

Adjunct Professor W.L. Peirson
Master
New College
University of New South Wales
Sydney NSW 2052

7 November 2017

Ms. Jacqueline Willing
President
New College Students Association
New College
UNSW Sydney NSW 2052

Dear Jacqueline

Re: NCSA report on the Australian Human Rights Commission's report on campus and college sexual assault and harassment

Thank you for the constructive interest that the New College Students Association (NCSA) have taken in the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) recommendations with regard to sexual assault and harassment. Specifically, thank you for your carefully considered *Community Action Report* (CAR) which was received by e-mail on 15 August 2017. I value this contribution with its focussed recommendations.

The process that I am presently following in addressing Recommendation 9 of the AHRC report is as follows:

1. Receipt and review of relevant documents from the AHRC, UNSW and the UNSW Human Rights Commission. (COMPLETE)
2. Preparation of a preliminary response to Recommendation 9. (COMPLETE)
3. Consultation with interested stakeholders (UNSW, alumni, NCSA and Sydney Anglican Diocese). (UNDERWAY)
4. Independent review of the present college policies and practices. (UNDERWAY)
5. Improvement of the present college policies and practices for the 2018 academic year. (UNDERWAY).
6. Finalisation of a response to key stakeholders for the 2018 academic year (UNSW, alumni, NCSA and Sydney Anglican Diocese). (TO BE DONE)
7. Publication of review outcomes (TO BE DONE).

There will ongoing annual review of our intentions, policies and practices addressing possible sexual misbehaviour prior to each academic year.

Please regard this letter as part of Step 3. Below I reiterate your recommendations noting, where necessary, any subpoints requiring comment or action. In italics are shown with my preliminary response and actions that I propose to address the issues raised.

- 1. That the Administration of New College actively seeks to appoint more diverse leaders into college positions, to provide more role models for female residents and to demonstrate New College's commitment to equality.**

In practice, there is no difference between the Administration approach and this CAR recommendation.

Resident adviser (RA) appointment is a delicate balance of applicants and community engagement. Given the pool of applicants, we endeavour to have an RA (SR at NCV) team that is as gender balanced and community balanced as possible.

The present AT team composition is a reflection of few women applying to be ATs for 2017. The appointed AT team for 2018 is closer to balance and a reflection of the applicant pool. Academic competence and ability to tutor are the basis for AT appointment, without discrimination.

In both NC and NCV, there is an aim for a gender balance between Dean and Deputy Dean/SRA positions.

- 2. That the Master and/or Dean deliver a serious and personal response to sexual harassment at NCSA Supper to generate important conversation about the gravity of such sensitive issues in college.**

As recommended, a preliminary verbal response was made to the community on 15 August 2017.

This is an important issue. This recommendation has highlighted the need for greater transparency in our intentions, policies and practices that will be addressed during preparation for the 2018 academic year. The college administration does diligently address such issues with the gravity that the issues deserve. However, our overall approach to doing this has not been enunciated clearly to the community. That residents have not been aware of our approach has tended to undermine trust in the college administration on this important issue.

Community leaders will be briefed at appropriate stages of the revision process.

With regard to the concerns expressed under points 2.5 and 2.6 (numbered as 1.5 and 1.6 in the version provided), these issues are serious and will be carefully noted under present revisions of our college practices.

- 3. That a more comprehensive and multi-faceted educational approach regarding drugs, alcohol, mental health, sexual assault, eating disorders and gender-oriented respect in college is introduced for residents. This new program should specifically include; a detailed outline of reporting procedures for residents, a brief of the protocols used in disciplinary proceedings including cautions and the behavioural expectations of residents.**

As discussed at the beginning of this letter, the college administration is presently revising O'Week inductions for the 2018 Fresher intake.

As discussed on the previous point, we will be taking a more transparent approach. Resident induction will be revised and expanded accordingly.

Specifically, the present plan is to undertake workshops with present and incoming residents with role plays on reporting procedures, discipline and behavioural expectations.

Community leaders will be briefed at appropriate stages of the revision process.

- 4. That the Administration of New College actively engage in consultation with other colleges to continually improve upon RA training and residential culture, RA training and cultural activities.**

This has and will continue. Specifically:

- The Master is playing an active role within the UNSW working group on sexual harassment.*
- The Dean of Residents completed UNSW First Responder training during the mid-year break.*
- The Master attended a briefing by the Human Rights Commissioner on 19 September.*
- The Master consulted Robert Menzies College on their approach to RA and resident training on 21 September.*
- With the NCSA President, the Master visited consulted with the Residence Manager at Weerona College on 26 September.*
- The Master attended the University Colleges Australia meeting in Brisbane on 28 September 2017.*

- *The Master continues to consult an alumni representative group on these matters.*
- *The Master is taking the principal leadership role in these matters.*
- *New College is presently in discussions with Robert Menzies College regarding participation in Mental Health First Aid Training with a view to evaluating its effectiveness in comparison with present training procedures in Mental Health.*

With regard to item 4.4, New College has found the work of University Colleges Australia to be more helpful than the Asia-Pacific Association for Student Housing.

5. That the Administration of New College expands Residential Advisor training to better equip those students in a pastoral care role for the complex challenges they face, including formal policy and training in transparency and privacy of a residents' confidential information.

It should be noted that the complexity of implementing natural justice in such a very public environment is significant, possibly unique.

Our present approach is described in our preliminary response to Recommendation 9 (attached).

As acknowledged in the CAR, our present RA training specifies "there is a legal requirement to provide confidential personal information (i.e. in the case of duty of care)."

At present, college is intending two actions to address concerns expressed within this recommendation.

First, as discussed within within O'Week, workshops are planned for present and incoming residents with role plays on reporting procedures.

Secondly, our intention is to formally change our practices so that any individual disclosing information to a member of staff (including RAs) will remain informed as to who is to be informed and what information they will receive.

In the case of a critical incident of sexual misbehaviour, the College Board, UNSW, the Master, the relevant Dean will all need to be informed. We are presently developing a protocol for reporting that will make it clear to residents what information is being conveyed and to whom it is being conveyed.

The New College Privacy Policy is presently under review. The revised policy will be released in due course.

With regard to item 5.2, we are regularly approached by providers offering different types of training for Residential Advisers/ Senior Residents. Present training scope is:

- *First aid*
- *In-house adviser training*
- *Mental Health Awareness Training: Managing Students in Distress*

In late 2017, we are going to undertake a pilot trial of Mental Health First Aid for some Residential Advisers.

We are discussing the possibility of Sensitivity Training but I am presently not convinced that this is the correct fit for Advisers. At present, I am thinking that the techniques used by counsellors and chaplains to open conversations might be more useful but this is subject to further consideration, discussion and evaluation during the 2018 RA training period.

6. That the Administration considers the employment of an external counsellor to provide a confidential service further removed from the community than internally employed, student, RAs. The possibility of the engagement of an external counsellor by the college administration was seriously considered in 2015. However, it was concluded that any counselling of residents should be undertaken with no conflict-of-interest.

Residents are referred to external counsellors for independent assessment with the college Deans providing support to secure this, as necessary.

Concerning your specific comments under items 6.1 and 6.2, I will make two points.

First, with regard to Adviser appointment, we purposefully endeavour to appoint advisers who are representative of, respected by and well connected with the community. Our Christian foundations and Adviser Training require that all pastoral staff show love and compassion for all residents, regardless of the particular resident's attitudes or background.

Secondly, we are explicit regarding the premier importance of our pastoral care. The well-being of residents is our most important operational priority. The adviser model is well developed internationally and has built into it a conflict between discipline and pastoral care. It should be the objective of all residents and staff to build trust in the pastoral care team for the well-being of all. As a college administration, we maintain a minimum set of rules to protect the well-being of residents and the good reputation of our college but our priority of care is explicit. The community's success depends on trust and respectful regard for all viewpoints and backgrounds.

I attach to this document our preliminary response to the AHRC Recommendation 9 (with its appendices) for your review.

Would you please consider these preliminary responses and provide me with your comments.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me on +61 2 9381 1999

Yours sincerely,



A/Prof. William L Peirson
Master
Adjunct, UNSW School of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Enclosed: Preliminary response to Recommendation 9