

LEAD Scholarship Report for UQef Board Meeting



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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 2025 we awarded 10 LEAD Scholarships. This report documents the highlights of the LEAD Scholarship recipients and their community over the last 12 months.

Scholarship applications in 2024 (awarded in 2025)

The promotional campaign lasted four months, from the opening of applications in August 2024 to the closing of applications in November 2024. The predominant demographic of applicants continued to be Year 12, high school leavers.

Results

We received a record number of eligible applications in 2024, with a total of 84 (up from 68 in 2023). Of the total applicant pool, 23 had verified financial hardship scores through having applied via QTAC's [Educational Access Scheme](#) (up from 16 in 2023). Multiple applicants also had verified disadvantages in categories of 'home environment', 'personal illness' and 'educational disadvantage', including 25 who indicated that they were first in their family to attend university. In terms of applicants identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, we had 5 (up marginally from 4 in 2023).

Following the application process:

- 14 applicants were interviewed in November 2024, 5 in January 2025;
- 10 applicants were offered a LEAD Scholarship, all of whom accepted;
- 9 of the 10 Scholarships awarded were to students with QTAC verified financial hardship backgrounds. The remaining Scholarship was awarded to a student of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background who indicated they were from a financial hardship background but simply not within the QTAC definitional threshold. We have received advice from the ATSI unit at UQ that this is often the case with First Nations students, and that less weight should be attributed to meeting the financial hardship threshold through the verified scores — in these cases a more tailored, global determination should be made using all available information.
- 1 of the 10 Scholarships awarded was to a student transferring/upgrading into the UQ Law dual degree from a Bachelor of Arts.

Support and Engagement for LEAD Scholars

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

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 School's Director of Teaching and Learning if issues of academic progression arise, or if more tailored assistance is required.

Additional measures of support and aftercare 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

opportunities 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

Demographically, the 2025 LEAD Scholarship recipients continues to represent a highly diverse group of students. Those receiving offers were from locations such as Upper Coomera, East Ballina, Gold Coast, Middlemount, Stanthorpe, Northgate and Brisbane Metro areas.

The Scholarship recipients for 2025 also represent resilient individuals who have achieved academic excellence despite exposure to financial hardship, domestic violence, single parent/single income households, and highly challenging home environments, among other set-backs.

Academic Mentors & Community Building

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-year students, and twice a semester for students in their second and upper years.

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, solidarity and support.

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.

The most recent occasion included a visit from a LEAD Scholar alumni, Mr Sam Skinner (Cohort of 2016), where he inspired the group with his story of what it was like to come from a small rural town, to studying law at UQ, securing a Judges Associateship at the District Court of Queensland, and then ultimately landing a graduate role at a top-tier law firm (MinterEllison).



College Memberships

The Law School continues to facilitate supplementary (separate donor-funded) scholarships for LEAD recipients to undertake residential or non-residential memberships at UQ colleges. This continues to be a costly endeavour, especially with continued increases in fees. While we understand that a college membership may not be ideal for all students, the feedback from those who have availed themselves of the various benefits available (eg daily meals, additional tutoring, extended support networks) is overwhelmingly positive and therefore worthwhile. We are also grateful to St Leo's College, who once again waived their non-residential membership fee for our 1 male student placed there for 2025.

As is often the case, the majority of incoming LEAD Scholars in 2025 were offered non-residential memberships. However, due to the exceptional circumstances of two new Scholars, we were able to support them with full residential memberships to Women's College this year. For one of those students, it meant that she was able to leave emergency accommodation and avert the real risk of homelessness. For the other student, it meant that she did not have to defer commencing her studies at UQ due to her remote location and unique financial instability, among other challenging circumstances. Similarly, we have committed funds and negotiated arrangements with Women's College to ensure that we can support these two students with ongoing residential memberships, should the students wish to continue. This includes offsetting some of our costs with a scholarship provided by the College internally, and by working with the College to ensure that accommodation is made available during the semester-break periods.

Our hope is to continue this type of support in the future when the need arises. The last time an arrangement of this type was made was in 2019.

Retention

The Law School appreciates that LEAD Scholars come to university from vulnerable settings and have less-than-optimal support networks or familial encouragement. We continue to receive feedback indicating that our retention rate, in comparison to other financial hardship-based scholarship programs at UQ, remains high. We believe this is in part due to our holistic approach of student-support, which includes building community, working with the academic mentors to support study habits, and ensuring that Scholars continue to see themselves as belonging to, and having prospects within, both the UQ Law School and in the wider legal profession.

Although two students from the 2023 intake (awarded in 2024) relinquished their LEAD Scholarship in 2025, we accept that their reasons for doing so were genuine and understandable. One student struggled to cope with the academic workload, while the other simply decided that a law degree was ultimately not to their liking.

Unpaid Work Experience Partnership with Darrow Chambers



Background

Darrow Chambers is a Barristers Chambers led by UQ alumnus Gerard (Gerry) Mullins KC (LLM, '98). Caroline Hawkins from the Business Economics and Law Advancement team had connected with Gerry in early 2024. Gerry himself grew up in a regional town where he did not have the benefit of accurate or realistic expectations about what a career in law would be like. He was also the first in his family to attend university. Through reflecting on his own personal experience, he decided it would be a good opportunity to help UQ students who might be from a similar background gain some exposure to the profession while they are early on in their studies and hence the idea for a mentoring program was proposed.

After various discussions and consultations with various stakeholders, we decided to pilot this mentoring program via an unpaid work experience format, exclusively for our LEAD Scholarship cohort, with the aim of enabling the Scholars to gain exposure to the legal profession through observing, shadowing and learning from experienced barristers within Darrow Chambers.

Pilot design

A pilot was proposed for a 12-month trial period, and it was launched with 9 LEAD Scholars initially. The Scholars were to attend the chambers in pairs, or small groups, for approximately half a day, on a monthly basis or as availability allowed.

Targeted students

The target group for the program are Scholars in early stages of their degree program, preferably from state schools and/or regional/remote areas, who haven't been exposed to what a career in law might be like (ie they are the first in their family to choose to study this profession), who don't otherwise have existing connections to the profession, and who are struggling to gain employment in a legal workplace/role. If the pilot is successful with the LEAD Scholars, we would consider expanding the program to include other law school scholarship recipients as well.

Onboarding

The work experience program launched with a visit to Darrow Chambers to meet the barristers and familiarise themselves with the chambers.

The barristers introduced themselves and gave short presentations on their upcoming workload and how the students might like to get involved. The students began to plan which experiences they were interested in observing and being a part of.

Commitment

The program is designed to be flexible around the study schedules of each Scholar and their unique circumstances (e.g. ease of commute, other work/family commitments), and the Scholar will not be required to do tasks or have responsibilities that would otherwise be considered employment.



Outcome

Since the pilot began in August 2024, the program has proven to be an all-round success. Scholars have gained invaluable experiences and knowledge from observing, shadowing and directly interacting with eminent legal professionals. The participating Scholars have attended client meetings, mediations, settlement conferences, and various Supreme Court hearings and trials. This included a trial co-led by Gerry and Brett Walker AO SC (considered by many as Australia's most eminent barrister).

We are pleased to advise that Gerry and his chambers have agreed to continue the program for the foreseeable future, and to accept a new intake of LEAD Scholars each year, while allowing past participants to continue with the program, if they wish, and to serve as leaders for their junior peers.

Notable Achievements from LEAD Scholars

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

Examples include the following:

- A Scholar from the 2023 cohort was competitively selected for our 2025 Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot team. The team had a very successful performance at Vienna, ultimately reaching the round of 32 (out of 384 teams). Based on the preliminary round scores, the UQ team ranked 3rd overall. They received an honourable mention for the Eric E. Bergsten Award for Best Team Orals. Additionally, all three oralists received awards for best individual oralist. The team also won the Budapest Pre-Moot, which had 47 teams compete.
- A Scholar from the 2023 cohort is currently in the advanced recruitment stages for a graduate role with the Australian Defence Force as a legal officer.
- A Scholar from the 2021 cohort was successful in securing a clerkship placement with top-tier firm MinterEllison in the winter 2025 season.
- A Scholar from the 2023 cohort was named as a finalist in the 'Lawyers Weekly, Women in Law Awards 2025' in the category of 'Law Student of the Year'.

Areas for Consideration

Funding projections

On current forecasts of active Scholarship commitments, the available funds are tracking slightly below what is required to be able to sustain awarding 10 Scholarships each year going forward (per the usual target).

The following figures and estimates in the table below were current as of 6 June 2025. The current balance of the LEAD account is \$705,350. There are 39 active recipients. The 10 projected recipients for 2025 were realised.

Award year	No.	2025 Remaining	\$ per year	2025 annual year total	Duration total	No. Actual 2025 sem1	\$ Actual 2025 sem 1	Comments - Semester 1 2025	\$ Estimated 2025 sem 2
2019	1	1 semester	4,000	4,000	4,000	1	4,000	Terminated following s1 payment	0
2020	2	1 semester	4,000	8,000	8,000	2	8,000	Terminated following s1 payment	0
2021	8	1 year	8,000	64,000	64,000	7	28,000	1 x terminated 30/1/2025 Unsatprogress - no s1 payment	28,000
2022	6	2 years	8,000	48,000	96,000	6	24,000	no change	24,000
2023*	11	3 years	8,000	88,000	264,000	10	40,000	*2022 student was terminated 12/5/2025 Unsatprogress - no s1 payment	40,000
2024	5	4 years	8,000	40,000	160,000	3	12,000	1 x terminated 30/1/2025 Unsatprogress - no s1 payment 1 x terminated 14/3/2025 no longer eligible - no s1 payment	12,000
2025	10	5 years	8,000	80,000	400,000	10	40,000	10 new commenced	40,000
	43			332,000	996,000	39	156,000		144,000

*For purposes of calculation in this table, 2023 includes 1 student from 2022 who interrupted for a year in 2024.

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Estimates for Semester 2, 2025.

Award year	No.	Sem 2 2025 Remaining	\$ per year	2025 remaining total	Remaining Duration total
2021	7	1 semester	8,000.00	28,000.00	28,000.00
2022	6	1.5 years	8,000.00	24,000.00	72,000.00
2023	10	2.5 years	8,000.00	40,000.00	200,000.00
2024	3	3.5 years	8,000.00	12,000.00	84,000.00
2025	10	4.5 years	8,000.00	40,000.00	360,000.00
	36			144,000.00	744,000.00

Donations

Donations received in 2023 totalled \$508,000. Donations received in 2024 totalled \$378,000. Donations received to date for 2025 total \$7,000.

Testimonials of Impact

Priscilla (Cohort of 2021)

"I am very appreciative of the impact that the LEAD Scholarship has had on my university experience. The LEAD Scholarship has allowed me to focus on my studies, afford living expenses and participate in extracurricular activities, including law competitions, societies and internships. I have also thoroughly benefited from having a community of supportive peers and mentors, who have played an important role in my academic and personal development. Thank you to the donors who have contributed to this scholarship."

Cheroki (Cohort of 2023)

"I can't express enough how much it has changed my life. With the generosity of the Law School, I have been gifted with freedom not particularly available before, such as being able to buy a car, go on holidays with friends, take my family to dinners — the list goes on. The support team behind the scholarship repeatedly go out of their way to make sure LEAD Scholars can partake in amazing career opportunities. I would also like to make an honourable mention to Dony who goes above and beyond to answer queries, set us on the right path, and genuinely make sure we are ok."

Ivy (Cohort of 2025)

"I'm so grateful for the LEAD Scholarship because it has provided me with opportunities such as networking, connecting with academics, and helping me finance my studies. The Scholarship has allowed me to connect with like-minded people who were in similar circumstances to me, providing me with a sense of community."

Thank you so much for the amazing generosity that has allowed me to live on campus at Women's College. The experience has been beyond my wildest dreams! I can't thank you enough for supporting my journey into university."

Leah (Cohort of 2023)

“The LEAD Scholarship program not only provided me with a pathway to study law at UQ, but also gave me the confidence, community, and support to truly thrive within in. Each year, through the community of scholars, alumni, and staff, I continue to discover new opportunities and experiences, with every application of mine with encouragement. With the Scholarship’s support, I’ve been able to pursue volunteer work in areas I’m passionate about, compete internationally in a prestigious law competition, and I’m now eagerly awaiting the outcome of my exchange application.

Before commencing my studies, I underestimated just how intimidating, prestigious, and often inaccessible the legal field can be. I found myself surrounded by people who couldn’t relate to my experiences, and without the familiar support network that students from inner-Brisbane school communities seemed to have already found.

However, these environments taught me the importance of sharing my own story and actively connecting with others from similar backgrounds. Through these connections, I’ve met not only fellow students but also practitioners and staff who have helped transform my hesitations and fears about the legal world into genuine optimism and a strong drive to make law a more accessible path.

I am very appreciative of the impact that the LEAD Scholarship has had on my university experience. The LEAD Scholarship has allowed me to focus on my studies, afford living expenses and participate in extracurricular activities, including law competitions, societies and internships. I have also thoroughly benefited from having a community of supportive peers and mentors, who have played an important role in my academic and personal development. Thank you to the donors who have contributed to this scholarship.”

Molly (Cohort of 2024)

The following is a copy of Molly’s Vote of Thanks Speech at the 2025 Macrossan Lecture.

“It is an honour and a privilege to stand before you tonight to express my heartfelt gratitude. My name is Molly Webster, and I am a second-year Law and Arts student at the University of Queensland. I am a proud recipient of the Leadership, Excellence, and Diversity Scholarship, known as the LEAD Scholarship.

From a young age, I have always been determined to study law. I was always captivated by the idea of justice and advocacy — how the law could be a powerful force for positive change. I grew up on the Sunshine Coast and fortunately, I was guided by a teacher at school who instilled in me the importance of a tertiary education, to be able to make a change for others and the world at large. Due to my family’s financial circumstances, I am a self-funded student, and pursuing a law degree at a prestigious university like the University of Queensland once felt like a distant dream. Achieving the high academic standards required for entry was only part of the challenge. The greater hurdle was affording the cost of relocating and financially supporting myself each year to obtain my degrees.

The LEAD Scholarship has made that dream a reality. It has removed financial barriers and allowed me to focus on my studies without the constant worry of making ends meet. One of the most incredible aspects of the LEAD Scholarship is the ongoing support for the entirety of my degrees. Unlike other scholarships that require yearly reapplication, this program offers long-term stability, allowing me to plan my future without added stress.

Being granted this financial support and mentorship has placed me on equal footing with my peers. Without the need to overextend my working hours to afford weekly accommodation and course resources, I have been able to fully immerse myself in the academic and extracurricular opportunities the University of Queensland offers.

Some of these opportunities have been truly transformative. I have been involved in a Pacific Island Human Rights Project with Caxton Legal Centre, as well as a mentoring and shadowing experience in collaboration

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with Darrow Chambers — an initiative exclusive to the LEAD Scholarship community. Coming from a regional town, I had little exposure to what a career in law truly entailed. These experiences have given me valuable insight into this profession and have helped me develop a clearer vision for my future.

Starting law school was undoubtedly daunting, filled with uncertainty and the pressure of adjusting to a rigorous academic environment. However, through this scholarship, I have been able to join a community of like-minded students who have made the transition easier. Simple moments, like coffee catch-ups organised by Dony at Merlo, have connected me with peers who have faced various challenges but share my passion for the law.

Receiving this scholarship has changed the trajectory of my life. It has given me the resources, confidence, and support to chase my aspirations. I am only the second person in my extended family to attend university, and because of this opportunity, I now have the ability to strive for excellence and give back in meaningful ways.

To the donors and to the staff at the University of Queensland — thank you for believing in me, for investing in my future, and for opening doors that I once thought were out of reach. Your generosity does more than fund education; it fosters ambition and builds a more inclusive legal profession.

With immense gratitude, I thank you all.”

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