

# LEAD Scholarship Report for UQef Board Meeting



## Table of Contents

<b>Overview.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Scholarship applications in 2022 (awarded in 2023) .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Results.....	1
Application Shortlisting .....	1
<b>LEAD Scholars Support and Engagement .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership, Equity and Diversity .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Academic Mentors.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>College Memberships.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Retention.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Notable Achievements in 2022-2023 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Areas for Consideration .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Testimonials of Impact.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Recent Testimonials .....	4



## Overview

The UQ Law Leadership, Excellence and Diversity (LEAD) Scholarship supports students who have experienced educational, social and/or financial disadvantage with a scholarship of \$8000 for up to five years. Thanks to the ongoing commitment from the UQeF, in 2023 we were able to award our maximum of 10 LEAD Scholarships.

This report also identifies the benefits of having implemented changes to the scholarship rules in 2022, that now allow for gap year students, and students already enrolled in a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) course to apply for a LEAD Scholarship.

## Scholarship applications in 2022 (awarded in 2023)

The promotional campaign lasted four months, from the opening of applications in August 2022 to the closing of applications in November 2022. The predominant target audience was again Year 12, high school leavers, who can provide evidence of financial and/or other disadvantage(s). However, with the update in rule changes, we were also now able to target gap year students, and students currently enrolled in an LLB at UQ.

### Results

A total of 174 applications were received in 2022 (complete and incomplete). This is similar to the 176 applications received in 2021. However, overall the applications received in 2022 were of a higher quality in that we received the highest number (15) of verified financial hardship applicants to date.

Of the applications:

- 71 completed (vs. 72 in 2021)
- 69 applicants were eligible for the scholarship (vs. 70 in 2021)
- 15 applicants were interviewed in November 2022, 3 in January 2023
- 10 applicants were offered and accepted their scholarships
- 2 of the 10 scholarships awarded, were to students already enrolled in the LLB at UQ. Those same 2 students were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.
- 15 of the eligible applicants had financial hardship verified through QTAC's EAS system

### Application Shortlisting

- The application shortlisting process begins with an assessment by the Student Support and Wellness Officer of the Law School. They work closely with UQ Admissions to access, and remain up to date with, the applicants' QTAC Educational Access Scheme ('EAS') rankings. It is on this basis that we assess applicants' financial hardship status in order to shortlist them for an interview.
- Where there are potential issues for the applicant to complete their EAS application to QTAC (such as access to financial documentation from their parents), we often provide them with the benefit of the doubt, and if supported by other information that they have provided through their written application, we determine whether they meet the other criteria, to merit an interview to proceed to the next stage of assessment. This was not required in 2023.
- It is our understanding that our assessment of financial hardship and reliance on QTAC's EAS rankings continues to be one of the most rigorous for financial hardship-based scholarships within the wider UQ scholarship awards system.

## LEAD Scholars Support and Engagement

### Overview

The LEAD Scholarship program is now in its seventh year of operation.

The breakdown of students currently in the program are as follows: 1 from the 2017 cohort (3 have graduated), 6 from the 2018 cohort (1 has graduated, 4 expected to graduate semester 1, 2023), 9 from the 2019 cohort (1 has graduated), 12 from the 2020 cohort, 9 from the 2021 cohort, 7 from the 2022 cohort, and 10 from the 2023 cohort. We currently have a total of 54 current LEAD Scholars.

The UQ Law School continues to make a concentrated effort to support these, and other vulnerable and at-risk students, through the 'Law, Life and Wellbeing' co-curricular program, facilitated by the Student Support, and Wellness Officer. This will often involve one-on-one pastoral care appointments, or more formal appointments, together with the student's academic mentors, or with the Director of Teaching and Learning if issues of academic progression arise, or if more tailored assistance is required.

We continue to facilitate regular coffee catchups and 'swotvac' pizza lunches with the entire cohort, and their respective academic mentors. We have received generous support in 2023 from law firms Ashurst and Corrs Chambers Westgarth, with providing workshops, career advice, and sending guest speakers to our scholars at our regular coffee catch up events. A number of other firms have also expressed their interest in contributing in a similar way.

These additional offerings of support continue to be a flagship feature of the LEAD Scholarship program, which emphasises the importance of connection and belonging to the School, as well as providing the opportunity for the students to build their own sense of community and feel motivated to engage further, whether it be through mooting, pro bono, or other volunteering and co-curricular initiatives.

### Leadership, Equity and Diversity

The demographic of Scholarship recipients from the 2023 cohort continues to represent a highly diverse group of students. The students have come from locations such as Cairns, Tablelands Region, Sunshine Coast, Brisbane Metro, Daisy Hill, and Slacks Creek areas.

The scholarship recipients for 2023 represent resilient individuals who have achieved academic excellence despite exposure to challenges relating to financial hardship, domestic violence, immigrant non-English speaking parents, single parent/single income households and heightened carer/household responsibilities.

### Academic Mentors

Each cohort of LEAD Scholars is paired with two academic mentors (1 male, 1 female) from the Law School who journey alongside the Scholar as they progress through their degree. The academic mentors consist of lecturers or researchers who volunteer their time to meet with the students as a group at least four times a semester for first-years, and twice a semester for students in their second year or beyond.

The academic mentors often provide advice on study techniques, connect or refer their LEAD Scholar to other available support, provide encouragement and motivation, and help to facilitate discussion between the peers to build a sense of community and solidarity.

Each cohort of Scholars, the two academic mentors, and the Student Support and Wellness Officer, will usually meet over coffee on campus. Once a semester, there is also an opportunity for all the Scholarship cohorts and their respective mentors to gather as a community over a pizza lunch on campus. This large group gathering has received excellent feedback, particularly from first-year students who benefit from the informal mentoring of the older students.

## College Memberships

Given that a majority of the LEAD Scholars leave their rural family homes to study or have experienced some form of a disadvantaged background, the Law School also offers each student the opportunity for a supplementary donor-funded scholarship for residential or non-residential memberships at UQ colleges. This is quite a costly endeavour, especially with increased fees in 2023. The Law School continues to monitor and review the efficacy of this component, assessing on a regular basis for individual student needs, circumstances and expected benefit.

Residential memberships grant the student convenient accommodation throughout the semester, along with food, an active community, access to internet and other recreational facilities, as well as study groups and tutoring. This was granted to two scholars in 2019 for one year due to unique circumstances but has not been awarded again since.

Non-residential memberships grant the student the opportunity to use all the amenities, receive meals, and take part in all the social and academic activities facilitated on the college campus throughout the semester. This is offered to each incoming scholar for one year, but where it is not suitable to particular circumstances, some students have opted out.

## Retention

The Law School appreciates that LEAD Scholars are vulnerable and have less-than-optimal support networks or familial encouragement. However, our retention rate in comparison to other hardship scholarship programs at UQ remain high. We believe this is in part due to the various student-support mechanisms in place on a school level. Notwithstanding, as of June 2023, a total of 9 students have withdrawn from their studies and/or the LEAD Scholarship program since its inception.

### 2017 Cohort

- One student transferred their enrolment within UQ after one semester to pursue a Bachelor in Business Management.
- One student withdrew after three semesters due to family interstate relocation. This student later returned to UQ Law and is now being supported through the Roslyn Griffith Scholarship instead.

### 2018 Cohort

- One student transferred their enrolment within UQ after three semesters to pursue a Bachelors of Arts/Education (Secondary).

### 2019 Cohort

- One student withdrew in semester 1 of 2021 due to health concerns and Covid-19-related stressors. We continued to support this student through multiple attempts to make concessions for their study load and alternative assessment pieces. This student unfortunately experienced frequent hospitalisation due to mental health issues and after much consideration, the best decision at the present time for their health was to withdraw from their university studies.
- One student took a pre-approved 12-month break from study during 2020. They returned in semester 1 of 2021. However, this student continued to struggle with significant mental health issues and due to ongoing hospitalisation, the health advice supported withdrawal from their university studies.

### 2020 Cohort

- One student transferred their enrolment within UQ after one semester to pursue a Bachelors of Mathematics/Education (Secondary).

- One student was unable to maintain satisfactory grades after attempts in two semesters and was therefore unable to retain their scholarship. They have continued with their enrolment but on a part-time basis that is hopefully more suitable to their personal circumstances.

## 2021 Cohort

- One student suffered ongoing medical issues due to a very challenging home environment involving domestic violence and associated mental health issues and a physical disability. We are continuing to support this student who is attempting a part-time load instead. However, with the uncertainty of their ability to return to full-time study, or to achieve the required minimum GPA, we unfortunately had to suspend their monetary scholarship support.
- One student transferred to a Bachelor of Advance Business course after one semester to pursue their goals, which more aligned with that degree.

## Notable Achievements in 2022-2023

We are proud to report that many of our LEAD Scholars continue to achieve recognition for excellence in various academic and cocurricular activities and to secure great employment outcomes.

Some examples include:

- A graduate from the 2017 cohort being named the valedictorian for Sem 1, 2022
- Two graduates from the 2017 cohort secured Judge's Associateships in 2023
- A scholar from the 2019 cohort is taking part in a New Colombo Scholarship and internship experience overseas throughout 2023
- A scholar from the 2019 cohort participated in the 2023 Jessup International Moot Court Competition and was able to travel to Canberra and Washington DC to represent UQ and Australia
- A scholar from the 2021 cohort was awarded a best written submission award in the UQLS internal senior moot competition

## Areas for Consideration

Similar to our reports from previous years, we continue to support individual students with case-by-case requests to defer study and pause their scholarships when unique circumstances arise. This year we have continued to receive requests based on challenging home environments and students taking breaks from study to better manage their mental health. These decisions are not taken lightly, and we take great care in discussing and guiding the students to make fully informed decisions. We also proactively work with these students upon return to ensure they are well connected with resources and assistance, if need be, in continuing their return to study in a fruitful manner and to manage any foreseeable future obstacles or concerns.

## Testimonials of Impact

### Recent Testimonials

1. To me receiving the LEAD scholarship is a life-changing experience. Receiving this award means that I can focus on studies and achieve academic goals without the burden of worrying about finances. It means I can participate in extracurricular activities, engage with peers, and get the most out of my university experience. It means that I can build a network of support through the lead Scholar mentor program that will be critical to my success and future (2022 Scholar).
2. The LEAD scholarship has provided me with a sense of confidence, support, and assurance. It has allowed me to pursue my studies without the financial burden of everyday expenses when striving to

do my best. The accruing costs of textbooks, printing, clothing, rent, petrol, or groceries is lift from my shoulders, for which I am immensely grateful. I am so appreciative to have found a scholarship that not only provides me with financial aid, but also creates a warm and supportive environment with other students who are in similar situations. My peers have been incredibly helpful and encouraging, and I am thankful to have them as part of my university experience (2022 Scholar).

3. The LEAD Scholarship has opened up many pathways for me that I would've never expected. Aside from the award itself, the frequent catch-ups provided a good way to meet other LEAD scholars from varying year levels who provided the most helpful advice and really made me feel like I wasn't alone when I was going through periods of struggle. I also found that it was unexpectedly a great networking opportunity. I've met many graduates, recruiters or those much further in their careers in a lot more casual environments than usual networking events, which allowed me to feel a lot more comfortable asking questions, reaching out and maintaining those connections that I made (2019 Scholar).



# LEAD Scholarship

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