

Management Report to Council**Agenda item 6.1****Making Melbourne the world's best city for student experience****14 December 2021****Presenter:** Andrew Wear, Director Economic Development and International**Purpose and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Councillors' support for a strategic framework and plan aimed at making Melbourne the world's best city for student experience.
2. According to the QS Best Student Cities Ranking, the City of Melbourne is home to Victoria's three top-ranking universities (University of Melbourne, Monash University and RMIT University) as well as campuses of a range of other universities. International students make up a critical part of the city's economic, social and cultural life. In the CBD and Carlton, more than a third of residents are international students.
3. The pandemic – and associated international border closures – has had a substantial impact on Melbourne's education sector. As at 7 November 2021, there were 80,000 (or 52.7 per cent) fewer international students in Victoria than at the start of the pandemic. Their absence has been conspicuous and the re-establishment of Melbourne's international education sector will be particularly important for the City of Melbourne's post-crisis recovery.
4. The Commonwealth Government endorsed Victoria's International Student Arrivals Plan in October. Following subsequent announcements, international students who meet vaccination conditions no longer require a Commonwealth exemption and are not required to quarantine. The first group of students arrived in Melbourne in early December.

Key issues

5. According to a recent survey of more than 1000 education agents conducted by global education provider, Navitas, in more than 70 countries, 'Australia's reputation as a study destination is at an all-time low.' On the key metric of 'open and welcoming' Australia is a long way behind Canada and the United Kingdom.
6. The plans for student arrivals being pursued by Victoria and a number of other states will partially address this concern, but it will be important that Melbourne works hard to re-establish itself as one of the world's great student cities. This will positively contribute to the vibrancy of the city, demand for housing, the flow of jobs and consumption for which the student market is responsible, tourism and the broader economy.
7. In 2021, Melbourne was once again recognised as Australia's best student city and the sixth best student city globally in the QS Best Student Cities Ranking. The rankings compared 115 cities across the world on indicators including desirability by students, affordability, diversity, safety and employment opportunities after graduation.
8. Melbourne's great strength is as a city that can offer a fantastic student experience. Melbourne ranks joint second (with London) in the student view indicator. It is viewed affectionately by former students who appreciate Melbourne for its diversity and inclusion, friendliness, ease of getting around, affordability, nightlife, employment opportunities, arts and culture, and sustainability. Berlin is ranked first.
9. Some dimensions of the overall student city rankings are beyond the City of Melbourne's influence, such as affordability (tuition fees and living costs) and university rankings.
10. However, the City of Melbourne can ensure that students have fulfilling experiences in Melbourne by continuing to offer a range of innovative programs and opportunities that help them engage with the community, experience fulfilling and beneficial employment and excel in their academic pursuits.
11. Through the success of these programs, the international student community will be inspired to build life-long connections with Melbourne and help them to make Melbourne a key consideration in future, study, work, business and travel decisions.
12. To re-build Melbourne's reputation, it is appropriate that the City of Melbourne set itself the goal of becoming the world's leading city for student experience.

13. Key dimensions of the City of Melbourne's approach to enhancing student experience include:

13.1 Welcome

13.1.1 Work with the Victorian Government (Study Melbourne) to welcome international students back to Melbourne, ensuring that future students understand the unique value proposition that Melbourne has to offer.

13.2 Experience and celebration of diversity

13.2.1 Support the inaugural Melbourne International Student Week (MISW) scheduled for May 2022. Initiated by the Committee for Melbourne with funding support from Victorian Government, MISW will consist of a flagship event at Federation Square with concurrent activities delivered by event partners. City of Melbourne is an official sponsor of this event.

13.2.2 Acknowledge, respect and celebrate the diverse cultural, economic and social contribution of international students to the life of the city through 'Experience Melbourne,' a program that offers students with the best experiences that Melbourne has to offer (welcome, experience, support, employment outcomes), including:

13.2.2.1 welcome activities for returning students to the state

13.2.2.2 free ticketing offers to key attractions and events to encourage local and international students to visit the city, including unique cultural, sporting and entertainment experiences

13.2.2.3 pathways to employment initiatives including workshops and seminars, as well as the opportunity to visit businesses, meet alumni, professionals and other guests (including the Lord Mayor and Councillors)

13.2.2.4 promotion of current programs at The Couch – International Student Centre; and cross-promote events from What's On that will appeal to students.

13.3 International Student Wellbeing

13.3.1 Continue to run programs in partnership with Study Melbourne, education institutions, international student groups and partner organisations that support the wellbeing of international students through wellness programs that address mental health, legal support and food security issues for international students.

13.4 Employment pathways

13.4.1 Support programs and pathways that welcome, connect and encourage international students to lead and excel in education, employment and community.

13.4.2 Explore student internships, mentoring programs and work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities.

13.5 Marketing and Promotion

13.5.1 Deliver a communications strategy that focuses on welcome, experience, support and employment outcomes for international students to reinforce Melbourne's reputation as the unparalleled Australian destination of choice.

13.6 Advocacy and collaboration

13.6.1 Continue to identify issues, challenges and opportunities for international students and enhance student wellbeing through a coordinated response across communities, sectors and government.

14. To fully deliver on this approach, additional resourcing will be required. It will be appropriate to explore with the Victorian government the potential for funding to be made available through the Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund.

Recommendations from management

15. That Council:

15.1 Endorses the goal of becoming the world's leading city for student experience.

15.2 Endorses the strategic framework for the delivery of the City of Melbourne international education program aimed at enhancing student experience

15.3 Endorses management working with the Victorian Government to explore additional funding for an enhanced international student experience package through the Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 3 of 3)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. There are no direct legal implications for council in the recommendation of this report.

Finance

2. The current budget for the proposed Experience Melbourne program is \$30,000. In order to scale-up the program for arriving and continuing students, additional funding will be needed.

Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Health and Safety

4. In developing this proposal, Health and Safety factors such as adherence to COVID-19 safety were taken into account.

Stakeholder consultation

5. This proposal was shaped by Council's Economic Development Strategy, which was developed with extensive stakeholder input.

Relation to Council Policy

6. This proposal aligns with Major Initiative 3 in the *Council Plan 2021-25* – 'Drive economic growth and resilience by implementing the Economic Development Strategy'.
7. It also seeks to deliver on the *Economic Development Strategy 2031* priorities to support the recovery and resurgence of our international and domestic education sector, by rebuilding Melbourne's reputation among students and their peers, communities and visiting parents.

Environmental sustainability

8. In developing this proposal, environmental sustainability issues have been considered and no direct issues were identified.