

Culture & Values Review Report

FOR: St John's College UQ

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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.

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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.

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction and Background	1
2.	Describing St John’s Culture (Current State)	4
	Positive Aspects of St John’s Culture.....	5
	Adverse Aspects of St John’s Culture	7
3.	Council, Staff, Students and Culture	10
4.	College Values	13
5.	Traditions, Practices and Behaviours.....	17
6.	Safety and Wellbeing	20
7.	Executive Summary	26
	Annexure A (see paragraph 6.10)	29

Content warning: Please note this report contains material that references sexual assault and sexual harassment which some readers may find distressing.

- Black Dog Institute
- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636
- Headspace on 1800 650 890

Information about UQ student support services is available at UQ Respect.

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 St John's College is a Brisbane based residential college within the University of Queensland. It has a rich and successful 110-year history of supporting students in their transition from formal education to the professional world. As at writing, the College has 312 students and 17 directly employed staff who together, along with an actively connected alumni, contribute to the diverse tapestry that enriches the individual resident student experience.
- 1.2 It is an Anglican College, formally established as the College of St John the Evangelist under Canon Law. The Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane is designated as "President" and ex officio member of the College. This is today more a symbolic role than an active one. The College is, rather, governed by a Council of 13, comprising the Archbishop, the Warden, three appointees of the Diocesan Council of the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, two appointees of the Archbishop, two Old Johnians, an appointee of the UQ Senate and three appointees of the College Council itself.
- 1.3 Elizabeth Jameson and Christina Turner (**the Reviewers**) were engaged by the Council of St John's College at the University of Queensland in February 2022 to conduct a review throughout 2022 of the culture of the College.
- 1.4 The purpose of the review as agreed at the outset was for a holistic and forward-looking consultation with students and other key St John's stakeholders, to help identify the preferred attributes of a strong positive culture for St John's and so to inform the Council and the Warden's evident commitment to fostering such a culture.
- 1.5 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 affected¹. 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.
- 1.6 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 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.
- 1.7 To ensure therefore that we gained a comprehensive and deep understanding of the culture that underpins St John's 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 See Universities Australia at <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/project/respect-now-always/>

- 1.8 The 'Listening' phases of the project comprised:
- (a) Interviews with the Chair of the Council, the Warden and the Student Club President;
 - (b) Interviews with four members of the Warden's Senior Leadership Team and staff;
 - (c) Interviews with several current and recently past students, including recently past members of the Student Club Executive;
 - (d) Interviews with two student services executives from the University of Queensland;
 - (e) Separate Focus Groups of each of the following stakeholder groups:
 - (i) The College Council
 - (ii) Residential Advisers
 - (iii) First Years (Freshers)
 - (iv) Second Years
 - (v) Third Years; and
 - (f) A comprehensive survey circulated to all 312 resident students of the College (with 69 completing the survey, comprising 33 First Year students, 17 Second Year students and 19 Third Year students, giving an overall statistically valid response rate of 22%).
- 1.9 Interestingly, 70% of the respondents to the survey reported that they were the first in their immediate family to attend the College. Of those with previous family members at the College, only 7% of the total respondents reported one or both parents as having attended the College and 28% reported an older sibling or close relation, such as a cousin, as having previously attended the College. This observation puts into context the heavy reliance, which we encountered, particularly from the student body of the importance of preserving traditions at St John's. This finding suggests that for most students at St John's they are referring to "traditions" as they have been practised only over the last 10 years or so.
- 1.10 A review of this nature, focusing as it does on the complex topic of culture, sometimes throws up surprising contradictions between what individuals describe in an interview, what others describe in a focus group, and how they respond to a survey. On the whole, however, in this review while the one-on-one interviews and the collective focus groups were mostly consistent with each other, the survey responses were in some cases inconsistent with the responses from the interviews and focus groups. This is to be expected as the binary nature of questions in a survey, and the lack of opportunity in a survey for a respondent to clarify the meaning of a question or their understanding of a concept, can result in less nuanced responses. Nonetheless, the survey also provided the opportunity to test some of the more common propositions heard during the interviews and focus groups. Where possible through this Report we have attempted to identify the contradictions between sources and explore some potential reasons for them.
- 1.11 The Key to Expressions used in this Report is set out below:
- (a) **College or St John's:** means St John's College within the University of Queensland;
 - (b) **College Girl/Boy:** A reference to a second year female (College Girl) and second year male (College Boy) elected by their peers at the annual general meeting of the Student Club to facilitate Slush;
 - (c) **Council or College Council:** means the governing body of the College under and pursuant to the constitution of the College;
 - (d) **Johnian:** a current or past student at St John's College;

- (e) **John's Traditions:** the traditions, practices, events and behaviours practiced by Johnians, such as Slush, Roaching and Tapping Out, recognised as an important part of the traditions of the College (see also Chapter 5);
- (f) **Old Johnian:** a past student at St John's College;
- (g) **Residential Advisers or RAs:** These are students who are resident at the College, predominantly in their third year of tertiary studies, although some are in their second year of tertiary studies, who are employed on a part-time basis by the College, and provided with certain training and other support by the College, to undertake certain activities in the nature of pastoral care and oversight of the students within the College;
- (h) **Reviewers:** Elizabeth Jameson and Christina Turner, the authors of this Report;
- (i) **Roaching:** A form of prank involving St John's students entering another student's room to turn it upside down (hence the name referring to cockroaches ending up on their back) sometime resulting in 'trashing' or vandalising a room;
- (j) **Royals:** A significant drinking event arranged by the students and held once per semester on a Thursday night with the date kept a secret and only announced that night;
- (k) **Senior Leadership Team:** the executive staff of the College, comprising the Warden, Vice Warden and other senior employees of the College reporting to the Warden;
- (l) **Slush:** An informal light-hearted weekly gathering at which students catch up on College news including at times gossip about students and in particular "sightings" of intimate relationships between students;
- (m) **Student Club:** an unincorporated association comprising the current students of St John's College;
- (n) **Student Club Executive:** The student-elected executive of the Student Club headed up by the Student Club President;
- (o) **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;
- (p) **Tapping Out:** A practice used to call out someone who has broken the unwritten student-generated rules of life in the College, whereby a typically more senior student leads others to "tap" (or bang hard) with their empty water glasses on the underside of the table in the dining hall to signify that the offending student needs to leave the dining hall.
- (q) **Values:** the Values of the College as published on the College website and set out in paragraph 2.7 of this Report;
- (r) **Warden:** means the person from time to time employed by the College Council to occupy the highest executive role within the College.

2. Describing St John's Culture (Current State)

- 2.1 In this Chapter, we have summarised and described what appeared from the review to be the culture of St John's, both in terms of the positive and adverse aspects of that culture.
- 2.2 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.² 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.³
- 2.3 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’.
- “When I think of culture, I think of a way that people go about doing things. A similarity between a group of people that brings them together.”*

Student
- 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 Some of the observable artefacts we reviewed at a high level included a range of governance and management policies affecting and affected by the culture of the College. This includes 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.
- 2.6 We noted a high 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.
- 2.7 In particular, this review was conducted against the backdrop of one important cultural artefact, namely the published Values of the College. 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. The published Values of the College are:
- Excellence
 - Respect
 - Integrity
 - Resilience
 - Inclusion

² 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)

³ https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_86.htm

- 2.8 Chapters 3-5 of this Report contain a detailed analysis of the findings of the review. Each Chapter deals with one of four themes into which our observations fell, namely:
- (a) Chapter 4: College Values
 - (b) Chapter 5: Safety and Wellbeing
 - (c) Chapter 6: Council, Staff, Students and Culture
 - (d) Chapter 7: Traditions, Practises and Behaviours
- 2.9 Drawing on the findings explored in Chapters 4- 7, several high level observations were made by the Reviewers, both positive and adverse, about the current state of the College culture. Those observations are set out in this Chapter 2.

Positive Aspects of St John's Culture

- 2.10 The Reviewers observed a very healthy level of interest in the conduct of this review amongst the leaders (Council, Warden, Senior Leadership Team, Student Club Executive and Residential Advisers) and students in the College. This attitude speaks positively of a culture that is willing to look at itself and the ways in which it can change and improve.
- 2.11 The Warden and the Senior Leadership Team have an evident respect for, and concern for the interests of, the students and the College. Staff and students almost universally hold palpable affection for the College, its history and traditions.
- 2.12 Participants in the interviews and focus groups, frequently identified to the Reviewers that significant positive cultural changes have already occurred in the course of the last two to three years. Comments in this regard particularly related to the establishment of a markedly stronger relationship of mutual respect between the students and staff in the College under the current Warden, following a period of uncertainty, high turnover and therefore instability in the Senior Leadership Team of the College over the prior 3-5 years.
- 2.13 There is a notable air of energy, enthusiasm and pride amongst College Council, staff and students in the way they talk about being a part of the College and the high standards of achievement amongst its students. This was also observed by the Reviewers when seeing the students in their natural environment (e.g. in the dining hall and at events attended by the Reviewers in the course of the review).
- 2.14 There is a strong and evident sense of community and fun. In describing the culture of the College in the survey responses, the most commonly-used words were "fun" and "friendly" and "family" and "inclusive". Those participating in interviews and focus groups frequently used the word "community" and/or even "family" to describe the positive emotion evoked by being a part of the College. This was even sometimes the case for interviewees with more critical or negative overall perspectives about the culture of the College. For most there is, moreover, even a sense of an unswerving trust in, and commitment and loyalty to the community of the College.

"I want this place to be the very best it can be and so we have to be prepared to be uncomfortable with some of the findings of this review."

Rose Alwyn, Warden

"Overall the community has a wonderfully unified, almost familial, culture of care and respect for one another."

Student

- 2.15 With a statistically valid response rate to the survey of over 20% (69 out of 317 students) it was notable that the qualitative comments made by participants revealed a mature and thoughtful understanding amongst students of the complexity of the culture of the College (and of culture generally) and a desire for the College community not to 'rest on its laurels' and to strive for an ever-improved culture. In many instances students rated most or all aspects of the College very highly and positively and yet provided comments that recognised how the culture could improve and the desirability of striving for an even better culture for the College.
- "The culture in some aspects of Johns is relatively good, but there is definitely room for improvement... we have awesome events...but we also have events that are just being done because they are tradition and have no real purpose."*

Student
- 2.16 The sense of community/family manifests itself in a range of traditions, practices and behaviours (John's Traditions). Johnians talk positively about a range of positive, supportive and outwardly inclusive practices, aimed at ensuring that pre-existing school loyalties or friendship groups (GMBC or 'Good Mates Before College') are broken down when First Years (or 'Freshers') enter the College, to be replaced by the more important, to many, sense of belonging to the College family with 'everyone at the College as your friend'. Other ongoing positive practices are designed to enhance this notion, such as the informal student-generated 'rule' that when eating in the dining hall you fill the next vacant seat, rather than start a new table with chosen friends, and that mobile phones are all left on the table at the door to the dining hall to encourage conversation and one person at the table fills everyone's water glasses. These practices are seen by many in the College as engendering a strong sense of 'inclusion'.
- 2.17 There is an observable energy within the College. Several interviewees identified 'having fun' (albeit expressed in a variety of ways) as an important part of college life. There are a great many activities in which to be involved and a palpable sense of fun. Some interviewees even described this as an "extravert's culture" (see also paragraph 2.27 for comments on some of the adverse aspects of this view of the culture).
- 2.18 There was a high level of pride in being a Johnian amongst those interviewed. Many interviewees expressed the belief that the sense of family or community sets St John's apart from other University of Queensland college communities. One interviewee related a story about dining in the dining hall of another college and being asked how long they had lived in the relevant college. This "could not happen at John's," said the interviewee, "because absolutely everyone knows absolutely everyone else here". This sentiment was also expressed in survey responses.
- 2.19 Students also commonly hold the view that John's has a range of advantages over, and so is the most highly sought after of, other UQ colleges. Many Johnians expressed enormous pride in the College winning a lot of the inter-college competitions and an extremely high level of participation by Johnians in teams but also in turning out to support their own sporting teams and cultural groups in competitions with other colleges. This is regarded as such an important practice that it has its own Johnian expression 'whipping out'.
- 2.20 There is an evident respect for the College's traditions and the legacy of past Johnians. This is in keeping with the practices of many Australian university colleges founded in the likeness of Oxford and Cambridge university colleges. Indeed, traditions obviously can and do serve a valuable function within institutions, fostering a sense of community and belonging and, it is to be hoped, a respect for observing and learning from those who have gone before. It was evident from the review that it is important to today's students that these aspects of life at St John's are celebrated and embraced.
- 2.21 The Warden and the Senior Leadership Team, and the student leaders, exhibit a genuine commitment to respecting, whilst modernising, many of these traditions to enhance their real

purposes. The Warden explicitly championed to the Reviewers a process of constructively questioning and then to “retain, rework or remove” practices and traditions that are outdated or outmoded. This conveys a distinct message, embraced particularly by the Senior Leadership Team of the College, about not losing or rejecting the College’s rich history and traditions but instead transforming them to be more relevant to today’s world.

Adverse Aspects of St John’s Culture

- 2.22 Like most communities with such a strong sense of pride in their own culture and beliefs, this can also have an adverse side.
- 2.23 The strongest negative comments about the culture at St John’s, albeit from a small minority of respondents to the survey and in the interviews and focus groups, included such descriptions as “elitist, exclusive, privileged, self-aggrandizing”. Some in the process described what manifests to them as a closed and exclusive club. A small number of interviewees even used the expression ‘cult-like’ to describe how others, particularly outside the College, have been known to talk about St John’s. Some interviewees (even those with strong positive views about and alignment with the College) noted the strong belief in the College could at times appear, to outsiders at least, as hubris.
- 2.24 It was also regularly and quickly raised by the strong majority of those participating in the review that St John’s is marked by a very heavy drinking culture amongst the students. For those who do not enjoy this aspect, it is “...a big drinking culture, if you don’t drink you are thought differently of, even excluded.” Whilst we observed that the Senior Leadership Team attempts to lead more reflective thought about the impacts of this, for those in the minority who report feeling pressured to participate in the drinking culture, this can have very negative impacts on their feelings about the College.
- 2.25 It is clear that, for the minority, the negative feelings of exclusion and anxiety can be quite acute. One of the cultural risks identified by the Reviewers is that because a small minority feel this way and are likely to quickly self-select out, some of the physical, psychological and other risks associated with the heavy drinking culture amongst students and with some of the John’s Traditions maintained by students might be more readily dismissed by many students who more easily ‘fit in’ as being of little concern or importance.
- 2.26 In addition, whilst it was not possible within the scope of this review to fully validate, the Reviewers frequently heard from staff and students that there is also relatively low diversity of ‘type’ amongst the College population insofar as there is a bias towards students who ‘fit the mould’ described in paragraph 2.17. Some speculated that students who do not fit that mould may be self-selecting out. Whilst this may be regarded as a natural social norm for any such community, the question it raises for the College is whether this is the desired outcome, namely a relatively narrow ‘type’ of student demographically and cognitively that ‘fits in’ at St John’s.
- 2.27 As noted earlier, a small number of interviewees described the College as an “extraverts’ culture” (see paragraph 2.17 above). This is perhaps a somewhat misguided view that errantly assumes all extraverts are drawn to conform to the norms of its culture. Doubtless this in part reflects a common misconception in the wider community about “extraversion” and “introversion” (and “ambiversion”). Nonetheless this characterisation appears to be a euphemism for a culture of expecting unflagging, high-energy participation in social events, often including significantly alcohol-driven student-organised activities several times a week.

*“The culture is...
- Heavy emphasis on
drinking a large amount
of alcohol
- Highly interconnected
- Fun.”*

Student

- 2.28 “Blokey” and “boy’s club” were other expressions used by some during the review to describe this culture. These terms were used notwithstanding that the College has been co-educational for over 30 years, and were not used to suggest that the more negative behaviours prevalent in the College were the exclusive, or even predominant, behaviour of males. In fact, it was somewhat surprising to the Reviewers to find the number of ‘gendered’ events (i.e. events for males and events for females) in a co-educational college with Inclusion as one of its Values.
- 2.29 Most, but not all, interviewees and focus group participants expressed the view that no-one is forced or even pressured into participating in the College’s student-run or other events. However, for the ‘uncomfortable’ small minority, the discomfort at participating in alcohol-fuelled events, or the fear of retribution for not doing so, can be acute. Even some of those who are comfortable with the culture for themselves recognise the strength of the tacit peer-pressure to conform to the culture, and to participate fully in all College activities.
- 2.30 In some cases, this form of peer pressure has led to some students finding themselves in situations that make them uncomfortable. A very small number of survey respondents reported having at times feared for their own or others’ mental, physical, sexual, psychological and/or other safety or wellbeing (see paragraph 6.5 for more detail).
- 2.31 There is also an observable but questionable form of recognised ‘hierarchy’ within the College. Whilst many students spoke to the Reviewers about it being important to ‘earn respect’ at the College, it appeared from a number of the practices at the College that respect is ‘earned’ simply by persisting into another year of College (see paragraph 5.5 below). This seems to contradict the ideal of ‘earning’ respect.
- 2.32 Somewhat surprisingly too, in terms of adverse aspects of the culture, the pride students feel about the College is not always reflected in the way they treat College property. This was observable from walking around the College campus seeing personal effects left in common areas and meeting rooms not restored to order after use. The Reviewers also heard of many instances of complete property destruction by students either after alcohol-fuelled events or as part of a tradition known as Roaching⁴. The Reviewers also heard from some students that unflinching loyalty to one another (see paragraph 2.14 above) means not “snitching” (or reporting) to the College Senior Leadership Team, cases of property destruction even by known individuals.
- “Roaching is disrespectful and damages people’s private property, not feeling like they can trust others around them to be considerate of their private space.”*

Student
- 2.33 The ultimate consequence of all of the above cultural observations, both positive and adverse, is that a certain ‘type’ of student fits in comfortably at St John’s. An interesting contradiction arises, namely that even some of the practices some students describe as highly ‘inclusive’ (see also paragraphs 2.16 and 4.7(b) below) are likely to drive away others and lead to a fairly narrow ‘type’ of student feeling welcome and included. Feelings of ‘inclusion’ are fairly self-evidently easier to achieve in a community with low diversity and yet it is difficult to achieve real diversity in a community that does not exhibit a sense of genuine inclusion of difference. St John’s has observably low levels of demographic diversity. We heard, although were unable to verify from data available to us, that there is a relatively high concentration of students from similar cultural,

⁴ “Roaching” appears in the past to have started as a practice of playing practical jokes on one another by interfering with some aspect of a student’s room but in more recent years has in some cases resulted in the extensive destruction of physical property and/or belongings in students’ rooms.

socio-economic and geographical backgrounds notwithstanding that the 312 students are drawn from 102 schools including 12 from international schools. Paradoxically then, in this low-diversity environment, a strong sense of inclusion for most students ought in fact to be regarded cautiously as potentially creating a barrier to achieving greater diversity amongst the College community.

3. Council, Staff, Students and Culture

- 3.1 Organisational culture, fairly self-evidently, begins and ends with people.
- 3.2 It was evident to the Reviewers from the outset that the Council, the Warden and the Senior Leadership Team individually and collectively are people who are passionate about the College. They consistently exhibit a high level of respect for the students and a commitment to providing an environment in which they can thrive and become well-rounded future leaders in society.
- 3.3 At the Council level, there is an excellent mix of relevant experience, skills and capabilities amongst the Council, including 7 out of 13 being Old Johnians. 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).
- 3.4 Like most voluntary governing bodies there is a very high level of passion and commitment but many of the members of Council are time-poor due to busy careers and lives. This can mean for less time to spend in and around the College, and more reliance therefore on recollections of College life as it once was. 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, and not, for instance, on recollections of past practices. 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 6 of this Report.
- 3.5 As mentioned in paragraph 2.6, 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 (see Section 5. Consequences of the 2022 Student Handbook and associated policies).
- 3.6 The current Warden arrived at the College in October 2019 towards the end of the academic year following a disruptive period of several years and four Wardens (including three Acting Wardens) since the retirement of the previous longstanding Warden. According to all accounts heard throughout this review, the current Warden inherited a duly weakened relationship between staff and students which was described by some as much more an 'us and them' culture than is the case today.
- 3.7 Since appointment, the Warden 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. Specifically, the Warden told the Reviewers "I want this place to be the very best it can be and so we have to be prepared to be uncomfortable with some of the findings of this review."
- 3.8 Throughout the review the Warden also frequently referenced to the Reviewers her commitment to an approach of 'retain, rework, or remove' in relation to John's Traditions as they bear on the culture of the College. This takes the form of constantly inviting students to be more discerning about the extent to which John's Traditions still remain relevant today.

- 3.9 We also found a high level of personal respect for the Warden and the Senior Leadership Team amongst students interviewed and participating in focus groups. The mutual respect between students and the Warden and Vice Warden was evident from walking around the College with each of them and observing the interactions with students. These student/senior staff relationships have, we frequently heard, improved considerably and in a number of ways since the arrival of the Warden in late 2019, such that today there is a generally good level of mutual respect between students and staff.
- 3.10 In spite of this, the Reviewers were surprised to hear students commonly refer to these very committed, experienced and senior staff 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 role of the Senior Leadership Team nor of their extensive experience and careers in university colleges and their commonly deep commitment to the College and the wellbeing of its students. It is to be expected that modernising the language of 'Warden' to, say, Head of College or CEO and otherwise continuing to enhance the understanding of students and the regard in which they hold the Senior Leadership Team would serve to help build a stronger relationship of mutual respect for the good of the College and its students.
- 3.11 Residential Advisers (or RAs) also warrant some attention in respect of their important role as 'staff' of the College in helping to build a stronger culture. RAs occupy an important role which is seen particularly by the Council and Senior Leadership Team as extremely important part of the life of the College. They are however placed in a rather difficult position as both students at the College but also paid staff. Leadership training and development is provided to the RAs to enable them to do their job but there is still an evident gap between the role they fulfil and the degree of responsibility they assume and respect they are accorded by other students.
- 3.12 Whilst somewhat outside the scope of this review, this raised concerns for the Reviewers around the potentially significant personal and legal responsibilities placed on the shoulders of Ras (see also paragraph 6.17) and vicariously on the College for their actions. The Reviewers noted that the College has taken recent legal advice about the status of these students as employees, and how best to structure and document this. However, from a cultural perspective, the College should consider other means for engaging a group of resident students in the governance of the College rather than through the mechanism of employment which has risks for the College and the students.
- 3.13 Finally, the Student Club Executive is also critical in the cultural life of the College. There is an evident high level of respect amongst students for the President and members of the Student Club Executive. However, a small number of disaffected students noted this group to be something of a closed shop.
- 3.14 It was also evident to the Reviewers throughout the process that whilst the Student Club Executive has an important role to play in the life and culture of the College, and runs a number of events for students independently of the College, this group does not have a full appreciation of the many risks and matters managed at the level of the Warden and Senior Leadership Team of the College.

"[It's a] bit of a boys club [at] present – leadership positions given to people who aren't the best for the job but have friends on the committee"

Student

Recommendations on College People Matters

1. **College Council Engagement:** Remain vigilant to ensuring a high level of engagement of all Council members in the life of the College, including monitoring and reporting minimum attendance expectations at College events and activities beyond Council meetings for greater Council understanding of issues and enhanced visibility within the College.
2. **CEO and Senior Leadership Team:** Designate the most senior employee and delegate of the College Council as CEO or Head of College (rather than Warden) and her staff as Senior Leadership Team to increase the warranted level of respect for their roles in College life.
3. **Residential Advisers:** Revisit the employee-status of this body of students and alternative ways to engage them as senior role models and leaders within the College, with a view to reducing the risks to them and enhancing the way in which they can serve as a strong conduit between the student body and the College.
4. **Student Club Executive:** Investigate, and champion to voting stakeholders constitutional change to allow for, formal appointment of the Student Club President and a senior RA (subject to Recommendation 3) to the College Council to broaden the student appreciation of the cultural and safety issues managed by the College and to ensure that student voices are informing same. Pending such constitutional change, invite the Student Club President and a senior RA to attend as observers at the full regular meetings of Council subject to managing matters of confidentiality and conflict of interest in the normal course.

4. College Values

4.1 The published Values of the College are:

- Excellence
- Respect
- Integrity
- Resilience
- Inclusion

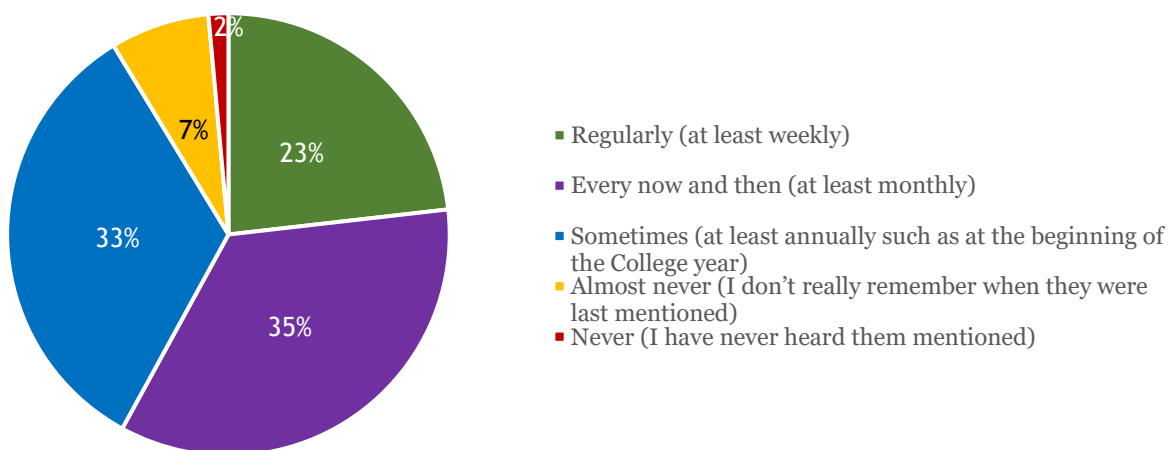
4.2 This review started with investigating how widely and how well these Values were understood, lived and embraced within the College. This is premised on the assumption that the College Values are intended to underpin the ongoing positive evolution of College culture which the Warden and the College Council appear to hope and expect to achieve.

4.3 Amongst interviewees and focus group participants, with only two exceptions who were both senior employees, the current published Values of the College were not well-known nor uniformly understood within the College. Indeed, one student interviewee confidently, and without prompting, asserted that the values of the College are “Honesty, Respect, Loyalty, Accountability”. Whilst these have common elements with the published Values, they are clearly not the same.

4.4 This directly conflicted with the responses in the survey to a question about how frequently the Values are spoken about. As shown in **Diagram 1** below, well over half the respondents (59%) report that the College Values are spoken about at least weekly or monthly, and the vast majority of the remaining 41% reporting that they are spoken about at least annually. Only 8% of respondents state that they are almost never to never spoken about.

Diagram 1

Q5 – St John’s College website publishes the following as its Values: Excellence, Respect, Integrity, Resilience, Inclusion. In the activities and gatherings of the College, how often are these Values mentioned or discussed at St John’s (choose one):

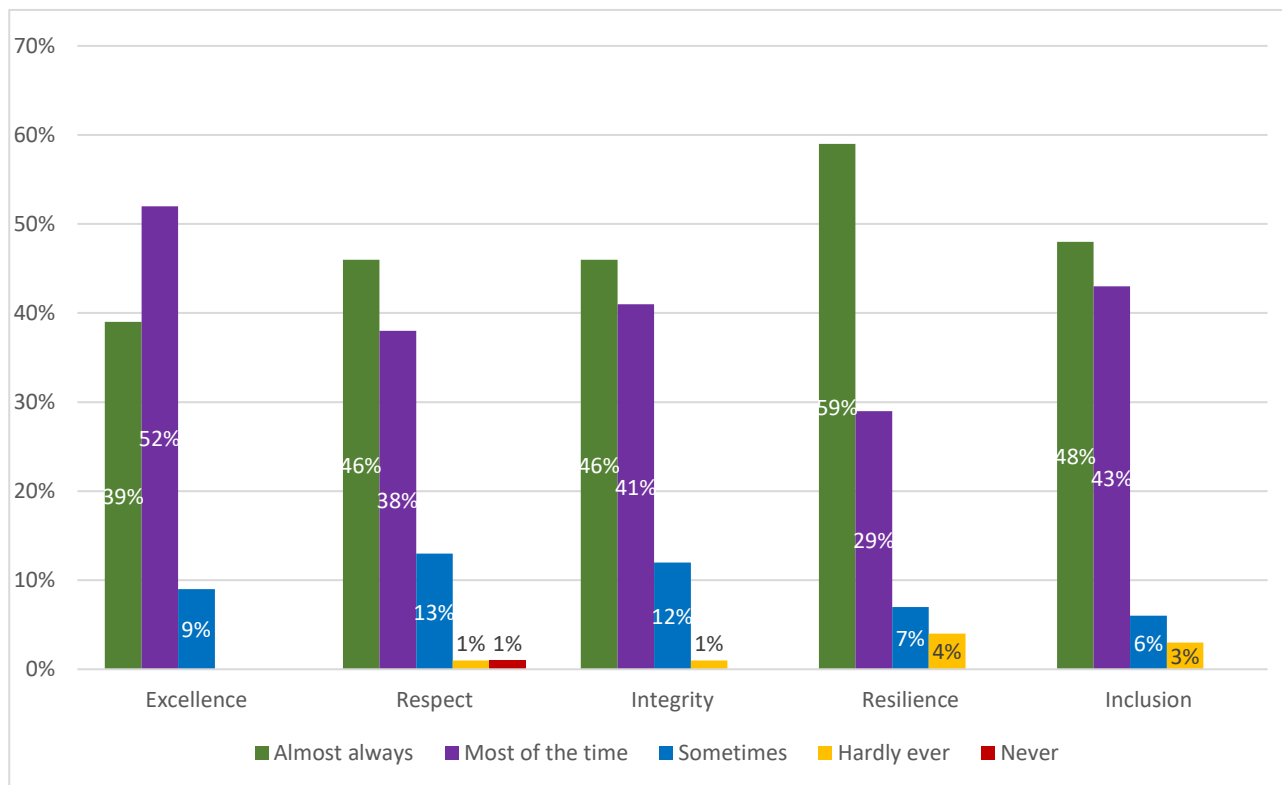


4.5 It was the conclusion of the Reviewers that this aspect of the survey responses should be regarded as anomalous, given the very low level of recognition of the Values amongst interviewees and focus groups. Clearly the inability of almost all interviewees and focus group participants to list the Values unprompted holds more validity than responses to a survey question which listed the Values and then asked about the frequency of their being mentioned.

4.6 The majority of students responding to the survey, also believed that the Values are lived consistently:

Diagram 2

Q6 – Please rate the extent to which you believe people at St John’s College live and act consistent with each of these values:



4.7 Unsurprisingly a more subtle picture emerged from the interviews and focus groups than from the survey results. This is explained in part by the fact that interviews and focus group enabled the Reviewers to tease out that people understand the meaning of various of the Values inconsistently across the College. The Reviewers’ observations about each of the individual Values are set out below:

(a) **Resilience** is, as shown in **Diagram 2**, rated by the students in the survey as the single highest of the ‘almost always’ lived Values. In interviews and focus groups, however, participants teased this out to explain that if Resilience meant stamina, or ability to ‘go on’ in spite of very little sleep and participation in lots of activities and events, then students at the College are very high in Resilience. If it meant ability to withstand achievement of anything less than 100% academic and other success, then it was the opposite outcome for many and Resilience would be rated quite low. Indeed out of the interviews and focus groups, the Reviewers concluded that Resilience was the least consistently understood of the Values by participants.

(b) **Inclusion** was the Value perhaps most strongly disagreed about amongst interviewees and focus groups, and yet rated in the survey as one of the two most overall ‘lived’ (with 91% of those surveyed saying it was ‘almost always’ or ‘most of the time’ lived). For the strong majority of those surveyed, the College is clearly exceptionally welcoming and inclusive. What emerges from the focus groups and interviews and minority of survey responses, however, is that this is

“Every person is provided with full acceptance at college. Regardless of where you come from, who you hang out with or what you look like everyone is treated with respect.”
Student

the case for those who 'fit the mould' (see also paragraph 2.33. It is a very homogenous student population with a large majority of Anglo/European cultural heritage albeit the 312 students are drawn from 102 feeder schools, including 12 international schools. There is a palpable appetite for many - staff and students alike - for a more diverse student body, with varying backgrounds, interests and styles, which would demand a much higher level culture of welcoming inclusivity.

"The vast majority of students are incredibly privileged...with no understanding of students...who cannot drop \$100 on an event ticket or just buy a car. There are very few non-white students."

Student

- (c) **Excellence** is, like Inclusion, rated by a total of 91% of survey responses as 'almost always' or 'most of the time' lived. This was also very highly rated in interviews and focus groups. However, one subtlety which emerged from the discussions, not so easily detected in the survey results, is that Excellence is often expressed by students to mean high-performance in their studies as well as in the various student-led extra-curricular activities. Indeed, we reviewed data, through the Warden's regular reporting to the Council, showing extremely high standards of academic achievement amongst the student body according to the Warden's regular reporting to the College Council. We also noted the requirement in the Student Handbook that students achieve a minimum GPA of 4.5 to ensure that the College is supporting them in their academic studies to an expected level. Conversely, the Reviewers also heard that there is less engagement by the students with current local and world political issues and with College-run academic or intellectual pursuits than there is with student-run social events. This was seen by some as reducing the rating of Excellence as a lived Value.
- (d) **Respect** as a 'lived' Value was somewhat more polarising. It gained a considerably lower, but still high overall, 84% of survey responses as 'almost always' or 'most of the time' lived. Moreover, senior employees of the College consistently observed that the College is full of intelligent, respectful, thoughtful and compassionate students (and this was apparent to the Reviewers). However, the 15% of survey responders who did not believe it is 'lived' consistently, as well as some of the interviewees, express quite strong opinions to the contrary. The Reviewers heard that when coming together as a collective, there can be high levels of 'group think' and extremely low-levels of self-respect, and respect for others, usually (but not only) associated with heavy alcohol consumption by students. The other regard in which Respect is seen by the minority as not being lived relates to many of the traditions and practices of the College (see Chapter 5 below).
- (e) **Integrity** gained a strong 87% of survey responses as 'almost always' or 'most of the time' lived. It was also the most consistently understood by interviewees and focus group participants. The Reviewers heard of several examples of Johnians going out of their way to 'lend a hand' in the local community following the February 2022 Brisbane floods and other ways in which the students would "give you the shirts off their backs". However, there was a high correlation between the minority that gave negative responses to Integrity and those that gave a negative response to Respect as a lived Value for very similar reasons (see prior paragraph). Isolated examples were also given of individual students demonstrating a lack of integrity through 'behaving badly'. Additionally some students, even those rating this Value quite highly, also observed that as a relatively

"We respect all different types of students here at John's."

Student

"Respect is pretty shocking. Taking a walk through the block, a dinner in the dining hall, roaching are all pretty simple examples."

Student

privileged part of society, Johnians could spend more of the time on wider community-building activities than on their social events.

- 4.8 Overall some of the anomalies and nuances arising between the survey results and the responses in interviews and focus groups suggested to the Reviewers that the Values need further discussion within the College. With discussion about the further definition of what is really meant by each Value, a shared language and greater commitment to these Values might be expected to drive positive change within the College.

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. **Cultural Improvement:** Encourage and support student-led continuous cultural improvement through enhancing the existing program of College-led and student-led activities with regular debates/discussions for the students to tackle and resolve the ethical dilemmas presented by conflicting Values.
7. **Diversity-based Inclusion:** Drive student-led culture of inclusion based on real and increased levels of diversity (rather than current form of 'inclusion' based on a very narrow student demographic) through student-agreed changes to enrolment processes that encourage and welcome a more demographically and cognitively diverse College population. To this end set modest annual targets over the coming three years to ensure real improvements in inclusion correspond with improvements in diversity.

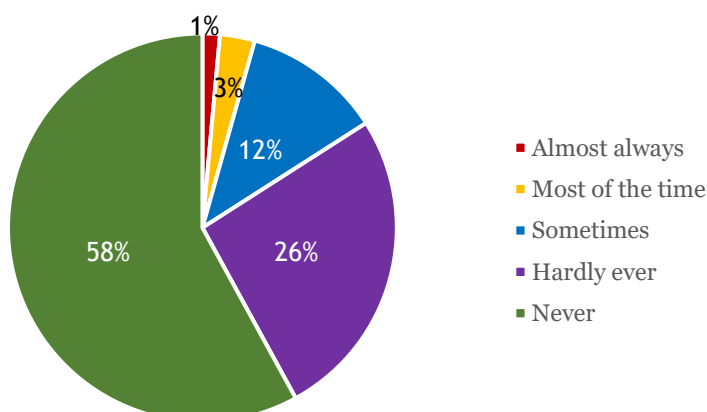
5. Traditions, Practices and Behaviours

5.1 There are a great many traditions, practices and behaviours (**John's Traditions**) practised and celebrated by today's Johnians (see paragraphs 2.16 and 2.20 above).

5.2 Many of these John's Traditions were cited as good examples of the ways in which a strong sense of 'belonging' to the College family is encouraged. For instance, the student-led practice of filling tables in the dining room by sitting at the next available seat, rather than starting a new table with your 'friends' is encouraged as a way of making sure that everyone at St John's is seen as 'your friend'. Likewise, the commendable student-led practice of leaving mobile phones on a table at the entrance to the dining hall is an observable way of ensuring that when eating together students are in conversation with each other rather than focused on other things.

5.3 At the outset, as shown below 84% of the students responding to the survey reported that they generally have not been made to feel uncomfortable with any of these practices. The minority who have felt uncomfortable however report sometimes high levels of discomfort as we will explore further below.

Q14 – Thinking about the various St John's practices, rituals and behaviours (e.g. tapping out, roaching, slush), have you felt uncomfortable for your own safety or wellbeing (whether physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or otherwise) or the safety or wellbeing of others as a result of any or all of those practices and behaviours:



5.4 As mentioned in paragraph 3.8, the Warden actively encourages students to adopt an approach of 'retain, rework, or remove' in relation to the John's Traditions, asking them to question their relevance today and whether it is time to repurpose some of them for today's world.

5.5 One example that the Reviewers observed as justifying review is the hierarchical approach to College life. Many students spoke quite positive about the need to "earn" respect at Johns and yet when questioned students report that respect is "earned" largely by staying at the College. Examples of this include:

- (a) The strict allocation of rooms to students in floors and buildings according to length of tenure in the College such that the Third Years occupy their own building in more comfortable rooms, promoting real segregation between year groups.
- (b) The practice of Tapping Out may only be exercised in keeping with a strict hierarchy of tenure based 'rules'. Only Second Years may 'tap out' First Years, only Third Years may 'tap out' Second Years and only 3 Third Years may 'tap out' a Third Year. Hence even if a Third Year has grossly abused their supposedly earned position of trust and respect, they may not be tapped out by a more junior student.

- (c) First Years or Freshers are referenced in communications by the distinctive F.initial and surname (e.g. F.msmith), whilst Second Years are accorded the more respectful use of their full name (Mary Smith) and Third Years with the full 'Miss Mary Smith' for no apparent reason other than being able to clearly distinguish the status, but purely in terms of tenure, of the student.

5.6 Another example for review is the level of student-organised 'gendered' events (as in events held separately for males and for females) purely it seems because they are considered by students as 'traditions'. There was little clarity in our conversations with students about the justification for separately gendered events in a College that has been co-educational for over 30 years and almost universally embraces Inclusion as one of its Values (see also Chapter 4).

5.7 In some instances too, John's Traditions serve quite different functions than was once the case, albeit today's Johnians defend the need to preserve them almost at all costs without any rationale for this view. Two examples of traditions we heard that are practised quite differently today from the past are as follows:

- (a) Slush - we heard from an Old Johnian several decades out of College that some years ago this practice involved a break from study to catch up on news and gossip in the College, without the use of alcohol. Today Slush usually follows drinks and dinner (and sometimes is combined with the student-led alcohol-dominated event known as Royals) and involves disclosure by the College Boy and/or College Girl of the details of sometimes deeply personal and intimate relationships within the College. The Reviewers heard from students that this is generally now done respectfully with efforts taken by the College Boy and College Girl to ensure that this is not done without the consent of the people affected, where in recent past years that was not always the case. The Reviewers also heard from some, however, that this tradition often exhibits a double-standard of celebrating males having intimate relationships with females but "slut-shaming" females who do the same.

- (b) Tapping Out - regarded as a means of enforcing the student-promulgated unwritten 'rules' of the College (as opposed to those set formally by the College), we heard that both the form and substance of this practice has changed considerably over time. Some 30 years ago it involved the tapping of spoons on the table in the dining hall as a signal to others that an 'outsider' was in their midst. Today it means banging empty glasses loudly on the underside of the dining hall tables to call out a Johnian for breaking the unwritten rules and 'shaming' them out of the dining hall. This has a quite strongly deterrent effect for a minority of students according to the survey results and views expressed in interviews and focus group discussions.

"I personally get takeaway meals if I am wound-up or upset because the level of noise of tap-outs is overwhelming..."

Student

5.8 In Chapter 6 we have also considered the extent to which some of the John's Traditions raise 'hazing' concerns. However in pure cultural terms, it appears that several John's Traditions warrant more open discussion and debate within the College - between both students and the Senior Leadership Team - to better understand:

- (a) What is the perceived value of retaining those traditions - asking why they are seen as good or even essential traditions to be preserved and what function they serve today;
- (b) the risks to retaining them without modification as many of them involve relatively high risks, including of the kind mentioned in the *Change the Course* Report (see paragraph 1.5) to the short- or long-term health and wellbeing of students.

Recommendations on John's Traditions

- 8. Actively Apply 'Retain, Rework or Remove' Policy to John's Traditions:** Engage in a College-wide discussion, between the Senior Leadership Team, Student Club Executive and Ras, and then with the student body as a whole (as part of College-wide discussions around culture and Values as per Recommendation 6 and safety and wellbeing as per Recommendations 9 and 10) particularly about the findings of, and College responses to, this Chapter 5 around:
- The role and place of hierarchy in the College (paragraph 5.5)
 - The rationale for 'gendered' events in a co-educational college (paragraph 5.6)
 - practices that have changed considerably over time and/or having disrespectful or other harmful or negative impacts on a small minority of students (paragraphs 5.7).

6. Safety and Wellbeing

6.1 The review uncovered a number of potential safety risks revolving particularly around the College's student-run activities and events. Some of these events occur on College property and some occur outside it on University of Queensland grounds. Yet others occur in private homes of Old Johnnians and others. College culture - specifically the accepted behavioural norms - has an important part to play in this aspect of College life. This is in spite of a very clear commitment by the Council and the Senior Leadership Team to student safety, as evidenced by the St John's College Handbook and the various policies included in it.

6.2 Before turning to such matters, some general physical safety risks were also noted arising from an observable general neglect with which students can commonly be seen to treat College property. The Reviewers on one 'walk-around' the College noted some small, but important, potential physical safety risks surrounding the leaving of personal property around stairways and common areas forming hazards. One marked example was a bicycle, presumably left by a student, in front of a fire hydrant in a residential area. Moreover, Roaching (see paragraph 2.32) causing serious damage to College property naturally can even raise safety risks for the resident of the room being roached, and the students doing the roaching.

"Students show little respect for...the college in general...empty bottles and cans scattered around, the kitchens are stacked with dirty dishes and rubbish...windows and doors are constantly being broken...this is not how you treat your home."

Student

6.3 The feedback from most students who participated in the review, was that the many activities and events at or associated with the College, whether College-run or student-run, are highly enjoyable and enjoyed. Most participants reported that students are not pressured to participate in events, to drink alcohol to a risky level (or at all) or to engage in activities that made them feel uncomfortable.

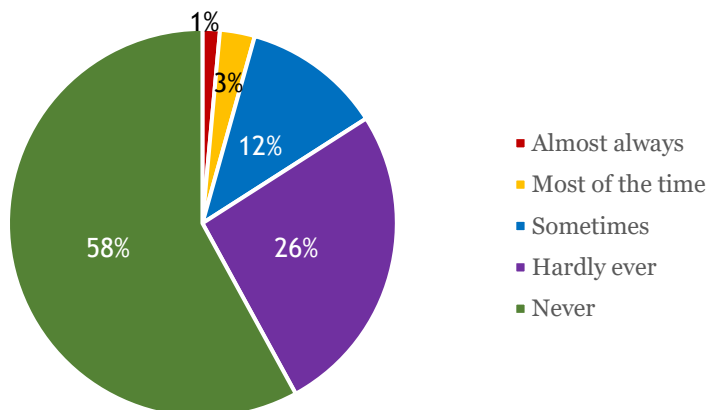
6.4 As mentioned earlier, however, there is evident peer-pressure for students to participate particularly in student-run activities and events, and to accept in good spirit some of the practices and traditions that are more personally invasive and/or quite stressful for some students. Even some who embrace and enjoy College life themselves acknowledge this in a frank and balanced way. Albeit that it seems from most accounts that this pressure is tacit and unintentional, rather than explicit and intentional, this is of little comfort to the minority of individuals who experience strong negative feelings about these types of situations.

"There is a lot of inclusion but also a lot of peer pressure that comes with it in order to fit in."

Student

6.5 Turning to the survey data on this point, we asked the following question with the results shown:

Q14 – Thinking about the various St John's practices, rituals and behaviours (e.g. tapping out, roaching, slush), have you felt uncomfortable for your own safety or wellbeing (whether physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or otherwise) or the safety or wellbeing of others as a result of any or all of those practices and behaviours:



6.6 Students gave a range of examples to support their negative responses in the survey. One example given was 'Tapping Out'. Frequently described to the Reviewers as a 'fun' way of getting people to conform with the (student's own) 'rules' of the College, some acknowledged it could be, although generally is not, misused to harass or bully students unreasonably. For a small number tapping out is seen as anxiety-provoking and harmful.

"I know people will actually avoid the dining hall to avoid getting tapped out due to their social anxiety."

Student

6.7 The example that drew the most negative comment in the survey was 'Roaching'. One respondent described it as "extremely invasive", with another saying that "...the 'playful' threat of being told I should keep my door open so that it can be roached is something that causes me a lot of anxiety..." and yet another that "I usually don't take offence to anything but am aware that I have a thicker skin than most and some of these practices need to be reworked".

"The 'playful' threat of being told I should keep my door open so that it can be roached is something that causes me a lot of anxiety..."

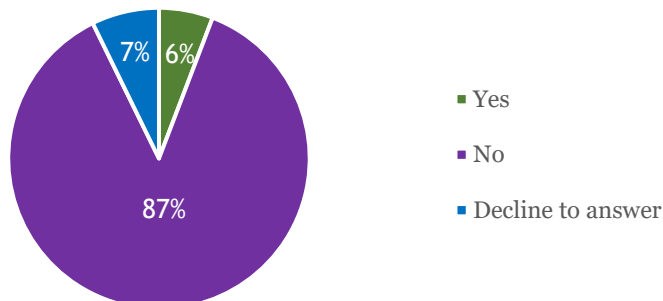
Student

6.8 We questioned students in interviews and focus groups about the extent to which some of these practices and pressures could amount to 'hazing'⁵. A large majority of students said they did not. The 2022 Student Handbook makes clear (at p16) that such conduct will not be tolerated. We did not observe or hear about any such instances which, once brought to the attention of the Senior Leadership Team were tolerated or accepted. Nonetheless, the line can be very fine and very personal between what are harmless forms of 'initiation rites' and symbols of 'belonging' as opposed to 'hazing' practices that cause a sense of ridicule, humiliation and degradation for some. A constant vigilance by the College to supporting students to ensure they do not cross this line is warranted. Some students acknowledged to the Reviewers that at the more concerning end of the spectrum of what are usually useful or fun traditions, there are indeed instances of more explicit and threatening behaviour from some students pressuring others to conform. Most students interviewed were of the view that this was usually a case of a rogue individual or individuals but that more work needs to be done to stamp out such behaviours.

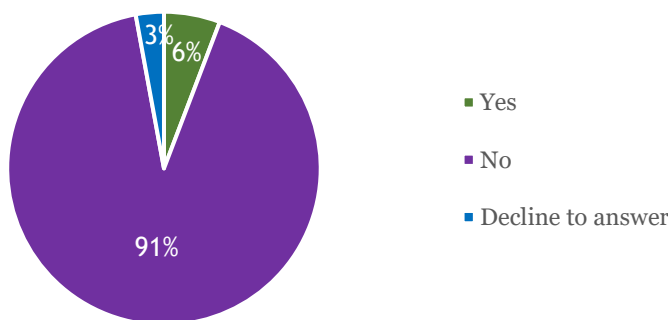
⁵ 'Hazing' is defined in the St John's College Student Handbook (p16) as being "...when a person is subjected to a situation or behaviour that is likely to cause embarrassment and results in the person feeling ridiculed, humiliated, degraded, abused, intimidated and/or harassed. Such behaviour risks the person's mental wellbeing and/or physical health and safety regardless of their willingness to participate."

- 6.9 Following on some of the matters raised with the Reviewers in interviews and focus groups, and having regard to the National Student Safety Survey (NSSS)⁶ released in May 2022, relating to the incidence of sexual assault and other safety risks at Australian Universities and Colleges, we also asked specifically about these types of risks with the following results:

Q20 – Have you ever been subject to sexual harassment at St John's College?



Q21 – Have you ever suffered sexual assault at St John's College?



- 6.10 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 the above responses given the very 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**, the St John's responses reveal a considerably lower level of reported experience of sexual harassment since being at College (6% at St John's v 19% UQ) but a comparable and only slightly higher level of reported sexual assault at St John's (6% at St John's v 5% UQ). In any case, it is clearly not acceptable to have any students, no matter how few, knowingly exposed to any such risk. This fact is clearly reflected in the College's Sexual Misconduct Policy included in the College Handbook.

- 6.11 The association between some of the more negative experiences of students' safety and wellbeing and the alcohol culture of the College cannot be ignored. A majority of staff and students participating in interviews and focus groups and a large number of those surveyed (even those who unqualifiedly embrace and enjoy College life) acknowledge this fact. The heavily alcohol-fuelled aspects of the culture surrounding student-led events raise a number of safety and wellbeing risks and occupied many of the discussions throughout the review.

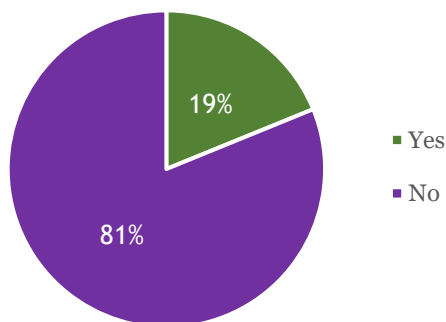
"I have witnessed sexual harassment at events like John's Fest, and heard of many close-calls or acts of sexual assault after an evening of drinking."

Student

⁶See 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.

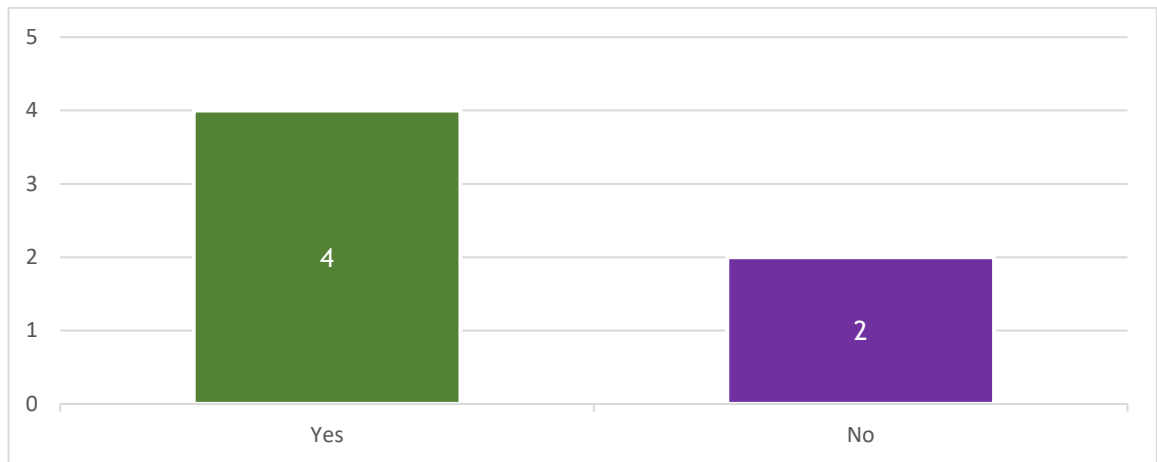
- 6.12 Two specific questions were therefore asked in the survey about the alcohol culture. The results were:

Q12 – 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?

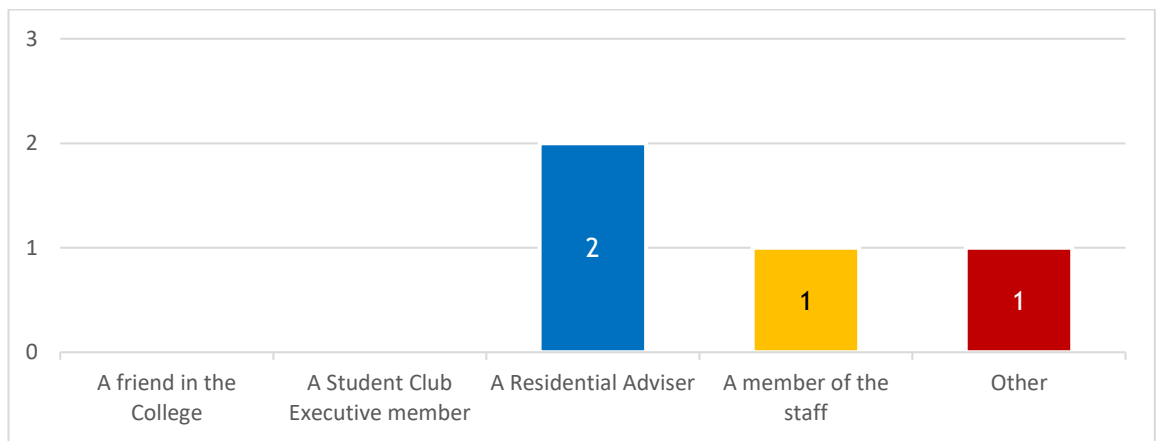


- 6.13 This identifies a sizeable minority of 19% (which if extrapolated across the College means as many as 50 of the 317 students) who are made to feel uncomfortably pressured to consume alcohol. When broken down into year groups, amongst First Years the numbers change to an even more significant 26% of First Year students who feel pressured to drink beyond their comfort levels.
- 6.14 It might of course be expected that within the first year out of school, students feel a higher level of peer pressure around the consumption of alcohol and so for First Years to record a higher level of discomfort than others. Further some students doubtless simply opt out of College to avoid such discomfort. However, this does not alleviate the risks surrounding the large minority of First Years (and others) feeling this type of pressure to engage in risky behaviour beyond their own comfort level. Moreover, it does not alleviate the heightened risks surrounding even those young adults who do feel comfortable with this behaviour.
- 6.15 Finally in respect of the alcohol culture, the presence of a licenced bar at the College potentially heightens a number of the safety and wellbeing risks outlined in this chapter. However, we understand that the College's risk and compliance programs take account of the need for rigorous controls over the operation of the bar. Assuming that is correct (it was beyond scope for our review), in our observation, the greater alcohol-related safety risks would in fact seem to arise from students bringing their own alcohol into the College, rather than from the operation of a properly-managed bar.
- 6.16 In terms of reporting of incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault, of the small number of respondents to the survey who recorded any concern with matters of sexual or other safety and wellbeing, only one person did not report the behaviour to anyone, because their concerns "did not seem serious enough" and they thought this should be resolved by themselves. For those who did report the situation of concern, it was usually to another student (whether a member of the Student Club Executive or a Residential Adviser or other).

Q22 – As you answered Yes to question 20 (sexual harassment) or question 21 (sexual assault), did you report the occurrence to anyone at St John’s College?



Q23 – As you answered ‘Yes’ to Question 22, to whom did you raise your concerns:



6.17 These responses obviously raise serious safety and wellbeing risks for the directly affected students⁷ 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.

6.18 In asking whether there are other channels that would be likely to ensure students are more likely to report such matters more formally so they can be tackled, a range of valuable suggestions were made about the desirability of more professional or expert assistance on site.

⁷ One response to the survey was referred confidentially and anonymously directly to the Warden 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.

Recommendations on Safety and Wellbeing

9. **Safety Culture:** Foster a greater safety culture through deeper engagement by the students in the impact of their own behaviours on the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others, including through greater respect for College property.
10. **End 'Roaching':** Roaching was one of the practices that attracted the highest level of strongly negative commentary from a minority of students who are made to feel anxious and/or otherwise unsafe with this practice. For discussion, the easiest way to end the practice may be, with the support of the Student Club Executive, to end the 'Open Door' policy of the students to ensure that all students are permitted to close and lock the door to their room without fear of reprisal.
11. **Risk appetite and framework:** Refer this Chapter 6 to the College Council to ensure that all physical and other safety and wellbeing risks raised 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' (Anglican Diocese of Brisbane) and property owners (UQ) given the intersection with their areas of responsibility.
12. **Resident graduate tutors:** Invest in increased number of resident graduate tutors living on campus to provide greater support for improvements in safety culture and risk management, instead of placing this responsibility on Residential Advisers.
13. **Existing Support Services:** Enhance student understanding of access to existing College and UQ support services in relation to reporting and dealing with experiences of sexual harassment, sexual assault or other risks to safety and wellbeing.
14. **Enhanced Support Services:** Consider employment of qualified psychologist/s within the College to provide qualified support for serious cases of risks to student (or staff) safety and wellbeing.
15. **Risk Oversight of Bar:** Ensure that annual compliance program for the College includes conduct of a formal annual audit of the operation of the bar against licensing and statutory obligations and the risk management framework of the College.

7. Executive Summary

- 7.1 St John's College has a rich and successful 110-year history of supporting students in their transition from formal education to the professional world. As at writing, the College has 312 students and 17 directly employed staff who together, along with an actively connected alumni, contribute to the diverse tapestry that enriches the individual resident student experience.
- 7.2 The Reviewers observed a very healthy level of interest in the conduct of this review amongst the leaders (Council, Warden, Senior Leadership Team, Student Club Executive and Residential Advisers) and students in the College. This attitude speaks positively of a culture that is willing to look at itself and the ways in which it can change and improve.
- 7.3 There is a notable air of energy, enthusiasm and pride amongst College Council, staff and students in the way they talk about being a part of the College and the high standards of achievement amongst its students. This was also observed by the Reviewers when seeing the students in their natural environment (e.g. in the dining hall and at events attended by the Reviewers in the course of the review).
- 7.4 There is a strong and evident sense of community and fun. In describing the culture of the College in the survey responses, participants frequently used the word "community" and/or even "family" to describe the positive emotion evoked by being a part of the College. This was even sometimes the case for interviewees with more critical or negative overall perspectives about the culture of the College. For most there is, moreover, even a sense of an unswerving trust in, and commitment and loyalty to the community of the College.
- 7.5 Like most communities with such a strong sense of pride in their own culture and beliefs, this can also have an adverse side.
- 7.6 Some in the process described what manifests to them as a closed and exclusive club and some even used the expression 'cult-like' to describe how others, particularly outside the College, have been known to talk about St John's.
- 7.7 It was also regularly and quickly raised by the strong majority of those participating in the review that St John's is marked by a very heavy drinking culture amongst the students. For those who do not enjoy this aspect, it is "...a big drinking culture, if you don't drink you are thought differently of, even excluded." Whilst we observed that the Senior Leadership Team attempts to lead more reflective thought about the impacts of this, for those in the minority who report feeling pressured to participate in the drinking culture, this can have very negative impacts on their feelings about the College.
- 7.8 It is clear that, for the minority, the negative feelings of exclusion and anxiety can be quite acute. One of the cultural risks identified by the Reviewers is that because a small minority feel this way and are likely to quickly self-select out, some of the physical, psychological and other risks associated with the heavy drinking culture amongst students and with some of the John's Traditions maintained by students might be more readily dismissed by many students who more easily 'fit in' as being of little concern or importance.
- 7.9 In addition, the Reviewers frequently heard from staff and students that there is a relatively low diversity of 'type' amongst the College population insofar as there is a bias towards students who 'fit the mould' described in paragraph 2.17. Some speculated that students who do not fit that mould may be self-selecting out. Whilst this may be regarded as a natural social norm for any such community, the question it raises for the College is whether this is the desired outcome, namely a relatively narrow 'type' of student demographically and cognitively that 'fits in' at St John's.

7.10 For the reasons set out in full in each of the corresponding chapters referenced below, the observations and recommendations arising out of this review are summarised below.

People Matters (see Chapter 3 for the full reasons for these Recommendations)

1. **College Council Engagement:** Remain vigilant to ensuring a high level of engagement of all Council members in the life of the College, including monitoring and reporting minimum attendance expectations at College events and activities beyond Council meetings for greater Council understanding of issues and enhanced visibility within the College.
2. **CEO and Senior Leadership Team:** Designate most senior delegate of the College Council as CEO (rather than Warden) and her staff as Senior Leadership Team to increase the warranted level of respect for their roles in College life.
3. **Residential Advisers:** Revisit the employee-status of this body of students and alternative ways to engage them as senior role models and leaders within the College, with a view to reducing the risks to them and enhancing the way in which they can serve as a strong conduit between the student body and the College.
4. **Student Club Executive:** Investigate, and champion to voting stakeholders constitutional change to allow for, appointment of the Student Club President and a senior RA (subject to Recommendation 3) to the College Council to broaden the student appreciation of the cultural and safety issues managed by the College and to ensure that student voices are informing same. Pending constitutional change, invite the Student Club President and a senior RA to attend as observers at the regular meetings of Council subject to managing matters of confidentiality and conflict of interest in the normal course.

College Values (see Chapter 4 for the full reasons for these Recommendations)

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. **Cultural Improvement:** Encourage and support student-led continuous cultural improvement through enhancing the existing program of College-led and student-led activities with regular debates/discussions for the students to tackle and resolve the ethical dilemmas presented by conflicting Values.
7. **Diversity-based Inclusion:** Drive student-led culture of inclusion based on increased diversity (rather than current inclusion based on a narrow student demographic) through student-agreed changes to enrolment processes that encourage and welcome a more demographically and cognitively diverse College population, setting modest annual targets over the coming three years to ensure improvements in inclusion correspond with improvements in diversity.

Traditions, Practices and Behaviours (see Chapter 5 for the full reasons for these Recommendations)

8. **Actively Apply 'Retain, Rework or Remove' Policy to John's Traditions:** Engage in a College-wide discussion, between the Senior Leadership Team, Student Club Executive and RAs, and then with the student body as a whole (as part of College-wide discussions around culture and Values as per Recommendation 6 and safety and wellbeing as per Recommendations 9 and 10) particularly about the findings of, and College responses to, this Chapter 5 around:
 - The role and place of hierarchy in the College (paragraph 5.5)
 - The rationale for 'gendered' events in a co-educational college (paragraph 5.6)
 - practices that have changed considerably over time and/or having disrespectful or other harmful or negative impacts on a small minority of students (paragraphs 5.7)

Safety and Wellbeing (see Chapter 6 for the full reasons for these Recommendations)

9. **Safety Culture:** Foster a greater safety culture deeper engagement by the students in the impact of their own behaviours on the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others, including through greater respect for College property.
10. **End 'Roaching':** Roaching was one of the practices that attracted the highest level of strongly negative commentary from a minority of students who are made to feel anxious and/or otherwise unsafe with this practice. Perhaps the easiest way to end the practice is with the support of the Student Club Executive to ensure that all students are permitted to close and lock the door to their room without fear of reprisal.
11. **Risk appetite and framework:** Refer Chapter 6 to the College Council to ensure that all physical and other safety and wellbeing risks raised 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' (Anglican Diocese of Brisbane) and property owners (UQ) given the intersection with their areas of responsibility.
12. **Resident graduate tutors:** Invest in increased number of resident graduate tutors living on campus to provide greater support for improvements in safety culture and risk management, in place of placing this responsibility on Residential Advisers.
13. **Existing Support Services:** Enhance student understanding of access to existing College and UQ support services in relation to reporting and dealing with experiences of sexual harassment, sexual assault or other risks to safety and wellbeing.
14. **Enhanced Support Services:** Consider employment of qualified psychologist/s within the College to provide qualified support for serious cases of risks to student (or staff) safety and wellbeing.
15. **Risk Oversight of Bar:** Ensure that annual compliance program for the College includes conduct of a formal annual audit of the operation of the bar against licensing and statutory obligations and the risk management framework of the College.

Report delivered on 11 October 2022.

Elizabeth Jameson & Christina Turner

Annexure A (see paragraph 6.10)⁸

The University of Queensland

1,255 students participated in the survey

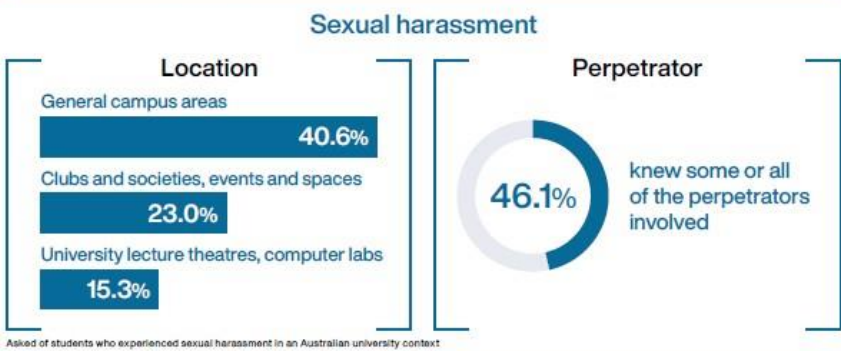
NATIONAL STUDENT SAFETY SURVEY

PREVALENCE IN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

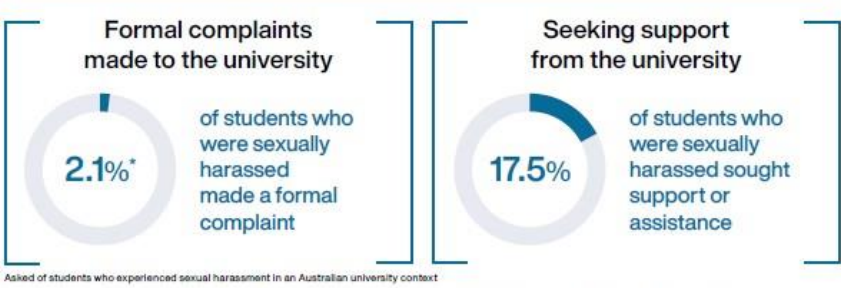


Relative standard errors (RSE) were calculated for survey estimates. If the RSE was between 25% and 50% an * appears next to the estimate that indicates caution should be used with the associated estimate. If the RSE was above 50% or ** appears meaning the estimate is unreliable and not reportable. Differently 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.

CONTEXT OF MOST IMPACTFUL INCIDENT



REPORTING AND SUPPORT SEEKING



⁸ <https://respect.uq.edu.au/2021nsss-findings>