



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

The University of Melbourne Sporting Club Performance Strategy

Sport Matters at Melbourne
It Inspires, Connects and Leads



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Introduction

The Sporting Club Performance Strategy outlines the framework for the University's sporting clubs to achieve performance objectives through specific actions, targets and support provided through Melbourne University Sport (MU Sport).



At a Glance

The strategy's actions, targets and support are summarised below:

 ACTION	 TARGET	 SUPPORT
Develop a student-athlete pathway program	Clubs have a student-athlete pathway program in place by 2023	Promotion, direct engagement with prospective student-athletes, and additional resources
Set up academy programs to target secondary-school student-athletes as future club members	Clubs have an academy program in place by 2024	Provide custom delivery modes, facility access and targeted promotion
Establish club scholarships	Clubs to have a range of student-athlete scholarships by 2025	Support to better engage with alumni and staff support to facilitate giving and donations
Devise student-athlete recruitment strategy and targets for each club	Student-athletes comprise a minimum 65 per cent of membership and 30 per cent of the top tier teams for all performance clubs by 2025	Identify student-athletes through the Elite Athlete Program (EAP) and engage club coaches to also coach intervarsity teams
Develop, recruit and retain senior coaches	A coaches' support network is established by 2022	HR services to recruit coaches, co-funding opportunities and the establishment of a coaching network
Engage an administrator and access support services	Administrators (paid or volunteer) appointed for all clubs by 2023	Additional volunteer resources, co-funding opportunities and club collaboration to improve quality and availability of facilities

This strategy has been developed in consultation with the University's sporting clubs, the Club Advisory Group and the MU Sport Board.

Summary

Performance is one of three pillars in the University of Melbourne Strategic Plan for Sport with the goal to ‘celebrate and support sporting excellence’. One of three actions underpinning the performance pillar is to:

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

The objectives of this strategy is to increase the number of student-athletes competing for clubs, including in the top tier teams, while maintaining or improving the clubs’ performance. This will be achieved by:

- Creating more extensive student-athlete development pathways within the clubs
- Improving clubs’ ability to attract student-athletes by aligning recruitment strategies with the aspirations of prospective undergraduate students (including school leavers and their parents) and graduate students who wish to study at the University
- Supporting clubs to develop, recruit and retain quality coaches
- Improving the management of clubs with support for administrators/general managers and club volunteers and the provision of a range of support services
- Ensuring gender equity across all performance programs



Background

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 regular community competitions, with the first recorded contest a cricket match in 1857. The clubs evolved to become some of the pre-eminent university sporting clubs in Australia.

The University now has 40+ affiliated sporting clubs that provide a range of competitive, instructional and recreational opportunities. Our sporting clubs operate in different regulatory environments, vary greatly in size from about 25 members to more than 700. More than 1400 club members compete weekly across 31 sports in 200-plus teams in one of the biggest competitive/performance club programs in the country.

The percentage of students at competitive clubs has gradually fallen below 50 per cent (49 per cent by 2017) over the past 20 years with the instructional (75 per cent) and recreational (60 per cent) clubs also experiencing a drop in student numbers. Anecdotally, the number of students competing in the top tier teams across most clubs (with a few notable exceptions) has also reduced.



The sporting clubs were initially established by students for students as they were funded from the compulsory student payment (the Sports Union Fee) and used University facilities. It was also a requirement of the affiliation to the league or association that they be 'student only'. A limited number of graduates (or community members) were allowed to compete for the club by a process called 'Director's Discretion' if it could be demonstrated that an individual was providing an important contribution. However, in most cases students stopped competing once their studies were completed, many very reluctantly. The practice of Director's Discretion was relaxed over time and eventually phased out in 2009 due to the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU), which resulted in a reduction in direct funding for clubs.

Historically, many of the clubs experienced periods of great success as student-only clubs but over time it became increasingly difficult to remain competitive as the level of professionalism increased in many sporting competitions. Some clubs felt that to remain competitive they needed to recruit the best athletes available – rather than be limited to the student cohort –

including through the development of junior programs. At the same time an increasing number of students chose to remain with their community club because they were reluctant to break established connections with family, friends and school.

For University clubs competing in semi-professional sports, it is difficult to attract and retain student-athletes from other clubs who may be receiving significant remuneration. Students are also making the decision not to join University clubs based on the level the club plays at, the quality of the club facilities, the level of coaching or a perception that the club, as a university (student) club, would be poorly managed.

Despite the drift away from the clubs, the sustained success of our teams at Intervarsity over many years would indicate the University is attracting enough quality student-athletes to enable the clubs to be successful while increasing the focus on student-athletes. The University has won multiple national university championships in a vast range of sports with teams consisting of student-athletes from our clubs and others who do not compete for our clubs.

The following are the key areas of the strategy.

Student-athlete development pathways and recruitment

Action — Support clubs to develop a student-athlete pathway program.

Successful and high-profile athlete development programs are an attraction for student-athletes coming to the University. Some clubs already have established pathways such as Under 19s and Colts while others earmark a team sitting a grade or two below the top tier for emerging student-athletes. The challenge is always to resource the pathway appropriately and allow the talented athletes to develop among their cohort.

Many student-athletes need time to transition from school/junior sport to open age competition. A strong pathway program enables young student-athletes to develop at the appropriate pace while experiencing success individually and collectively. It also allows for strong bonds to develop as peers (first-year students) train and compete as a group, which encourages a nucleus of future leaders to emerge and progress to the top tier together. This ongoing process reinvigorates the top tier, ensuring sustained success.

MU Sport will support this strategy by improving the promotion of clubs to current and prospective students and aligning with the University's student recruitment activities to maximise the value of the University's reputation.

Actions will include:

- Promoting the broader benefits of pathway programs, quality coaching, access to wider professional networks and career mentoring support
- Facilitating community engagement opportunities, international exchange and travel opportunities and reinforcing
- the convenience of training and competing on – or close to – campus
- Directly approaching prospective graduate students who are elite athletes, including those from interstate and overseas, looking for opportunities after a professional or high-performance sporting career to still compete and receive the broader career benefits of being involved in a University sporting club
- Supporting clubs to resource pathway programs at the same, or a similar, level as the top tier team program with quality coaches and other athlete support services

Target— Clubs have a student-athlete pathway program in place by 2023.

Academy programs aligned with the aspiration to study at the University

Action — Support clubs to develop academy programs to target secondary-school student-athletes as future club members.

To encourage prospective students to consider leaving their community clubs, more sophisticated approaches are required that align with the aspiration to study at the University. Several clubs now conduct academies at which talented secondary-school student-athletes, with a demonstrated academic capacity to study at the University, are invited to discover the coaching, facilities, student-athlete support and alumni network on offer.

Academy participants do not compete for the club but are generally provided between 4-8 training opportunities over the course of the year. Academy programs are very appealing to the parents of prospective student-athletes and MU Sport can provide support by conducting introduction sessions for parents and prospective students on pathways to the University.

MU Sport will support this strategy, collaborating with clubs to set up academy programs, by:

- Establishing custom program delivery modes
- Providing facility access to deliver programs
- Promoting academy opportunities to targeted individuals, schools and other identified markets

Target — Clubs have an academy program in place by 2024.



Case study #1:

The Cricket Club had struggled to compete with its Premier Cricket rivals, many of whom had cherry-picked emerging talent from their local suburban competitions. Without similar competitions to mine, the Club developed its own junior academy, targeting secondary-school cricketers with the aim of introducing them to its culture, history, coaches and facilities via six to eight training days during the off-season. A growing percentage of academy cricketers are now studying at the University and working their way through the Club's Premier Cricket pathway, including more than 50 per cent of the 2019-20 1st XI who finished atop the Premier Cricket ladder.

Club scholarships

Action — Support clubs to establish club scholarships.

The cachet attached to University of Melbourne club sport scholarships can be an important part of student-athlete recruitment. A number of clubs have established student-athlete scholarships of up to \$25,000 a year while other clubs provide more modest scholarships that

waive the membership fees for student-athletes. Regardless of the scholarship's size and scope, they are a draw for parents of prospective students. And secondary schools are often interested in promoting those branded as University scholarships to their school leavers.

The provision of these scholarships is generally the result of alumni support. Many graduates actively support one or more of our sporting clubs, attending matches, mentoring athletes and contributing financially. MU Sport will support clubs to more actively engage with their alumni by celebrating milestones and communicating more frequently to encourage financial support for scholarships, coaching, administration and facility improvements.

MU Sport will support this strategy to help clubs more actively engage with their alumni by:

- Celebrating milestones and key events with more regular communication to encourage financial support for scholarships, coaching, administration and facility improvements
- Providing dedicated staff support to facilitate club-specific giving and donation campaigns

Target — Clubs to have a range of student-athlete scholarships by 2025.

Case study #2:

The Rugby Club competes in a football code that struggles to have a foothold in Victoria. With the establishment of the Melbourne Rebels as a catalyst, the Club and MU Sport created the University of Melbourne Rugby Young Achiever, a \$5,000 club sport scholarship for the best year-12 school leaver. The Young Achiever scholarship program has led to increased student recruitment since its inception with the Colts team becoming perennial finalists and more students now regularly playing in the 1st XV. Co-winners of the 2019 award were accepted into the University's Bachelor of Agriculture and are squad members of the Melbourne Rebels.





Case study #3:

The Basketball Club is closely aligned with the University's intervarsity program, with their men's and women's Big V coaches regularly taking charge of the University's IV teams. Both men's and women's IV teams have been perennial intervarsity medallists. This coaching alignment has enabled some of the best basketballers studying at the University to learn more about the culture, values and people behind the Basketball Club. It has also recruited a number of student-athletes to the courts of the Nona Lee Sports Centre with the women's team winning the 2019 championship and regaining promotion back into Division One.

Student participation targets

Action — That a student-athlete recruitment strategy and targets are developed for each club taking into account the specific circumstances of the club. Targets are established and reported on annually.

To achieve the objective of increasing the percentage of University of Melbourne students in the clubs, specific and ambitious targets need to be agreed to. Each club operates in its own unique sporting environment and some clubs will need to continue with non-student athletes

to remain competitive in the short term, especially if their sport involves a small local playing pool or requires a high level of specialised skill. In this case, if the club is able to demonstrate that it has a student-athlete development pathway program, the target will be adjusted.

Nonetheless, the clubs will be encouraged and supported to focus on recruiting student-athletes studying at the University who may be playing elsewhere, particularly those who have the capacity to play in senior high-performance teams. Some of these student-athletes will represent the University in intervarsity competition, while others may be recognised for flexible study assistance as part of the University's Elite Athlete Program (EAP). Both programs provide opportunities to recruit student-athletes to clubs.

MU Sport will support this strategy for clubs to reach student targets by:

- Identifying student-athletes supported through the EAP and facilitating communication from clubs to them
- Engaging club coaches to also coach the University's intervarsity teams, which in turn provides targeted recruitment opportunities for student-athletes not currently playing with clubs

Target — That University of Melbourne student-athletes comprise a minimum 65 per cent of membership and 30 per cent of the top tier teams for all performance clubs by 2025.

Quality coaching makes for a successful club

Action — Support clubs to develop, recruit and retain senior coaches.

Many of the clubs already successfully develop and recruit quality coaches internally or externally. A respected coach raises expectations across the club for the performance of the playing group, athlete development and support services (pathway, medical and recovery) and for the governance and administration that leads to improved performance. Athletes, including student-athletes, want to be involved in successful programs. In simple terms, recruiting the right coach is crucial.

MU Sport supports the clubs to attract, train and retain quality coaches for performance teams and pathway programs.

MU Sport will support this strategy of recruiting and supporting quality coaches by:

- Providing HR services including duty statements, advertising positions and coordinating interviews for short-listed coaches
- Providing a payroll service for casual, salaried or contracted coaches on behalf of the club
- Co-funding coaching roles where outcomes align with the strategy
- Establishing a coaches' network to share experiences, participate in coaching workshops and engage in skill development programs

Target — A coaches' support network is established by 2022.



Case study #4:

The Hockey Club's Senior teams had been languishing in the second tier of the state-based competition when they devised a bold plan to recruit the best available coach in the market, attract student-athletes playing elsewhere to the Club and regain a place in the top tier. The Club, with MU Sport's support, developed a package that ultimately recruited New Zealand's most-capped player and emerging coach as its Director of Coaching, shifted its senior team training to the State Hockey Centre, enticed more student-athletes to Parkville and saw it gain promotion back into Premier Hockey.

Improved club management

Action — Support clubs to engage an administrator and access support services including facilities.

The issues and challenges of managing clubs – including the duty of care, compliance and risk management, access to suitable facilities, inclusion and diversity, and general management tasks – are becoming increasingly complex. Providing a dedicated administration is crucial in promoting a club to prospective participants, coaches, volunteers, sponsors and other stakeholders.

Several clubs have recently partnered with MU Sport to appoint a club administrator as the complexity and scale of club activities and compliance has increased. Club administrators complement and support the work of the club committee, coaches and volunteers by managing general administration and financial tasks. This allows the club committee to focus on strategic and performance

issues and alumni engagement. The club administrators are embedded in MU Sport, which provides professional support and direction and ensures support services can be accessed.

However, a significant proportion of the tasks required at clubs will continue to be carried out by volunteers, ranging from committee and strategic leadership and highly specialised coaching roles through to cutting the half-time oranges and sweeping the clubrooms.

Having access to quality, fit-for-purpose sporting facilities can also be a strong attraction for prospective high-performing members. The sports facilities on campus are limited and many clubs operate in facilities and on grounds located in the surrounding parks and local community. Having new and upgraded facilities on

site and secured longer-term access to local community facilities could support and improve our clubs' recruitment efforts and performance. A future Sporting Infrastructure Plan will address how facilities would support performance.

MU Sport will support this strategy of improving club management by:

- Developing additional resources to assist in the recruitment, training, recognition and retention of volunteers
- Co-funding administrators or managers where outcomes align with this strategy
- Collaborating with clubs and other stakeholders to improve the quality and availability of facilities, including future developments, to ensure access to fit-for-purpose spaces aligned with performance levels

Target — Administrators (paid or volunteer) appointed for all clubs by 2023.

Case study #5:

The Boat Club is Australia's oldest and arguably most successful rowing club. To maintain this mantle, the Club set about an ambitious fundraising campaign to raise \$5 million to ensure it could continue to provide the best coaching, boats and rowing program in the country. To enable its committee and elders to develop and implement this key strategy, the Club with MU Sport support, employed a full-time General Manager to administer and manage day-to-day operations. The Club is now more than 50 per cent closer to its fundraising goal, engages multiple coaches including an Olympic medallist and has one of the country's best-equipped boat fleets.



Strategy governance and reporting

The following governance and reporting arrangements for the Sporting Club Performance Strategy will be put in place:

1. Clubs will be encouraged to include the relevant elements of the **Sporting Club Performance Strategy** into their Club Strategic Plan.
2. Relevant strategic tasks and student recruitment targets will be determined and reviewed annually at the Annual Strategic Meeting (with MU Sport) along with proposed applications for additional funding.
3. Funding applications will be presented to the Club Advisory Group for consideration and recommendations made to the Director of Sport.
4. A report on the progress against targets for the **Sporting Club Performance Strategy** will be presented to the Club Advisory Group and MU Sport Advisory Board annually.





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