

Media Release

Mr Danny Pearson MP

Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs

Minister for Finance

Minister for Government Services



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KICKING GOALS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

It's the beloved Australian game that brings people together - now footy is boosting the wellbeing of international students.

A program backed by the Allan Labor Government is ensuring they get a hands on introduction to AFL to help build connections with the community.

Minister Pearson today joined representatives from the AFL, North Melbourne and the Western Bulldogs to launch the initiative under the Study Melbourne Inclusion Program.

It funds projects that help international students stay safe, connected and supported while living in Victoria.

Grants of up to \$30,000 are being provided to 14 organisations to deliver a range of targeted wellbeing projects.

They include driver's education, food workshops, professional development and an art showcase.

The AFL will deliver a culturally responsive program in partnership with North Melbourne and the Western Bulldogs.

Up to 200 international students will learn how to play and be taken to live AFL matches.

It's about building a social connection to the game, and confidence engaging in what is a huge part of the Victorian community and culture.

Since its inception in 2015, the Study Melbourne Inclusion Program has funded 178 projects to the value of \$7.8 million.

It has also supported more than 238,000 international students.

Victoria is home to the nation's top universities, TAFEs and private colleges, internationally recognised sporting and cultural events and rich multicultural networks, making it the ideal place to study, work and live.

Melbourne was once again voted Australia's Best Student City in 2025 by global higher education ranking specialist Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) – and the 5th best in the world.

The *Victorian Budget 2025/26* is investing \$18.6 million to continue backing international education programs and services, including the Study Melbourne Inclusion Program.

International education is Victoria's largest single export and largest services export.

In 2024 alone, the sector generated almost \$16 billion in export revenue and supported 64,000 jobs.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs Danny Pearson

"The diverse projects we've backed this year are critical to the wellbeing of our international students."

"We're supporting them to make the most of their time in Victoria, engaging with all our great state has to offer."

"I am incredibly proud that Victoria will continue to welcome international students from around the world, and I look forward to the lasting contributions they will make to our communities, our economy and our state."

Quotes attributable to AFL Executive General Manager Game Development Rob Auld

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“As Australia’s game, footy has a unique ability to bring people together, and this program is about ensuring international students feel that connection from the moment they arrive in Victoria.”

“By providing a welcoming and inclusive introduction to AFL, we’re helping students build friendships, confidence and a genuine sense of belonging, while fostering a lifelong connection to the game.”

“We thank the Victorian Government, as well as North Melbourne and the Western Bulldogs for the support of this initiative, and look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have as it rolls out across the year.”