, students predominantly reported being unaware of the Equity and First Peoples Scholarships available through Griffith University (n=810; 71%). Respondents were invited to share qualitative comments on the barriers that may prevent them applying, and the most common deterrent was a perceived ineligibility for scholarships. Many students felt they would not qualify due to their grades, a sense they were not 'deserving' enough, or their enrolment status as either an international, Masters, or part-time student. Several students also commented that they simply didn't know anything about the scholarships or what would be involved in compiling an application.

BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

The following questions summarise the perceived benefits and drawbacks of student placements or practicums. Whilst most students reflected on the opportunities to develop skills and confidence, and put theory into practice, over 95% (n=1,085) identified impact on financial wellbeing as a major disadvantage. This reinforces the urgent need for placement-related poverty to be comprehensively addressed for students across health and educational fields.

Students who selected that there are 'other' benefits most often identified areas covered under existing response options, such as opportunities to gain organisational skills, learn on the job, or complete a rural placement. Several students said they felt there were no benefits, and completing placement only allowed them to 'tick the box' and fulfill the requirements for their degree. Some students mentioned they already worked as enrolled nurses and felt that their professional experience should be credited towards a reduction in clinical placement hours (beyond that currently afforded under the Diploma of Nursing pathway).

Students who identified 'other' drawbacks of placement primarily commented on financial difficulties, including inability to work casually or part-time during placement. One student commented, "2 x 500 hour blocks equates to 32k worth of lost income for me ontop [sic] of my student loan debt. This sets students back a tremendous amount and in my opinion increases pressures to find a high paying job right away after graduation to play catch up. " Another said, "I was scheduled to do it this trimester (2) but simply can not afford to do so. The dire financial constraint, combined with the stress this would cause for my family is unfathomable. I wont do it to them."

Several students mentioned the challenges of having to complete coursework and placement concurrently. Some mentioned difficulty with parenting or carer responsibilities, and impact on physical or mental and emotional health. Several students also felt they received inadequate support from Griffith staff, and several felt they were given either too much or too little responsibility by placement supervisors. Concerningly, five students said they had experienced bullying, discrimination, or racism during placement.

The full range of responses is available for comparison in the following tables.

> "THE ONLY WAY I AM ABLE TO COMPLETE AN UNPAID PLACEMENT IS THROUGH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF MY PARTNER, OTHERWISE I WOULD BE UNABLE TO COMPLETE THIS DEGREE. FURTHER, THE FINANCIAL BURDEN THAT IT TAKES TO COMPLETE A PLACEMENT LIMITS THE PEOPLE ABLE TO DO SO TO ONLY A PRIVILEGED POPULATION. WHEN WORKING WITH DIVERSE GROUPS OF PEOPLE, WE SHOULD HAVE A DIVERSE WORKFORCE, NOT JUST THE PRIVILEGED."
> GRIFFITH STUDENT

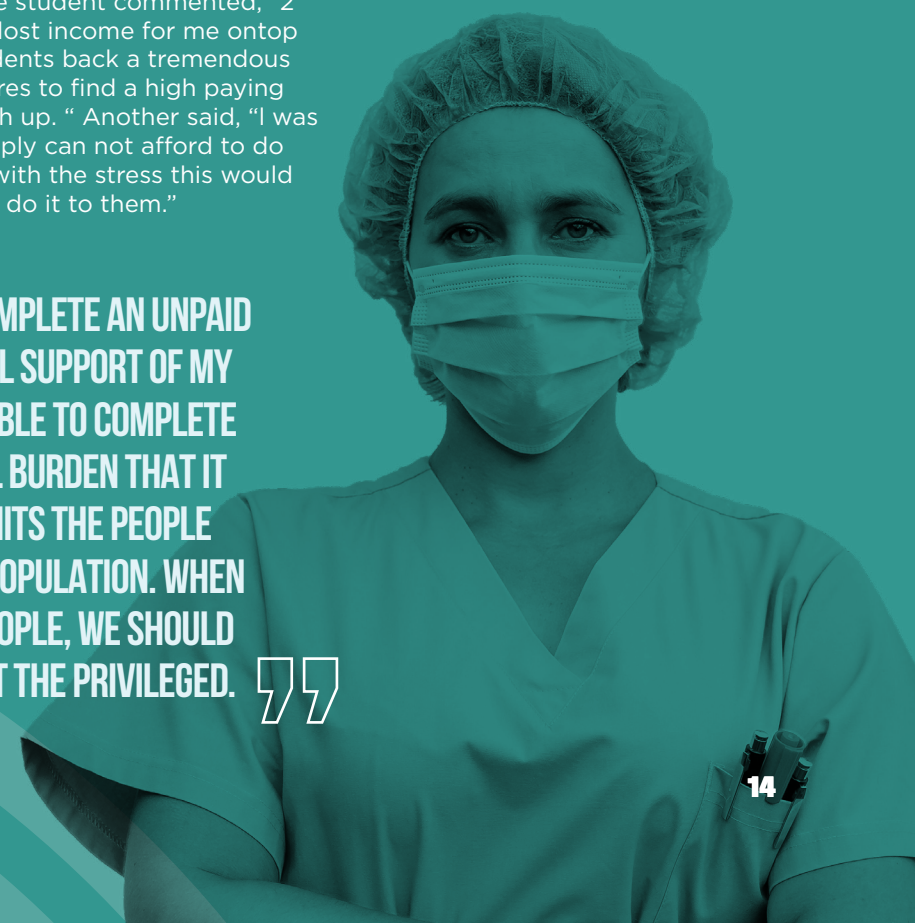


TABLE 3.

MAJOR BENEFITS OF PLACEMENT (N= 1141)

Benefit	Number (%)
Opportunities for new learning or skill development	**1040** (91%)
Applying theory to practice	**1027** (90%)
Improving my confidence to practice independently and autonomously	**926** (81%)
Gaining insight into fields I am interested in working in	**923** (81%)
Improving my ability to communicate effectively with colleagues, external providers and clients / service users	**785** (69%)
Increasing opportunities for employment	**780** (68%)
Being supervised in my practice	**699** (61%)
Networking	**642** (56%)
Developing effective self-care and professional boundaries	**526** (46%)
Other	**38** (3%)

TABLE 4.

MAJOR DRAWBACKS OF PLACEMENT (N= 1141)

Drawback	Number (%)
Impact on income and/or financial wellbeing	**1085** (95%)
Not having the same leave entitlements as paid workers	**823** (72%)
Lack of flexibility (structural requirements)	**817** (71.5%)
Length of placement	**721** (63%)
Location / distance to travel	**706** (62%)
Limited choice on type of placement	**698** (61%)
Quality of placements	**342** (30%)
Lack of support from university staff	**324** (28%)
Lack of support from / contact with other students	**232** (20%)
Other	**117** (10%)

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT WELLBEING DURING PLACEMENT

Students were next asked their opinions on a range of possible strategies for addressing student poverty, wellbeing and attrition. Some of these may have been trialled in 2020/21 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were asked to rate their level of support for each suggested strategy on a 5-point Likert scale.

The most supported suggestion was for paid placements and/or financial support, with a weighted average of 4.93/5 and over 95% of respondents strongly supporting this idea. The second most popular suggestion was to allow placement students to take sick and/or personal leave, in line with allowances for paid workers. Interestingly, the most contentious suggestion was a reduction in placement hours, which indicates that students do see value in participating in substantial practicums if the financial implications can be mitigated. The full range of suggested strategies and levels of support are provided in Table 5.

Strategy	Strongly oppose (1)	Oppose (2)	Unsure (3)	Support (4)	Strongly support (5)	Weighted average
Placement hours reduced	12.01% 137	19.19% 219	20.51% 234	23.40% 267	24.89% 284	3.30
Different placement types	2.80% 32	6.31% 72	23.23% 265	38.21% 436	29.45% 336	3.85
Allowing students to complete a placement in their workplace (but in a different role)	5.08% 58	8.33% 95	18.40% 210	27.96% 319	40.23% 459	3.90
Ability to complete placement flexibly (including remotely or from home)	4.82% 55	12.36% 141	19.54% 223	28.40% 324	34.88% 398	3.76
Some simulated (rather than real world) **learning counted toward placement requirements**	11.83% 135	15.25% 174	17.70% 202	28.13% 321	27.08% 309	3.43
Paid placements and/or financial support for students on placement	0.70% 8	0.00% 0	0.26% 3	3.42% 39	95.62% 1,091	4.93
Emphasis on demonstrating learning outcomes rather than meeting set hours	1.67% 19	4.12% 47	12.80% 146	32.25% 368	49.17% 561	4.23
Allowing placement to be completed part-time over a longer period	2.72% 31	8.33% 95	15.43% 176	29.27% 334	44.26% 505	4.04
Greater recognition of prior learning (RPL) toward meeting placement requirements	0.96% 11	2.54% 29	16.30% 186	34.09% 389	46.10% 526	4.22
Allowing placement students to take sick or personal leave (same as paid workers)	0.61% 7	0.88% 10	5.96% 68	26.91% 307	65.64% 749	4.56

QUALITATIVE COMMENTS

In the last section of the survey, students were able to provide additional open-ended suggestions and comments.

When asked about further ideas for reducing student placement poverty whilst maintaining or enhancing wellbeing and learning, 412 students responded. The themes that emerged reinforced findings from the previous sections of the survey. These included:

- the need for financial support, reimbursement, and grants for placement students
- advocacy for paid placements
- improved equity and inclusion
- the need for improved communication and planning for placements
- consideration of the impacts on health and well-being
- fair treatment of students
- support for students in specific professions (particularly nursing and social work)
- the need for accommodation assistance
- increased flexibility in placement requirements
- support for students with diverse circumstances, particularly parents
- recognition of prior work experience
- consideration for different learning styles and needs
- a need for change and response from the Australian Government.

QUALITATIVE COMMENTS CONTINUED

A sample of responses is provided in Appendix A.

Finally, students were able to comment on any issues that had been raised throughout the survey. A further 238 responses were received. Thematic analysis showed that students again discussed the challenges and concerns they face during placements. The primary themes were as follows:

- students face financial difficulties due to loss of employment, impacting their ability to pay rent and bills
- placement causes exhaustion, anxiety, stress, and burnout due to long hours and pressure to balance placement with other responsibilities
- the length and lack of flexibility in placement make it challenging to find employment, maintain relationships, and handle household responsibilities
- students feel undervalued and want more recognition, support resources, and strategies for mental health challenges
- advocacy for paid placements as a solution to financial struggles, with unpaid placements considered as exploitative and favouring privileged individuals
- calls for the university to advocate for change in placement requirements and conditions
- frustration with current practices, feeling unheard and unsupported, calling for a re-evaluation of requirements and a focus on social justice
- concerns about unrealistic expectations affecting students' ability to fully engage and embrace the learning experience
- criticism of the Australian Association of Social Workers for requiring lengthy unpaid placements
- the need for better support systems and communication between universities, placement educators, and students
- frustration with the lack of recognition of prior experience and skills
- there is perceived inequality and a lack of support for students with disabilities and rural / regional students.

Appendix B provides a sample of qualitative comments received in response to the last survey question.

CONCLUSION

Responses to the Griffith University Student Representative Council's Poverty on Placement survey offer conclusive proof of the dire financial implications of lengthy and/or frequent unpaid student placements.

Students have shared that they experience both significant loss of income and increased expenditure during periods of placement. Consequently, many students - who already struggle with the costs of living - experience greater difficulty covering essential living expenses such as food, accommodation, transport and household bills whilst engaging in unpaid practicums. The financial difficulties students face during placement manifest as significantly heightened stress levels and mental ill-health, along with negatively impacted sleep quality and quantity, general wellbeing, learning outcomes, and relationships.

It is evident that the compulsory placement requirements for students in a range of health and education disciplines require urgent reform. Peak professional registration bodies are encouraged to allow greater flexibility in placement requirements, in recognition and appreciation of the diverse personal circumstances of students. Furthermore, both the University and Governments are urged to provide more accessible and significantly increased financial support for placement students.

> "I KNOW PEOPLE LIVING OUT OF CARS OR IN TENTS BECAUSE THEY CANNOT AFFORD RENT. THEN WE'RE BEING TOLD TO FINISH OUR DEGREE WE NEED TO COMPLETE 1000 HOURS OF PLACEMENT, APPROXIMATELY 6 MONTHS OF UNPAID WORK. I HAVE BEEN ASKED BY STAFF "CAN NO ONE IN YOUR FAMILY SUPPORT YOU FINANCIALLY?" I CANNOT BELIEVE WE ARE BEING ASKED THIS. FIRSTLY, NO I DON'T HAVE ANYONE IN MY FAMILY WHO CAN SUPPORT ME AS BOTH MY PARENTS ARE ON DISABILITY PENSIONS. SECONDLY, IT'S NOT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO HAVE TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT ME AS AN ADULT. WHERE IS THE SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR THE STUDENTS?"
>
> GRIFFITH STUDENT

FURTHER READING

Australian Council of Social Services & UNSW Sydney. (2023). Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected. https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org=aulpovertyzjnz australia-2023-who-is-affected/

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APPENDIX A - SAMPLE OF QUALITATIVE COMMENTS ON WAYS TO REDUCE STUDENT PLACEMENT POVERTY

It is Insane to expect young people to both work and complete placement especially in healthcare as there needs to be a duty of care for both students and the clients they are supporting in these placements.

I believe that there should be a small amount of $ earned each day for attending placement to help reduce the financial stress and help cover the cost of parking, public transport etc. I attended placement on some public holidays, where ALL staff are being paid penalty rates whilst the students Work for free.

Not expecting student to complete another placement block if they miss one day of placement, especially if it is supported with a medical certificate or they are a caner. There should be more flexibility with placement blocks especially 4 week blocks.

Minimum wage is better than none.

Strong lobbying efforts for Commonwealth support.

I feel that we are not treated as adult learners but as teenagers. I am a mature student with a family. I think that if students have to take a day off of placement for any reason it's up to them to manage that. Having to get a stat Dec signed by a JP or a sick note from a Dr is ridiculous. We are paying for this degree, and therefore we are the ones who manage our times as adult learners, not children.

A payment of $50 a day would help students. When I go on a 2 week placement I lose $3000 a f/n in wages before tax So that is a lot to lose for a degree that DOES NOT guarantee us a job at the end.

A major issue with a lot of us that undergo placements if [sic] the set days and hours we have to be there and no [sic] being able to work to support ourselves. I would happily do a 4-6 week placement if I attended 3 -4 days out of each week and got to work for the other days.

As a mum of 4 children and grandbaby due to be born our household expenses are high and very tight. Yet nearly half our income will be lost when I have to do placement. I'm penalised for wanting to improve my life and following my career goal.

The government needs to implement some sudden actions regarding this, even though placements have always been unpaid but now is the time to change this due to increase in expenses.

Mostly on placement us students are sometimes doing equal if not more than what the paid workers do. Sometimes we are not treated right, which further leads to mental health issues, increase stress levels, lack of sleep.

Due to this our studies are affected, causing some of us to eventually give up on our dreams and sometimes even some families' dreams of seeing their child be the first one to graduate from uni.

An EASY and QUICK process for a centrelink [sic] payment dedicated to students on placement that equate to equal amounts as job seeker payments or student payments that support the student financially during placement. Aslo [sic] having more scholarships and bursaries available to ALL people NOT just indigenous [sic] or rural students.

Students could do a day per week in the role of teacher's aide and build up to teaching. This would allow students to work for the remaining days, build relationships within their classroom, still gain experience but without the stress levels.

Talking about the requirements of placement from the start of the degree instead of ignoring the impact of unpaid work.

Ditching the hours-based model and replace with competency-based criteria. Updating AASW requirements to reflect the reality of social work student demographics of 2023 - that many have jobs, families, caring responsibilities, financial obligations etc. we are no longer school leavers that are financially supported by our parents as was the case when the rules were introduced in the 60s. The refusal to change ironically puts systemic barriers to completing this degree for those who are not privileged enough to be able to afford to complete 1000hrs unpaid.

In victoria [sic], midwifery students are paid from the middle of their second year as they have achieved essentially assistant in midwifery level. They have been paying students like this for multiple years. Why is queensland [sic] behind?

Help to form a more equitable placement allocation system which considers students who CANNOT drive and will be impacted as a result of being allocated to distant locations.

Paid placement is almost the ONLY option with the cost of living crisis. Otherwise these fields will end up suffering in the long run. Plenty of people want these degrees, no one can afford the placement which contributes for the lack of sufficient staff in each sector.

as a master of social work student with 7 years of experience having to complete 2 placements is at times ludicrous...

I would suggest allowing students to choose their own time in completing their placements. For example, I can choose to do placements 3x a week (each day being 8 hours) then work for the rest of the week.

I am incredibly passionate about this topic. I'm currently on my final block placement and it has been the most difficult time in my life - it has been a worse experience than when my father died when I was a child. Due to my placement supervisor having incredibly high expectations, I work non-stop. I attend placement for 8 hours a day. I travel 1 hour per day to placement. I then come home and do a few hours of placement related work in the evening. I work on placement work or university assignments all weekend. I've had no mental nor physical capacity to do anything other than placement and keep up with my university assignments which are still due.

FURTHER READING CONTINUED

APPENDIX B - SAMPLE OF GENERAL QUALITATIVE COMMENTS

The inequity of prac requirements is astonishing, especially in a profession such as occupational therapy. Not all students can go without paid employment for 20 weeks in one year. The recommendation to save in the years prior implies that my family would earn excess income to save, which is very far from our reality.

I've known students who've had car accidents because they were driving tired, having to work 8 hours of placement and then work at their own job to make ends.

I have suffered major health episodes in past years because of the stress of placement, full-time study, working weekends and trying to maintain a life outside of my career - and I dont even have children.

I have an ADHD and autism diagnosis and can find university quite challenging and it can take a big toll on my physical and mental wellbeing as well as negatively impact the relationships in my life. / haven't seen any resources that recommend strategies to help people who are neurodivergent or struggling with other mental health diagnoses to manage university placements and to help prepare.

placement is important it has solidified my knowledge and i [sic] have gained confidence. 1000 hours over the course of my degree is too much. two placements 300 hours each would have been significantly easier for myself and my family financially and with respect to our mental health and family/ work/ life wellbeing.

i [sic] am just lucky that my husband supported me and my mother has helped me with looking after my children. this has meant my mother has taken less shifts at her work and her finances have been negatively impacted by my decision to complete my social work degree.

Griffith University as well as ASSW [sic] should reconfigure the toil [sic] that placement places on students. The hallmark of social work is self-care yet during placement students are unable to achieve this due to spending days off placement working to raise money for sustenance. It leads to students having a negative image of social work and potentially dropping the course before the completion.

I experienced a loss of someone close to me during my placement and required two weeks off to grieve, and I was treated poorly because of this. More support should be offered in this instance. Flexibility is imperative.

I am dreading my next placement due to it being unpaid, I do not qualify for Austudy and I am managing a chronic illness.

The AASW regulations and accreditation process requiring students to undertake 1000 hours of unpaid placement is in total contradiction to the AASW Code of Ethics that promotes social justice. The AASW expects social workers to promote "Justice, social fairness and equity by acting to reduce barriers and to expand choice and potential for all peoples'! The AASW as the regulatory body does not model or adhere to it's [sic] own requirements of "equity and social justice", thus the AASW non adherence to its [sic] own regulations and Code of Ethics oppressors [sic] students, and causes economical and social disadvantage.

It's all good and well for the uni to suggest (recommend) that students don't work because it's too much plus study but I have bills to pay. I was working close to 70 hour weeks between uni placement and actual work.