



# PeakCare Queensland Inc.



**Queensland University of Technology**

Faculty of Health

School of Public Health and Social Work

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Professor Mary O’Kane AC,  
Chair, Australian Universities Accord

CC: Cindy Smith, CEO, Australian Association of Social Workers  
Professor Beth Crisp, Chair, Australian Council of heads of social work education

25 August 2023

## **Re: Queensland University of Technology Industry Reference Group Submission to University Accord**

Dear Professor O’Kane,

At the meeting of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Industry Reference Group (IRG) on July 20, 2023, the membership spent considerable time discussing student poverty and the impacts of compulsory, lengthy unpaid placements on student well-being. Members reflected on how many students are under significant financial stress, and it was noted that this is particularly pronounced among students from equity groups, including First Nations students, international students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disability, and mature-aged women with significant caring responsibilities. The membership committee which is comprised of many senior practitioners, managers and CEOs of organisations that host student placements for QUT (and other) students across Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast talked at length about the ways placement poverty is impacting on students and their capacity to learn.

We are aware of the work led by Professor Christine Morley that was published earlier this year in *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, ‘THIS UNPAID PLACEMENT MAKES YOU POOR’: Australian social work students’ experiences of the financial burden of field education’ which exposes the prevalence of placement poverty and the serious consequences for social work students in Australia. We also understand The Australian Council of Heads of Social Work Education (ACHSWE) has undertaken a nationwide study, examining the impacts of placements on student well-being and potential strategies for change; issues that were also highlighted in the National Summit on Reimagining Field Education that was held in February of this year.

Most students are managing competing demands in a cost of living and housing affordability crisis. Placement poverty is becoming a disincentive for them to study, to remain involved in their courses, and certainly to complete a placement.

The requirement to undertake two, 500-hour blocks of field education, where most placements are unpaid excludes many students from being able to study. Importantly, the research shows that when students must give up paid work in order to undertake unpaid placements, they are often employed more precariously after their placement, if they are able to find work again at all, with another 500-hour placement looming.

Many students continue their paid work alongside placement and are therefore working well in excess of the hours that would enable optimum learning. Students are reporting significant fatigue and burnout in addition to significant financial stress.

The impacts of poor mental health and well-being for students are also widely acknowledged.

We support initiatives to come out of the research and the summit such as recommendations that the Federal government provide financial support for students on placements, as they do in other countries such as the United Kingdom.

We also support other initiatives that were trialed during the COVID-19 pandemic, including a reduction of the 1000 hours required, increased recognition of prior learning, and enabling students to complete a placement in their existing workplace.

We support in the Universities Accord interim report's recognition of the difficulty students face while undertaking placements, and commend the Australian government for exploring options to address to this important equity issue.

We support a government funded model where the student is paid a stipend while undertaking their placement. We support this for both domestic and international students.

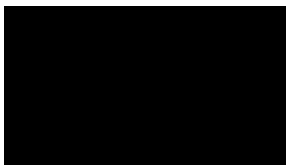
We support greater flexibility in field education and models to enable students to be able to successfully undertake their placements and graduate as social workers.

It is noteworthy that at our last industry reference group meeting, most industry representatives talked about workforce shortages in our various fields of practice; an issue also well acknowledged in the Universities Accord interim report.

We hope that you will consider implementing these options as a matter of urgency for the mental and economic wellbeing of social work students. Our concern is if these issues are not addressed we risk further shortages of social work students enrolling and completing their degrees, which would add to the current shortages of social workers particularly in rural and regional areas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Your sincerely,

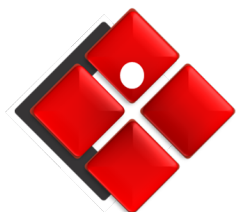


**Tom Allsop**

Chief Executive Officer

Peakcare Queensland Incorporated

Pronouns: (he/him)



## QUT Industry Reference Group Members

Name	Organisation	Role
Kay Sargent	Wesley Mission Qld	Social Worker
Joanne Roff	IFYS Limited	Executive Manager, Service Delivery
Dr Chez Leggatt Cook	UnitingCare Community	Research & Knowledge Translation Manager
Donna Shkalla	UnitingCare Community	Group Executive
Eden McNamara	Community Living Association	Practice Manager
Dr Margi Bennet	Thrive Beyond Trauma	Private Practitioner
Dave Scott	Redlands City Council	Community Development worker
Dr Joseph Mc Dowall	Create Foundation	Executive Director (Research)
Angela O'Malia	Queensland Health	Social Worker
Tom Allsop	PeakCare Queensland Incorporated	Chief Executive Officer
Louise Villanova	Work Up Qld	Senior Manager
Candice Butler	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)	Innovation and Practice Development Manager
Prof Linda Briskman	University of Western Sydney	External academic – Professor
Dr Jo Clarke	Queensland University of Technology	MSW (Q) Coordinator
Dr Phillip Ablett	Queensland University of Technology	BSW Coordinator
A/Prof Jenni Mays	Queensland University of Technology	Academic Lead Education
Prof Christine Morley	Queensland University of Technology	Discipline Lead
Dr Jean Carruthers	Queensland University of Technology	BHS Coordinator
Dr Michelle Newcomb	Queensland University of Technology	Academic

