

ATTACHMENT



CITY OF MELBOURNE

**Response to the
International Education Discussion Paper
VICTORIA'S FUTURE INDUSTRIES**

AUGUST 2015

Introduction

There are over 34,000 international students living and/or studying at one of the university campuses or tertiary, foundation, secondary and non-award education institutions in the City of Melbourne. International education provides Melbourne with a globalised and highly skilled workforce, and our diverse international student population contributes enormously to the cultural and social fabric of our communities throughout the city. Melbourne also benefits economically through both employment growth and contribution to the education sector and the retail, housing and service sectors.

Throughout the last decade, the City of Melbourne has engaged and collaborated with international students, with all levels of education providers, community organisations, and the Victorian government to identify and address emerging issues through the provision of programs and support for international students and the international education sector more broadly. Key initiatives include the City of Melbourne's student welcome desk at the Melbourne Airport and Lord Mayor's student welcome events. Both programs have been running for over seven years.

The City of Melbourne's focus on international education sits within three strategic Council documents:

1. In 2013 the City of Melbourne developed its first international student strategy. The *International Student Strategy 2013–17 'A Great Place to Study'* builds on and integrates the work across the organisation to attract and support international students in Melbourne. In this strategy, the City of Melbourne defined the role of local government in the international education sector by considering areas the organisation is able to effectively improve the experiences of international students.

A Great Place to Study sits within the Council Plan goal 'A Knowledge City' and outlines five key areas where Council will deliver programs in international education. These are:

- research and consultation
 - collaborative practice and partnering
 - knowledge and innovation
 - celebrate diversity
 - promote destination of choice
2. Underpinning the City of Melbourne *Council Plan 2013–17* goal 'A Knowledge City' is the *Knowledge City Strategy 2014–18*. The strategy aims to support the international education sector through actions that will:
 - attract global talent in skilled occupations to support the knowledge sector
 - increase knowledge sector international investment and engagement, research and partnerships
 - ensure Melbourne remains among the world's most liveable cities and the world's most admired knowledge cities.
 3. The City of Melbourne international business framework, *Melbourne: Doing Business Globally* prioritises the development of international partnerships that will foster business, innovation

and economic development between government, education providers and industry. Activities in this framework include:

- Supporting universities to continue to attract international students to Melbourne, and
- Promoting Melbourne as the preferred Australian location for business, education, cultural and tourist activities.

Recommendations

Collaboration opportunities between the Victorian government and local government:

1. Jointly support and deliver ongoing programs that welcome and support international students such as the airport welcome desk, welcome events and community engagement programs.
2. Continue to facilitate discussion between Victorian government and the broader local government community.
3. Consider and work towards solutions for accommodation challenges in Melbourne in relation to affordability, adequate supply and access.
4. Continue to jointly focus on further developing programs that will enhance internship and graduate employment opportunities among the Melbourne's business community.

Discussion paper questions

The City of Melbourne has responded to selected discussion questions. Recommendations are contained throughout the document.

1. *How can Victoria draw on the strengths of our international education sector to become the Education State?*

By regaining international status as one of the best student cities in the world in 2015 (QS university rankings 2015), Melbourne has contributed to enhancing Victoria's reputation as the preferred education destination. The strategies highlighted above outline the role of Council in promoting Melbourne as a preferred destination, and linking key business, education and tourism development activities.

The Victorian government should continue to work with regional and local governments to identify where international education may be included in strategies for economic development with the aim to aligning activities across Victoria.

The education experience for international students in Victoria has been underpinned by a structure of well-connected and informed peak representative organisations within the international education sector that work with both local governments and the Victorian government.

Continued Victorian government support of peak student and industry organisations would assist to ensure a high quality international education experience for all students in Victoria.

2. *How can Victoria capitalise and respond to market opportunities for online learning and technology solutions to enhance our international education position?*

The discussion paper has identified a key challenge in national policy and legislative restrictions bound by the Migration Act and Education for Services to Overseas Students Act limiting onshore students' engagement in online study.

The Victorian government should advocate to the Commonwealth government for changes to reduce legislative barriers that currently restrict the modes of study undertaken by international students while studying in Australia on a student visa.

Students are known to study at all hours – both voluntarily and as a necessity of Australia's time zone misalignment with international providers of online services. Currently Melbourne has a shortage of spaces facilitating online learning for the entirety of the day. Melbourne has developed its capacity as a 24 hour city through initiatives targeting the entertainment and hospitality sectors, and plans for a 24 hour public transport service on weekends.

In order to actively support a 24 hour education city, the Victorian government should consider supporting the establishment of 24 hour hubs with appropriate learning facilities. A trial could be conducted at the Study Melbourne Student Centre to determine the demand for the facility on weekends or in the late evening.

3. *Given the diverse range of higher education courses, delivery modes and student cohorts, what should the future mix of Victoria's higher education exports look like?*

The ongoing growth in the sector will need to ensure that the onshore student population remains sustainable such that the provision of services, accommodation and support available to students is able to adequately meet the needs of students.

4. *How can the government and institutions work collectively to support international research engagement?*

Increased participation in international research collaboration should be a priority for Victorian institutions. International partnerships can increase the impact of Victorian led research, localise outcomes and enable new funding opportunities. They can drive innovation within private enterprise and, with Melbourne sharing many of the complex problems that challenge cities around the world: they also offer cost-effective solutions to public policy problems.

International research partnerships should not solely be the domain of individual researchers and universities. Universities need to partner with industry (including local government) to access a number of international research opportunities that exist in Europe, North America and increasingly in Asia. Research networks such as Europe's Horizon2020, which has been established to foster industry-university partnerships, can then become avenues for participation by our universities.

The Victorian government should play a role in assisting universities and industry partners to collaborate with research networks offshore.

5. *How can we address supply side challenges relating to: increasing the number of places within the school system, expanding English language provision and exploring new models of student accommodation? What new ways of working will be required?*

Current research by the Commonwealth government suggests that students are content living in the broader community and are satisfied with the availability and location of accommodation. Students' main concerns regarding accommodation relates to affordability. New models of student accommodation should take into account the relatively low incomes levels of international students. City of Melbourne and other authorities are aware of cases where students are living in illegal rooming houses and experiencing substandard living conditions, this can be linked to the low income levels obtained by students. Students have also reported to City of Melbourne that there is limited information about accommodation options available.

Home Ground Real Estate, which has been developed in Melbourne in response to the shortfall in accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, is one model which could be adapted for international students.

Victorian government should consider innovative and targeted programs that will increase international student access to appropriate, adequate and affordable accommodation.

6. *Given the consistent feedback that more international students would like to socialise with local students and communities, what innovative approaches and stakeholders can be engaged to facilitate this?*

In 2015 the City of Melbourne partnered in a program that went 'beyond welcoming'. International students were connected with workplaces and communities through a combination of existing and new programs. This program enables students to gain a more connected experience with local residents and employers. The success of similar programs is contingent upon the responsibility belonging to a local host; community, organisation or resident.

The Victorian government should support the development of programs that provide social connections for international students through community organisations such as the Welcome Dinner Project.

7. *How can government's approach to positioning Victoria as both an international education centre and tourism destination be enhanced?*

The work and holiday visa program currently includes many countries that are key source markets and some emerging markets of the international education sector. This visa requires applicants to meet defined levels of tertiary education and English language proficiency. There may be opportunities for tourism operators to align the current work and holiday programs with education providers and employers to provide temporary work opportunities such as community work and volunteering through large events or conservation programs. These programs may be able to attract skilled applicants and assist in attracting and retaining skilled and talented workers to Victoria.

The Victorian government should identify opportunities for program development utilising the Work and Holiday visa programs and advocate to the Commonwealth government where required.

Opportunities exist to leverage major international events each year to enhance student's perception of Melbourne as an international city. These include sporting events such as the Grand Prix, Australian Open and international cricket matches, large events and conferences such as International Aids Conference, leading research conferences, and international art events and exhibitions.

The Victorian government should identify major international events in both destination positioning and in creating opportunities for networking and part-time or casual, internship or graduate employment experiences.

8. How can Victoria better leverage its extensive alumni of international graduates to build profile and generate increasing economic activity particularly in trade and investment?

The benefits of connecting with international students remaining in Melbourne are under realised through formal programs by education providers and the business sector. Through our volunteering programs we have found that international student alumni are often extremely interested in being ambassadors or mentors for their former education institution and the wider community they have participated in as students.

Alumni can play a role in assisting Victoria to generate growth in international conferences and business events, through connection with Victorian industry.

9. In the face of increasing local and global competition for specialist skills and talent, how can Victoria attract and retain global talent in areas of high value to the Victorian economy?

In May 2015, the Committee for Melbourne hosted a roundtable event addressing global talent attraction to Melbourne. One of the key themes that arose in this discussion was the importance of drawing a greater share of international and Australian company's headquarters in the Asia-Pacific to Melbourne in order to attract and retain talent in areas of high economic value to Victoria. Large company headquarters offer more progression opportunities throughout every level of a company, from graduate-entry level to senior management or executive level positions.

The Victorian government should continue to identify the sectors most suitable and beneficial to Melbourne and consider ways to attract large international and Australian companies to relocate their headquarters to Melbourne.

10. The Commonwealth Government hold important levers in supporting our global competitiveness. What are the most important areas of reform and action that the Commonwealth Government should take to best support growth in international education in Victoria?

City of Melbourne student surveys in 2008 and 2010 found that many international students would remain in Melbourne if they were able to find adequate employment. It is common practice for companies participating in graduate and career fairs in Melbourne to openly state that student visa

holders are ineligible to participate in graduate employment programs. In competitor countries, such as New Zealand graduate programs are open to all graduates of New Zealand higher education institutions. In developing a skilled, global workforce and knowledge economy employers should be encouraged to consider the most qualified and appropriate candidates for their graduate programs rather than being limited by visa status where there is no real case for this barrier to exist.

The Victorian government should advocate to the Commonwealth government to actively encourage the business and industry communities to consider opening graduate employment programs to all graduates of Australian higher education institutions.

11. What are the opportunities for closer engagement with business and industry as partners in the sector's growth and sustainability?

The Committee for Melbourne has recently released a strategy paper outlining key business and economic factors for enhancing the international education sector in Melbourne. In particular, the significant global reach of the members of Committee for Melbourne would assist in generating partnerships with industry both on and offshore, in areas such as professional education and consulting, research and development.

The Victorian government should embrace the opportunity to work with the Committee for Melbourne's members to engage on a number of the recommendations in their strategy paper.