

Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship - Global Sydney Talent Connect Program

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Summary

Gradability Pty Ltd (trading name Readygrad) has applied for a Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship of \$40,000 (excluding GST) per year for three years to help support the establishment of the Global Sydney Talent Connect Program. The program aims to support local small to medium businesses to connect with international students studying in the City of Sydney. This includes employability training for the international students, work integrated learning placement and mentoring with qualifying small to medium enterprises. If approved, the City's sponsorship will go towards the cost of 90 placements of Sydney-based international students into 90 small to medium enterprises in Sydney over three years.

Readygrad, founded and headquartered in Sydney CBD, is one of Australia's largest graduate employability specialists with a 12 year history of delivering work readiness training and work integrated learning placement programs. Readygrad has placed more than 12,000 international students with over 4,000 host companies. This unique and innovative program builds capacity of local businesses to engage globally and enhances employability outcomes for international students.

The City's recently endorsed International Education Action Plan identifies the need to support international students to gain work integrated learning opportunities, to increase their employability and strengthen their relationship with the local community. Access to meaningful work experience affects both study destination choice and the overall student experience.

The City's Economic Development Strategy identifies long-term, sustainable connections with Asia as a priority for the City in order to deliver greater benefits to the local economy. Nationally, four out of five international students are from Asia and, through this program, the City can support local small to medium businesses to build their engagement with Asia. The program will provide local small to medium businesses with access to global talent, cross cultural skill sets and capabilities to deepen their engagement with Asia. These opportunities include pursuing export opportunities, sourcing imports, developing offshore partnerships or enhancing product and service offerings for multicultural consumers to increase their customer base.

Readygrad will be responsible for delivery of all aspects, including sourcing and selection of students and host companies, delivery of training and coaching, sourcing and matching placements, monitoring and assessment and evaluation.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve \$40,000 (exclusive of GST) cash support to Gradability Pty Ltd (trading as Readygrad) per year for three years for the coordination and delivery of the Global Sydney Talent Connect Program; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer a sponsorship agreement with Readygrad Pty Ltd.

Attachments

Nil.

Background

1. Gradability Pty Ltd (trading name Readygrad) is a market leader in work experience placements for international students.
2. Readygrad is an incorporated for-profit organisation and is a Registered Training Organisation accredited by the Australian Skills and Qualification Authority.
3. Work experience opportunities are one of the critical selection criteria when international students select a study destination and a key driver of satisfaction. International students struggle to find meaningful work and relevant work experience opportunities for a range of reasons, including the reluctance or inability of the small to medium sized enterprises sector (representing a large proportion of employers) to engage with them.
4. Small to medium sized businesses often find it difficult to engage with students and graduates and rarely have graduate recruitment programs. Furthermore, small to medium sized businesses can be hesitant to engage with international students for a range of reasons, including confusion over visas and work rights, perceived challenges with communication and cultural fit, and limited access to international student talent. At the same time, to remain competitive and economically viable, local small to medium sized businesses are increasingly operating in global and multicultural marketplaces.
5. This program will provide local small to medium sized businesses with an easy and comfortable way to engage with international students to build their capacity around leveraging and accessing global markets to benefit their business. It gives small to medium sized businesses access to the unique skill sets and knowledge that can be drawn from international students, including multilingual abilities, cross cultural skill sets and understanding of offshore markets and cultures. At the same time, the program is designed to equip students and recent graduates with skills, experience and confidence to bridge the gap between study and professional employment, whether ultimately in Australia or overseas.
6. The Global Talent Connect Program has defined eligibility criteria for student and host selection and each placement will be tailored according to the needs of the student and host businesses. This includes that the students could be either graduated (on a 485 graduate visa) and/or still studying (on a student visa). Their program would be part of an accredited training, either as a recognised part of their university studies or under Readygrad's accredited program. The placement component meets the definition of a 'vocational placement' for the purposes of the Fair Work Act and therefore does not require the students to be paid by the host companies.
7. The format of the program is for approximately 30 international students to undertake work integrated learning placements at 30 local small to medium sized businesses per year. The program includes:
 - (a) a two week selection process which includes a video interview application, cognitive ability assessment, selection criteria assessment and enrolment;
 - (b) eight weeks of preparation and employability training which prepares students to develop goals and employability skills, and provides interview and resume coaching, an entering business life e-learning program, a Work Health and Safety module, host company interviews and matching with student skill sets;

- (c) twelve weeks of work integrated learning placement, which includes developing a formal training agreement, undertaking online assessment and developing case studies, monitoring learning outcomes tracked through e-grad Learning Management System, consultant checkpoints and evaluation of host and student experiences; and
 - (d) a graduation ceremony showcasing participating small to medium sized enterprises and international students, presenting a statement of attainment to businesses and students, and inspiring other businesses and international students.
8. The benefits of supporting the project include:
- (a) Providing opportunities for international students to understand Australian business culture, workplace expectations and practices, teamwork, relationship building and practical skills relevant to the student's area of study.
 - (b) Increasing employability of international students and retaining talent in the City. As found through independent evaluation undertaken by McCrindle Research, Readygrad programs have resulted in 88 per cent of students being employed within six months of graduation, 67 per cent of students working in the area of internship and 42 per cent being offered employment at their host company. Ninety-eight per cent of students said the program made a difference in securing work.
 - (c) Providing local small to medium sized businesses with access to global talent with cross cultural skill sets and capabilities to deepen their engagement with Asia, to pursue export opportunities, source imports, and develop offshore partnerships or reach multicultural customers in Australia to expand their customer base.
 - (d) Strengthening relationships with the higher education sector (universities and private providers) who identify this as a critical area of opportunity where the City can add value.
 - (e) Positioning Sydney as a desirable destination of choice for international students.
9. The sponsorship benefits include a number of branding and acknowledgement opportunities, and involvement of students in other City events such as the International Education Providers Forum and Future Asia Business Summit.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

10. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This sponsorship aligns with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City - Sydney's connections with Asia are specifically recognised within the Strategy as being integral to Sydney's future economic competitiveness and our ability to facilitate trade and investment outcomes. Sponsorship of this project increases the attractiveness of Sydney as an international education destination, enables local small to medium sized businesses to have deeper engagement with Asia, and enables a platform for enhancing economic prosperity (export, import, investment, joint ventures, attracting multicultural consumers and customer base).
 - (b) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies - connecting local small to medium sized businesses to international students through this program creates new international networks, sources of funding, innovation, talent and expertise for the local economy. Fostering connections between local businesses and international students has the potential to create jobs and develop relationships to underpin the growth of small businesses in the city centre. The program increases the employability of international students and improves overall student experience and opportunities for talent retention in the City.
 - (c) Direction 10 - Implementation through Effective Governance and Partnerships - by supporting the Global Sydney Talent Connect Program, the City demonstrates collaboration and partnership in progressing our 2030 vision and strategic directions.

Social / Cultural / Community

11. The program provides a platform for representatives from culturally diverse communities to connect to the local economy, local culture, regulation and capabilities and create meaningful research, products and services that enhance social cohesion.
12. Nationally, four out of five international students are from Asia, and this program is an opportunity to retain talent and stimulate greater access to global markets through this demographic who are acclimatised to Sydney's culture.

Economic

13. Supporting the Global Sydney Talent Connect Program is an opportunity to increase local business' connections with Asian markets. This can be around increasing export opportunities, attracting investment, sourcing importers, forming joint ventures, and increasing the Asian and global customer base.
14. The program will increase the employability of international students and boost their student experience in Sydney to form future global ambassadors. The impact of this initiative is also to retain talent in the Local Government Area.
15. Supporting the program positions Sydney as a destination of choice for international education, business and investment.

Budget Implications

16. Sponsorship of \$40,000 is provided in the approved 2018-19 operating budget for Knowledge Exchange Sponsorships Program. Provision of \$40,000 per annum will be made in budgets for the financial years 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Relevant Legislation

17. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 provides that a council may, in accordance with a resolution of the council, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to person for exercising its functions.
18. Section 356(3)(a) - (d) is satisfied for the purpose of providing grant funding to for-profit organisations because:
 - (a) the funding is part of the Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship program;
 - (b) the details of this program have been included in Council's draft operational plan for financial year 2018/19;
 - (c) the program's proposed budget does not exceed five per cent of Council's proposed income from ordinary rates for financial year 2018/19; and
 - (d) this program applies to a significant group of persons within the local government area.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

19. The program will commence in early 2019 to allow for a pilot group of applicants to participate in the program before the end of the 2018/19 financial year.

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Director City Life

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