



18 December 2025

Caroline Hartnett  
Director, International Education and Study Melbourne  
Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

via email: [info@studymelbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@studymelbourne.vic.gov.au)

Dear Ms Hartnett

**Subject: Refreshing Victoria's strategy for international education**

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the refresh of Victoria's strategy for international education. While the vision and goals outlined in [Victoria's International Education Recovery Plan 2025](#) remain largely relevant, the landscape has shifted significantly since its release in September 2022. Most notably, changes to student visa processing by the Federal Government have reshaped the sector's dynamics. Noting these changes, it is more important than ever that the Victorian Government intensifies its efforts to support this critical sector for our State.

**Importance of international education to Victoria**

A vibrant international education sector serves as the bedrock for Victoria's economic prosperity and cultural dynamism. As the State's largest export, generating \$15.8 billion in 2023-24, the sector accounts for nearly half of Victoria's services exports and 23% of total exports. Analysis undertaken by SPP last year estimated that each international student contributes \$66,000 to the economy, with over 68% of this benefit driven by spending beyond tuition fees. This substantial economic injection ripples through a range of sectors, supporting local businesses and job creation across the State.

The benefits of international education, however, transcend economic metrics. It serves as a powerful catalyst for cultural enrichment, fostering diverse and inclusive communities across Victoria. Our campuses become vibrant hubs of global perspectives, strengthening social cohesion and preparing all students for success in an interconnected world. International education also underpins Victoria's research excellence and innovation capacity by attracting high-calibre global talent, fostering international partnerships, and building skills pipelines in critical sectors such as health, technology and engineering. Over the long term, international graduates become lifelong ambassadors for Victoria, deepening trade, diplomatic and people-to-people links and reinforcing the State's reputation as a leading global education destination.

The Victorian Government's public support for the sector has been crucial. Initiatives such as the *Yes to International Students Fund* have not only reinforced Victoria's reputation as a welcoming destination but also demonstrated a strong commitment to innovative education models and transnational education. The University of Melbourne's Winter School program, supported by this Fund, exemplifies the potential for such initiatives to embed global awareness and experiences into our student programs and strengthen partnerships with leading international institutions.



Victorian Government Education Managers have played a pivotal role in enhancing Victoria's global reputation in international education. Our close collaboration with Study Melbourne, both locally and through the Global Education Network, has yielded significant benefits. The Melbourne Global Centre – Delhi, officially opened by the Premier in 2024, continues to expand collaboration between Australia and India. The Centre has hosted key events, including the launch of the Sports Report by the Australia India Institute, in partnership with the Victorian Government's Trade and Investment Office in Chennai and chaired by Victorian Minister Steve Dimopoulos. While we support Study Melbourne as a global brand, the Victorian Government could consider how it could demonstrate the distinctiveness of individual providers, promoting the variety of the international education offering in Victoria.

The expansion of the Global Education Network in Latin America has also helped to strengthen our connections with the region, supporting the University in its establishment of alumni network groups in 10 countries across the continent. We see a similar opportunity for growth in the Pacific region, which would not only support our educational objectives in the region but also strengthen ties with the growing Pasifika community in Melbourne. The University's Oceania Institute, launched in March 2024, is focused on strengthening engagement with Pacific partners and building a welcoming and supportive community for staff, students and the public.

Previously, offshore Study Hubs also played a significant role, showcasing our education offering, but these Hubs ceased operations in July 2025. The Melbourne-based Study Hub remains an important asset, with University of Melbourne students among the most active users and event facilitators. The University proudly supports initiatives that celebrate the extraordinary contribution that international students make to the State, such as the Victorian International Education Awards. We were pleased to see our students recognised for their contributions to enhancing Victoria's cultural knowledge and global connectedness, including the Premier's Award for International Student of the Year.

Looking ahead, we urge the Victorian Government to maintain and intensify its advocacy for the international education sector, reinforcing Victoria's reputation as a premier study destination. This advocacy should be proactive, countering harmful narratives about international students, particularly emanating from the federal sphere.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ***Build on the Study Melbourne brand by promoting the distinctiveness of individual providers and variety of education offerings available in Victoria.***
- ***Extend Victoria's Global Education Network to the Pacific region.***
- ***Continue proactively advocating for the international education sector.***

#### **Key opportunities**

The University of Melbourne sees diversification, international student experience and student employability as key priorities. These are outlined in further detail below.

#### **Diversification**

Our [Advancing Melbourne Globally](#) strategy outlines our commitment to continue diversifying our international student community, with a focus on recruiting talented students from across Asia, the Pacific, and beyond. We believe that embracing diversity is a collective strength that enhances the educational experience for all students.



Transnational education offers a compelling avenue for diversification. Our Bachelor of Science Dual Degree program with Indian partners exemplifies this approach, providing students with a unique cross-cultural educational experience. This program allows participants to complete their degree across two countries, spending the initial two years in India before transitioning to Melbourne for the final two years of study. Similarly, our partnerships in Indonesia for joint masters degrees and articulation agreements demonstrate the potential for deep, mutually beneficial educational collaborations.

Beyond transnational education, the recruitment of sponsored students presents a crucial opportunity for sustainable sector growth. These sponsored commencements offer a unique advantage as they are not subject to the constraints of the Federal Government's National Planning Level. This exemption is partly due to the requirement for sponsored students to return to their home countries upon completion of their studies. Importantly, these sponsorship programs often attract students from underrepresented countries, including Indonesia and various Latin American countries, thereby contributing to the diversification of our international student cohort. While the University already recruits a number of sponsored students, including from Indonesia, we would welcome the Victorian Government's support in navigating and leveraging these sponsorship schemes across the region.

#### **Recommendation:**

- **Support providers navigating overseas student sponsorship schemes, such as those in Indonesia.**

#### **Improving student experience**

Improving student experience remains a critical focus for the University of Melbourne. This month, we released [Strategy 2030](#), which emphasises our goal that by 2030, our students and graduates will be highly satisfied with their learning experiences and succeeding in their graduate endeavours. We are committed to creating an environment where every student, regardless of background, can flourish.

At the same time, we recognise that student experience extends beyond educational aspects. International students' experiences in Victoria are influenced by a range of factors, including their ability to make friends, sense of personal safety, and cost of living. According to [QILT data](#), international students are generally satisfied with their overall living experience. The overwhelming majority (97%) of international students positively rate their personal safety on campus. However, the proportion who rate it positively off campus is lower (88%). Experiences are not uniform, with Chinese students less likely to feel safe off campus (81% of undergraduates, 80% of postgraduates). The University encourages the Victorian Government to continue to work with the City of Melbourne and Victoria Police to improve safety in the city.

Victoria's approach to public transport concessions for international students lags behind most other Australian jurisdictions. It is one of only two States, along with New South Wales, that does not provide undergraduate international students with concession fares on public transport. Victoria stands alone in not offering concession fares to any full-time postgraduate students. While undergraduate international students can now purchase an International Student Travel Pass for a 50% discount, this requires a significant upfront cost of at least \$297 for a 90-day pass in inner-metro areas. This situation is reflected in the proportion of international students who rate transport positively in QILT surveys – 76% of undergraduates and 78% of postgraduates.

To enhance accessibility and improve the student experience, we urge the Victorian Government to consider extending regular student concessions to international students. Additionally, expanding the Free Tram Zone along



Swanston Street and Royal Parade would make the University's Parkville campus more accessible from the CBD without additional cost to students.

Another crucial factor in student experience is access to affordable accommodation. Under the Federal Government's managed system for international education, universities must demonstrate increased provision of student accommodation to grow international student places. However, the availability of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) is impacted by factors beyond providers' control.

The recent [Urbis Student Accommodation Benchmarks](#), created in partnership with the Student Accommodation Council, revealed that while Victoria has a substantial pipeline of 9,170 PBSA beds, the majority (7,262) are in the approval or application stage. The report highlighted that Victoria's foreign investor land tax surcharge on international capital can undermine project feasibility, with the tax burden on each bed 126% higher than in other jurisdictions. Noting these findings, we encourage the Victorian Government to consider ways to facilitate greater provision of affordable and accessible accommodation, potentially through targeted policy adjustments or incentives for PBSA development. In doing so, the Victorian Government should work with the Federal Government and local providers to ensure supply aligns with demand.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ***Continue to work with the City of Melbourne and Victoria Police to improve safety in the city.***
- ***Extend regular transport concessions to international students and expand the Free Tram Zone to include the University's Parkville campus.***
- ***Consider ways to facilitate provision of affordable student accommodation, including through targeted policy adjustments or incentives for purpose-built student accommodation development.***

#### **Enhancing student employability**

Enhancing student employability is crucial for the long-term success of our international education sector. Earlier this year, Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) released the report, [International Students Outcomes and Pathways Study](#). It found that "international graduates remaining in Australia after their study are less likely to secure employment in their field and at their qualification level and earn less than domestic counterparts. These effects are more exaggerated for higher education graduates than VET graduates."

Barriers highlighted included limited exposure to work-relevant practical and cultural experiences and employer sentiment (including uncertainty around visas). A range of responses are therefore needed to improve international student employability. For example, the University of Melbourne offers the Students@Work program, which arranges accessible, convenient and flexible job opportunities on campus for current students. The program includes internships, which provide tailored skills development, careers support and professional development sessions, as well as casual opportunities in professional and service roles. Some courses at the University also offer opportunities for work-integrated learning (WIL), where students can participate in industry-based placements or projects as part of their studies.

We recognise the important work the Victorian Government already does in this space. For example, the Work Ready program, which offers international students free one-on-one employment consultations, is essential and should be maintained. Similarly, the University recommends that international students' access to [Skills and Job Centres](#) continues, as these services are greatly valued by students. We also acknowledge the value of ["Victoria's](#)



[Commitment to Action](#)” on improving international student employment outcomes. This is a unique initiative encouraging employers to support international student employability, which could grow in participation and visibility, contributing to our reputation as one of the world’s best student cities.

JSA recommended that the Government “grow employer appetite for international graduates by making resources available to support greater understanding of the value of international graduates over the medium and long term to the Australian workforce.” While this was primarily targeted at the Federal Government, the Victorian Government could play a role in this too. Additionally, the Victorian Government could consider expanding the number of internship and WIL opportunities available for international students through its own bodies and programs.

**Recommendations:**

- ***Work with the Federal Government to make resources available to employers, supporting understanding of the value of international graduates.***
- ***Maintain existing employability programs such as Work Ready and Victoria’s Commitment to Action on improving international student employment outcomes.***
- ***Expand the number of internship and work-integrated learning opportunities available through Victorian public sector bodies.***

For further information or to discuss this submission, I can be contacted at [michael.wesley@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:michael.wesley@unimelb.edu.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Michael Wesley'.

**Professor Michael Wesley**  
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