Global Quality Regulation and Compliance

Organisational Review

International Portfolio

Panel Report

panel members

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1. Purpose of the Organisational Review

RMIT’s commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement is guided by its Quality Policy framework. The organisational review process is one of the mechanisms to support academic and administrative units in evaluating and assessing their performance against RMIT’s strategic objectives. The panel approved by the Vice-Chancellor brings together external and internal expertise in the area as well as local understandings of RMIT. The Terms of Reference including the Vice-Chancellor’s Strategic Questions are addressed in Section 3 Review Terms of Reference and Initial Assessment.

The panel considered the Self-assessment Report prepared by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International, stakeholder feedback survey responses as well as the RMIT University Strategic Plan 2011 – 2015 and supporting plans. Over a two day period, the panel met with representatives from the following groups, campuses and presences:

- Vice-Chancellor’s Executive group
- Colleges and Schools
- RMIT Vietnam Campus
- RMIT Training
- Students (four selected students)
- Portfolios – International, Academic, Research and Innovation, Engagement and Vocational Education
- Partners – Singapore Institute of Management
- Agents (three selected agents)

2. Overall findings and summary of recommendations

RMIT’s espoused identity is strong. The panel found that among the staff, students and externals, there was a high level of recognition and awareness that RMIT was ‘a global university of technology and design’. In addition, staff used the words ‘global’, ‘urban’ and ‘connected’ to describe RMIT in most sessions.

The panel believed that there were substantial untapped opportunities available as a result of the range of levels and awards delivered across RMIT. RMIT offers embedded pathways for students to build upon their language and educational skills which are quite distinctive both nationally and internationally and are probably not exploited to the full. Realising the opportunities that these present will require a willingness to operate a flexible policy framework which recognises and adapts to the diversity of pathways.

The following programs are offered across the RMIT:

- English language
- Victorian Certificate in Education
- foundation studies
- vocational education
- sub-degree
- degree
- postgraduate coursework degrees
- higher degrees by research

The panel noted from the survey responses that staff within the international portfolio are committed to their work and understand how this work contributes to the University’s strategic direction. Given RMIT’s size and diverse activities, the panel was impressed with the way in which staff in the international portfolio deal with the organisational complexity associated with a function
that cuts across such a large range of University functions. In part this is about the depth and breadth of knowledge associated with key staff and in part it is about culture and attitude. For example, the panel heard about the issues associated with the Admissions system (Iapply) and how staff continued to work to improve the processes and systems to manage high-volume, transactional activity.

The panel heard consistently that there had been a substantial improvement in the way in which staff in the International Portfolio engaged with the broader University community particularly since the appointment of the current Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International. Examples offered included:

- regular meetings between the senior executive staff
- International portfolio representation at college/school meetings
- International portfolio support for college/school activities
- Regular communication across the central portfolios
- Improved communication with the campuses outside of Australia

The panel heard that the most recent restructure within the International Portfolio was received positively by the broader university community. Feedback from the Colleges and Schools to the panel suggested that it had resulted in an increased greater awareness of ‘who does what’ and that there been a noticeable emphasis on providing a ‘customer-focused’ service. The panel endorses these achievements and encourages the International portfolio to build upon this goodwill.

The panel noted that there has been substantial on-going structural and management change over the past five years. Looking beyond RMIT, it is apparent that there are a diversity of models for the structure and operation of an international portfolio and there is no overwhelming evidence to point to a single “best way”. For example, some institutions operate will a full service International function dealing with all aspects of the non-academic student life cycle; others embed international within core services and others may operate a mixed model. Accordingly, the panel makes no detailed recommendations about structure or about the International Portfolio’s ways of working but notes that after a period of such significant changes there may be real benefits to a period of stability in terms of structure and operations. However, without structural change there will continue to be scope to improve the co-ordination of activity across functions (for example marketing and recruitment).

Within this Report, the panel has identified the following key areas:

- RMIT Strategy and International Plan (both current and proposed future developments)
- Approach to Partnerships
- Student experience, specifically international student experience
- Risk around agent management
- Enabling capability

The panel intends for the findings, observations and recommendations to assist the University in general and the International portfolio in particular to respond to the internal and external influences impacting RMIT in the global education market. Following is the summary list of recommendations:

1. That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International drive the strategic thinking around what ‘global’ means at RMIT and socialise the next International Plan within the International Portfolio and across RMIT to drive a shared understanding and ownership of initiatives.

2. That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International leads discussion across RMIT around the strategy concerning presences and partnerships outside of Australia with regard to developing and explaining an overarching strategy which guides the appropriate
balance and mix of international activities. This should consider a broad range of issues, including:
- Campus / partnership / presence model
- Physical / virtual locations
- Institutional / individual relationship
- Impact on institutional reputation and global rankings
- Teaching / Research partnerships
- Partnership evaluations.

3 That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International engages with professional services (including marketing, careers and employment, alumni) to ensure that these services fully support international students for purposes of retention, experience and progression to employment and/or further study. An issue of urgency relates to employability for onshore international students and this should be prioritised.

4 That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International consider establishing a more strategic and robust approach to managing agents – one driven by applicant quality, informed by evidence and supported by incentives.

5 That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International review the existing controls around its activities to ensure that RMIT’s risks associated with its international strategy in and outside Australia are managed.

3 Review Terms of Reference and Initial Assessment

The review was asked to address the following specific issues:

3.1 To consider whether the area understands its intended contribution to RMIT strategy, whether it contributes effectively and whether it has sound processes for ensuring ongoing strategic alignment and improvement.

3.1.1 How clear is the University's existing international strategy and are there opportunities for the Portfolio to better serve the University by accelerating the adoption of a global mindset in everything it does?

The current International Strategy is expiring. It does not appear to have been well communicated and is not widely recognised or understood. However, it was apparent from discussions during the review that the International Portfolio is now much better regarded and there is much better engagement with the international agenda than has been the case in the past. There seemed to be a good understanding of the diversity of challenges facing RMIT in its international activities, although beyond the immediate International Portfolio, there seemed to be a lack of clarity regarding leadership responsibility in a number of key areas (e.g., foundation retention rates, employability and graduate outcomes).

To date there is much to suggest a significantly opportunistic element within the international strategy. While some element of opportunism is to be expected, there appeared to have been a lack of evidence-based approaches to policy and strategy development. There appears to be data available but that data is not heavily used to inform strategy development.

This presents a real opportunity for the International Portfolio to drive initiatives to embed international across different areas of the University and to drive greater cross-functional co-ordination. The International Portfolio cannot do everything but it can drive broader-based engagement including across central services and between central services and
colleges. The development of the University’s Strategic Plan and the associated development of a new international strategy and plan provides an excellent opportunity to do this.

The central role of students and teaching in the international strategy is very clear – it is much less apparent that there is engagement between the international strategy and research strategy.

3.1.2 How do the activities of the portfolio support student outcomes (e.g. student satisfaction, employment outcomes)?

Both satisfaction and employability are areas of concern in relation to international students. Employability in particular is an issue. It is not clear that the International Portfolio can or should drive these agendas, not least because they extend beyond the international dimension and are of relevance to all students. They need active management across the University, probably with a central lead and the role of the International Portfolio should be to ensure that such centrally led activity fully addresses the specific needs of the internationalisation strategy.

Both alumni relationships and marketing could also benefit from a similar approach to embedding the international dimension in their activity.

3.1.3 Has the Portfolio made reasonable progress in taking on leadership of the GMH and oversight of the University's global international footprint? Are accountabilities and capabilities appropriately aligned?

The GMH has been formally terminated and an alternative mechanism is to be put in place. This will require careful thought and during this process it might be helpful to give further thought as to what is meant by “global” and “international” in the RMIT context – the terms are contested, complex and often used interchangeably.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the structural arrangements that allow the International Portfolio to drive change across functions and colleges.

3.2 To consider the area’s performance and achievements over time, the adequacy and effectiveness of governance and management arrangements, and whether it delivers associated outcomes efficiently and effectively.

3.2.1 How effective is the Portfolio’s engagement with the rest of the University (Colleges, other Portfolios and Controlled Entities) and key external stakeholders (particularly, partner institutions)?

The Panel found widespread evidence to suggest that this engagement was generally good. There was also clear evidence that with much to suggest that the International Portfolio’s internal communication and involvement had improved considerably in the past year.

3.2.2 How effective is the restructured portfolio in delivering the University’s strategic objectives in onshore recruitment, transnational education partnership management, developing new offshore presences and broader internationalisation support? Are there particular opportunities for enhancing the quality of these activities (especially as they affect students) or for enhancing their operational cost-efficiency?
The International Portfolio plays a key role in helping University create and define a shared vision about what global/international means. Alongside the broader strategic considerations referred to above, this also requires consideration and explanation for the balance of activity (offshore v offshore, partnership, physical presence, virtual delivery, geographic spread etc).

The Panel noted that a particular strength in RMIT was the diversity of pathways and the integration of vocational and higher education. This integrated approach could be regarded as a very positive attribute, but to realise this required that pathways were genuinely integrated. A particular issue was highlighted to the Panel which concerned the relationship between REW and RMIT. REW students were being recruited on the understanding that they were joining an RMIT pathway, but organizational boundaries meant they were technically restricted in terms of access to RMIT services and facilities. The Panel would urge the University to address this in the interests of delivering appropriate student integration.

3.3 To consider how the area is positioned having regard to relevant benchmarks, comparative data and good practice, continuous improvement processes, and areas of strength or significant risks in relation to quality, or viability.

3.3.1 How effective is the Portfolio's approach to risk management (especially market and regulatory compliance and security in terms of personal safety and duty of care risks) in areas such as: international student recruitment, offshore program-delivery, student mobility and offshore campus-development. Are lines of accountability clear and appropriate?

It is not clear that there is an appropriate prioritisation of risk; similarly it is not clear that the issue of risk appetite has been fully thought through. There is an opportunity to make greater use of scenarios in thinking about future risk.

There is a strong emphasis on compliance and this seemed to be well managed. Nonetheless, it is prudent to review the governance framework in relation to student recruitment, vis-a-vis recruitment agents and the assessment of applications.

3.3.2 Is the current approach in outsourcing student recruitment to agents suitable and efficient, noting current costs?

There is a heavy dependence on agents for recruitment purposes and while this might be regarded as cost effective, there are a number of issues associated with current practice including the size and management of the agent portfolio (different levels of support for different quality agents/) and ensuring that agent contracts are incentive compatible (eg rewarding retention as well as just recruitment).

There are potential tensions around agent recruitment activity in markets where RMIT also has offshore activity.

The issue of recruitment agents is addressed in more detail later in this report.
4 Discussion of key findings

4.1 RMIT Strategy and the International Plan

Based on the discussions with staff, the panel formed the view that there was little if no engagement with the existing international plan, although this seemed to be changing. The reasons for this lack of engagement were not obvious to the panel. It may have been a result of poor communication or the changing leadership of the portfolio or the autonomous nature of the Colleges/Schools. For whatever reason, the panel found that historically, there was limited awareness and ownership of the International Plan across RMIT.

In asking staff about the rationale driving RMIT’s specific presences outside of Australia, there was no clear sense of a compelling strategic imperative – more often than not the responses centred on either opportunism or simply growth and revenue. It was not evident to the panel that presences outside of Australia were monitored or reviewed against critical success factors or performance criteria.

The panel saw little evidence that the current International Plan has been effective in terms of driving a strategic approach to global education, and there seemed to be no formal intersect with research activities. The panel noted that the current International Plan functions effectively as a separate strand within the 2011 – 2015 Strategic Plan and is represented ‘vertically’ in the institution. This gives rise to a siloed approach to international activities. The panel believes that the challenge (and opportunity) is for the International Portfolio to develop its contribution to the new strategic plan in a way that ensures engagement ‘horizontally’ across RMIT.

The panel believes that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International and the International Portfolio have a significant role to play in leading RMIT’s thinking around the strategic direction for ‘a global university’. Such thinking should result in a clearly articulated vision of what a ‘global university’ would look like in 2020 and the International Plan should be a roadmap for RMIT to achieve that vision. The panel heard from the DVC, International, that it was his intention that the next International Plan be one that explicitly enables the ambitions of the 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan.

The panel strongly supports this course of action and offers the following points to assist in the discussion surrounding the international strategy:

- Does RMIT see itself as international or global? What are the defining characteristics?
- In the rapidly changing highly competitive global education market what does RMIT want to be in x years?
- How to support ‘quality education outcomes’ and ‘research with impact’ across RMIT in a way that is financially sustainable? On what basis does RMIT prioritise these opportunities?
- What does global mean to RMIT – are presences physical, virtual, partnerships? And what about geographic coverage – what types of presences are required in which region?
- How does RMIT conceptualise its current overseas presence (ie what is the relationship between RMIT and RMIT Vietnam?). How does such a distinctive development fit, what is its strategic rationale?
- What does it mean in practice to be global?
- What a global mindset means across RMIT and how to create and support a global mindset?
- How effective has the 2011-2015 Strategy been? What have been the successes and what activities have not been successful?

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International advised the panel that the Global Management Hub (GMH) had been disestablished and its replacement remained under discussion. The panel urges
the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International to actively reflect on the initial purpose of the GMH and consider how a potential replacement can support him in not only leading the development of the next plan but also in monitoring and reviewing its implementation particularly for presences outside of Australia.

Recommendation 1

That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International drive the strategic thinking around what ‘global’ means at RMIT and socialise the next International Plan within the International Portfolio and across RMIT to drive a shared understanding and ownership of initiatives.

4.2 Strategic approach to offshore engagements

The panel found that there needs to be much clearer thinking around the strategy for offshore engagement, including partnerships and overseas presence. Existing and future RMIT presence outside of Australia (currently Vietnam and Barcelona, with others under consideration) would benefit from a much clearer articulation in terms of rationale and relationship to other activity. For example, is it about reputation, growth in student numbers, access to new markets? What is the balance between teaching and research in different locations? How does an RMIT in-country presence relate to other activities in that market (e.g., partnerships, recruitment)?

The panel formed the view that up until very recently, the approach to partnerships was driven by a focus on growth in student numbers and developed by opportunity. In exploring the rationale behind RMIT’s existing partnerships in Singapore, China, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka with staff, the panel heard that there was an historical aspect as many were long-term relationships which often originated from individual connections and were seen as attractive because of the ability to generate student numbers and associated revenue. It seemed to the panel that revenue was a primary driver of the approach to partner selection and partnership development. The partnerships discussed were focused on teaching and there was little explicit consideration of research focused partnerships. It was not clear that there was any assessment of ‘return on investment’ at the partnership level. It seemed to the Panel that the approach to partnerships historically was one that was to ‘let one hundred flowers bloom’ albeit within a broad strategic framework of revenue generation.

The panel heard very few references to the process for establishing partnerships which enhanced RMIT’s reputation or partnerships to support research or knowledge transfer. Moreover, the panel heard claims that in one country market an existing partnership had been a barrier to the establishment of a partnership with a top-tier University. The panel did hear that the many-staged process for approving partnerships had been recently replaced by a simplified policy where the International Portfolio is responsible for approving new partnerships.

The panel fully supports the proposal to adopt a more strategic approach to partnerships as noted by the DVC – International in the Self-assessment Report. The panel endorses the following principles to guide institutional engagement outside of Australia as put forward by the DVC, International:

- Enhance the learning experience of RMIT students across locations
- Strengthen reach, range and impact of RMIT’s research production
- Enhance the RMIT brand and global standing
- Improve RMIT’s financial sustainability
- Improve the overall balance of the RMIT risk profile

The panel supports extensive communication around what the principles mean in practice or to continue the analogy above, providing the parameters or garden beds in which the one hundred
flowers may bloom’. As noted in section 3.1 with regard to the next International Plan, it will be important that there is a shared interpretation across RMIT, in order to ensure that these principles will be effective in shaping decision-making.

More generally, the panel would encourage further thought about the need to balance strategic, top-down driven approaches to partnership and opportunistic and bottom-up driven approaches. This would need to acknowledge the different influences on partner selection for teaching relationships versus partner selection for research relationships. It should also consider the relative merits of a discipline specific approach (in which disciplines choose to work with the best partners in their areas) versus an institutional approach (in which the institution seeks to have multiple links with a small number of strategic partners).

As part of this process there would be merit in exploring different approaches to partnership evaluation to ensure that there is a mechanism for reviewing the existing portfolio of partnerships and deciding on the longer terms strategy of the management of existing relationships and the development of new ones.

**Recommendation 2**

That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International leads discussion across RMIT around the strategy concerning presences and partnerships outside of Australia with regard to developing and explaining an overarching strategy which guides the appropriate balance and mix of international activities. This should consider a broad range of issues, including:

- Campus / partnership / presence model
- Physical / virtual locations
- Institutional / individual relationship
- Impact on institutional reputation and global rankings
- Teaching / Research partnerships
- Partnership evaluations

4.3 Student recruitment and student experience

RMIT has a strong record in terms of student recruitment – both onshore (to Melbourne) and offshore (to partners, to its Vietnam campus). The longer term sustainability of recruitment performance will be heavily influenced by student experience and the links between the two processes are not always clearly articulated. In particular, the panel felt that the links between recruitment and marketing were not entirely clear or well understood and that there was little evidence of student experience issues feeding back into marketing communications. There are particular challenges associated with students studying via partnerships. The management of the (non-academic) student experience is often heavily dependent on the partner and all too often students identify with the partner who has recruited them rather than with the institution that delivers their academic qualification. The Panel heard that at Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), for example, students saw themselves as ‘SIM’ students rather than RMIT students.

When asked about benchmarking partners and/or activities relating to the student experience, the panel heard that RMIT participated in the International Student Barometer Survey and the Australian Graduate Survey. In regard to student satisfaction measures, the panel was advised that in recent years both domestic and international onshore students overall satisfaction score has lagged behind the national average\(^1\). In regard to full-time employment scores as measured by the AGS, domestic students and international onshore students were below the national averages in 2013-2014\(^2\).

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1 RMIT results of the Australian Graduate Survey (outcomes and satisfaction) Prepared by Business Analytics and Planning 4 May 2015  
2 RMIT results of the Australian Graduate Survey (outcomes and satisfaction) Prepared by Business Analytics and Planning 4 May 2015
The panel heard from one of the large Partners outside Australia of the need to focus on the quality of the student experience. The panel was told that students in the global higher education market are seeking more value from their international experience. The panel heard about the stronger employability outcomes for students in Vietnam, Singapore, Hong Kong and China compared to those who studied in Australia.

There was considerable discussion about the issue of employability in the light of differences between onshore and offshore students and the importance of employability as a recruitment/marketing message to sustain future student numbers. The current figures do suggest that there is an issue to be addressed and that there needs to be more thought given to the best ways of providing employability and careers support to international students on-shore — who may be job hunting in either Australia or their home country. It was noted that employability was helped by initiatives relating to programme accreditation particularly where industries have recognisable (sometimes global) standards as in IT, engineering, financial services and logistics but this alone will not be sufficient to drive improved employability performance. There was reference to losing track of international students on their return home and, as an associated implication, the engagement with international alumni was not as well developed as it could be. The alumni represent an important resource and have the potential to support employability initiatives from international students.

Current arrangements for students taking pre-sessional English language do not fit well with a vision of an integrated student experience and efforts should be made to ensure that those students are more fully integrated within the RMIT community.

The panel also was interested in the retention/attrition rates as an indicator of either issues around student recruitment (student preparedness / admission criteria) or issues around student experience (failure to adapt to University life). There was a reference to a 40% attrition rate in a review of the Foundation Studies Program. The panel was provided with high level College dashboards used to support the Program Annual Review yet the activities to address attrition across the institution remained somewhat opaque. The panel heard clearly that attrition and retention was a problem (at least with domestic and international onshore students) but did not explicitly hear how it was being addressed. Often a response was couched by explaining a process by which reports make their way to Academic Board. Even at the end of the review, the panel had not formed a clear institutional picture of where the accountability for student retention sat within RMIT.

The panel understands that this fragmented or distributed model of accountability is common in universities but some co-ordinating mechanism is need if RMIT is to achieve its goals. The panel recommends that in the absence of a clear line of accountability, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International) champion the need for an institutional focus on enhancing the student experience for international students at all locations and presences. This accountability should not be limited to the admission and recruitment stage of the student lifecycle. With the Heads of the campuses outside of Australia reporting the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, this accountability now is clearer for offshore locations. Further work on articulating specific responsibilities should be undertaken with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and the Pro Vice-Chancellors.

More broadly, it became apparent during the review that there was not one RMIT but four - one central and three Colleges. This autonomy was also noted in the apparent separateness of Vietnam and SIM activities. In general, this is not an unusual feature although the degree of independence of organisational units across RMIT was striking and gave rise to what appeared to be almost a policy/strategy vacuum. While individual colleges were clear in their focus and concerns about the needs of their students, there appeared to be a lack of consistency across colleges and limited engagement with central support. The panel believes that more active local engagement with strategy is critical and that there needs to be a shared and agreed set of
parameters in which that translation occurs. For example, in terms of the student experience lifecycle there appeared to be boundaries which were functional as much as structural. Because of the size and scale of RMIT, it is not feasible for the International Portfolio to manage all aspects of the international student lifecycle and indeed it is probably inappropriate to wholly separate international and domestic student experience. Nonetheless, there is an important role for the International Portfolio to ensure that an international dimension is embedded throughout the student lifecycle.

**Recommendation 3**

The panel recommends that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International engages with professional services (including marketing, careers and employment, alumni) to ensure that these services fully support international students for purposes of retention, experience and progression to employment and/or further study. An issue of urgency relates to employability for onshore international students and this should be prioritised.

### 4.4 Risk – Agent management

The panel believes that the use of agents is an efficient approach to student recruitment provided that the institution has an effective approach to managing the agents and that there are appropriate controls in place to manage the associated risk and to appropriately service agents based on the return to the University. The panel heard that the International Portfolio engages over 400 agents, has nearly 500 programs on the CRICOS register and that about 85% of international onshore students are recruited through agents.

With the large number of agents and RMIT’s reliance on them for recruitment, the panel sought to understand how the International Portfolio managed the associated risk particularly in light of the recent publicity. While the International Portfolio was able to identify that there was top 100 list of programs there was no reference a ‘top 10’ or ‘top 50’ list of agents and that these will vary by country. If such a portfolio approach to the management of recruitment agents is not currently in place, the Panel would urge the international recruitment team to adopt such an appropriate mechanism to ensure that agents are managed in a way that reflects their value to the institution.

The panel formed the view that the International Portfolio is strong on contract management, legislative compliance and security. These activities are important however they are not sufficient in themselves to manage risk.

The panel found it difficult to understand how agents were managed as well the framework to manage the associated risk within the International Portfolio. Based on the information provided it appeared that the regional manager role not only recommends the appointment of the agent and but also conducts the annual performance review of the agent. This review appeared to be based on compliance with visa regulations. The panel believes that the existing criteria for reviewing the performance of the agents is limited and should be extended to include student value/performance measures, eg, student retention past first year and program completions. However, the panel recognises that evaluating agent performance in this way is a challenge across the sector and is by no means unique to RMIT.

The panel felt that RMIT was exposed to significant risk given its reliance on agents for its international on-shore student recruitment strategy. A high reliance on agents in a competitive environment may also lead to other risks in terms of reputation and potential fraud. The panel heard that the Academic Board had asked for a report from the International Portfolio regarding

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3 There are approximately 245 unique agents (based on number of agreements); larger agencies run multiple wholly-owned offices providing RMIT applicants access to agent representatives in 400+ locations.
4 ICAC Report (April 2015) and Four Corners Program (ABC 2015)
5 Appendix 5 Agent Management 2015
academic integrity in terms of entry requirements. The governing bodies of RMIT need to be assured that there are strong controls to mitigate the various elements of risk both financial and reputational. It was difficult for the panel to gauge RMIT’s appetite for risk when considering its global footprint. It may be helpful if the risk-appetite is clearly articulated particularly in terms of agent and partnership management.

The panel did not hear that there was any categorisation of agents based on their performance. For example, a model of gold, silver or bronze based on performance criteria could be used to support portfolio management. It may be that this happens but there was no evidence presented to the panel during the course of the review. The panel recommends that a more strategic and robust approach to managing agents be adopted which includes consideration of incentives around student retention and completion rates.

The panel acknowledges that a focus on student experience and employment outcomes must be supported by systems that enable the student lifecycle to be tracked from point of application through to becoming an alumnus.

Recommendation 4

That the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International consider establishing a more strategic and robust approach to managing agents – one driven by applicant quality, informed by evidence and supported by incentives.

Recommendation 5

Therefore, the panel recommends the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International review the existing controls around its activities to ensure that RMIT’s risks associated with its international strategy in and outside Australia are managed.

5 Observations to enable capacity

5.1 Analysis and evaluation

The panel noted that the International Business Intelligence unit provides comprehensive data and analyses to support the management of activities within the International Portfolio’s internal activities such as on-shore student recruitment. The work of this unit is well-regarded.

The panel, nonetheless believes that there is a critical need for more high-level strategic analyses of long term global trends across sectors (for example, vocational education, higher education, research) to inform the strategic positioning of RMIT. The panel believes that the International Portfolio is well-positioned to take on this role. The panel has identified a gap in terms of the following:

- changing nature of global trends in education and research
- education delivery models
- informing strategic positioning through onshore/offshore growth, regions and sectors.
5.2 **Global systems and processes**

Following on from the need to provide strategic advice informed by high level analysis the panel heard that there were a number of projects devoted to improving the systems and technology which underpin a global university. The panel believes that a digital identity strategy would be of substantial value not only in terms of practicality\(^6\) but also in terms of reinforcing a global mindset.

For a quick win, the panel encourages the DVC, International to seek support from the DVC, Engagement and Vocational Education to approve an RMIT student card for REW students enrolled in programs at an RMIT campus. This would enable the REW students to use the library (with no need for workarounds) and be granted access to buildings, including the Prayer room.

It seemed to the panel that the central portfolio areas (with perhaps the exception of the Library) have had limited or no engagement with the RMIT Vietnam campus. The panel believes that there are opportunities for these portfolios to work with RMIT Vietnam that would not only improve outcomes for Vietnam but also Melbourne. The panel believes that in a global university there are opportunities for each of the entities to learn from each other. The panel encourages RMIT to consider how new systems and/or technologies may be piloted in RMIT Vietnam. It was posited that at some point in the future, it may be that particular services are delivered by RMIT Vietnam to other RMIT presences.

5.3 **A global mindset - working across boundaries or working without boundaries**

During the course of the review, the panel observed that concerns about role clarity and confusion around responsibilities occurred primarily at points of ‘handover’, that is to say, where processes or functions crossed organisational boundaries.

The panel noted the following examples relating to the International Portfolio:

- International Portfolio / Marketing / College Marketing / Campus Marketing – issues concerning branding, marketing and recruitment to programs.
- International Portfolio / Students Group – issues concerning support and services specifically for international students once enrolled in RMIT programs.
- International Portfolio / Research and Innovation Portfolio – research partnerships and research higher degree student admissions.
- International Portfolio / RMIT Training – issues concerning packaging of pathways including English Language.

6. **Acknowledgements**

The panel thanks those who made themselves available for interview for their frank and open approach to the Review. The panel trusts that the findings and recommendations made in this report will support RMIT University and the International Portfolio in maximising efforts to achieve the strategic objectives.

\(^6\) The panel heard that some staff in Vietnam were required to have 3 digital identities.