

New College Board and Staff  
New College UNSW  
Sydney  
NSW 2052

Monday 7 August, 2017

Dear Bruce Morrison (Chair), Bill Peirson (Master), Arend Boog and Susan Bazzana (Deans) and other members of the New College Board and staff,

**Re: Alumni call for action on the Australian Human Rights Commission's report on campus and college sexual assault and harassment**

We're contacting you as a group of recent and older alumni who care about the community of New College. College was our first home away from home, and – for most of us – a treasured part of our university experience and memories. We're writing now because we are concerned for the wellbeing of students on campus and in College, and we want current and future Collegians to have a positive experience in our old home.

As you'll no doubt be aware, the Australian Human Rights Commission's report, *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities 2017* has recently been released, detailing the chilling prevalence of sexual assault and harassment on campus at Australian Universities.

Specifically, 29% of students at UNSW report having experienced sexual harassment on campus in 2016. Residential colleges have been identified as a hotspot for incidents, with 3% of respondents experiencing the most recent incidence of sexual harassment at residential college – this number goes up to 5% at university or residential college social events. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, trans and gender diverse students and students with disability are even more likely to have been sexually harassed than their peers. These incidents are occurring in places where students should feel most comfortable and safe – in their on-campus home.

The study also shows that the lack of adequate support structures for survivors of assault and harassment force young women to choose between a safe recovery and their education. Many students who have been subjected to sexual violence find themselves forced to continue to spend time with the perpetrator of their attack. When, in order to continue their studies, someone has to share a classroom, or a college, or a bedroom wall with someone who has hurt them, they may feel that the only option is to leave. This is a tragic and inequitable – but entirely predictable – product of institutions that lack the structures needed to prevent violence and to help those who have been subjected to it. These structures are in dire and urgent need of review.

We were proud to learn that UNSW is at the forefront of the AHRC's investigation, working with other bodies to design the survey, as well as conducting the ethics reviews necessary to a study of this nature. As a key on-campus institution, we look to New College to likewise lead in the fight against sexual harassment and assault on Australian campuses.

New College has a reputation for taking pastoral care very seriously and providing support for students that may not have otherwise been able to study at UNSW. The release of this report is an important moment that demands action: the College must publicly and clearly take a stand against the harassment and assault that so many young people are subjected to while at university. It must take a stand for equality of safe access to education.

This means acknowledging that there may be New Collegians, both past and present, who have either suffered from or committed sexual harassment and assault.

It means acknowledging that victims may have not felt able to seek help from the College, and that those who have spoken up may not have been helped as they should have been.

It means always striving to do better: to search policies and cultures and approaches and hearts to find new and better ways of making College a safe place, and taking active steps to implement the results of this thinking.

It means acknowledging that the College has a crucial role in nurturing a culture of bodily autonomy and consent, in preventing sexual harassment and assault within its community, and in enabling those who have been harassed or assaulted to seek justice and access supports that will enable them to continue their studies in a safe environment.

We, the undersigned New College alumni, urge the Board and staff members to take this High Commission for Human Rights report seriously. We ask you to:

1. Review and revise policies based on the Recommendations of the report, particularly Recommendation 9, which specifically addresses residential/on-campus accommodation and is included below
2. Invite and encourage current residents to be part of this process (one suggestion would be to read this letter out at supper on a Tuesday)
3. Provide relevant sensitivity and policy training to RAs
4. Provide consent awareness-raising talks as part of formal O'Week inductions
5. Make your efforts and activities regarding this review public, and contribute your influence and voice to the public conversation around consent in Australian universities.

## Recommendation 9

In addition to considering the implementation of the university recommendations made in this report, residential colleges and university residences should commission an independent, expert-led review of the factors which contribute to sexual assault and sexual harassment in their settings.

This review should consider:

- appropriate responses by a college or university residence to reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment
- a trauma-informed and rights-based approach in a situation in which an allegation of sexual assault has been made
- the ways that hazing practices and college 'traditions' facilitate a culture which may increase the likelihood of sexual violence
- the role of alcohol in facilitating a culture which may increase the likelihood of sexual violence
- the level and nature of supervision in a twenty-four hour residential setting in which large numbers of young people are living away from home, and
- the level and adequacy of training required to equip residential advisors to serve as first responders or in response to matters of sexual assault and harassment.

College was our home, as it has been for lucky generations before and after us. We write because the culture of this home is still important to us, years later, and because we want it to be the best place it can be for students at UNSW.

Signed,