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13 October 2017

Johanna Elms,
Chair
New College Alumni Consultation Group
By E-mail to: emilyjchull@gmail.com

Dear Johanna

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

Thank you for the interest that New College alumni have taken in the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) report, the well-being of past and present residents and the reputation of New College. I value this contribution and your concise letter dated 7 August 2017.

The process that I am presently following in addressing Recommendation 9 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. Communication of the preliminary response to interested stakeholders (UNSW, alumni, NCSA and Sydney Anglican Diocese). (UNDERWAY)
4. Independent review of the present college policies and practices. (TO BE DONE)
5. Improvement of the present college policies and practices for the 2018 academic year, addressing issues raised by stakeholders and the independent reviewer. (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).

I attach to this letter our preliminary response to Recommendation 9 for your review.

There will ongoing annual review of our policies and practices in relation to sexual misbehaviour prior to each academic year.

Please regard this letter as being part of Step 3. Below I summarise and highlight the issues that I understand that you have raised. In italics are shown my preliminary response. These are followed by a suite of actions that I propose to resolve the issues that you have raised.

1. "Many students who have been subjected to sexual violence find themselves forced to continue to spend time with the perpetrator of their attack."
Having two college buildings, New College has already moved to make emergency accommodation available within the other building if it became apparent that there was a need to rapidly allow victim or perpetrator to be relocated

If no suitable accommodation is available, and except in cases of clear criminal conduct, New College will be responsible for finding and providing suitable accommodation.

2. "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."
The potential scope of this request could be extensive and beyond college resources. That said, I am committed to implementing policies and practices at New College that are exemplary, of defined scope and brought to speedy conclusion. It is clear that greater transparency is required with regard to our policies and practices. We will aim to make these publically available (as appropriate) and thereby fulfil the spirit of this request.
3. "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."
Via its harassment policy and its discussion by the Master during O'Week, New College has taken an internal stand that I believe addresses this concern with regard to its residents. My present intention is to make our intentions, policies and a summary of our practices public.
4. "This means acknowledging that there may be New Collegians, both past and present, who have either suffered from or committed sexual harassment and assault."
New College would not have a harassment policy that names sexual harassment as its first definitional facet unless the possibility of sexual harassment or more severe forms of sexual abuse was real and ongoing. New College is a vibrant community which draws people from a wide range of backgrounds. In spite of our interview process, it is still possible that perpetrators of sexual misbehaviour have entered our community. Three months ago, I interviewed all living past New College Masters and have compiled what I believe to be a full list of all known incidents of alleged sexual assault. There is also a record of the more serious incidents of sexual harassment but this has not been assembled in a more consolidated form.
5. "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."
Enabling victims to seek help is a real and ongoing challenge. Via its Resident Adviser/Senior Resident recruitment, New College endeavours to recruit empathetic and approachable people who will encourage disclosure of any matter that may be troubling a resident. This cannot be a perfect system due to the complexity of the issue. Relevant improvements to RA/SR training are presently being developed.

New College staff may make mistakes so it is possible that people have not been helped as they should have been. The complexity of implementing natural justice in such a very public environment is significant and must be acknowledged.

Any victims who believe that they have not been adequately supported by New College are welcome to contact me. They should be assured that their concern will be respectfully and discreetly addressed as best as I am able. Of course, if I am made aware of a situation which has not been adequately addressed in the past, I will certainly put in place any necessary steps to minimise the risk of this recurring.
6. "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."
Our practices are subject to annual review. New College staff also play an active role in workshops by relevant peak bodies to ensure that its policies and practices are state-of-the-art.

The requirements of the HRC Recommendation 9 has required a present stringent review of all relevant aspects.
7. "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."
Issues of consent are addressed during discussions of sexual assault and harassment with residents during O'Week. These are subject to present review. The other matters raised here have been addressed previously.

8. We, the undersigned New College alumni, urge the Board and staff members to take this Australian High Commission for Human Rights report seriously. We ask you to:
- a. 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
This presently underway as discussed above.
 - b. 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)
This letter was presented to the community by me on 15 August 2017.

The NCSA has convened a working group to assist me in present review. I am responding to them separately.
 - c. Provide relevant sensitivity and policy training to RAs
Sensitivity training is presently being planned in preparation for the 2018 academic year. RAs are presently trained in policy prior to O'Week. If you have specific concerns in this regard, please advise.
 - d. Provide consent awareness-raising talks as part of formal O'Week inductions
For 2017, we introduced new O'Week material on some of the risks associated with sexual activity. As discussed above, there are plans to expand this for 2018.

Present plans are to retain the relevant presentation by Brent Sanders in O'Week.
 - e. Make your efforts and activities regarding this review public, and contribute your influence and voice to the public conversation around consent in Australian universities.
As discussed above, our present plans are to make our intentions, policies and practices publically available.

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
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Enclosed: Preliminary response to Recommendation 9