

# **Culture & Values Review Report**

**FOR: Duchesne College**

**CONTACT: Elizabeth Jameson & Christina Turner**

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## Reviewers

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Elizabeth draws on almost 30 years of governance culture experience in and around boardrooms as a practicing director within over 20 boards, 20 years as a governance consultant and educator, and a prior career as a corporate/commercial lawyer and partner of a national law firm. Amongst other things, Elizabeth founded national governance consultancy, Board Matters, to which she still consults today and was a leading facilitator for the Australian Institute of Company Directors in their national and international programs for over 17 years. Elizabeth enjoys a particular affinity for education governance, having spent 12 years as chair of a leading independent school following 12 years as a member, and almost 10 years as deputy chair, of the same board. She has also sat on the Council of a Queensland based University and the board of Independent Schools Queensland as well as having consulted to hundreds of educational institutions and their boards over the past 25 years. She is currently undertaking her PhD (in governance) through the University of Queensland Law School and is President of RACQ, Chair of Queensland Theatre and a member of the board of Endeavour Foundation.

### **Dr Christina Turner**

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Christina is an experienced management consultant specializing in all aspects of human resource management including organizational culture and behaviour. She has headed up the people and culture functions of global and national organisations including ABC Learning Centres, the Brisbane City Council, the University of the Sunshine Coast, Myer, and QSuper Ltd. As a consultant of over 15 years, Christina has undertaken over 100 organisational, cultural, functional, and process reviews across the public and private sectors. Those reviews have included high profile functions such as the Queensland Parliament, the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, the Marine Pilot Stations of Qld, and the Finance Functions of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Lutheran Community Care.

Christina is very familiar with universities having engaged with higher education as an executive employee, an external consultant, a lecturer, a researcher, and a corporate educator. Her passion for education at all levels is also reflected in her Board governance roles with C&K, the PMSA, and CSIA. Christina's PhD explored why and how leaders use coaching techniques in the workplace.

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### *\*Important Notices*

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## 1. Introduction and Background

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- 1.1 Duchesne College (**Duchesne**) is a Brisbane based women's Catholic residential college within the University of Queensland. With a proud 85-year history of supporting students in their transition from formal education to the professional world, Duchesne's website states:

*Duchesne College has a rich history shaped by so many wise women and men and has been beautifully influenced by the values of the Society of the Sacred Heart.*

*At the direct wish of His Grace, Archbishop James Duhig, Duchesne College was founded in March 1937. He invited the Society of the Sacred Heart, a religious order founded in France in 1800 by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, to take responsibility for the first university college for Catholic women in Queensland. Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat was a firm believer in educating young women.*

*Archbishop Duhig named the College after a valiant Frenchwoman, Blessed (now Saint) Rose Philippine Duchesne, who was instrumental in bringing the Society of the Sacred Heart to America from France in 1818.*

- 1.2 Originally housed within the Stuartholme convent at Toowong, a boarding school for girls also operated by the Society of the Sacred Heart, Duchesne moved to its present location in 1959. There is still a strong representation of former Stuartholme students amongst the College population.

- 1.3 The relationship with the Society of the Sacred Heart is reflected in several ways in the Constitution of Duchesne College, which sets out a range of important governance matters. According to its Constitution, Duchesne was incorporated as a separate legal entity in 1949 by 'Letters Patent'<sup>1</sup>, as an affiliated College of the University of Queensland, standing on land held by *The Corporation of the Trustees of the Roman Catholic University Colleges* under a Deed of Trust<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, Clause 4 explicitly states as follows in relation to the 'Mission' of the College:

*The Council is responsible to ensure that at all times the College is faithful to and conducted in accordance with the Mission, Values and Philosophy of the Society of the Sacred Heart.*

- 1.4 Clause 5 of the Constitution goes on to state the 'Objects' of the College as follows:

*The Objects of the College are:*

- (a) to afford to women university students the advantages of residence in a Catholic, residential, educational, institution affiliated with The University of Queensland, and to provide an atmosphere conducive to living a full Christian life in an academic setting; and*
- (b) to provide opportunities for faith development and a deeper engagement with the Catholic faith.*

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<sup>1</sup> Letters Patent were a common form of separate incorporation used in Queensland (and elsewhere) by charitable organisations, particularly those operating under the auspices of a Church, before the advent in Australia of the State-based legislation for incorporation of charitable associations which, in Queensland's case, occurred in 1981 and under which, for example, the Duchesne College Students Club is incorporated.

<sup>2</sup> See the definition of 'College' contained in clause 1 of the Constitution of Duchesne College.

- 1.5 The College admits both resident students and non-resident (Associate) students in keeping with Clause 8 of the Constitution. As at the close of the review year (2022) the enrolled numbers were:

2022 (Sem 2)	Residents	Associates
1st Year	112	26
2nd Year	68	7
3rd Year	29	3
4th Year	0	1
5th Year	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	210	37

- 1.6 There is a palpable respect amongst students and staff of the College for its foundations and religious affiliation. Students at the College commonly are aware of, and explicitly express respect for, Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat and some proudly reference their role in ensuring fitting commemoration of the Patron Saint is ongoing within the life of the College.
- 1.7 In terms of the governance of Duchesne, the Constitution provides in clause 9 that the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane ultimately holds the overarching traditional and ceremonial governance role of Visitor. Such a role is not uncommon amongst Catholic and other Christian schools and colleges in Australia although its powers are rarely exercised today. The responsibilities and powers of the Archbishop as Visitor are designated by Catholic Canon Law.
- 1.8 In practical terms, the governance of the College day to day rests with the College Council. Under clause 10 of Duchesne's Constitution the Council comprises anywhere between nine and a potential unwieldy 20 members, being:
- (a) Four Ex Officios (being three 'ex officio' employees of the College (the Head and two Deputy Heads) and the President of the Duchesne Students Club);
  - (b) 'Up to three' representatives of each of the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Bishops of Queensland;
  - (c) Between six and ten others elected by the Council; and
  - (d) A representative of the University of Qld Senate.
- 1.9 We note from the Duchesne website that the Council presently comprises 13 members including the Ex Officios.
- 1.10 Elizabeth Jameson and Christina Turner (**the Reviewers**) were engaged by the Council of Duchesne College at the University of Queensland in July 2022 to conduct a review of the culture of the College.
- 1.11 The purpose of the review as agreed at the outset was for a holistic and forward-looking consultation with students and other key Duchesne stakeholders, to help identify the preferred attributes of a strong positive culture for Duchesne and so to inform the Council and the Head of College's evident commitment to fostering such a culture. It is notable that given the breadth of the review, both in scope and timing, many of the matters observed in this Report have, to our knowledge, already begun to be addressed by the College during its course. Indeed, some of the matters raised by students and staff engaged in the process were doubtless top of mind for them because of discussions then occurring.

- 1.12 The Reviewers also took note of a number of published reports on other narrower and special purpose reviews into University Colleges around Australia over recent years. Negative aspects of the culture of higher education residential colleges came under the spotlight in 2016 with the instigation of Universities' Australia *Respect. Now. Always.* initiative which aimed to prevent sexual violence in university communities and improve how universities respond to and support those who have been affected<sup>3</sup>. To that effect, Universities Australia engaged the Australian Human Rights Commission who in 2017, produced their landmark report, *Change the Course*. This report not only highlighted the issues directly related to sexual assault and sexual harassment, but also looked at the broader issues of culture in higher education which give rise to or are impacted by issues of culture.
- 1.13 One of the key recommendations arising from the *Change the Course* report was directly related to residential colleges and university residences which identified student residences as a particularly high-risk environment. It recommended that specific steps to improve the culture within residential colleges and university residences, with a particular focus on risk management. While this was necessarily taken into consideration in conducting this review as it deals with only one dimension of culture, it does not represent the sum total of the cultural considerations that informed the review and this resulting Report.
- 1.14 To ensure therefore that we gained a comprehensive and deep understanding of the culture that underpins Duchesne College, the review took a multi-pronged and iterative approach. It also comprised a broad and deep 'Listening' phase through consultation primarily with staff and students to gain an understanding first of the 'current state' of the culture of the College.
- 1.15 The 'Listening' phases of the project comprised:
- (a) Interviews with the Chair of the Council, the Head of College and then 2022 Student Club President;
  - (b) Interviews with five members of the Head of College's Senior Leadership Team and staff;
  - (c) Separate Focus Groups were conducted but very poorly attended (between one and three students attending) for each of the following stakeholder groups:
    - (i) Resident Leaders
    - (ii) First Years
    - (iii) Second Years
    - (iv) Third Years
  - (d) A Focus Group comprising all of the members of the College Council (other than the four Ex Officios) was also conducted;
  - (e) A comprehensive survey circulated to 241 resident and associate students (out of the total 247<sup>4</sup> enrolled with the College) of which 76 completed the survey, comprising 37 First Year students, 26 Second Year students and 13 Third Year students, giving a pleasing statistically valid response rate of 32%.
  - (f) Whilst the survey feedback was extremely helpful, in view of the low student turnout for the Student Focus Groups as mentioned above, the Consultants sought more student feedback through the conduct of an interactive workshop in relation

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<sup>3</sup> See Universities Australia at <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/project/respect-now-always/>

<sup>4</sup> The difference between the College's total enrolment of 248 students and the 241 surveys sent is the result of a small number of email addresses that were not provided to the Reviewers.

to the emerging themes of the review in a three hour session with the 2023 student leadership cohort (comprising both the new Student Club Executive and newly appointed Resident Leaders for 2023) at their in-house leadership conference in late November 2022, with no members of the Staff Executive Team present.

- 1.16 The Reviewers were unsure how to interpret the low turnout to the student Focus Groups (see paragraph 1.15(c) above), questioning whether there may be some disengagement from the review amongst students. This was curious given the high response rate to the survey as mentioned above and the strength of the negative feelings expressed by a sizeable minority (38%) of the respondents to the survey (see also paragraph 2.17). However, by the end of the 'Listening' phase, the Reviewers detected a sense of disconnection between the College Leadership Team and parts of the student body about a range of things leading to an 'us and them' culture for some, helping in part to explain the poor student turnout to the Focus Groups. Indeed, there were high levels of scepticism for some about the point of the culture review. This led some to question the independence of the Reviewers albeit this appears to have been satisfactorily answered when raised resulting in helpfully frank and constructive conversations with all of the participating students. For many other students - the majority - they express contentment with the culture and operation of the College and perhaps saw little need to participate.
- 1.17 The 76 respondents to the survey were spread across year groups, roughly in proportion to the relative sizes of the year groups. In other words, First Years were approximately 53% of the enrolled students at the College and this group made up 49% of the responses; Second Years comprised roughly 32% of the student population and made up 34% of the responses; Third Years represent around 13% of the student population and made up 17% of the responses.
- 1.18 Of those responding to the survey, 79% reported that they were the first in their immediate family to attend the College. Of those with previous family members at the College, only 4% of the total respondents reported a parent as having attended the College and 18% reported a parent attending a University College other than Duchesne. Of the respondents, 21% reported an elder sibling or close relation, such as a cousin, as having previously attended the College and 32% reported an elder sibling or cousin having attended a University College other than Duchesne.
- 1.19 In addition to the Listening Phase we reviewed a number of 'artefacts' that have a connection with the College culture. This included a range of governance and management policies, the Council's charter and a range of associated documents relating to the governance of the College. A number of key policies directly affecting students are clearly set out in the Student Handbook. This includes the Student Code of Conduct as well as policies specifically relating to the responsible consumption of alcohol, the prohibition of the illegal drug use and the channels open to students to provide them support and field their grievances and complaints.
- 1.20 We noted a good level of maturity in the governance and management policy suite. However, this review did not amount to an audit of the policy suite either for their compliance with the law or to identify the level of compliance with them within the College. Nonetheless, some of the observations in this Report touch on aspects of those policies which may require greater monitoring into the future to ensure compliance with them. We have sought to indicate this where possible.

1.21 The Key to Expressions used in this Report is set out below:

- (a) **Associate:** means a non-resident member of the College, with no voting rights as a member of the Duchesne Student Club;
- (b) **Blue Hair Day:** means an annual day on which some students, mainly with blonde hair, are nominated by other students to dye their hair blue;
- (c) **College or Duchesne:** means Duchesne College within the University of Queensland;
- (d) **College Leadership Team or CLT:** the executive staff of the College, comprising the Head of College, Deputy Heads of College and other senior employees of the College reporting to the Head of College;
- (e) **Council or College Council:** means the governing body of the College under and pursuant to the constitution of the College;
- (f) **Ex Officios:** means the four persons who, at any given time, by virtue of their office, are members of the College Council (see this Report paragraph 1.8(a))
- (g) **Eyebrow Tracks:** means a practice whereby some students shave a track into their eyebrows;
- (h) **Freshers:** first year students at the College;
- (i) **Head of College:** means the person from time to time employed by the College Council to occupy the highest executive role within the College;
- (j) **Mums and Dads:** means the student-promulgated support mechanism, in the nature of a 'buddy system', whereby College Freshers are assigned a 'Mum' (one of the Resident Leaders) and a 'Dad' (one of the Student Club Executive) based on the allocation of Fresher rooms;
- (k) **Resident Leaders or RLs:** These are students who are resident at the College, predominantly in their second year of tertiary studies, although some are in their third year of tertiary studies;
- (l) **Reviewers:** Elizabeth Jameson and Christina Turner, the authors of this Report, whose short biographies appear at the beginning of this Report;
- (m) **Student/s:** means except where the context provides otherwise, any or all student/s, whether resident or non-resident Associates, enrolled at Duchesne College;
- (n) **Student Club or Duchesne Student Club:** a separately incorporated association comprising the current resident students of Duchesne College as voting members, and Associates as non-voting members;
- (o) **Student Club Executive:** The student-elected executive of the Student Club headed up by the Student Club President and comprising resident students who are predominantly in their third year of tertiary studies;
- (p) **Student Leadership Team or SLT:** The combined group of Student Club Executive and Resident Leaders;
- (q) **Student Handbook:** The published handbook for the College issued to students each year and available on the website, setting out the expectations of students and the supports provided to them as a resident of the College.



## 2. Summarising Duchesne's Culture

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- 2.1 Organisational culture is variously defined by a range of sources and authorities. For instance, according to one source, culture accounts for the values, beliefs and practices which distinguish one group of people or organisations from each other.<sup>5</sup> In one recognised model (Deal and Kennedy, 1982) organisational culture is quite simply described as “the way things are done around here” as a function of six connected organisational elements: history, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, stories, heroic figures and the cultural network.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.2 In the interviews, focus groups and the student survey, the Reviewers asked those who participated in the process what they understood by the term “culture” in the context of a review like this. Predictably, responses varied. They were however overwhelmingly consistent with the idea of culture as ‘the way things are done around here’.
- I see culture as the environment within, and how people and their behaviour shape this environment.*

**Student**
- 2.3 Throughout the review, we detected a sense of scepticism amongst students about the review itself and some common points of dissatisfaction and negativity about Duchesne’s “culture”. This was perhaps best articulated by one student who responded to a survey question about culture, saying that Duchesne “currently...does not have a great deal of culture”. And going on to say that whilst “...it is a good idea the college is looking into the culture” and it “...would be nice to think the admin and the students were on the same page, but realistically this is not possible.”
- 2.4 The manifestations of culture are found in a variety of things: the behaviours, practices, traditions and recognised cultural ‘artefacts’ of the College. Hence in the review, and this Report, the Reviewers have identified, considered and tested with stakeholders the attitudes of those within the College, mainly students and staff, to those behaviours, practices, traditions and artefacts.
- 2.5 Drawing on the more detailed findings explored in the remaining Chapters of this Report, several high level observations can be made, both positive and adverse, about the current state of the College culture. Those observations are set out in this Chapter 2.

### Positive Aspects of Duchesne Culture

- 2.6 The decision of the Head of College, with the support of the College Council, to conduct a culture review itself speaks of a culture that is willing to examine itself and to strive to improve. This willingness was also supported by the members of the CLT. This is a commendable starting point for considering the culture of Duchesne.
- 2.7 It is also notable that given the breadth of the review, both in scope and timing, many of the matters observed in this Report have, to our knowledge, already begun to be addressed by the College during its course. Indeed, some of the matters raised by students and staff engaged in the process were doubtless top of mind for them because of discussions then occurring. It speaks well of a culture that not only willingly reviews itself but also does not await an external Report to start addressing matters as they are raised.

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<sup>5</sup> Giorgi, S., Lockwood, C., & Glynn, M. (2015) The Many Faces of Culture: Making Sense of 30 Years of Research on Culture in Organization Studies, The Academy of Management Annals, 9:1, 1-54, DOI: [10.1080/19416520.2015.1007645](https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2015.1007645)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR\\_86.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_86.htm)

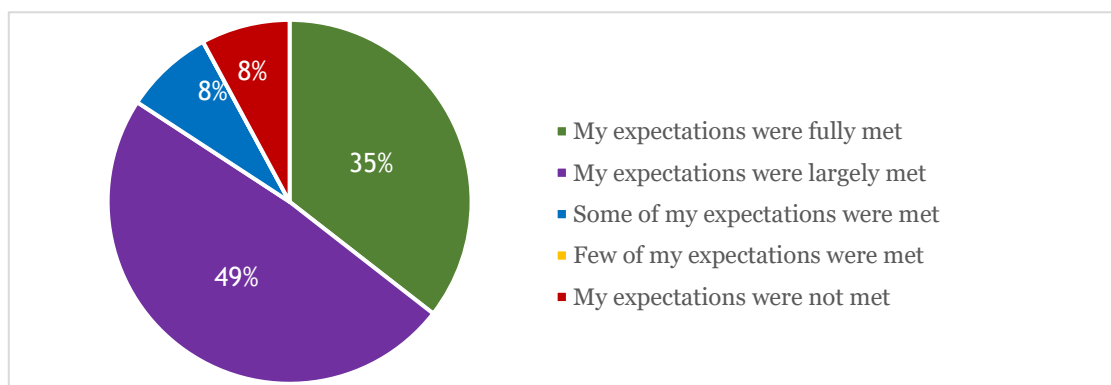
- 2.8 Across both student and staff participating in the process, we heard an evident respect for the connection with the Catholic Church and in particular with the Society of the Sacred Heart and its Founder, Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat. Indeed, we heard views expressed by some staff and students that it was desirable that there be more regular celebration and acknowledgement of this relationship, and in particular of the Sacred Heart Values. The Sacred Heart Values explicitly resonated positively with those participating in the review to a higher degree than did the published Values of the College. This is explored further in Chapter 4.
- 2.9 One question in the survey asked students to describe the culture of Duchesne. An almost two-thirds majority of responses (62%) expressed anything from general satisfaction to very warm, positive feelings for the culture of the College. A sense of ‘sisterhood’ and ‘never leaving a Duch girl behind’ were two of the most commonly expressed positive sentiments. These are recognised by staff and students alike as two of the defining characteristics - or at least informal mantras - of Duchesne. These are largely student driven concepts, rather than being driven by the College’s formally adopted Values.
- Duchesne culture involves sisterhood, inclusivity and kindness...we never leave a duch girl behind*  
**Student**
- 2.10 A range of other positive words were also commonly used in response to this question, and in the focus groups. These included descriptions like ‘warm and welcoming’, ‘friendly’, ‘supportive’ and ‘inclusive’ were also commonly used by those holding positive views about Duchesne’s culture. Nonetheless, many students also recognise that these positive sentiments may not always be felt by everyone all the time and that whilst, for them, a good culture it could also be better. This aligns well with the commitment of the Head of College and CLT to seek to improve the culture (see paragraph 2.6).
- Duchesne’s culture is one of support and encouragement. From the moment I came to this College I felt welcomed by everyone.*  
**Student**
- 2.11 Many students speak with pride and affection about the important role played by the student-promulgated support mechanism of each of the Freshers being assigned a ‘Mum’ (one of the Resident Leaders) and a ‘Dad’ (one of the Student Club Executive) based on the allocation of Fresher rooms. Its origins unclear to the Reviewers, this is a type of ‘buddy system’ which, according to students, helps ensure new students are quickly integrated into College life and ‘not left behind’. We comment later on some diversity and inclusivity implications of the practice.
- 2.12 In respect of diversity and inclusivity, there is a palpable appetite in the College Leadership Team in particular to foster greater diversity and genuine inclusivity of students with backgrounds and characteristics from the majority. At present there is a very small proportion of the student body (less than 5%) coming from outside Queensland and a large pool of students drawn from a small number of Queensland Catholic girls’ schools. However, interestingly some of the most positive comments about the strength of becoming part of the ‘sisterhood’ came from students who had not attended one of these schools or indeed an ‘all girls’ school. We also noted a broad range of quite different fields of study amongst students, with a resultant diversity of thinking styles.
- 2.13 Perhaps having both positive and negative cultural implications for the College, the review revealed that, relative to some other university colleges in Australia, there are very few ‘initiation’ and/or ‘belonging’ traditions amongst the students. The positive aspect of this is that some of the traditions of other university colleges that can quickly and easily lead or

amount to ‘hazing’<sup>7</sup> are uncommon at Duchesne. In particular, we did not hear of any traditions involving the use of alcohol of the kind correlated in the *Change the Course Report* with extremely high levels of risk of sexual assault and other harmful activities.

- 2.14 Many participants in the process noted a high level of turmoil for students over recent years, with the current Head of College being the fourth person in the role in six-and-a-half years, and Covid lockdowns severely impacting College life for the now second and third year students. There is an evident sense of optimism, especially amongst staff, that greater stability with the renewed College Leadership Team will continue to assist in settling the cultural life of the College.

### Negative Aspects of Duchesne Culture

- 2.15 Perhaps the most obvious negative aspect of the Duchesne culture is the apparent disconnect between different parts of the College community. This sense was gained from many participants in the process across different year groups (students) and different roles (staff and students).
- 2.16 One member of the College Leadership Team remarked that the culture of Duchesne was most usefully thought of like ‘onion rings’ - with students generally happy with their own immediate ‘ring’ (their room and their friends) but moving out to the separate ‘rings’ of the Student Club Executive, the Resident Leaders and the College Leadership Team, there is something of a disconnect between the ‘rings’. This disconnect is explored in more detail in Chapter 3.
- 2.17 In the survey, when asked to describe the culture of the College, a substantial minority of over one-third (38%) of the student responses expressed disappointment or generally negative feelings<sup>8</sup>. Based on other similar college and organisational reviews, we consider this quite a high level of negativity. We distinguish feelings of ‘disappointment’ which arise from pre-College expectations not being met) from general ‘negative’ feelings relating more to dissatisfaction with such matters as College policies/rules, service standards (food, parking etc) and the student/staff relationship.
- 2.18 We therefore asked specifically the extent to which Duchesne met the students’ expectations prior to attending College. The results showed just under three-quarters of respondents felt their expectations were largely or wholly met leaving just over one-quarter for whom they were not or only partially met:



<sup>7</sup> Hazing’ is referenced in the *Change the Course Report* published in 2017 by the Australian Human Rights Commission at p79, based on the prior report into sexual abuse in the Australian Defence Force, as the ‘inappropriate humiliation and degradation of others to produce a stressful environment’ and which includes behaviours such as ‘harassment, bullying, physical abuse, degradation, forced alcohol consumption and sleep deprivation’

<sup>8</sup> For an outline of the 62% positive responses to the survey in this regard see paragraph 2.9

2.19 In many instances of feelings of disappointment or negativity, albeit held by a minority of students, they were frequently quite strongly expressed, with the most commonly expressed negative view relating to the strictness of College rules (albeit mostly accepting of the importance of having rules for the protection of all) and the resulting limitations on the empowerment of students to take responsibility, as the young adults they are. The example given several times were the rules around consumption of alcohol on College grounds and the strictness of penalties for parking infringements amongst others. This view, whether perception or reality, is extremely strong and clouds much else for many of those students who have negative feelings about Duchesne and its culture.

*"I thought college would have been more of an adult environment where we could do what we wanted as adults...For example alcohol. We are all adults here and should be able to drink alcohol...to a morally acceptable state...I don't feel as though we are treated like adults at all."*

**Student**

2.20 For others however, in roughly equal numbers with those citing the desire for more freedom around the use of alcohol) there is a converse problem of far too much drinking, with one respondent stating that they "thought there would be less drinking based events that many would attend" and also that they "thought the religious side of Duchesne would be greater." Yet another commented on the disrespect paid to other students by those who regularly come home very late and extremely drunk, negatively impacting those around them. We did observe, however, based on the sheer frequency and intensity of comments from staff and students, that the level of alcohol consumption and resulting damage to property and other harmful consequences within the College, does not appear to be as acute as in some other university colleges.

2.21 On other issues, a relatively small number of comments highlight the difficulty for those who do not fit the demographic majority. Naturally this is only from a small number of respondents because those not fitting the demographic majority are very small in number. Comments fielded in this category included references to the lack of diversity in terms of sheer numbers within the student population coming from different demographic groups but also, more importantly, in terms of real and meaningful respect for difference.

2.22 We commented earlier in a positive sense on less evident heavy alcohol-use-based traditions at Duchesne (see paragraph 2.13 above) and so lower chances of 'hazing' incidents than may be so at other university colleges based on publicly available national data<sup>9</sup>. That said, there are a small number of practices or (seen by the students as 'traditions') such as 'Blue Hair Day' and 'Eyebrow Tracks' that drew comment from a small number of respondents in relation to their capacity to humiliate students into participation. Moreover, and conversely, some students commented negatively on the lack of traditions at the College that engender a sense of community and belonging by comparison with other university colleges.

2.23 The Reviewers also heard quite frequently, especially from younger students, about a level of disconnection between year groups that is seen as undesirable to building a strong sense of community. Many participants in the review cited that the relationships between each Fresher and their own 'Mum' and/or 'Dad'<sup>10</sup> was excellent but otherwise there was little interaction outside of those relationships between year groups.

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 7 for reference especially to the 2017 *Change the Course Report* published by the Australian Human Rights Commission

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 3, paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22, for a full explanation of the concept of 'Mums and Dads' at the College and some of its cultural implications.

- 2.24 Interestingly, one of the most common complaints referenced in the survey responses and the student focus groups was the food provided by the College. Whilst on its face this is clearly an operational matter rather than a cultural one, the very fact that it was such a dominant and unprompted theme for students in a culture review raises some interesting considerations. The complaints about the food varied from quality to the impact on diversity and inclusivity. Over a quarter of the student survey responses referred, unprompted, in one context or another to the consistently poor quality and variety of food. Furthermore, in the context of a comment on diversity and inclusivity, one student commented on the lack of suitable foods for different cultural requirements and the offensiveness of presenting “a watery soup puree as curry”.
- 2.25 We cannot and do not, of course, make any assessment of the validity or otherwise of criticisms of the College catering. However, it is notable in the cultural context in which students frequently raised it, namely as an example of what a sizeable minority of those participating in the review reported as feeling that they are not treated like the adults they are, are not heard when they complain or even speak up and/or are ‘fobbed’ off with a quick answer and no follow-through when they do so.
- 2.26 In a similar vein, a smaller but notable number of dissatisfied comments from students in survey responses and focus groups related to the recent introduction of a substantial new fee for student parking on site and the CLT more strictly enforcing rules about parking. Again, we mention this not in the context of whether these are operationally appropriate decisions, but as a further example cited by some students that their complaints about the equity and/or impact of decisions go unheard or unanswered.
- 2.27 Finally, whilst the students generally treat College facilities well, a very common problem referenced to us by both students and staff was that of students taking/losing College items - particularly cutlery and crockery - and suggestions of some stockpiling items for later use. Whatever the causes and effects of this, it is difficult in this context not to interpret this culturally as reflecting a level of disrespect for the College for some students in an environment where almost all those participating in the review profess a love of their College and its ‘sisterhood’ and a desire only for it to be better.

### 3. Students, Staff, Council and Culture

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- 3.1 Organisational culture, fairly self-evidently, begins and ends with people.
- 3.2 As mentioned earlier (see paragraph 2.15), this review revealed an apparent “disconnect” between different parts of the College community. This was detected from the responses and comments across students in different year groups and staff and students in different roles.
- 3.3 In this chapter, using the analogy of one member of the CLT, thinking about the culture of Duchesne like the layers of an onion, we will peel back those layers to understand how this disconnect manifests. We will start with the students at the heart of the onion and then move out through the outer ‘protective layers’ - the Student Club Executive, Resident Leaders, College Leadership Team and College Council.
- 3.4 A useful reflection during a joint meeting of the Council, the CLT and the SLT to discuss the emergent themes as they arose out of the review, was that this analogy is accurate and helpful. One observation made by a Council member during this discussion was that the Council regards the College’s role as being to help students manage this most important transitional period of their lives and careers. In doing so, it was observed, it can be difficult to achieve “meaningful conversation circles” and the student leaders were invited by the Council, and even urged by them, to feel free to come to these “conversation circles” openly and to urge the rest of the student body to do so also. This, we suggest, is an important step in ensuring stronger “connection” between the rings of the onion.

#### Separation between Year Groups and Residents/Associates

- 3.5 Perhaps the clearest cultural improvement opportunity observed at the student level, especially amongst Freshers, is the desirability of breaking down the separation between year groups and improving the connections between resident students and non-resident Associates. Many students commented on the separation between year groups and expressed the desire for this to change in order to create a stronger sense of community. It was however clear that students do not want this to be a ‘forced’ occurrence through required attendance at events but a genuine breaking down of the separation.
- 3.6 The most obvious symbol of this separation is the allocation of rooms so that students are largely in their year groups. This is not an uncommon practice within university colleges and is not in and of itself surprising or concerning. However, we raise for consideration whether this means other measures should be considered by the CLT in consultation with the SLT to tackle the sense of separation it creates.
- 3.7 Albeit an isolated comment, one student remarked that resident students can be quite dismissive and exclusionary of non-resident associates. We also noted some important symbols of the difference between the resident students and non-resident associates. For instance, the Constitution of the Duchesne Student Club excludes Associates from voting at meetings of the Student Club and provides them no seat or voice at the Student Club Executive level. Whilst the Student Club is a separately incorporated association and it is for the voting resident student members of it to decide such matters, if there is a desire to build a larger and/or more engaged body of non-resident Associates, some steps forward could be achieved, for example, by introducing some matters in respect of which Associates also have voting rights and also adding, say, one or two Associate seats on the Student Club Executive.

### Student Leadership Team

- 3.8 The next two layers of the onion - the Student Club Executive and the Resident Leaders - together form the Student Leadership Team. Separately these two groups discharge quite different functions.
- 3.9 The Student Club is separately incorporated as an incorporated association and enjoys a high level of respect amongst students across years. Its student-representative roles and responsibilities are very clearly set out in the Duchesne Student Club Constitution. The Student Club Executive, that governs it, comprises solely resident student members (as opposed to non-resident associates) and is predominantly third year students, with one 2<sup>nd</sup> year representative seat.
- 3.10 Under the Constitution for Duchesne College itself (as opposed to the Duchesne Student Club Constitution), the President of the Student Club has a full voting 'ex officio' seat at the College Council. In our experience having a seat at the College Council is an excellent way to encourage a strong connection between the College and the student body, effectively giving it a voice and a vote at the governance table. However, it appeared from this review that the relationship between the College and the Student Club Executive could be strengthened to ensure that the Student Club provides a more meaningful channel by which students are, and feel, heard by the College.
- 3.11 We also note that, especially given the appetite amongst younger students to break down the separation between year groups (see paragraph 3.5), and given our comments in paragraph 3.6 about ways to build a more engaged community of Associates, the Student Club could consider creating a small number of seats at the Student Club Executive for both First Years and Associates and/or regular dedicated forums for those groups to meet with the Executive.
- 3.12 In relation to Resident Leaders, this group occupies a very different role from the Student Club Executive. As with many of the university residential colleges, some of the informal pastoral care for students is undertaken by these students who receive a reduction in their fees in return for becoming a Resident Leader.
- 3.13 At Duchesne, the RLs are predominantly Second Years selected by the CLT based on a rigorous application process and assessment against explicit criteria. They are rostered to be on call to attend to student colleague issues from 8pm to 8am. While RLs consider it an honour to be nominated for this role, some find the demands from other students to provide advice and comfort be quite daunting and even "relentless", especially when the RLs themselves have the pressure of assignments and exams. They relayed that the need to attend students occurred mostly in the first half of the first semester and issues related largely to homesickness, being locked out, fall outs in friendships, break ups with boyfriends, and on occasion, what they referred to as "mental health issues". RLs report that they also support sport and culture activities as well as various wellbeing activities, and one described this as a "very heavy workload" and another as a "thankless task" and yet another as "unpaid extracurricular event organisers".
- 3.14 This group is regarded by the College Council and College Leadership Team as extremely important part of the life of the College. They support and assist the CLT as required and, in return, are provided with leadership training and development and a reduction to their enrolment fees. However, it appears that more work could be done to work with the RLs to clarify and agree the reasonable boundaries of the role, and set them out in the RL role description, as well as understanding better how it interfaces with that of the Student Club Executive.
- 3.15 As set out in the table in paragraph 1.5, Freshers comprise by far the largest group in College. This is not unusual in a university college, but as shown in the table, the drop in enrolment numbers between first and second year students and then again into third year is quite dramatic.

This raises the question whether the College could do more to be of relevance and appeal to more older students for a more diverse and stimulating living and academic environment for all.

- 3.16 We heard a handful of instances of students feeling that they would stay on beyond first year only if they were successful in gaining an RL role in second year, with its attendant reduction in fees, and then a Student Club Executive role in third year given the leadership opportunity it affords. Whilst we were unable to verify whether this is a widespread attitude, it suggests that more could be done to enhance the experience for students beyond first year.

### **Student/Staff Relationship**

- 3.17 The current Head of College arrived at the College towards the end of the 2020 academic year following a disruptive period of several years and several Heads of College, including a period of over six months in which the Chair of the College Council (a former Stuartholme Principal) had stepped in to act after the unexpected loss of the then Head of College. Alongside these changes there was a significant turnover within the wider College Leadership Team. The CLT is therefore still in the process of coming together fully as a team which has been interrupted by the impacts of Covid over recent years.
- 3.18 Since her appointment, the Head of College has, with the full support of the Council, driven a very clear focus on further improving the culture of the College, through such things as engaging in this review. There is an evident willingness to tackle, with the students, the less desirable aspects of College culture which inevitably such a review would include.
- 3.19 The Head of College has expressed the desire to modernise a range of aspects of the operation of the College, supported by her CLT. Relevantly, with the full support of the College Council, the Head of College when newly in the role brought the fresh perspectives of one who has significant experience in the wider field of education but not of university colleges and so is not captive of some of the commonly accepted practices within them. This has meant for some firm decisions regarded by the students as controversial or in a negative light. Examples of this cited to us by students are decisions relating to rules restricting the consumption of alcohol on College grounds and the introduction of material parking fees for College students.
- 3.20 Students commonly refer to the very experienced and senior staff comprising the CLT in a somewhat dismissive and even, though no doubt unintended, disparaging manner as “Admin”. The use of this term appears rather to be symptomatic of the fact that the students do not have a deep knowledge or appreciation of the complexity of the role of the CLT nor of their extensive experience and careers in education, university colleges and/or corporate environments and their commonly deep commitment to the College and the wellbeing of its students. It is to be expected that continuing to enhance this understanding by students and the regard in which they hold the College Leadership Team would serve to help build a stronger relationship of mutual respect for the good of the College and its students.
- 3.21 More apparently negatively impacting the College experience for students (and staff) is the belief quite strongly held by many - but certainly not all - students that they are not treated as the legal adults they are. This is cited by a small number of students in relation to the desire to more freely consume alcohol on College grounds and to be responsible for themselves in doing so but more commonly was cited in relation to a desire to be heard and to be a part of mature adult conversations with the CLT and Head of College about College policies and decisions. Other examples of students not feeling heard are outlined earlier at paragraphs 2.24 (quality, variety and consistency of food) to 2.26 (parking charges and enforcement).



- 3.22 The Reviewers witnessed firsthand examples of the CLT/Head of College seeking genuine student-input to key College policies through the Student Leadership Team. However several students perceived that their input was not always genuinely sought and often was ignored once received. Some students even put some of the less desirable (for them) decisions of CLT down to a perception that members of CLT do not appreciate that their workplace is the students' home and that this should be prioritised. Specifically, towards the end of the review, a major renovation of the offices occupied by staff was underway which a number of students found difficult to understand in light of other perceived pressing priorities for them required in the general improvement of student accommodation.
- 3.23 In summary, student perceptions of the relationship with CLT accounts for a large part of the more strongly held negative student sentiments expressed<sup>11</sup>. Curiously, the strength of these negative perceptions conflicts with the obvious contentment of the 62% majority and what appeared to us to be a genuine desire by the Head of College and the College Leadership Team for a mature two-way relationship with students. This suggests a critical student/staff engagement disconnect requiring a joint approach by CLT and SLT together to ensure students are more fully engaged in the decisions - and reasons for decisions - made at the College and thus for better student experience.

*"...it would be beneficial to break down the barriers between administration and students...it should be seen as adults talking to adults not adults controlling students."*

**Student**

### College Council

- 3.24 At the Council level, there is an excellent mix of relevant experience, skills and capabilities amongst the Council, including two out of nine being past students. All of the Council members appear to have a high level of respect for what the College does and represents but also recognise some of the challenges of managing the risks associated with college life generally (as outlined in other parts of this Report).
- 3.25 Like most voluntary governing bodies there is a very high level of passion and commitment but busy careers and lives can mean for less time to spend in and around the College than is ideal. Based on our experience of the challenges of governance oversight of organisations of this kind, having responsibility for resident young adults, it is critical for the Council regularly to review the extent to which its members engage in the life of the College to ensure that they base their decisions on current knowledge, from observable behaviour in and around the College. Whilst the Reviewers were not made aware of any specific deficiency in this regard, it is important for the Council to keep under constant review. This is especially important given the (unsurprising) number of safety and wellbeing risks giving rise to our observations in Chapter 5 of this Report.
- 3.26 As mentioned in paragraph 1.20, we observed a quite mature set of governance policies but, given the nature of the review, we did not conduct a full audit of their compliance with the law nor of the extent of compliance by staff and/or students with them or of the manner in which the Council assures itself of compliance with them. Nonetheless, the policy suite sets out clear and observable expectations of students about their conduct and how it is to be managed in the event of non-compliance.

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<sup>11</sup> See paragraph 2.17 in relation to the 38% negative views of the Duchesne culture

**Recommendations on College People Matters**

1. **Resident Leaders:** The CLT should work with the 2023 RL cohort to review the role description for the Resident Leaders, clarifying their role and objectives in relation to the College Leadership Team and the Student Club Executive and include in it an explicit role in relation to the enhancement of a positive College Culture.
2. **Student Club:** The CLT should work with the 2023 Student Club Executive to identify ways in which the Student Club formally (e.g. through its Constitutional provisions relating to voting rights and representation on the Student Club Executive) and informally (e.g. through regular forums and events) could help to improve the connections between year groups and between resident and non-resident Associate members of the College.
3. **Remuneration of roles:** Council, CLT and SLT to discuss and consider and review the equitable allocation of College-provided support and/or remuneration to the student leader positions to fairly support and encourage the more seamless cooperation between the RLs and the Student Club Executive.
4. **Strengthen the Duchesne Conversation Circles:** CLT work closely with SLT in 2023 to develop an explicit 'Duchesne College engagement plan', identifying ways to strengthen the connections between all layers of the College community - Council, CLT, SLT, Year Group Cohorts, Resident and Associate Members and other identified stakeholder groups - including ensuring students are and feel heard on key College policy issues and providing conduits for meaningful feedback to the CLT.

## 4. College Values and The Sisterhood

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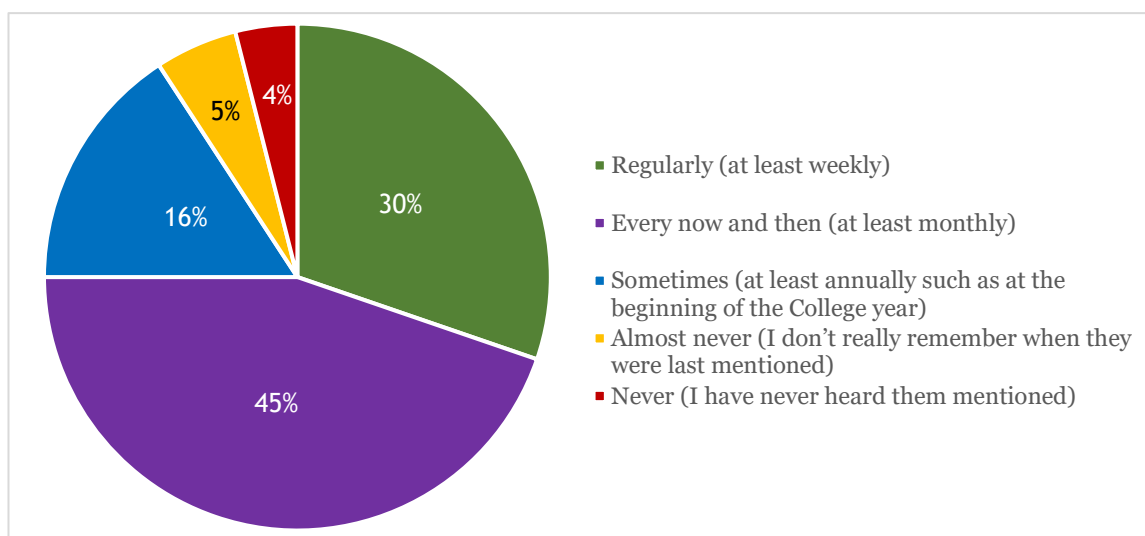
- 4.1 At the outset we sought to frame the review around the College Values. This was premised on the assumption that to be effective in shaping the culture of an organisation, its agreed Values ought to be observable in the words, actions and behaviours of its people. That approach proved to be more difficult than anticipated as there were a range of materials citing applicable 'values' and values-based goals and so varying views within the College about what does and ought to comprise the College Values.

### College Values Statements

- 4.2 During the review, we identified three different sets of College Values sharing common threads:
- (a) The 2021 Student Code of Conduct (now under review):
    - *We respect each individual within our community*
    - *We embrace diversity and inclusivity*
    - *We aim for the highest standards in all our undertakings*
    - *We value and promote charity and service*
    - *We are committed to our Vision - Inspiring personal formation within an inclusive community and an atmosphere of wise freedom*
  - (b) The Duchesne website Vision and Values page, lists the following under 'Our Values'
 

*We build upon the values of the Society of the Sacred Heart - our values define what we stand for and are our guiding principles:*

    - *We believe community is a powerful catalyst for personal growth*
    - *We are inclusive and embrace diversity*
    - *Our social awareness impels us to act*
    - *We value deep respect for intellectual life*
    - *We are guided by truth, courage and confidence.*
  - (c) Alongside them appears 'Our Sacred Heart Goals':
    - *a personal and active faith in God*
    - *a deep respect for intellectual values*
    - *building community as a Christian value*
    - *a social awareness that impels to action*
    - *personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom.*
- 4.3 Also appearing under Vision and Values on the website is an explanation of Duchesne's Crest and Motto: *Strength in the Light of Truth*. In yet another part of the website, under the heading of the 'Duchesne Advantage', and in a range of materials are three "key areas" - Live. Grow. Flourish.
- 4.4 Unsurprisingly in conversations with participants in the review, there was a level of confusion about what are the College Values that are expected to guide the acts, thoughts and deeds of students and staff at Duchesne.
- 4.5 This directly conflicted with the responses in the survey to a question about how frequently the Values are spoken about. As shown in the diagram below, three-quarters of the respondents (75%) report that the College Values are spoken about at least weekly or monthly, and the majority of the remaining 25% reporting that they are spoken about at least annually. Only 9% of respondents state that they are almost never to never spoken about.



- 4.6 It was the conclusion of the Reviewers that this aspect of the survey responses should be regarded as anomalous, given the very low level of recognition of the published Values amongst interviewees and focus groups. Clearly the inability of almost all interviewees and focus group participants to list the Values unprompted holds more validity than responses to a survey question which listed the Values and then asked about the frequency of their being mentioned.
- 4.7 Most commonly, when asked about what they understood to be the College Values, students were unsure but referenced the Motto (*Strength in the Light of Truth*), the key areas (*Live. Grow. Flourish.*) and/or the Sacred Heart Values. In many instances students who had attended a Sacred Heart School, or those who were friends with them, could recite all or most of the Sacred Heart Values over the Duchesne Values.
- 4.8 It would serve the College well culturally to develop a uniform set of Values, based on the shared views of students, staff and Council.

#### Student Values: The Sisterhood

- 4.9 Highest on the list of students when it comes to what they value behaviourally at Duchesne were two persistent and consistent responses - the 'sisterhood' and the associated informal motto 'never leave a Duch girl behind'. Staff also recognise these as of the highest order to the students and that they culturally drive mostly positive outcomes, although some staff and students question whether the concept of 'never leaving a Duch girl behind' is used too narrowly to mean 'looking after each other on night of drinking' and not frequently enough meaning to go the extra mile for one another in other contexts.
- 4.10 Nonetheless, the concepts are deeply important to the students and raise for us the question whether the formal Duchesne Values could be better aligned with these fervently held matters of importance to the students.
- 4.11 In relation to the importance of the 'sisterhood' we also questioned the contradiction presented by 'cliques' within the student body. Even some of those who hold Duchesne's culture in very high regard and themselves enjoy strong friendship groups and/or leadership roles acknowledge that there are 'cliques' amongst the student body. We found a small number of respondents to the survey proactively asserting that there are no cliques, but a far greater number of respondents held the view that cliques do form and should be broken down - by the student body and not the College Leadership Team - to build a truly strong sisterhood-based community.

- 4.12 When debating and settling the Values for Duchesne, these types of matters - the real meaning of Duchesne's community as a sisterhood and the multi-dimensional ways in which 'never leaving a Duch girl behind' could be better lived would be valuable conversations in the cultural life of the College.

#### Other Duchesne Values

- 4.13 In relation to the existing 'formal' Duchesne Values (by which we mean the published valued set out in paragraph 4.2), both staff and students frequently mentioned charity and service (drawn from the 2021 Code of Conduct) and 'social awareness that impels us to act' (from the Sacred Heart Values) as being a point of real difference for Duchesne students. The students themselves often acknowledged to us that this is an important value in the Sacred Heart tradition and one they think could be even more actively lived by the Duchesne student body.
- 4.14 Diversity and Inclusivity also emerged as a matter of importance to many staff and students with the observations that generally speaking this is a commendable aspiration that has not yet been achieved
- 4.15 It is clear that, for the small minority, the negative feelings of exclusion are real. This creates a vicious circle. Because a small minority feel this way and are likely to quickly self-select out, these objections might be more readily dismissed by the majority of students as being of little concern or importance. For so long as people from diverse backgrounds are not visible and do not feel as welcome and respected as others this will continue to act as a deterrent for such individuals to attend the College. In other words, without more meaningful attention to inclusivity, true diversity cannot be achieve.
- 4.16 On the matter of diversity and inclusivity, from this perspective we have addressed one of the Duchesne student traditions - 'Mums and Dads' - in its own section below (see paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22 below).
- 4.17 Finally, one Sacred Heart Value frequently quoted by students in the review was that of *personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom*. This can generally be correlated with those students who held the view that the College could grant them greater freedom, coupled with personal responsibility, as explored in paragraph 3.21 above).

*"Simply choosing to prioritise people from other cultural backgrounds and ethnicity is not being diverse...It is evident that other cultures don't have the same college experience so they find it hard to relate and fit in."*

**Student**

#### 'Mums and Dads' and Duchesne Values

- 4.18 As mentioned earlier in this Report, many students speak with affection and even pride about their 'Mums' and 'Dads', or their role as such. This refers to a student-promulgated support mechanism in the nature of a 'buddy system'. It was explained to us as an example of how the students live the motto 'never leave a Duch girl behind'.
- 4.19 In this system, Freshers are assigned a 'Mum' (one of the Resident Leaders) and a 'Dad' (one of the Student Club Executive) based on the allocation of Fresher rooms. This is designed both to help new students to settle into College life and to help solve College-related problems arising throughout the year. Depending on the nature of problems encountered, the Fresher's 'Mum' or 'Dad' is frequently the first port of call for students with any sort of College-related problem.

- 4.20 This 'tradition' works well for the majority of students. Often they expressed respect, affection and/or admiration for their allocated 'Mum' and/or 'Dad' although this is obviously dependent on the chemistry between individuals concerned. Some Freshers reported that it does not always work well for everyone, depending on their 'Mum' and 'Dad'.
- 4.21 The characterisation of this system as a 'Mums and Dads' framework does not reflect College policy. It is, rather, a strongly embraced student-led tradition. It was somewhat puzzling to the Reviewers in the context of today's world in which it is no longer the case that the only accepted family unit is one in which the 'kids' are managed and presided over by a mum and a dad. Today the family unit in society, and the once stereotyped roles of women and men in it, is no longer regarded in the same way it once was. Whilst we did not encounter any student complaining about this practice, we raise the question whether it could become a deterrent - and even a hurtful and offensive one - especially for students whose family of origin does not reflect this traditional norm.
- 4.22 It is also interesting to reflect that many in the student body vocally express a stronger desire to be "treated like adults" on the one hand, and yet support the adoption of a traditional family unit framework connoting a the more senior Mum and Dad 'calling the shots' for the Fresher 'kids'.

#### Recommendations on College Values

5. **College Values:** Review and re-set the College Values with wide and deep discussion and input from students and providing clearer behavioural statements to support each one, clarifying the type of behaviour that is agreed between staff and students to be consistent or inconsistent with each Value.
6. **Diversity-based Inclusivity:** Drive staff- and student-led culture of inclusivity based on real and increased levels of diversity (rather than current form of 'inclusion' based on a narrow student demographic) through deepening conversations within the College about the barriers and enablers to improvement. To this end set modest annual targets over the coming three years to ensure real improvements in inclusion correspond with improvements in diversity.
7. **'Mums and Dads':** Charge the Student Leadership Team with exploring more contemporary models than 'Mums and Dads' for the otherwise effective buddy system within the College.

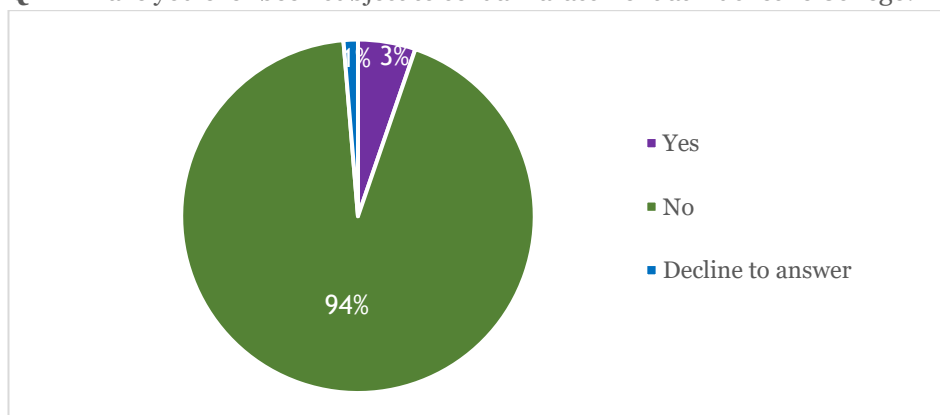
## 5. Safety and Wellbeing

- 5.1 In the overall, we observed a clear awareness by staff and students of the many safety and wellbeing issues that present themselves in a residential college for young women.
- 5.2 At a superficial and physical level, the buildings and facilities appear to be kept extremely clean and tidy. Doorways, stairwells, hallways etc were generally observed to be unobstructed by obstacles that might otherwise present hazards for staff and students. We did not hear of any views to the contrary from anyone participating in the process.
- 5.3 However, one aspect of buildings and facilities raised by a small number of students related to the wear and tear on much of the student accommodation and the need for a rolling program of upgrade work to ensure facilities are kept up to date with student and family expectations. This was particularly noted by some students in the context of major works being undertaken on the main administration area occupied by the College Leadership Team towards the end of 2022 whilst a range of what students regarded as overdue priorities for student accommodation remain unaddressed. This appeared to the Reviewers to be a good example of matters that should be subject to higher levels of student/staff engagement, debate and discussion (see Recommendation 3 in summary of Recommendations, Chapter 1).
- 5.4 We also heard that several students had raised with CLT the need for more social spaces within the College. Whilst the changes over the past 12 months to 2 years in relation to existing common and social spaces were welcomed, there is a clear appetite amongst students for further work in this respect. This too should form part of the student/staff engagement plan.

### Sexual Safety and Wellbeing

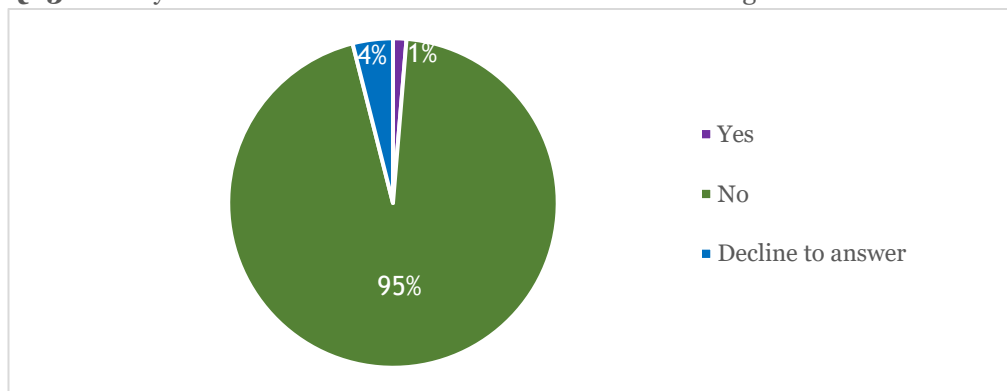
- 5.5 In terms of the safety and wellbeing issues relating to mental wellbeing, the review also took into account the matters of sexual safety and wellbeing, alcohol-related health and safety risks and student mental wellness support.
- 5.6 The benchmark we drew upon in this aspect of the review was the National Student Safety Survey (NSSS)<sup>12</sup> released in May 2022, relating to the incidence of sexual assault and other safety risks at Australian Universities and Colleges. We therefore asked Duchesne students specifically about these types of risks. Bearing in mind that we received 76 responses to the survey:

**Q22** - Have you ever been subject to sexual harassment at Duchesne College?



<sup>12</sup>See Heywood, W., Myers, P., Powell, A., Meikle, G., & Nguyen, D. (2022). National Student Safety Survey: Report on the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault among university students in 2021. Melbourne: The Social Research Centre.



**Q23 - Have you ever suffered sexual assault at Duchesne College?**

5.7 This should be considered against the data disclosed by the NSSS in relation to universities nationally and by the University of Queensland in relation to its campus specifically. Caution is required in interpreting this data given the small sample size of students in this review as against the more far-reaching nature of the NSSS. With that qualification, as shown in **Annexure A** this reveals:

- (a) a materially lower level of reported experience of sexual harassment at Duchesne than at the University of Queensland generally (3% of Duchesne students responding to the survey versus 19.3% of students at UQ<sup>13</sup>);
- (b) a slightly lower level of sexual assault at Duchesne than reported in the national figures (3% of Duchesne students responding to the survey versus 5% of students at UQ<sup>14</sup>).

5.8 Naturally, this is one matter where it is of little comfort that the figures are better than the national or University of Queensland figures if there are any students, no matter how few, knowingly exposed to any such risks. The published policies of the College make this clear.

### Reporting of Incidents

5.9 In conversations and survey responses from students, a small number of students held grave concerns for the ways in which these matters when they do occur are dealt with in terms of open conversations and real and meaningful actions. Our enquiries, which did not - and could not - amount to a full investigation of such matters, revealed that in the small number of instances where students reported concerns of this nature, the complexity of the legal rights and responsibilities surrounding privacy and confidentiality of all parties affected was not always well understood by students not directly involved. However, commendably this was a matter in relation to which students indicated they would welcome the opportunity to understand the rationale for decisions and complexity of the legal and ethical issues arising to a higher degree, especially in pursuit of living the ideal of personal responsibility with 'wise freedom'.

<sup>13</sup> For clarity we have used the figure of 19.3% for University of Queensland generally, which corresponds with students who have experienced sexual harassment since commencing at university rather than the lower figure of 11% - albeit still materially higher than the result for Duchesne - being the reported incidence of sexual harassment over the previous 12 months. We chose to adopt the figure for the incidence since starting university since we asked the Duchesne students about their experience at the College, which for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students is longer than the past 12 months.

<sup>14</sup> Again, we have used the figure for University of Queensland which students who have experienced sexual assault since commencing at university rather than the lower figure of 1.6% - which is lower than the Duchesne experience - being the reported incidence of sexual assault over the previous 12 months for the same reason as set out in Footnote 13.

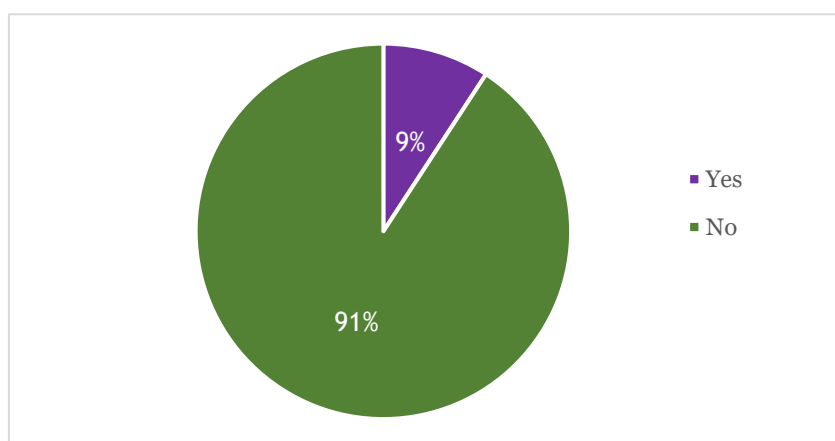


- 5.10 Perhaps of most concern, the small number of students that reported any experience of sexual harassment or assault, or even the general experience of being made to feel uncomfortable for their own safety and wellbeing at Duchesne events, frequently reported that they did not report it to the College because of perceptions of no action being taken in the past or not being sure whether it was a matter that should be reported. In most instances, the affected student would instead discuss it with a friend or another student, particularly, we heard the student's Duchesne 'Mum' (see paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22 above in relation to the Duchesne 'Mums and Dads' framework) or another Resident Leader.
- 5.11 These responses obviously raise serious safety and wellbeing risks for the directly affected students<sup>15</sup> but also for those to whom these incidents are reported. As noted from the survey results above, albeit applying caution based on such a small sample size, this suggests that in 40% of cases (extrapolating the survey results) students directly affected report such matters to a Residential Advisor. In interviews and focus groups we also heard that these types of matters may be more common than are actually reported because they often are not understood at the time as sexual harassment or assault, sometimes because of the role alcohol plays resulting in students simply talking it out with a friend.

### Alcohol Culture

- 5.12 Finally, in the national review and benchmarking exercises of recent years, the association between some of the more negative experiences of students' safety and wellbeing and the alcohol culture of universities and colleges cannot be ignored. A small but articulate minority at Duchesne nonetheless express real concern about the level of alcohol consumption in association with College life at Duchesne being too high. This appears to be at lower levels than for some other university colleges and more akin to university and Australian societal levels generally.
- 5.13 Specific questions were therefore asked about Duchesne's alcohol culture. The results in terms of students feeling pressured to drink alcohol were:

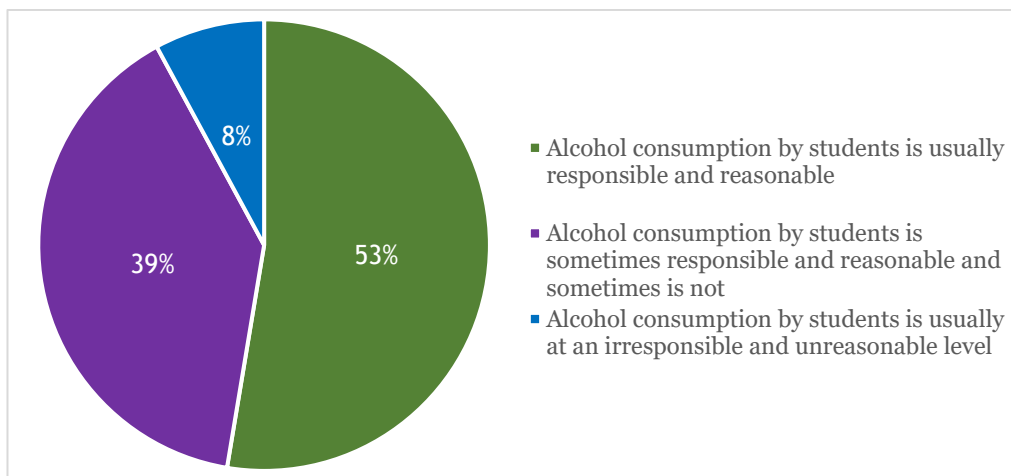
**Q20** - In relation to the consumption of alcohol at the college and college-related events, do you feel pressured to consume alcohol beyond your own comfort level to be accepted by your peers?



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<sup>15</sup> One response to the survey was referred confidentially and anonymously directly to the Head of College to ensure a reported outstanding matter could be investigated as fully as possible without compromising the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity given to students completing the survey.

- 5.14 Whilst this shows a relatively strong-minded cohort not easily pressured into participating in drinking alcohol where they do not wish to do so, this did not mean that students necessarily felt the drinking associated with College life was at responsible levels:



- 5.15 In conclusion in relation to the matter of student safety and wellbeing, whilst the various aspects of risks of physical, sexual, mental and other types of harm do not appear to be any more extreme than that at university colleges or universities themselves (or arguably in Australian society), and in several instance appeared to be at more benign levels at Duchesne, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that these known risk factors for Duchesne must be kept under constant review and incorporated into the risk management framework for the College, including all risks relating to:

- (a) Physical safety of buildings and facilities generally;
- (b) Student accommodation and social spaces;
- (c) Staff facilities and amenities;
- (d) Sexual health and wellbeing of students; and
- (e) Mental health and wellbeing of students.

#### Recommendations on Safety and Wellbeing

8. **Student facilities and social spaces:** Incorporate into the staff/student engagement plan (see Recommendation 3) the matter of ongoing planning for the maintenance, upgrade and development of student facilities and social spaces.
9. **Awareness-raising discussion and debate culture:** In keeping with the appetite expressed by students to be more engaged in understanding the rationale for decisions and the complexity of legal and ethical issues surrounding responses to incidents of harm, develop an optional program and culture of discussion and debate for students around these topics for students (acknowledging as expressed by some students, not all students who have been exposed to uncomfortable or harmful experiences wish constantly to be discussing these matters with College Leadership Team members).
10. **Risk appetite and framework:** College Council to ensure that all physical and other safety and wellbeing risks raised in this Report are properly addressed in the existing College risk appetite and associated framework. Following this step, engage in discussion about the agreed risk appetite with the 'owners' (Bishops of Queensland of Brisbane) and property owners (UQ) given the intersection with their areas of responsibility.

## 6. Summary of Recommendations

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### Recommendations on College People Matters

1. **Resident Leaders:** The CLT should work with the 2023 RL cohort to review the role description for the Resident Leaders, clarifying their role and objectives in relation to the College Leadership Team and the Student Club Executive and include in it an explicit role in relation to the enhancement of a positive College Culture.
2. **Student Club:** The CLT should work with the 2023 Student Club Executive to identify ways in which the Student Club formally (e.g. through its Constitutional provisions relating to voting rights and representation on the Student Club Executive) and informally (e.g. through regular forums and events) could help to improve the connections between year groups and between resident and non-resident Associate members of the College.
3. **Remuneration of roles:** Council, CLT and SLT to discuss and consider and review the equitable allocation of College-provided support and/or remuneration to the student leader positions to fairly support and encourage the more seamless cooperation between the RLs and the Student Club Executive.
4. **Strengthen the Duchesne Conversation Circles:** CLT work closely with SLT in 2023 to develop an explicit 'Duchesne College engagement plan', identifying ways to strengthen the connections between all layers of the College community - Council, CLT, SLT, Year Group Cohorts, Resident and Associate Members and other identified stakeholder groups - including ensuring students are and feel heard on key College policy issues and providing conduits for meaningful feedback to the CLT.

### Recommendations on College Values

5. **College Values:** Review and re-set the College Values with wide and deep discussion and input from students and providing clearer behavioural statements to support each one, clarifying the type of behaviour that is agreed between staff and students to be consistent or inconsistent with each Value.
6. **Diversity-based Inclusivity:** Drive staff- and student-led culture of inclusivity based on real and increased levels of diversity (rather than current form of 'inclusion' based on a narrow student demographic) through deepening conversations within the College about the barriers and enablers to improvement. To this end set modest annual targets over the coming three years to ensure real improvements in inclusion correspond with improvements in diversity.
7. **'Mums and Dads':** Charge the Student Leadership Team with exploring more contemporary models than 'Mums and Dads' for the otherwise effective buddy system within the College.

### Recommendations on Safety and Wellbeing

8. **Student facilities and social spaces:** Incorporate into the staff/student engagement plan (see Recommendation 3) the matter of ongoing planning for the maintenance, upgrade and development of student facilities and social spaces.
9. **Awareness-raising discussion and debate culture:** In keeping with the appetite expressed by students to be more engaged in understanding the rationale for decisions and the complexity of legal and ethical issues surrounding responses to incidents of harm, develop an optional program and culture of discussion and debate for students around these topics for students (acknowledging as

expressed by some students, not all students who have been exposed to uncomfortable or harmful experiences wish constantly to be discussing these matters with College Leadership Team members).

10. **Risk appetite and framework:** College Council to ensure that all physical and other safety and wellbeing risks raised in this Report are properly addressed in the existing College risk appetite and associated framework. Following this step, engage in discussion about the agreed risk appetite with the 'owners' (Bishops of Queensland of Brisbane) and property owners (UQ) given the intersection with their areas of responsibility.

Report delivered on 6 April 2023.



**Elizabeth Jameson**

## Annexure A (see paragraph 6.10)<sup>16</sup>

# The University of Queensland



1,255 students participated in the survey

NATIONAL STUDENT SAFETY SURVEY

### PREVALENCE IN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

#### Sexual harassment

**19.3%**

since starting university

**11.0%**

in the past 12 months

Experiences of sexual harassment in the past 12 months:

Female

**15.4%**

Male

**4.4%**

Differently-described gender

**25.3%\***

#### Sexual assault

**5.0%**

since starting university

**1.6%**

in the past 12 months

Experiences of sexual assault in the past 12 months:

Female\*

**1.8%\***

Male\*\*

Differently-described gender\*\*

### CONTEXT OF MOST IMPACTFUL INCIDENT

#### Sexual harassment

##### Location

General campus areas

**40.6%**

Clubs and societies, events and spaces

**23.0%**

University lecture theatres, computer labs

**15.3%**

##### Perpetrator

**46.1%**

knew some or all of the perpetrators involved

Asked of students who experienced sexual harassment in an Australian university context

### REPORTING AND SUPPORT SEEKING

#### Formal complaints made to the university

**2.1%\***

of students who were sexually harassed made a formal complaint

#### Seeking support from the university

**17.5%**

of students who were sexually harassed sought support or assistance

Asked of students who experienced sexual harassment in an Australian university context

### Knowledge of university support and reporting channels

**47.9%**

know nothing or very little about where to go to make a complaint about sexual harassment

**51.7%**

know nothing or very little about where to go to make a complaint about sexual assault

**42.6%**

know nothing or very little about where to seek support or assistance for harassment

**39.3%**

know nothing or very little about where to seek support or assistance for assault

Asked of all students

Relative standard errors (RSE) were calculated for survey estimates. If the RSE was between 25% and 50% an \* appears next to the estimate that indicates caution should be used with the associated estimate. If the RSE was above 50% an \*\* appears meaning the estimate is unreliable and not reportable. Differently described gender includes students whose gender identity was not classified as female or male. Gender identity was derived using the 'two-step method' of cross-classifying responses to sex assigned at birth and current gender. Context of most impactful incident: Students who had been sexually harassed in a university context were asked questions about the context of the most impactful (or significant) incident they had experienced. This incident was self-identified by the student.

<sup>16</sup> <https://respect.uq.edu.au/2021nsss-findings>