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St Mark's College

Cultural Renewal at St Mark's College

Residential university colleges such as St Mark's College provide a rich and valuable addition to the university experience of students with opportunities to build life-long relationships and networks.

The College's Board and its Master, Rose Alwyn, have given priority to cultural renewal in the past decade – taking the best practice approach that students should be involved in renewal, own it and lead it. We accept that the pace of renewal and performance has not changed fast enough to meet community expectations.

The College accepts that the behaviour of some students has not complied with the College's stated values or community standards, and that we should have done more to monitor and control student behaviour.

We acknowledge that some students have felt uncomfortable with other student's behaviour at St Mark's College. This is unacceptable, and the Board and College leadership apologise unreservedly to anyone affected by those failings.

The College strongly reiterates that there is zero tolerance for sexual misconduct. Every allegation of sexual misconduct reported to the College in recent years has been investigated and addressed with several students expelled from the College. Their victims have always been listened to, believed and supported.

University colleges provide a broader range of life experiences than simply accommodation. When students come to St Mark's College they are embarking on an important life transition. As young adults they are responsible for themselves and their actions.

The College strives to balance student autonomy with supervision to build a safe and respectful environment. Getting this balance right is difficult - the challenge is to ensure this balance meets community expectations, provides a sense of fun and enjoyment and promotes a love of learning.

In the last two decades poor behaviour at some university colleges has been the subject of critical comment. The behaviour has ranged from inconsiderate to offensive and illegal. The need for change has been evident but at times has been resisted by those with nostalgia for long standing traditions. Some behaviours which might once have been tolerated as 'traditions' have now become overtly offensive.

The failure of some colleges to meet community expectations has attracted public criticism. This has resulted in extensive reviews by Elizabeth Broderick and others, together with national and international media coverage.

St Mark's College is no different and has been grappling with this challenge.

For the overwhelming majority of students their time at St Mark's College is positive, enjoyable and life affirming and greatly enhances their university experience. They are proud of the College and how it has prepared them for the next phase of their life.

We should not forget that this is an ongoing journey. The challenge is to continue to change and to ensure that our approach is robust enough to minimise risk and respond appropriately. We understand that we may still fall short at times, but it is how we respond to any failure that is important.

The St Mark's College Council, Board, staff, students and alumni support the ongoing effort to ensure that our students understand which behaviours are unacceptable, encourage these behaviours to be called out by fellow students and continue to take firm action against breaches of guidelines. The College will reinforce that it is right and safe to report unacceptable activities.

We will ensure that we have the right policies in place, suitable review and monitoring mechanisms and concerted attention to raising awareness of acceptable values and behaviour.

The St Mark's College *Action Plan for Cultural Renewal* is the next step. It is a series of practical actions informed by the findings of the Cultural Renewal at the University of Sydney Residential Colleges Report by Elizabeth Broderick, the work of Universities Australia and University Colleges Australia, and the University of Adelaide: Review of Student Residential Colleges Report prepared by the South Australian Equal Opportunity Commission. It has also been informed by the research undertaken by KPMG for the College Board.

The *Action Plan* gives priority to some specific areas of College life including events, discipline, training and communications. We will continue to consult extensively with students and College stakeholders to refine the Plan.

Key elements of the *Action Plan* include:

- Ensuring greater controls are in place for College events to reduce harmful drinking and reduce the likelihood of unacceptable activities and behaviour;
- An expanded and more extensive leadership training program will provide ongoing personal and professional development for student leaders;
- Planning for a new Welcome Week to replace Orientation Week. Welcome Week focuses on building an inclusive and diverse student body. Unacceptable past traditions and activities will not be tolerated;
- Strengthen existing training for all students and staff on the College's Values, sexual assault and harassment, consent, bystander awareness, drug and alcohol harm minimisation, mental and sexual health by increasing its frequency throughout the year and introducing cultural sensitivity training;
- Seek expert advice and engage an independent investigator for sexual misconduct;
- Communicate the consequence of unacceptable behaviours such as expulsions and suspensions while providing a safe and supportive environment for those who report
- Monitoring and reviewing progress to ensure the Action Plan achieves its targets and adapts to leading evidence-based practice and feedback.

The College will report regularly on progress to the St Mark's community, and our key stakeholders on the implementation of this plan.

The St Mark's College community is committed to cultural renewal and building upon the initiatives undertaken in recent years. Student safety, welfare and well-being remain the foundation of our purpose.

St Mark's College is an active and vibrant student community providing a complete university experience. Students are encouraged to engage in the academic, community service, social, cultural, sporting, spiritual and intellectual life of a leading residential learning community.

Ms Linda Matthews
Chair
St Mark's College Council

Ms Rose Alwyn
Master
St Mark's College

Mr Benjamin Massey
President
St Mark's College Club

Mr Craig Williams
President
St Mark's Old Collegians Assn

Mr James Price
President
St Mark's College Foundation

7th September 2018