

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE**

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

Discussion Paper

July 2024

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

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## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### SUMMARY

This Discussion Paper will inform the development of the next *University of Melbourne Strategic Plan for Sport*.

The University of Melbourne has a proud tradition of providing students with quality programs and facilities that foster participation, volunteerism and community leadership, nurture sporting excellence, and support exceptional athletes. The term 'sport' refers to the vast range of formal and informal recreation, instructional and competitive opportunities provided by the University.

The previous *Strategic Plan for Sport – Sport Matters at Melbourne* was developed in 2016 to set the strategic direction and priorities for the following five years to 2021. The plan recognised the unique role that sport plays at the University in engaging with students, staff, and the alumni and provides a platform for engagement with senior University decision makers and other stakeholders.

The *Strategic Plan* concluded in 2021, but a review was deferred to focus on the immediate priority of getting students and staff back on campus. The review will ensure that the next plan aligns with the University's new strategic framework out to 2030 and has involved consultation with stakeholders, including meetings and workshops, to ensure that the University sporting community and partners have the opportunity to contribute to the vision for the future.

The intention is to articulate an aspirational Strategic Plan for Sport based on ensuring that all students and staff are provided with the opportunity to engage in regular physical activity, creating social connections and a sense of belonging that increase the level of satisfaction with the University experience.

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### ADVANCING MELBOURNE 2030

In 2020 the University released *Advancing Melbourne 2030*, an ambitious 10-year strategy that states:

*“We will offer students a distinctive and outstanding education and experience, preparing them for success as leaders, change agents and global citizens.”*

Subsequently, the *Advancing Students and Education Strategy 2023-2030* was released, charting the University’s course in student experience and education. Sport can support several of the University’s priorities outlined in both strategies in delivering:

- A community in which students thrive
- Nurturing excellent students from all backgrounds
- Develop our precincts and campuses to contribute to social, economic and cultural wealth
- Strengthen diversity and inclusion in the University community
- Strengthen opportunities for talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Intensify our commitment to an exceptional student experience that continues beyond graduation
- Maintain an enduring relationship with alumni, including opportunities for lifelong learning

In 2023, the University announced a \$60m investment to provide Narm Scholarships to all Indigenous Australian students, and to students from identified low socioeconomic areas with a target of almost 5,000 students annually by 2030. In addition, the University is focused on developing Safer Communities and Anti–Racism consistent with the University’s *Murmuk Djerring Indigenous Strategy 2023-2027*.

Our aspiration is to be a world-leading and globally-connected Australian university  
**with students at the heart of everything we do**

Advancing Melbourne 2030

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### SPORT AT MELBOURNE

***Sport has always held a special significance in the life of the University through the performance of its sporting clubs, teams and student-athletes, and in the vast array of sporting programs and facilities that provide students and staff with an outstanding campus experience.***

Students have participated in informal and organised sporting and physical recreation since the formation of the University in 1853. Students came together to form clubs and teams to compete in community competitions, with the first recorded contest, a cricket match in 1857. Intervarsity sport followed in 1870, and the University soon adopted the British practice of awarding sporting “Blues” for outstanding performance. In 1874, the land north of Tin Alley, the Sports Precinct, was provided to the University for recreational purposes, with the original pavilion built in 1906. The Boat House was constructed on the Yarra River in 1908.

Intercollegiate sport was established in 1921 and now involves hard-fought competition between 12 residential colleges, with many finals attracting colourful and vocal supporters. After the Second World War, the arrival at the University of returned servicemen and the children of post-war migrants led to the introduction of new activities such as Fencing, Judo, Badminton, Basketball and Soccer. Many of these activities could not be accommodated on campus and requiring access to sporting grounds and facilities in Princes and Royal parks, as well as facilities within the local community.

In 1954, the Beaurepaire Centre was built with the generous support of Olympian and former Melbourne Lord Mayor Sir Frank Beaurepaire, and the first hard-surface running track was laid. The Sports Centre was developed in 1967, providing opportunities for the development of indoor sports on campus as well as weight training and general fitness programs. The building of the Ski Lodge at Mount Buller and the mountaineering hut at Mount Feathertop in the 1960s reflected an expanding interest in alpine sports and bushwalking.

Franz Stampfl arrived in 1955 to teach physical education and successfully coach a generation of student-athletes, many of whom represented Australia, including 1968 Olympic gold medallist Ralph Doubell. Some of Australia’s most successful athletes have been students at the University, many of whom have gone on to be significant community and industry leaders.

The *Australian University Games* commenced in 1995, and the University has taken out the title of Overall University Champion six times, most recently in 2013. In 2009, the tradition of head-to-head competition was revived with the Australian Boat Race (ABR), reigniting a long-standing rivalry with the University of Sydney.

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### SPORT AT MELBOURNE (cont.)

A significant upgrade of the Beaurepaire Centre was completed in 2006, incorporating a refurbishment of the pool and extensive strength and cardio-training areas. Two group fitness rooms were also established in the Sports Centre, significantly increasing the participation of female students. The Lincoln Square Fitness Centre opened in 2011 to accommodate the growing campus population south of Grattan Street.

The Boat House was extended, and a function space added in 2009. Shortly after, the northern end of the Sports Centre was remodelled, and the building was renamed in recognition of a significant gift from Nona Lee. The new pavilion was opened in 2014 and named in honour of long-serving head curator Ernie Cropley at the request of the many generous benefactors who made the development possible.

The University funded sport directly during Voluntary Student Unionism between 2007 and 2011, before a Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) was reintroduced in 2012. SSAF is directed to providing subsidised access to programs and services, support to sporting clubs and to maintain sporting facilities and grounds.

The first *Student Wellbeing Survey* was undertaken in 2015 that identified that over 21% of students were inactive and reported a greater sense of isolation and lower level of satisfaction with the University compared to their peers. As a result, a range of new or expanded programs and services were targeted at international students and underrepresented groups, significantly decreasing the number of inactive students by 2019.

In 2019, Melbourne University Sport was named the Sporting Organisation of the Year (nationally) at the Pride in Sport Australia Awards, in recognition of the efforts of the University sporting community and sporting clubs over many years.

In March 2020, all sport operations and club activities were either suspended or continued remotely for almost two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Online programs were provided, while the sporting clubs continued to connect with and support their members in creative ways. Student-athletes were also provided with support and advice to continue to train remotely.

In November 2021, after a couple of false starts, the campus reopened. There was an immediate appetite from students to return to campus and engage in regular physical activity in many new initiatives and traditional programs and services. Informal student participation also surged, with students utilising subsidised or free access to sporting facilities and programs in ever-increasing numbers. However, overall participation has not yet returned to 2019 levels by 2023.

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### OUR ASPIRATION

***That all students and staff are provided with the opportunity to engage in regular physical activity on campus, creating social connections and a sense of belonging that increase the level of satisfaction with the University experience.***

The ambitious 70/30 plan is to ensure that all students and staff are provided with the opportunity to engage in regular physical activity on campus, with a participation target of 70% by 2030.

Sport has always been able to engage students in significant numbers, and by 2019, sport, fitness and recreation activities were one of the largest single co-curricular activities at the University, with over 18,000 students, and 3,000 staff, utilising programs and facilities on over 800,000 occasions.

Since returning to campus in late 2021, there has been an appetite from students to engage in regular physical activity, in both new initiatives and many traditional programs and services. The University undertook a *Student Physical Activity Survey* in April this year that demonstrated that students involved in regular physical activity with the University are more satisfied with the student experience than their peers and that inactive students are the most disengaged. This was consistent with the results of the *Student Wellbeing Survey 2015 – 2019*.

During the stakeholder engagement process for the strategy, there was consensus that the structure of three pillars, as they were called, remains an effective way to demonstrate and report on the strategy, though the labels could be updated to reflect the University's current strategic terminology. Consequently, the three themes proposed are:

- Active Engagement
- Performance
- Community

The University has a proud tradition of providing students with quality programs and facilities that foster participation, volunteerism and community leadership, nurture sporting excellence, and support exceptional athletes. It aims to continue building on this legacy with the following themes and priorities.



## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

#### Improve the physical and mental wellbeing of all students and staff

Regular physical activity improves student wellbeing and academic success through improvements to physical and mental health, confidence, self-esteem and reduced social isolation. Active Engagement aligns with the University's focus on student engagement and support for equity groups, though increasing participation remains the focus of the overall strategy. The challenge is to develop a healthy and thriving University community whilst managing an increasing student population, including more international and postgraduate students, across more campuses.





## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT**

### **PRIORITY - SUPPORT ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS AND PROVIDE NEW AND EMERGING ACTIVITIES**

*Provide opportunities for the University community to regularly engage in a diverse range of physical activities, formal and informal, that are safe, respectful and inclusive.*

Every student will be provided with the opportunity to find an activity that enables them to participate in their own way and on their own terms, creating connections with their peers and a sense of belonging.

Since returning to campus there has been an appetite from students to engage in regular physical activity in both new initiatives and many traditional programs and services. These include a diverse range of competitive, instructional and recreational activities provided by the sporting clubs; fitness services, including aquatics and group fitness; intercollegiate and campus sport; and casual use of sporting facilities, which has surged. Many students will be continuing a lifelong involvement in physical activity or sport

Students are also keen to learn new skills and/or participate in sporting activities for the first time. Still, they are hesitant about making significant financial or time commitments if they are unsure about the activity or likely study demands. More flexible program options including one-off or short-course opportunities as a 'taster' are required. This can include introductory 'come and try' instructional activities and recreation beginner trips aimed at encouraging students to experience the activity without having to commit to the cost of membership or a drawn-out program.

Students can also learn and play a competitive sport within the club environment without committing to the travel and training demands of formal community club competitions. This can be a 'learn to' opportunity for beginners or, for the more accomplished, competitions held during the semester that cater to those who live on campus but return home during semester breaks.

The diversity and breadth of programs are constantly evolving as students are often at the forefront of new and emerging sports and activities, such as inline skating, which may not be provided at the time. We continue to work with student groups to identify and cater to new and emerging activities to support this important demonstration of student initiative and leadership.

Informal opportunities are also provided to target students who are not active at the University, such as programs in recreation rooms and outdoor activity spaces near where they are located. These informal options build important initial social connections with peers and provide an entrée to more formal activities as their engagement becomes habit-forming.

We will continue to ensure that programs, services and events are relevant, convenient to access, affordable, professionally managed and promoted in the University's student communication channels to maximise student participation.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT**

### **PRIORITY – PROVIDE MORE SPACES AND PLACES**

*Improve the quality, capacity and accessibility of sporting facilities that support regular physical activity for students and staff across all campuses of the University*

Access to quality and flexible sport and recreation facilities, including showers and lockers, are required across all campuses to maintain and increase student and staff participation in traditional sporting clubs and programs, cater to new and emerging activities, and to respond to the diverse and constantly changing needs of the University community.

The sports facilities at the Parkville campus no longer meet the needs of a larger student and staff population on a bigger campus footprint spread across Grattan Street. Organised club and college sport, along with a range of informal activities, also take place in the sporting facilities and grounds located in the surrounding parks and local community, but access is not assured. Facilities at the regional and smaller metropolitan campuses are also either non-existent or poorly maintained. Current facilities operate above capacity and, in some cases, are no longer fit for purpose and do not cater effectively for the increasing number of women, international students and equity groups.

Progress was achieved when the University announced in 2023 an \$18m investment in the Sport Precinct Redevelopment, which is the first stage of a broader project that includes refurbishing the Beaurepaire and Nona Lee Sports Centre. A range of new and upgraded facilities is still required, including a purpose-built sport and recreation facility with a lap pool south of Grattan Street, to service the increasing number of students studying and living in the south precinct. In addition, providing smaller scale indoor recreation rooms, modest outdoor activity areas, and access to change and shower facilities across all campuses would encourage students and staff to participate in both formal and informal activities, including riding to campus.

The goal is to ensure the provision of quality sporting facilities that are conveniently located and easy to access, with the flexibility and capacity to meet the diverse and constantly changing needs of the University community.

This will require the support of the University, creative partnerships with local councils, schools and sporting associations, federal and state government agencies, and the support of our clubs and alumni.

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### PRIORITY – BUILD CONNECTIONS FOR STUDENTS FACING EDUCATIONAL OR OTHER BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

*Provide targeted programs, in conjunction with academic divisions and partners, that build connection through physical activity for Narrm Scholars, students with a disability, the LGBTQIA+ community, students at rural and smaller metro campuses and international students*

Students not engaging in regular physical activity report a greater sense of isolation and a lower level of satisfaction with the student experience. These students tend to be from non-English-speaking backgrounds, equity groups, experiencing genuine financial hardship, commuting significant distances, or based at regional or smaller metropolitan campuses. Aligned with the University's focus on student engagement and support for equity groups, strategies, policies, and programs have been introduced to ensure inclusion and equity are embedded into all sporting activities and programs so that all students are welcome and included.

Diversity and inclusiveness are attributes that enrich our broad community. ... Diversity and inclusiveness also underpin fairness, which is essential if every individual is to thrive and realise their potential

Advancing Melbourne 2030

Great strides have occurred in engaging many of the most vulnerable and isolated students through targeted and innovative programs that increase levels of regular activity and reduce social isolation. These programs are developed by, with and for specific cohorts to ensure students are invited in, provided with a positive experience that creates a sense of belonging.

Cost remains a significant barrier for many, so student fees have been reduced for many programs. However, this is often not enough to engage students from underrepresented groups, as they also need tailored programs that recognise and address their unique issues and requirements. To this end, opportunities will be explored to provide additional programs for Narrm Scholars, students with disabilities, women from disadvantaged communities, students with mental health issues and those experiencing genuine financial hardship.

Ongoing University support and partnerships with student clubs and groups, faculties, University departments such as Murrup Barak and Student Services, residential colleges and accommodation providers, and our sporting clubs, will remain crucial in providing safe and culturally appropriate environments for activities to take place.

Sport at the University is a 'community within a community' and can set the standard for diversity and equity.

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### PERFORMANCE

#### Celebrate and support sporting excellence

The performance of our sporting clubs, teams and student-athletes reflects positively on the reputation of the University and for many stakeholders, including alumni, is what they are most passionate about.

Some of Australia's most successful athletes have been students at the University and include Olympic and Commonwealth Games medallists, world champions and national representatives. Current high-profile athletes such as Darcy Moore and Annabel Sutherland are intelligent and engaging spokespeople for the University.

Our sporting clubs are some of the pre-eminent university sporting clubs in the country, and our sporting teams are some of the most successful. Performance will continue to build on our successful sporting tradition.



## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT**

### **PRIORITY – RECRUIT AND SUPPORT TALENTED STUDENT-ATHLETES**

*Recruit and support talented student-athletes by providing a high-performance sporting environment and comprehensive athlete support services.*

Some of Australia's most successful athletes have been students at the University and include Olympic and Commonwealth Games medallists, world champions and national representatives. We have celebrated their athletic triumphs and followed them closely as many have developed into significant community and industry leaders. Alumni include Second World War hero and humanitarian Edward "Weary" Dunlop, the first Victorian-born rugby player to represent Australia, and Olympian and former Governor of Victoria John Landy, to name but two.

Twenty-four members of the University community represented Australia at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2021, collecting three gold, four silver and three bronze medals. Elena Galiabovitch (Surgery student) was one of six athletes selected to carry the Olympic flag at the Opening Ceremony in honour of all front-line medical workers. Six student-athletes and four alumni represented Australia at the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games. University athletes won five gold, one silver and one bronze medal, and the University ranked 14 of 43 countries on the medal table.

The University supports approximately 300 talented student-athletes each year with the provision of flexible study assistance, athlete support services, mentoring, sporting scholarships and advocacy. These students often represent the University with pride and form deep and loyal connections, plus a sense of affinity with their peers from the shared experience of representing the University.

Increasingly, universities here and overseas, particularly in the US, are becoming more active in recruiting student-athletes (mostly from Olympic and Commonwealth Games sports) who would normally have come to the University. Many students who ultimately became student-athletes at overseas universities have indicated that they would have preferred to have attended an Australian university if more comprehensive student-athlete support programs and suitable University competitions had been available.

In collaboration with the academic divisions, our clubs, and alumni, we will establish a more comprehensive sporting, academic and professional mentoring and support system, including entry scheme, to ensure that we continue to attract the 'brightest and the best'. This will include an expanded suite of athlete services consistent with high-performance sporting environments.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT**

### **PRIORITY – PRIDE AND PASSION, SUPPORT AND EXPAND THE INTERVARSITY TRADITION**

*That all student-athletes are supported to represent the University in regional, national and international sporting competitions and leagues.*

Representing the University provides an *Esprit de Corps* beyond graduation and creates a lifelong bond with the University. Students have returned to intervarsity in strong numbers in competitions such as Uni Nationals on the Gold Coast, the Australian Boat Race, the Big Blue Challenge against Monash and the University Basketball League with the men's team taking out the 2023 national title. Cost and other factors continue to restrict the involvement some students, so we need to provide opportunities for all talented student athletes to represent their University.

The Uni Nationals are often held interstate and the timing often clashes with national junior championships and other representative competitions, making it difficult for many of our best student-athletes to represent the University. The Uni Nationals will continue to provide important opportunities for many student-athletes, but a different intervarsity model is evolving, including more regular head-to-head competition opportunities such as the 'Big Blue' and additional national leagues like the UBL as student interest grows.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT**

### **PRIORITY – HAVE MORE STUDENTS COMPETING FOR UNIVERSITY CLUBS**

*Ensure that the University sporting clubs are the first choice of our student-athletes with support for quality coaching, professional administration, athlete development and student recruitment.*

More than 1,500 students compete on a weekly basis across 200 teams from 30 clubs in what stands as one of the biggest competitive club programs in the country. Many of our clubs are both successful and well regarded. However, many students elect to remain with their community club because they are reluctant to break established connections with family, friends and school, or they are receiving, in some cases, significant remuneration.

The *Club Sport Performance Strategy* was developed in 2018 with the objective of increasing the number of student-athletes competing for clubs, including in the top tier teams, whilst maintaining or improving the level of performance. Five key actions and targets were outlined, including creating extensive student-athlete development programs, aligning recruitment strategies with the aspirations of prospective students and their parents, providing quality coaches, improving club management and ensuring gender equity.

We will reach out to prospective and current students by promoting the broader benefits of competing for a University club, including access to alumni professional networks, career mentoring support, community engagement programs, international exchange and travel opportunities – as well as the convenience of training and competing on, or close to, campus.



## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### COMMUNITY

#### Develop and enhance social connections, leadership and active citizenship

Sport provides a platform to build and sustain communities of students, staff and alumni that transcend gender, culture, abilities and other individual differences. Those communities are only possible with strong and sustained volunteering, engagement with alumni, and celebration of sporting efforts and achievements. These communities provide an outstanding opportunity for students to develop leadership and citizenship skills to arm them for success beyond their time at the University.



## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### PRIORITY – SUPPORT VOLUNTEERISM AND DEVELOP STRONG LEADERS

*Provide 'next generation' leadership development activities and programs to train, reward and recruit student and alumni volunteers.*

Developing and supporting student leaders who go on to contribute to the community remains an important role for sport in supporting the University's ambition for students by "*preparing them for success as leaders, change agents and global citizens.*"

An estimated 1,000 students and alumni volunteer across our sporting clubs, intervarsity and other programs by supporting our 400 competitive sporting teams and providing a diverse range of recreational and instructional activities. The contributions range from committee and strategic leadership tasks and highly specialised coaching and instructing roles through to match day duties, including sweeping the change rooms. The volunteers are fundamental to the sense of community around their clubs and programs.

Our sporting clubs have also traditionally led the way on important community issues that can engage local and global communities alike. This includes programs such as "*Gay? That's OK!*" launched in 2015 by the Football Club, a forerunner to Pride events by professional sporting codes, whilst other clubs have taken the lead on gender equity and establishing Indigenous Rounds.

Student volunteering in clubs and sporting teams develops a commitment to community service and provides opportunities to develop and refine their leadership and management skills. Such experience increases their employability as they make vital and invaluable contributions to their club and community. Our volunteers provide an estimated 160,000 hours of labour per annum, critical to the sustainability of our diverse range of clubs and programs, which are central to an engaged campus community.

We will continue to explore opportunities to use sport as a vehicle to enhance student leadership and address important social issues. We will also continue to recruit, train and reward our volunteers and equip them with the skills and knowledge to ensure that all activities are safe, inclusive and respectful.

## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT

### PRIORITY – BUILD CONNECTIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

*Provide sporting events and competitions that bring the University community together to cheer on our teams and athletes that creates a sense of belonging and lifelong bond with the University.*

Sporting events and competitions bring the University community together and are opportunities for meaningful engagement with alumni, business, government, and the wider community. Supporting the University at a sporting event provides a sense of belonging beyond graduation and creates a lifelong bond with the University akin to the US homecoming celebrations. This bond creates an important emotional connection to the University for both competitors and spectators.

In 2009, the tradition of head-to-head competition was revived with the Australian Boat Race (ABR), reigniting a long-standing rivalry with the University of Sydney that engages the wider University community. The ABR led to the development of the first informal national university sporting league between the Group of Eight (Go8) universities, and more recently, the inaugural university national league, the University Basketball League (UBL), commenced with the men's team taking out the 2023 national title. In 2024, the UBL games on campus were all sold out, with many international students becoming active supporters, attending home and away games, wearing team merchandise and following the student-athletes avidly on social media, creating an online and campus community.

The '*Big Blue*' is an annual head-to-head competition against Monash University across more than 30 sports. Both Badminton and Table Tennis matches attract big crowds and are broadcast live. Both teams comprise international elite student-athletes and viewer numbers in their home countries are significant and growing, increasing the profile of the University in those markets. The development of additional national University leagues is inevitable as sporting bodies look to support the establishment of these competitions to retain talented student-athletes who are being drawn to the US, and local student interest grows.

The University is also being invited to participate in sporting events and carnivals conducted by our international partner universities. These competitions offer a unique and exciting opportunity for our student-athletes to travel and compete overseas, and for the University community to support our teams against visiting teams. These opportunities also align with international student recruitment strategies, including student cricket tours to India.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SPORT**

### **PRIORITY – ENGAGE WITH OUR ALUMNI AND CELEBRATE THE HISTORY OF SPORT**

*Improve the level of engagement with our sport and club alumni and increase their support for our sport programs, clubs and student-athletes.*

Many alumni stay engaged with the University long after they have graduated, actively supporting one or more of our sporting clubs by attending matches, volunteering, mentoring students or contributing financially in support of the club or sport generally. There are over 5,000 alumni who have represented the University at Intersvarsity over the last 50 years without an ongoing connection to a club, but many remain connected informally to those that they competed with or, in some cases, against.

We will support our clubs to develop or further strengthen the connection to their alumni with regular events and celebrations of major club milestones. The Intersvarsity alumni will also be invited to celebrate and acknowledge their contributions to the rich history of sport at the University and to reengage with their peers. Opportunities will be provided for alumni to support and mentor our student-athletes, provide sport and equity scholarships, support our sport leadership programs and sport facility projects.