



ASA Survey: Australian Student Placement Poverty

Summary of Findings



FEBRUARY 2026

[Sonographers.org](https://www.sonographers.org)

A. Survey Background

- **Aim:** To better understand the financial and other difficulties students experience during placements, to help the ASA advocate for students facing placement poverty.
- **Population:** Australian students, undertaking an accredited sonography course, who have commenced/completed a clinical training placement* in the past two years.
- **Timing:** Open from mid-August until mid-October 2025.
- **Question design:** Undertaken in Survey Monkey, consisting of 15 questions, with 3 questions allowing for open comments.
- **Responses:** 112 responses were received.

*The term 'clinical training placement' encompasses all modes of clinical experience / clinical placement that meet the recommendations¹ and definition² set out by ASAR. Some students may refer to this as work integrated learning, block placement, clinical experience etc.

I [and others] were placed at a site with a commute of 2 hours each way. By the time I [got] home I was exhausted and had no time or energy to do anything. I did not move closer to the site as accommodation was too expensive.

B. Key Findings

This survey provides a snapshot of student sentiment regarding placement poverty and related stress. Key findings include:

- **Most students (79%) work while studying. Half (51%) use savings** to support themselves, and half (52%) rely on friends, family or partners to support them.
- One third of students (34%) **work 21 hours or more each week while studying.**
- Almost all students undertaking a combined bachelor/graduate diploma course report being **unpaid** while on placement, as did one third of post-graduate students.
- Almost half (46%) of respondents report having to **commute significant distances** to undertake a placement, and one quarter (24%) had to **relocate**. Almost two thirds (65%) report needing to **give up their usual paid work while on placement.**
- **Many sonography students face significant financial and related stress** while undertaking clinical placements. **One third (35%) of students report the pressure as extreme (2%) or significant (32%)** – leaving them to question if or how they will manage future placements. Half (49%) report the pressure as moderate – meaning it was quite stressful, but they found ways to manage.
- The **financial and other pressure during placements impacts students** in many ways, including leaving them **stressed or anxious (71%), tired and having difficulty sleeping (67%), with poor mental health and confidence (59%),** and unable to apply themselves academically (42%). Other impacts include reducing essential health care such as appointments and medications (29%), affecting relationships (29%), and skipping meals and essentials (22%).
- 40% of students report doing, or seriously considering, one or more of the following: **delaying or deferring study (19%), dropping out of the course (15%), reducing course commitments (11%), or needing to repeat a unit (11%).**
- Most students indicated that if they were to receive **additional financial support** during placements – they **would spend it on essentials** such as food, accommodation, travel and utility expenses.

¹ ASAR. Standards for the Accreditation of Sonographer Courses. 2025

² ASAR. Course Accreditation Handbook. 2025

C. Findings by Question

1. Which course are you undertaking?

Combined bachelor/graduate diploma (64%), post-graduate (29%), masters (7%).

2. In which area of practice are you studying?

General (72%), cardiac (26%), vascular (1%), obstetrics/gynecological (1%).

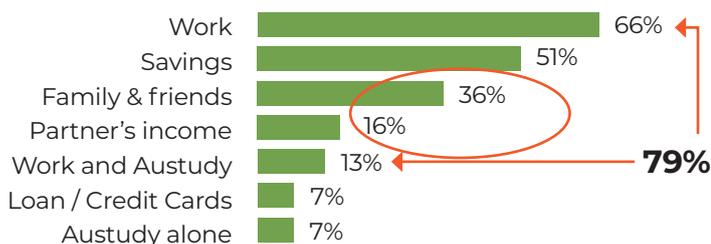
Without accessing scholarship(s), [I] would not have been able to afford groceries or petrol money.

3. What best describes your situation?

Single with no dependent children (63%), single with dependent children (4%), a couple with no dependent children (21%), a couple with dependent children (13%).

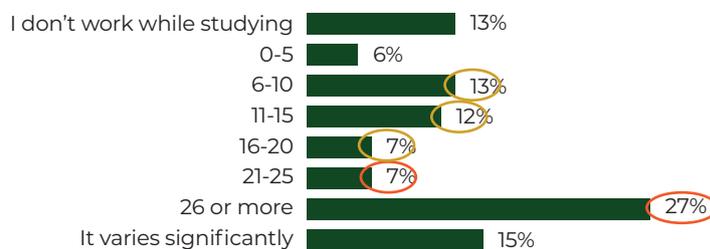
In total, 84% of respondents do not have dependent children, while 17% do. The majority of those who do have dependent children are post-graduate students (74%).

4. When studying, how do you support yourself? (Select any that apply)



Most students (**79%**) work while studying (most without Austudy assistance), and half (51%) use savings. Half (52%) rely on family, friends or partners to support them, with a minority relying on Austudy alone or using loans/credit cards.

5. When studying, how many hours do you typically work per week?



One third of students (34%) work 21 hours or more a week. A further third (32%) work between 6 and 20 hours per week, 13% report not working at all, and 15% say it varies significantly. The majority of those working 26 hours or more each week are post-graduate students.

6. In which state or territory did you undertake your current or most recent placement?

QLD (38%), VIC (25%) NSW (25%) SA (6%), WA (4%), TAS (1%), ACT (1%).

In total, 88% of respondents were in NSW, QLD, or VIC.

7. Where was the placement located?

Metro (66%), regional (26%), and rural or remote (8%).

Students who undertook their most recent placement in regional, rural or remote areas, were a mix of undergraduate/post-graduate; who overwhelmingly did not have dependent children; and were predominantly studying general sonography.

The combination of heavy study load, clinical expectations, and financial hardship creates a difficult environment to manage.

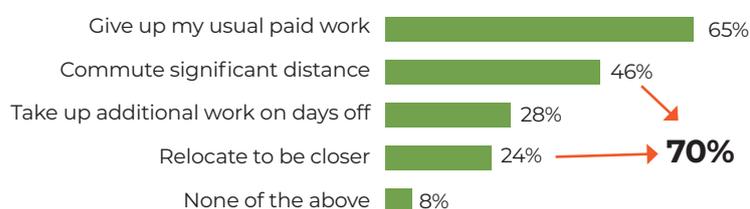
8. What was the workplace arrangement of this placement?

Unpaid (69%), paid (22%), other / combination (9%), self-funded (0%).

Unpaid placements were most commonly reported by students undertaking the combined bachelor/graduate diploma course, however, one third of post-graduate students also report undertaking unpaid placements. One respondent mentioned having undertaken a self-funded placement in the past.

9. For this placement, which of the following is true for you? (Select any that apply)

Respondents reported needing to do the following:



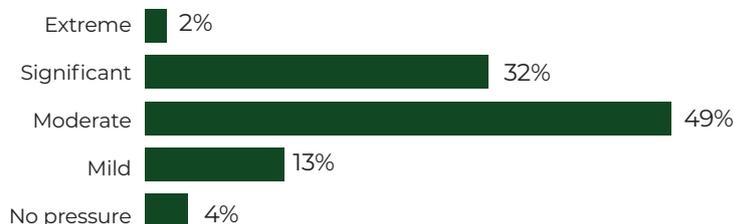
Almost half (46%) of respondents reported having to commute significant distances to undertake their placement, and a further one quarter (24%) needing to relocate.

Almost two thirds (65%) reported needing to give up their usual paid work to meet the commitments of the course, and more than a quarter (28%) needed to take up additional work to cover expenses.

There was a strong correlation between those needing to relocate and those needing to give up usual paid work. The overwhelming majority of these students did not have dependent children.

Placement is critical in consolidating my knowledge and ... skills However, the toll it takes not being able to financially support myself ... affect[s] my productivity and application. Even \$10 an hour would be extremely beneficial to afford ... necessities.

10. During the placement, how would you rate the financial and other pressure you experienced?



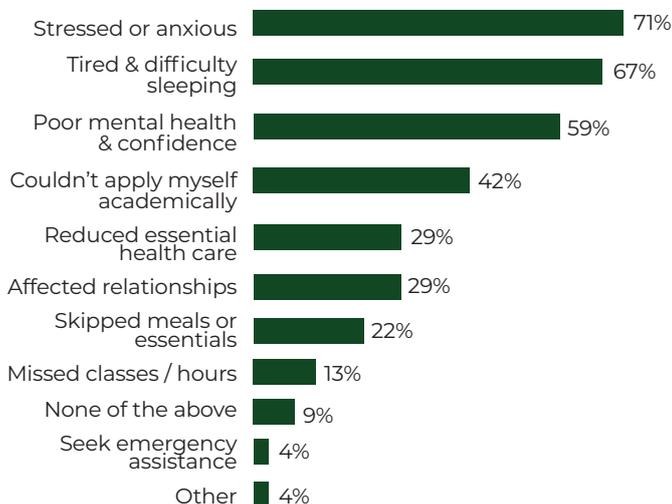
A third (34%) of respondents reported the pressure they experienced on their most recent placement as being **significant or extreme** – leaving them to question if or how they will manage future placements.

Half (49%) reported the pressure as being **moderate** – that is, quite stressful but they found ways to manage. Less than one fifth (17%) report **no pressure or mild pressure**.

Almost all of those reporting significant or extreme pressure were unpaid, and 70% reported having to give up their normal paid work due to the commitments of the placement.

I strongly advocate for workplaces paying trainees especially when they are at the point of working independently with some minimal supervision. If a company is making money off of the student, they should be financially rewarded.

11. How did the financial and other pressures during placement impact you? (Select any that apply)



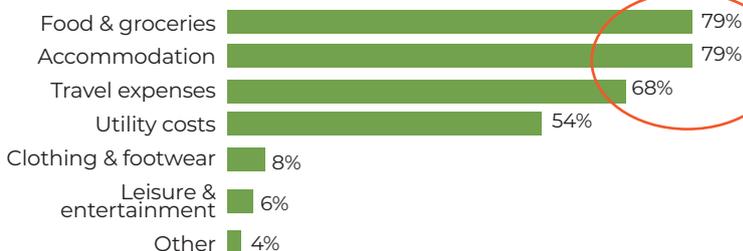
The pressure on students during placements is evident in a variety of ways, including feeling regularly stressed or anxious (71%), and regularly tired or having difficulty sleeping (67%). Many also reported negative impacts on their mental health and confidence (59%), and not being able to apply themselves academically as well as they normally would (42%). One third (29%) also reported it affecting their relationships with friends and family.

Some students on placements say the financial and other pressure caused them to reduce essential health care such as appointments or medications (29%), skip meals or essentials due to lack of money (22%), or seek emergency assistance (4%). A small proportion (13%) reported having to miss classes or placement hours due to ill health and stress.

12. Due to financial and other difficulties experienced during placement have you, or are you seriously considering, any of the following? (Select any that apply)

While 60% of respondents reported 'none', 40% had done or seriously considered one or more of the following: delaying or deferring study (19%), dropping out of the course (15%), reducing course commitments (11%) or have failed a component and need to repeat (11%) – with 16% of students indicating more than one thing.

13. If you were to receive additional financial support during your placement, what 3 areas would you be most likely to use it for? (Select three only)



Respondents predominately reported that any additional financial support would go towards; food/groceries (79%), accommodation (79%), travel expenses (68%), and utility costs (54%).

Most people doing a [postgrad] sonography course are mature aged. I can't understand how they ... have to do a placement for free for 3 days per week, plus study and still have enough hours to pay ... rent or mortgage.

D. Additional Comments

Would you like to make any additional comments about any aspect of sonography placements or courses?

Below is a summary of open comments by respondents according to course type.

Combined Bachelor / Graduate Diploma Student Respondents

- The fourth / final year is very challenging due to length / intensity of the placements. Students should definitely receive financial assistance.
- The financial challenge is one of the biggest challenges during placements – particularly in regard to travel and living costs.
- Placements are in short supply; students are under pressure to accept and relocate / commute or risk facing lengthy delays in course completion.
- The pressure of placements is significant – ongoing support is needed to ensure students can achieve success without compromising their health and wellbeing.

Graduate Diploma / Masters Student Respondents

- It's very difficult to work 9-5 while attending classes and find time to study.
- Increased government funding or remuneration for students would help make the pathway more accessible and sustainable.
- Students – particularly those with dependents – are challenged by finances, logistics, plus personal and family commitments.
- The biggest challenge that most students face is poor financial support. Having all sonography courses as part of Austudy would make a massive difference. All placements should also be paid.

[I have had to] rely on the support of family members in order to cover basic living and study-related expenses.