

Cam Bestwick

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF
COLLEGE
CULTURE
AT EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Final Report
November 2023

Prepared for:
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The University of Queensland
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“traditions must be tested wisely and well... [to ensure] the usage is beneficial to the community. And if the custom or tradition cannot bear the weight of legitimate criticism — let it go without a qualm.”

Reverend Dr Ernest Northcroft Merrington MA,
Founding Chairperson of Emmanuel College

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies and waterways within which Emmanuel College is located, the people of the Turrbal nation and Jagera/Yaggera nation and pay my deepest respects to respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I recognise that sovereignty over all the lands on the continent we know of as Australia has never been ceded and affirm my commitment to the principles of reconciliation.

Content warning

This report raises sensitive topics in places which may be distressing or confronting to read. Please use your available support networks.

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Dictionary

The report uses some terms which specific to Emmanuel College. These are defined below. These terms have been capitalised in the body of the report where possible.

Admin:

A term used by students to refer to staff at Emmanuel College.

Blue Dogs:

A name for residents of Emmanuel College.

Brew Dogs:

A cafe within Emmanuel College, located in the quadrangle, which is operated by the College's food services partner, Chartwells, and staffed by students.

Chopping:

An occurrence where someone's room is thrown into disarray (such as turning every item upside down or wrapping every item in newspaper).

College:

When capitalised, refers to Emmanuel College within The University of Queensland, the subject of this review; and otherwise refers to residential colleges in general.

Executives or Exec:

The students occupying the positions of the Emmanuel College Students' Club – Executive Committee ('execs'), who manage the affairs of the Club. Positions on the Executive are elected (except for one).

Fresher:

A resident who is in their first year of living at the College.

Head:

The accountable leader and officer in effective control (CEO-equivalent) at another college besides Emmanuel College. The title of this role varies from college-to-college at the University of Queensland and includes Director, Head, Master, Principal, and Warden.

Hazing:

A type of Initiation (also defined here – see below) which degrades, humiliates, or harms someone, either mentally or physically, regardless of intent.

Initiation:

A broad term referring to situations where existing residents require or encourage any act to join or stay part of a group, whether or not it is voluntarily agreed to. These are not automatically Hazing (see above).

Interdigitation:

The term appears to have two layers of meaning:

1. The concept of getting to know people from other wings or colleges at the University. It has encouraging overtones, being seen as an altogether positive thing to do.
2. A slang term for “hooking up” with someone from another wing or college.

Old Dogs:

Past residents, or alumni, of the College.

O-Week:

Short for Orientation Week, this is the first week Freshers live at the College. In this week the Freshers typically engage in a busy itinerary of both orientation and social activities organised by student leaders and staff of the College.

Principal:

The role of Principal & CEO at Emmanuel College. This is a single role with a dual title and is occupied by one person.

Senior Management Team (SMT):

The highest layer of management at the College including the roles of Principal & CEO (a single role – see above), the Director of College Life (Deputy Principal) and the Director of Wellbeing.

Students' Club:

Is the Emmanuel College Students' Club, an association of residents. All residents become members upon entering the College.

Student leaders:

A collective noun for Wing Leaders and the Executive (also a defined term – see above), and other office holders.

University:

When capitalised, refers to The University of Queensland; and otherwise refers to universities in general.

Wings:

The wings are the residential buildings spread across Emmanuel College's campus which reliably become small neighbourhoods or sub-communities within the College.

Wing Leader:

A volunteer student leadership role. A Wing Leader is assigned to one wing where they are expected to get to know the residents of that wing, build community, get residents involved in College life, foster a safe and caring community, and connect students who may need support to available support services.

Executive Summary

Background

Emmanuel College (the “College”) is a co-educational residential college within the University of Queensland (the “University”) located at the St Lucia campus. The College provides a living-learning environment for up to 359 (primarily undergraduate) residents studying at the University and nearby institutions. Emmanuel College is considered to be the oldest and largest residential college at the University and is affiliated with the Uniting Church of Australia, Queensland Synod.

The College engaged myself, Cam Bestwick (the “reviewer”), to conduct an independent review of the College’s culture. The review was conceived of by both parties as a broad, forward-looking process which, while sensitive to the College’s rich history, should identify opportunities to strengthen the College for the future. The review was not a reaction to an incident or known issue, which gave the project an air of genuine exploration and discovery.

Methodology

The design of the review process sought to examine College life from as many angles as possible, and be as data-driven as possible, while striking at the heart of cultural renewal opportunities for the College.

Data was collected from a range of sources, including desktop reviews; a student survey; interviews and focus groups; written submissions; and direct observation. Particular care was taken to ensure that the voices of the most marginalised and powerless members of the College were actively sought.

Data were analysed through a framework of four interrelated Factors affecting people’s propensity to live the values of the College. These were **Awareness** (of the desired values and behaviours) as well as the **Opportunities**, **Motivators**, and **Capabilities** (needed to put those values and behaviours into practice).

Strengths of the Current Culture

This review process validated some wonderful strengths in the College's current culture. This report does not comment on every strength put forward by participants, but those which were echoed across many groups as well as those which seemed to contribute most to the unique essence of the College. These were:

- There is a very powerful **sense of community** around the College.
- The people form strong, **lifelong friendships** while at the College.
- The **ethos of mutual support** among students is resolute, making the College feel like a 'second family'. This ethos is perpetuated by the students themselves.
- The community thrives on **voluntarism**. Residents steadfastly volunteer their time towards College activities. This is powered by a sense of **stewardship** over the College – where one feels an obligation to improve the College as they are passing through it.
- The students and the College are known for their **well-roundedness**. Participation in a broad range of pursuits across sports, the arts, academia and other areas, are all valued. No single domain is over-emphasised or over-valued at the College.
- The College has a kind of **unassuming prestige** where, it is recognised by others as a prestigious place, but cultivating prestige is not front-of-mind for people at the College.
- The College is deeply **committed to safety**; enjoys a widespread sense of safety already; and has demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement in the areas of safety and respect.

Future Focus Areas for Culture

The overarching finding of the review is that Emmanuel College is a commendable institution poised for further advancement. Yet it faces challenges with its current culture, which it will need to overcome to reach its full potential. These culture challenges and the associated opportunities for improvement are discussed across three chapters of this report: *Working as Colleagues*, *Working on Reforms*, and *Working on Alignment*. A summary of each is provided below.

#1 Working as Colleagues

Strengthening the working relationships between students and professional members of the College community, particularly as it relates to decision-making, is a fulcrum for improving several interrelated aspects of the culture at this time.

All participating internal stakeholder groups expressed a desire for more participative and altogether collegiate approaches to decisions affecting them, but have also tended to be strategic when involving others in their own decision-making processes.

Interestingly the participating groups offered remarkably similar reasons for deeming collegiate decision-making desirable but impractical. The hesitation stems from a sense that the other groups have been inconsistent in previous attempts to share decision-making. Where a stakeholder was perceived as unpredictable by another, their overall credibility was also brought into question, diminishing the likelihood of them being engaged in a collegiate decision-making approach going forward.

Each group of professional stakeholders at the College (the Board, Senior Management, and Staff) had a perceived credibility gap with student groups, which were largely centred on the genuineness of caring for students and treating them as other adults. Equally, all groups of students had a perceived credibility gap with professional members of the College, which was rooted in their reliability.

Recommendations to improve collegiality in decision-making include establishing a RACI matrix to set expectations around consultation; greater student input into Board-level decision-making processes; developing an overall student experience framework or logic model for the College; staff being more visible and present in the everyday life of the College; and arranging external mentors for leaders of the student Executive.

#2 Working on Reforms

In addition to identifying new ways of working together, there are some priority areas to work on together. The review process identified several aspects of the current culture that warrant attention and reform:

The **values**, whilst agreeable, do not unite the community. The College has an uncommonly large number of espoused values which members struggle to commit to memory, and omits some enacted values of the student community (see Chapter 3). The review recommends a broad, participative process to discover and crystalise the College's core values.

Emmanuel College's strong **wing culture**, while nurturing close-knit friendships among neighbours, unintentionally hinders residents from forging relationships across the whole College, and sometimes allows wings to evolve sub-cultures which deviate from the broader College identity. The review recommends the developing additional strategies to help residents to build relationships beyond their wings. Another consideration in wing culture is that, while Wing Leaders play a crucial role in both wing culture and student support systems, they face challenges in their role due to conflicts between their two main responsibilities of community building and assisting pastoral care. The review recommends reviewing the role to professionalise it and give precedence to the wellbeing/pastoral care functions of the role.

Alcohol consumption is tightly woven into the social fabric of the College and was, collectively, the greatest concern among all stakeholders. Acknowledging the efforts made by both staff and students to manage the risks, the drinking culture requires continuous attention and solutions. The review recommends a student-led alcohol culture taskforce who will own the responsibility of effecting a social norm of genuinely optional and healthy enjoyment of alcohol at the College.

The student body at Emmanuel College organises into both formal and **informal hierarchies**, with older residents being able to exercise considerable power over Freshers (first-year students) in different situations, which are often linked to College traditions. Despite the notable contributions traditions can make to the overall community spirit, the impact on individuals if these practices misfire is severe, and the safeguards in place to prevent that from happening can be fragile. The review recommends the students adopt and mutually enforce an inviolable ethical framework to ensure safety remains paramount in informal traditions. It also recommends the awareness and participation rates for exit surveys and interviews be raised to gain more data and a deeper understanding of situations where residents have had distressing experiences at the College.

In the areas of **inclusiveness and allyship**, there is a generally respectful culture around the College, but complaints were received from queer residents and allies (drawn from both

current and former residents) about a persistent heteronormative attitude in the student body, which they interpret as being more overt than other university or college settings. Some incidents, as described to the review, constituted outright homophobia and were only met with silent disapproval by bystanders. In the future, in moments where the College's prevailing climate of permanent universal respect is punctured by unacceptable behaviours, there needs to be more on-time advocacy from those present. The review recommends the introduction of ally programs to foster everyday moments of advocacy and decentralise responsibility for promoting greater inclusiveness.

Student-led programs and events significantly shape Emmanuel College's culture, influencing all of the other aspects identified above. Improving the way programs and events are developed will have significant ripple effects throughout the College. Concerns were shared about stagnation in the programming, where the same programs and events are repeated each year without enough variation. There was also an absence of clear pathways for bottom-up ideas to be developed and implemented. The review recommends creating an evergreen set of event guidelines; providing event management training to the Students' Club Executive; and quarantining a small amount of funding for a contestable student experience innovation fund to put grants and other support towards new ideas.

#3 Working on Alignment

During the review, compelling but contrasting visions for the advancement of the College were shared. While not requiring immediate action, these nuanced areas called for greater discussion and ultimately alignment if the members of the College are to collectively chart pathways for bringing these ideas to life. They centred around a few aspects of college life, being: the academic tone and character of the College; involving alumni in College programs; diversity of the student body; and harnessing the influence of third year residents for the betterment of the College. The review recommends the College search for new ways to spark more open discussion of ambitious and long-term ideas for the future of the College.

Outcomes

A complete list of recommendations with some initial criteria for their successful implementation is listed at the beginning of *Chapter 7: Conclusion*, and a one-page summary of the entire review is provided in *Appendix C: Review Summary Card*.

The spirit in which the whole community at Emmanuel College engaged in the review left nothing to be desired. In addition to conveying my sincere thanks to all participants, I would content that their spirit of participation has imbued the review with the holistic, forward-looking and opportunity-focused direction the leadership team had hoped for at the outset of the review process.

Limitations

Because of the quality of stakeholders' participation, and that of the methodology applied, I believe the findings of this review are valid and the corresponding recommendations will provide an eminently useful starting point for a period of cultural renewal at the College. However, as with any review of this nature, it is subject to some limitations. These are:

- The review is based on the information provided, and it is possible important details about the culture were not contemplated despite the best efforts of myself and the College (who was exemplary in this regard).
- Assessing the College culture has been challenging due to recent disruptions such as floods and the COVID-19 pandemic, with the current year being the first "normal" year since 2019 which could serve as an effective baseline.
- The student culture in residential colleges is dynamic, with characteristics and issues evolving rapidly and sometimes moving in cycles. This report captures a snapshot from August to October 2023, and become increasingly obsolete over time.
- There are inherent nuances in college traditions and firsthand experience is sometimes essential to gaining a comprehensive understanding. I have tried to overcome this, there may still be gaps in my understanding of some traditions.
- While the College may be taking action independently to address some of the issues and opportunities highlighted in this review, and those are acknowledged wherever possible, no findings or recommendations were omitted because of the College's current plans or actions.

More detail on the limitations of this report is provided in the following chapter: *Introduction*.

Introduction

This chapter sets the stage by presenting essential information about the background and intentions of Emmanuel College and this review. Additionally, it outlines critical limitations to enhance the reader's understanding and interpretation of the forthcoming discussion and findings.

Emmanuel College

Emmanuel College is a co-educational residential college within the University of Queensland located at the St Lucia campus. The College provides a living and learning environment for up to 359 (primarily undergraduate) students studying at the University and other nearby institutions, which makes it the largest residential college at the University.

Emmanuel's mission is *"to provide a world-class collegiate experience that gives Emmanuel residents the greatest chance of success in their chosen careers while also developing well-rounded and respected citizens of the world."*¹

The College is considered to be the oldest residential college at the University, having continuously operated for this purpose from its founding in 1911 to present. Founded under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church, its initial focus was as a theological hall alongside the newly established University of Queensland. Prior to 1956, the College was located in downtown Brisbane on Wickham Terrace, then, along with St John's College, was the first among the residential colleges to be established at the St Lucia campus after the University relocated. The College opened its admissions to female students in 1975, becoming the first of the 'old' colleges to do so. In 1977, when part of the Presbyterian Church joined with the Congregational and Methodist Churches to become the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), the UCA became a co-auspicer of the College. In 2019 the Presbyterian Church advised its withdrawal from College. In 2021, Emmanuel College became a co-signatory to the Relationship Framework created between the University and all the residential colleges situated at the St Lucia campus.

¹ Retrieved from the Emmanuel College website and other key documents provided in the review.

The College is an incorporated association created under Letters Patent, and the governance of the entity is undertaken by a seven-member board under a constitution updated in 2021. It has a religious affiliation with The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod, which maintains the College's church alignment through the appointment of 4 board members. While the requirement of students to participate in spiritual life is nominal, the College strives to live the Christian ethos which has served it well throughout its comparatively lengthy history, and supporting the spiritual development of students remains a fundamental objective of the institution.² The College's name, *Emmanuel*, is commonly translated to the phrase "God with us".

The Review

I was engaged by the College to conduct an independent review of its current culture. At the outset, the College was clear it wanted a broad-ranging review which would spark a constructive and future-oriented dialogue among students and key stakeholders about their shared ambitions for the College culture along, with ways to develop the culture in that direction.

It should be noted that electing to undertake a review of this nature, both in its scope and timing, reflects the existing maturity of College's culture and its willingness to proactively engage in self-reflection. This is especially the case when some further context is considered.

Firstly, this review is not a reaction to an incident, complaint, scandal, or other acute issue which might have made such a review narrow or hasty. The College became interested in an independent culture review approximately four years ago, but unfortunately experienced disruptive events at the beginning of each subsequent year (the Covid-19 pandemic and the Southern Queensland Floods). Since the inception of a culture review, this year has been the first 'normal' year which could serve as an effective baseline.

"There's always more we can do to ensure we foster a great college culture and experience for all of our college members" (Principal)

² Noted in Section 3 of the current Emmanuel College Constitution

Secondly, the scope of the review was intentionally left quite open-ended. While my primary focus was on exploring the College's culture, I was extended an invitation to delve into all facets of College life, including commentary on operational matters. In the initial communication from the college, it was emphasised to me that only by allowing the review to explore any aspect of College life would *"the true picture be assessed"*, which was needed *"to ensure that as a community we are relevant, forward looking, pursuing best practice, and ensuring the wellbeing of the community."*³ It was entrusted to me to determine how to approach the assignment (the result of which is described in the following chapter: *Methodology*). More information on the scope is included below in Box 1:

Box 1: Dissimilarities between this review and 'Recommendation 9' reviews held elsewhere.

This review was not a 'Recommendation 9' review.

This review is not principally a 'Recommendation 9' review, which refers to the final recommendation of the first report on what is now known as the National Student Safety Survey, entitled *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities 2017*, prepared by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). The recommendation urges residential colleges to *"commission an independent, expert-led review of the factors which contribute to sexual assault and sexual harassment in their settings"* underlining the areas of policy, procedure, training, supervision, alcohol and hazing as important areas to review.⁴

While the College appears to be deeply committed to eradicating sexual misconduct and fostering respectful relationships at all levels, and it has made sustained and meaningful progress in this area in the time since the AHRC report was published (more detail on this is provided in *Chapter 3: Strengths of the Current Culture*), this review was conceived of as a broader initiative. The focus extends beyond threats to safety, encompassing their known antecedents such as hazing and alcohol misuse (as were the surrounding policies, procedures, and training), and explores the balance of factors affecting College life as well.

³ Quotations are from the initial communication of the scope of the review.

⁴ Recommendation 9 can be found on page 188 of *Changing the Course* report, available on the AHRC's website at this location: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/change-course-national-report-sexual-assault-and-sexual>

Limitations

I have made every effort to maximise the validity of this review. However, like any study of this nature, the following chapters will be an imperfect representation of the culture at the College. I would like to highlight some limitations to assist with interpretation of the findings of the review in the subsequent chapters:

- I have only been able to consider information which has been provided to me. There may be important information which, despite the best efforts of myself and the College (which has been exemplary in this regard), has not been contemplated by the review.
- It is not an easy time to appraise the culture of the College, which has been in greater flux than usual. The College has withstood some disruptions in recent years including the Southern Queensland Floods in 2022, the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020-2022, and some other disruptions prior to these. This year has been the first 'normal' year at the College since 2019.
- I note the student culture in residential colleges is ever-changing. While some aspects of student culture can seem incredibly stable, any element of student culture can shift rapidly. The characteristics of the student cohort can be markedly different every 3-5 years and some issues move in cycles, disappearing and re-emerging even within a decade. This report should be interpreted as a snapshot of the College's culture at a specific period of time, namely August to October 2023 (which is when data was collected). To that effect, this report has been 'out of date' from its publication in November 2023 (and will become increasingly more so as time goes on).
- I accept there is often nuance to college traditions which can only be understood by 'being there' and witnessing or participating in the tradition firsthand (sometimes multiple times). I have done my best to understand the traditions as much as possible, but I will, no doubt, still have an incomplete understanding of these.
- The College may already be independently taking steps to address issues and opportunities raised in this review. Where I am aware of these, I have acknowledged them, but I have not withheld any findings or recommendations in this report because an action by the College was planned or underway.

Methodology

The design of the review process reflected three broad aims: to examine College life from as many angles as possible, and to be as evidence-based as possible, while still getting to the heart of culture issues at the College.

Data Collection

Data was collected from a range of sources designed to obtain a cross-sectional view of the College community. These data collection methods (often referred to as 'channels') were:

- Desktop Reviews
- A Student Survey
- Interviews and focus groups
- Written submissions; and
- Observation

Each of these methods and the associated level of response is described below.

Desktop Reviews

Two desktop reviews were completed which examined existing information and documents deemed relevant to the review. Each desktop review had a different purpose and was carried out at a different stage of the project.

The first desktop review was an attempt to simulate the journey of a new student from their initial discovery of the College's existence through to their in-person induction when moving in. This review was completed before any primary data was collected from students or other stakeholders. The intention behind it was to help me see different situations from the same perspective as a new resident (a 'Fresher') and bring the same information and expectations into my first interactions at the College as a Fresher might.

The documents and other artifacts reviewed as part of this review included: all sections of the College's website; the application portal and application form; the communications templates of all the different application stages and outcomes; the offer of residency, including the student agreement, Student Handbook; the pre-arrival information; and new student induction materials.

Later in the project, during my interviews and focus groups with students, they confirmed that the typical Fresher has not reviewed all of the information listed.

The second desktop review was a top-down review of governance, strategy, planning, policy, procedure, and resource materials. The documents and other artefacts reviewed included: the College's strategic plan; its Master Plan; the College Constitution; the Board Charter; examples of board reports; the strategic plan; various functional area strategies and plans; key policies and procedures; the demographics of the college; past survey results; along with several other ad hoc requests to understand emergent data from other channels. This desktop review was completed as late as possible in the project review to notice any potential misalignments between first impressions and these direction-setting documents, and to avoid becoming anchored in the contents of these documents.⁵

Student Survey

One of the key ways the student voice was incorporated into the review was through administering a student survey. The survey was available to all current residents of the College to complete from 29 August to 22 September 2023. The primary purpose of the survey was to understand students' attitudes and perceptions of different aspects of college life. The survey asked questions about as many elements of residential life as possible, with many questions focusing on how they feel about the College environment, and how it makes people relate to one another. Respondents were asked 43 questions about the College, with 32 of these being structured (all 5- point Likert scale questions) and there were 11 opportunities for respondents to make open-ended comments.

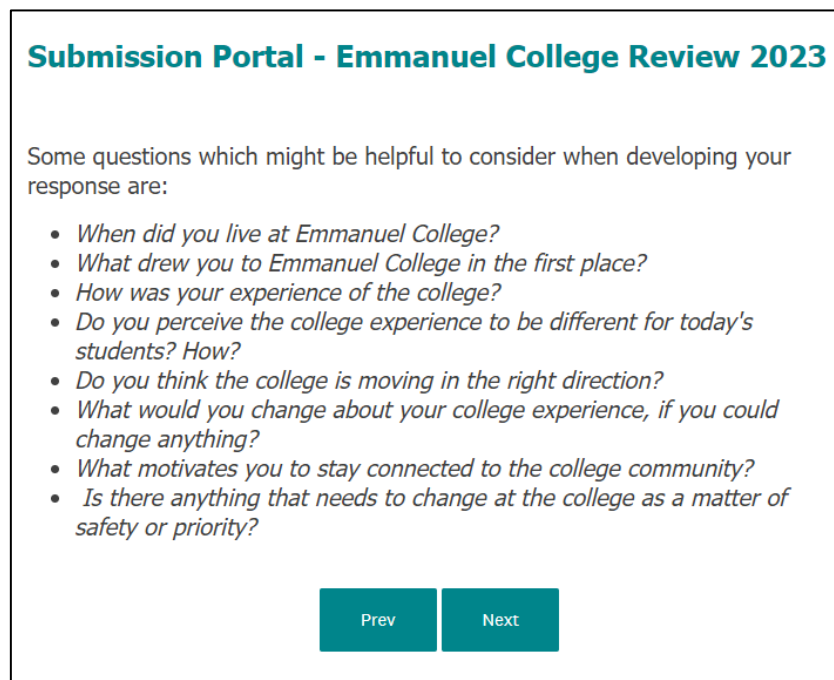
⁵ Both desktop reviews were purely for my own research and analysis as part of my assignment from the College for this review project. Neither desktop review was intended to amount to an audit or other assurance activity against any external standard or law and no representations are made about the adequacy of these documents.

The response to the survey was pleasing. With assistance from the College to promote the survey to its residents, the survey received 104 responses, which translates to a useful and statistically valid response rate of 30.50%⁶. The average time taken to complete the survey was 13 minutes. The survey data was analysed by myself with assistance from one subject-matter expert. We screened for invalid responses using basic pre-defined parameters (for example, responses with no variance across all positively and negatively framed Likert scale questions would be considered invalid). Fortunately, no responses met these criteria and therefore none were excluded from the analysis. *Appendix A: Student Survey Response* provides more detailed information about the representativeness of the sample.

Submission portal

An online submission portal was open to all students, parents, alumni, and staff of the College to have written submissions considered as part of the review. Submissions were accepted from 31 August to 2 October 2023. Contributors could elect to be anonymous or offer their name and contact details to provide me with the opportunity to seek further or clarifications from them. Stakeholders were invited to comment on any aspect of college life but were encouraged to focus on culture, through a small set of priming questions.

Figure 1: Example of priming questions for alumni in the submission portal



Submission Portal - Emmanuel College Review 2023

Some questions which might be helpful to consider when developing your response are:

- *When did you live at Emmanuel College?*
- *What drew you to Emmanuel College in the first place?*
- *How was your experience of the college?*
- *Do you perceive the college experience to be different for today's students? How?*
- *Do you think the college is moving in the right direction?*
- *What would you change about your college experience, if you could change anything?*
- *What motivates you to stay connected to the college community?*
- *Is there anything that needs to change at the college as a matter of safety or priority?*

Prev Next

⁶ To a confidence interval of 90% and confidence level of 95%.

Submissions were made in response to a single text box in the questionnaire or as a document upload (documentary submissions were limited to 16MB files with of the following types: pdf, doc, docx, png, jpg, jpeg).

The submission portal drew a diverse range of contributions. 72 submissions were received in total, which included 32 parents, 3 staff, 3 students, and 34 alumni. Alumni submissions ranged from people whose time at college spanned from 1947 to 2022. All submissions were read in their entirety and their contents were thematically coded after the portal closed.

I directly contacted a small number of contributors whose submissions were noticeably incomplete (who had provided their contact details) with an offer to resubmit. I also directly contacted one elderly member of the alumni community who indicated an eagerness to participate and preferred other communication channels.

Interviews and Focus Groups

A range of stakeholders were identified for participation in focus groups and individual interviews. This resulted in 25 interviews and 5 focus groups being conducted, which spanned:

- Students.
- Student leaders.
- Staff (including both day and night staff, residential and non-residential staff).
- The Senior Management Team.
- Board Members.
- Heads of other colleges at the University.
- Executives from the University most active in the relationship with the College.

Focus groups were generally only conducted where groups of people had similar roles or similar levels of seniority. Interviews were held in all other circumstances. All focus groups were held in-person at the College, whereas interviews were a mixture of online and in-person meetings at different locations.

Actively seeking the voices at the margins

At the outset, I saw it as a positive obligation to hear from members of the community who do not hold positions of power and, to the extent they exist, to hear from people who felt excluded, powerless, or even degraded by events shaped by the current culture of the College. I made several meaningful attempts to locate and listen to people at the margins, which included:

(1) Confidential interviews were held with students who felt themselves to be outside the prevailing culture at the College. These students were recruited through a voluntary, online Expression of Interest (EOI) process shared with all current residents of the College. The EOI form was open from 6 to 24 September 2023 and attracted seven responses. Of these, four students proceeded to an interview, one did not respond to my outreach, one was uncontactable on the contact details provided, and one was classified as having a grievance with management of the college. Interviews were conducted online and at the location of the participant's choosing.

(2) Confidential interviews were sought with three residents selected at random who held no position at the College. Initially, only one of the selected students elected to participate, so I re-selected and approached another batch of students, and another, and so on until all interview slots were filled. Unfortunately, after four such cycles only one student had completed an interview, so these interview slots were reallocated to other stakeholder groups.

(3) By design, to avoid becoming anchored in the perspectives of the more visible/influential members of the College, interviews with the Senior Leadership Team and Board Members did not commence until the mid-point of the planned program of fieldwork when consultations with all other stakeholder groups were already underway and all online channels were open.

(4) In addition to the outreach described above, the larger channels were kept as safe as possible for those disaffected by the prevailing culture. Both the survey and submission portal could be completed privately and were, by default, completely anonymous.

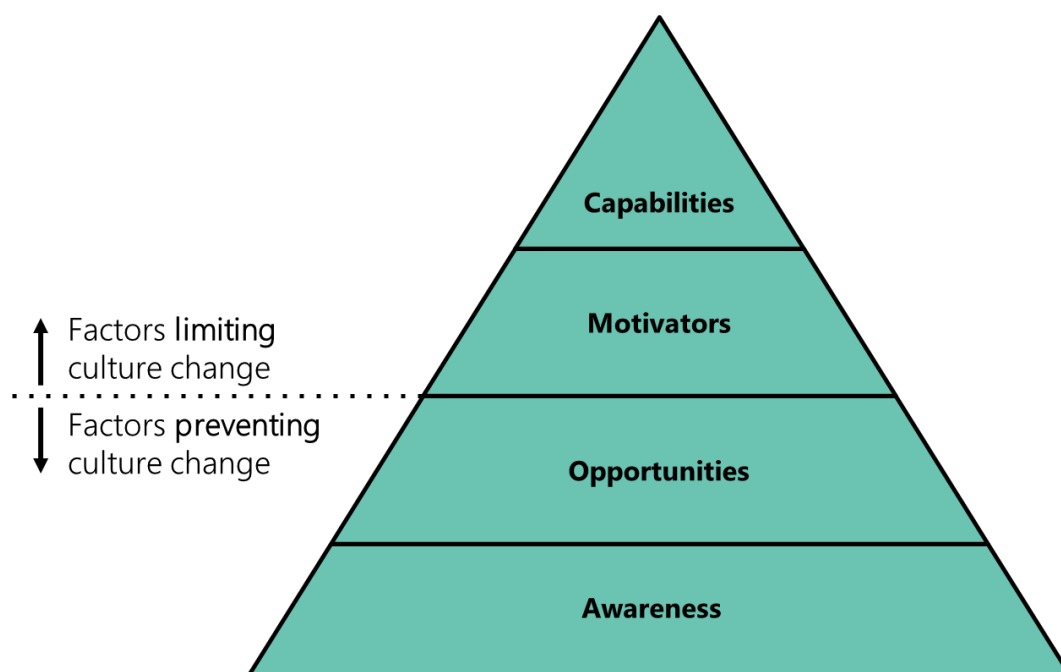
Observation

I stayed at the college for 6 days and 6 nights (cumulative) across three visits spaced throughout the semester. This provided the opportunity to observe students and staff interacting with each other and the built environment. I ate in the dining hall; enjoyed coffee from Brew Dogs; attended events; walked the College's common spaces and grounds; read newsletters; notices and posters; and spoke to students passing by me in corridors.

Framework for Analysis

The data collected were considered against a set of Factors affecting how aligned College members' behaviour was aligned with its mission and espoused values on aggregate. This gave the information structure and helped to prioritise potential findings and recommendations. The design of the fieldwork and analysis procedures, such as the survey, discussion groups, and desktop reviews, were structured to explore how these Factors were shaping behaviours at the College. The Factors were:

Figure 2: Framework used to analyse qualitative data in the review.



Awareness

This factor was characterised by questions like:

Am I aware of the expectations of me? And what are the standards? How is feedback provided? How will I know when I'm getting it? What is the vision of the college? What are its values? How does my behaviour contribute to the cultural climate of the college?

Opportunities

This factor was characterised by questions like:

Do I have adequate opportunities to do what's expected of me? Do I have enough time? Can I afford to do the right thing with the resources I have? Am I given ready access to the tools, systems, spaces and equipment I need?

Motivators

This factor was characterised by questions like:

What incentives are at work, positive and negative, formal and informal? What is most rewarding about being here? What is the least? Are incentives aligned to stated expectations, policies, and risk appetite? Do I feel committed and part of this community? Am I proud to be associated with this community?

Capabilities

This factor was characterised by questions like:

Do I have the skills, knowledge and training to do what is expected of me? Do other people around me have the capabilities they need? How do we engage others to modify behaviours? How do people upgrade their contributions to the college over time? How are my capabilities being developed by leaders and others at the College?

The above descriptors are explanatory only and do not represent the full breadth of analysis performed.

Strengths of the Current Culture

Throughout the review, participants generously shared their perspectives on the essence of Emmanuel College. From this wealth of information some distinct qualities emerged. While it will be difficult to pinpoint the character of the institution exactly, or capture every virtue, this chapter attempts to combine and re-express the attributes that both internal and external participants identified as commendable strengths of the College culture.

Sense of Community

Emmanuel College is more than a place to live. It is a vibrant community. This notion was energetically conveyed by participants and resonated strongly in group discussions. In fact, during consultations, participants of all types referred to Emmanuel as a “community” considerably more often than they called it a “college”. Whenever residents or alumni made statements like *“[m]y experience at Emmanuel College was unbelievably positive”*, *“something I’ll never forget”*, *“something I’ll cherish for the rest of my life”*, the *“best 2 years of my life”* or *“best 3 years ever”*, their connection to ‘the community’ and their ‘lifelong friends’ were among the first reasons offered for these appraisals. One resident aptly described what it is like to feel a part of the Emmanuel community:

“There’s this great connection that everyone who goes to [Emmanuel] or has been to Emmanuel in the past shares that is amazing. I’ve met countless people for the first time and the simple fact they went to Emmanuel seems to be enough reason for us to be friends. And within the college it feels the same, it sounds cliché, but I feel as though everyone who goes to the college is a brother or sister or sibling, and would help me out just as I would them.” (student)

Furthermore, the sense of community is not just a byproduct of experiencing Emmanuel firsthand – it is perceptible and magnetic enough to newcomers that it is a key part of what draws them to the College in the first place. As one Board Member noted:

“What draws people to Emmanuel is something very innate for human beings and that’s a yearning for community, connection, a sense of belonging, collective identity, and being part of something greater than yourself. All those ideas – which are as old as humankind – are manifested at Emmanuel and I think it’s an environment where people can find that” (Board Member)

This was echoed by the students themselves when they described their search for a place to call home during their tertiary studies in Brisbane. As one alumnus shared:⁷

“...the values of community, the sense of belonging, the friendships forged between residents, and the identity of ‘home’ were clear, evident and palpable. It was these values that instantly drew me to the College. The way myself and my family were welcomed on the tour, and the profound sense of community immediately sold me on applying for Emmanuel. In fact, I didn’t tour anymore of the other UQ Colleges after that – Emmanuel was the only option for me.” (recent resident)

Lifelong friendships

An obvious corollary to the sense of community at Emmanuel was that the College environment fosters enduring, if not lifelong, bonds of friendship.

This sentiment extends across generations. Both current students and alumni frequently emphasised “[t]he beautiful, strong, and long lasting friendships” formed during their time at the College as one of the most cherished aspects of their experience. They explained how the proximity of living together and daily interactions at College laid the foundation for enduring friendships that span decades. Several different vintages of alumni spoke about this in their submissions.

⁷ All alumni will be referred to in the singular as an alumnus throughout this report.

“Living so closely together with regular daily contact inspired conviviality and the growth of [lifelong] friendships” (alumnus)

The fatefulness of these connections is further accentuated by the fact that many alumni, independent of any formal College business, actively maintain regular face-to-face contact for decades after their residency. This intrinsic motivation to stay connected and relive their college experiences speaks volumes about the strength of the bonds formed. Noteworthy anecdotes from alumni submissions included various alumni groups that have organically sustained themselves (independently of the College), with some continuing to meet once a year for up to two decades after their college years. One group, however, eclipsed them all, who is *“still lunching regularly after 60 years.”*

“I have made so many lifelong friends and memories I will cherish forever” (student)

Supporting each other

Among Emmanuel College students, there is a culture of mutual support which goes beyond the formal wellbeing system and forms a robust network of peer assistance. This closely-knit community is often equated to a second family, fostering a shared responsibility to notice when someone is facing challenges and confront them together.

Staff describe students as *“a community”* who is *“rock solid”*, *“believe in each other”* and *“are there for each other”* emphasising their unwavering belief in and support for each other. This unwavering belief and support were particularly evident during the pandemic and flooding crises of the past few years:

“It was incredible: during the pandemic the students connected with each other so much, and supported each other so much, that it was like the college continued to exist, virtually. And when they came back it was like they simply resumed the physical side of being at College” (Principal)

Students made extensive references to the spirit of camaraderie. Examples of putting this value in action ranged from motivating each other to prepare for an intimidating exam,

through to rescuing one another on a night out, and making the effort to turn out to support the College's competitors – *"both cultural and sporting (and both men and women)"* – in inter-college competitions.

Some non-students added the caveat that students can support each other to a fault, suggesting this strength can occasionally 'backfire' when residents over rely on their peers, taking unnecessary risks or not taking their own initiative in problem-solving (because help is so readily available). However, these stakeholders were quick to point out it is merely the downside of having 'too much of a good thing'.

Stewardship and voluntarism

Emmanuel College thrives on a robust sense of stewardship and voluntarism, where these two principles mutually reinforce each other.

Students understand their time at the College to be a temporary custodianship, that carries with it a collective obligation to leave the institution in an improved state for the benefit of future generations.

Mirroring this is a significant commitment to voluntarism. The engine room of the College is the dedicated efforts of volunteers, who together run countless programs and activities. Many of the most cherished traditions at Emmanuel are sustained by individuals who donate their time and passion, shaping the College experience for others through their voluntary contributions.

"Overall, Emmanuel shaped me as a person in many invaluable ways. I am beyond grateful for [the people] who put hours of effort and love into providing the college experience." (student)

Comparatively, stakeholders with experience at other institutions noted a marked willingness among current Emmanuel students to volunteer and create their own legacy of their time at the College. This sets Emmanuel apart, especially when contrasted with institutions that resort to financial incentives to encourage student involvement.

Roundedness

Another distinctive strength of Emmanuel College is its roundedness. Unlike some colleges that develop a specific persona by attracting similar types of students or prioritising excellence in particular areas, Emmanuel refuses to specialise in one domain. It wants to be excellent in all domains but would not choose to privilege any one domain if it meant sacrificing breadth. The College's lack of distinctiveness in this regard is, without any irony, something that makes it distinct.

"I loved my time at Emmanuel. I loved the campus, the people, engaging in discourse over meals in the dining hall with my peers from all walks of life, staying out late, applying myself with my peers to my studies, taking the field with the rugby team and the stage with the Dancefest trope" (alumni)

Members of the College community take great pride in the diversity of experiences and opportunities available with many asserting Emmanuel has struck a good, or even "perfect", balance of extra- and co-curricular activities. They also believed the multifariousness of College life meant that residents were at less risk of isolation at Emmanuel because, with people pursuing such varied interests, everyone is more likely to have established satisfying friendships with like-minded people.

"I look back on my time at Emmanuel college as some of the best years of my life. It was a great place to grow as a young adult, living with students from all over the world, studying different subjects, playing different sports, partaking in different events etc." (alumni)

Part of what creates the well-roundedness is the social norm of 'giving things a go'. Participants thought it was important people should use their time at the College to step forward and try new things, and the community rewards this. *"The people who get the most out of Emmanuel..."* said one student leader *"...have an open-mindedness about them. They are willing to try things"*; and some alluded to the idea that you can 'build your own experience' and 'control your own destiny' at Emmanuel:

“The leadership and extracurricular opportunities I had at Emmanuel were highly influential in my personal development. It was an environment where you were rewarded for putting your hand up and giving things a go” (recent resident)

Unassuming prestige

Emmanuel was lauded from a few directions as being a prestigious institution and was roundly identified as part of a ‘top tier’ of colleges at the University (informally, which appears to be a function of student demand, academic symbols, and success against other colleges in organised competitions). Some people described Emmanuel as currently being in the enviable position of having a ‘goldilocks’ level of elite-ness where it is unquestionably elite, but not to the point where its elite status is something which needs to be consciously cultivated. In other words, prestige is not a goal of the College, but a by-product of pursuing its true goals.

Interestingly, the College seems to naturally accrue prestige through quiet distinction. It does not actively seek out external validation or fret over outside perceptions (in fact, none of the internal stakeholders consulted bothered to mention to the reviewer that the College was, in fact, prestigious). External stakeholders remarked on how the College has less need to monitor and emulate other colleges, which they attribute to its larger size and longer history than most others.

The College’s standing, however, is not completely effortless. It is selective and openly aspires to attract the ‘best and brightest’ students. Additionally, it preserves its well-rounded character and sense of stewardship (as discussed in the previous Chapter) which inspires individuals to become involved at the College and unlock their talents.

Commitment to safety

While safety may appear functional, it is the foundation upon which the other strengths of the College culture rest.⁸ Establishing a secure environment is integral to fostering the warm and welcoming community that defines Emmanuel. And without safety, the qualities

⁸ Safety was always framed as encompassing both physical and psychological safety in this review.

discussed in this chapter would quickly crumble. To understand the freedom to explore that safety imparts to students, consider this account of a past resident:

“...it was vitally important to me to find a space to live where I could embed myself within a warm and welcoming community. For me, the anxieties I held were instantly calmed as soon as I walked through the entrance of Emmanuel on Open Day” and how “the values of community, the sense of belonging, the friendships forged between residents, and the identity of ‘home’ were clear, evident and palpable.” (alumnus)

Emmanuel appears to have successfully cultivated a widespread sense of safety. In the student survey, there was unanimous agreement with the statement *“I feel safe when I am at the college”*. In interviews and focus groups, the vast majority of participants could not recall a single time when they felt unsafe at the College. For the rare instances where someone shared when safety was compromised the root causes of those situations are addressed in the subsequent chapters.

Notably, the College has sustained a proactive commitment to sexual safety and the cultivation of respectful relationships over the past five years. Since the sector-wide wake up call delivered by the Australian Human Rights Commission report on safety at university campuses in late 2017, the College's actions appear to have been thoughtful, sustained, and evidence-based, indicating a genuine dedication to achieving an atmosphere of total safety and respect. Some markers of the College's progress over this period are listed in Box 3.

The College's pursuit of total safety and respect:

Throughout the course of the review, I became aware of the following efforts of the College in pursuit of permanent, universal safety and respect since the AHRC report in late 2017.⁹ These were:

- Developed a respectful relationships policy which is reviewed annually and it has come to be the bedrock of behavioural expectations at the College.
- Administered a culture and safety survey annually since 2018, paying close attention to results.
- Implemented recommendations from all five major areas of the *Broderick Review* of colleges at the University of Sydney.¹⁰
- Expanded and improved upon the leadership training and support for student leaders.
- Created 4+ Diversity and Inclusion Officers within the community (a student leadership role)
- Enacted a broad Student Wellbeing Strategy focusing on prevention education, support options, and reporting options, which has become a pillar of the College's overall strategy.
- Compulsory consent and respectful relationships training is held in addition to, not in place of, sustained education and support throughout the rest of the academic year.
- The lead staff member in this area was awarded a Churchill Fellowship examining healthy and safe strategies for young people in sexual relationships in a university environment.

Safety at the College is not perfect, but it still stands as a current strength. Acknowledging that the College has done its best to achieve meaningful progress to this point does not preclude – but encourages – ongoing effort by the College to further enhance the safety

⁹ There are other actions or accomplishments at the College which are not acknowledged here. This should not be interpreted as an exhaustive list of the College's efforts in this area.

¹⁰ Refers to a high-profile review into *Cultural Renewal at the University of Sydney Residential Colleges*, conducted by Elizabeth Broderick and Co. in 2017, available here: <https://elizabethbroderick.com.au/projects/>

and wellbeing of the entire community. Many of the analysis and recommendations in the subsequent chapters are aimed at safeguarding safety.

Conclusion

Altogether, these strengths of the College culture are estimable and have a profound impact on individuals within. Those who have passed through Emmanuel's halls expressed their overall positivity about the College, even in moments of critique, employing labels like *"extremely formative"* and *"a defining moment in life"* to describe its overall effect on them. What was most telling, perhaps, is the same type of acknowledgements from participants who were critical of the College. One disgruntled young alumnus, who was still nursing wounds from their time at College, encapsulated this with the following signoff: *"[a]fter all the negative experiences... I still have a profound connection to the College. I am still a Blue Dog through and through."*

While these qualities are undeniably praiseworthy, they are not invulnerable to threats. The College, like any other, faces its share of culture-related challenges. The upcoming chapters explore these potential threats and offer recommendations aimed at preserving and enhancing the distinctive culture of Emmanuel College.

Working as Colleagues

Culture both shapes, and is shaped by, the way people relate to one another over time. At Emmanuel College, interpersonal connections – particularly around decision-making – was the predominant theme of the review and appears to be the fulcrum that will most influence the outcomes of all other opportunities identified in this report. This pivotal role makes it the focus of this entire chapter.

While the College culture has much to be proud of (as explored in the previous chapter), and people’s commitment to the College and each other are commendable, the review process uncovered opportunities to improve working relationships. Each internal stakeholder group offered insights into how others could get the best from them by engaging with them differently. These relationship dynamics are explored in the sections that follow.

Box 4: Essential context to the information in Chapter 4.

This chapter is skewed towards improvement opportunities.

This chapter will primarily explore areas for improvement rather than validating what is already working well. It is critical to recognise that reading this chapter in isolation may lead to a misunderstanding of the strength of the relationships and teamwork around the College, which is currently both amicable and functional. The challenges presented in this chapter are barriers preventing the College from reaching the next level.

The feedback from stakeholders for one another was exceptionally professional, grounded in a shared love for the College, surrounded by ample praise and gratitude. It is important that the focus on improvement in this Chapter does not overshadow the overall togetherness the members of the College unmistakably feel.

Ways of engaging

While there are many types of working relationships at the College, and each may benefit from some type of intervention, the most useful cluster of challenges for the College to confront, and the area where improvements will have the largest effect sizes, is the overall relationship between students and non-students. Each of these groups relies on the other to make College life special and experiences some frustrations when engaging the other.

A divide between students and non-students probably exists at most colleges much of the time because students and non-students have different priorities, goals and obligations. All participating stakeholders recognised this and agreed that the smaller and more manageable the divide, the better. An overall student-administration relationship which is healthy and high-functioning can unleash tremendous potential and growth at a college, whereas a strained or even toxic relationship will almost certainly lead to dysfunction, which can take years to recover from.

“You have to work well with the students. Not least of which is because they outnumber you by a few hundred” (Head of another college)

There was a discernible – if not striking – pattern in the feedback from nearly all stakeholder groups. Most of the situations in living memory where a disagreement between students and the administration over a single issue came to affect their engagement on other issues, or affected the relationship overall, had very similar causes and consequences. Interestingly, each stakeholder group also used remarkably similar criteria to evaluate the way others related to them in these situations (which are the subject of the following section). This suggests that stakeholders have very similar needs, and relationships at the College can be more productive and rewarding if all parties were a little more synchronised in how they engage one another.

“It feels like student leaders and admin are not working together. It’s not a collaboration” (student; non-leader)

This remainder of this chapter elaborates on this perceived pattern of relationship breakdown and provides each stakeholder group inside the College (the Board, Senior

Management, staff, student leaders, and students) with a summary of how their fellow Collegians felt they could adapt their style of engagement in decisions affecting them.

The issue of credibility

The most common source of frustration between students and non-students at the College was a tendency to selectively involve the other group in decisions that impact them. The hesitation arises from a belief that the other group's reactions are inconsistent, or even unpredictable, leading to a reluctance to take the risk of consulting them unless it is mandated or advantageous to do so.

Behind this belief was something of a chain reaction of contributing factors. Firstly, due to the perceived unpredictability involved, when groups do engage one another, the way they do so is incomplete. The information shared can be partial and on a 'need-to-know' basis. This incompleteness is generally detected by the other side who suspects there is more information withheld, sees it as unreasonable not to trust them completely, and becomes more cautious in their participation. This starves both sides of an opportunity to find common ground and, at the end of these interactions, people feel that the issue was not fully explored, their ideas were ignored, or the final decision by the other side was not adequately explained.

Over time and with different instantiations of this pattern, the groups begin to question the other side's *credibility*.

Recommendation #1:

The College should consider creating a RACI matrix covering all stakeholders.¹¹ This would stabilise people's expectations about how much consultation should occur and who the final decision rests with. Such a matrix should be developed collaboratively to maximise its own credibility.

This last factor, credibility, emerged as the most promising means of improving relationships at the College. If people's credibility with each other were more durable, it

¹¹ RACI stands for Responsible-Accountable-Consulted-Informed and is a useful tool for organisations to enhance communication and prevent misunderstandings in decision-making.

would encourage more fulsome engagement in joint decision-making, and even where these interactions go poorly, it would be seen as isolated incidents rather than further evidence to discredit the other side.

The primary way to boost credibility in all directions is for all members of the College to consistently signal adherence to clear, stable principles. These principles should align with the concept of *collegiality*, a style of engagement that the participating students, student leaders, staff, and senior management all nominated as desirable (see Box 5).

The upcoming sections of this chapter will detail the areas where each group is gaining or losing credibility, offering insights into how these dynamics appear to be impacting their effectiveness at the College.

Box 5: Clarification of the concept of collegiality in this context

Colleges are not automatically collegiate.

The inclusion of the term "college" in Emmanuel College might lead to uncertainty regarding the meaning of "collegiate" in this report. Most definitions of 'collegiate' groups and organisations, characterised by 'collegial' conduct, share a few key elements: (i) members of the group regard each other as equals (or *colleagues*), who (ii) come together to make decisions in a discursive way, and (iii) any member can influence decision-making based on the quality of their contributions. In a collegiate environment, the strength of one's contribution, not their level of authority, determines their level of say in a decision (presuming they had an opportunity to contribute).

Most residential colleges in Australia were not named 'College' as a means of enshrining *collegiality*. It is an echo of older residential colleges in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, most people have come to expect a level of collegiality in residential colleges, most likely because of the heightened interaction that comes from living and working together so closely.

Professional members of the College

The Board

The Board of Directors is highly skilled and highly committed to the College. Board Members have impressive professional backgrounds, ample governance training, and displayed sincere motivations for doing the role. The Board was also seen by participants as confident in its role, having contended with some challenging decisions over the past five to six years.

However, the Board is also subject to perceptions of exclusivity and a certain degree of detachment from the broader community. Some important stakeholder groups view the Board as 'clubby' and somewhat closed off to different voices of the community. While the Board members are involved in College life – frequently visiting the College, attending events, and making an earnest effort to get to know students, staff, and alumni while doing so – this visibility does not equate to listening for many. They would like to see the Board use more systematic means of gathering the community's perspective, so it can be incorporated into its deliberations.

The perception of inaccessibility was rooted in several contributing factors. One is that it is not clear to many stakeholders how a genuine, deserving member of the College community could join the Board (especially being a relatively small board at seven members, including the Principal, one University appointee, four Uniting Church appointees, and one Board appointee); another was that there is no widely understood pathway to raise concerns about Board (or senior management) behaviour or performance; and finally, the timing of the changes to the Emmanuel College Constitution ('Constitution') in February 2021 appeared to be opportunistic to many.

The changes to the Constitution in February 2021 were a source of concern for some respondents, not just in terms of timing, but also in their substance. A change to the Constitution was necessitated by the withdrawal of the Presbyterian Church as an auspicer of the College in 2019, which provided the Board with the opportunity to adopt a new governance model which would emphasise a skills-based board (in keeping with the governance principles set out by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission).

Under the previous constitution, students and alumni had representatives on the Board, a system consistent with the principles of collegiality (see Box 5). Despite its flaws, this

mechanism provided a systematic means of conveying the wants and needs of these sub-sections of the community to the remainder of the Board. While the new Constitution is recognised as adhering to legal best practices, the under-communication of the catalyst for, and reasoning behind, the changes has contributed to a sense of distrust. The changes were proposed in 2020 – a time when many stakeholders may have been too preoccupied with navigating the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic to properly engage with the issue.

Under the new Constitution, the students' appointee to the board was replaced with a mechanism called "permanent invitees" where the students' representative is indefinitely invited to the meeting. However this invitation, while currently indefinite, may be withdrawn. Student representation to the Board is governed by the following ruling: "*[t]he president of the Emmanuel College Students Club (if such a club exists) and one other representative of the Emmanuel College Students Club may, if the Board agrees, be invited to attend Board meetings (or any particular Board meeting) as an observer.*"¹² In practice, the invitation is to attend a dinner with Board members before the meetings, as well as the opening few agenda items of the meeting, which does make it possible for students to present information or concerns to the Board. Students prepare a report in advance of each Board meeting, but admitted to the reviewer that they are usually unaware of the substantive agenda items, which results in a report that is very general in nature and not fitted to the upcoming discussions and decisions of the Board.

These changes have led to a loss of *visibility* into the issues the Board is contemplating for students, which deprives them of the *opportunity* to influence decision-making by sharing the student voice in that forum. And while the attempts to build a relationship with students and understand their needs through interactions like the pre-meeting dinners were widely welcomed and seen as genuine, it is not a substitute for consultation. Gaining a general sense of empathy for students from social interactions cannot equip an existing Board Member (or any other potential proxy not appointed by the current students) to bring the student voice to the boardroom effectively.

Recommendation #2:

The Board should experiment with different formats of involving the students in decision-making that provides them with visibility over the nature of upcoming

¹² From the Emmanuel College Constitution, s9.7

decisions and a realistic opportunity to contribute. Students should give honest, on-time feedback on the effectiveness of each iteration and offer to co-design each subsequent iteration.

Some members of the alumni community shared a similar grievance in their submissions regarding the change to their elected representatives on the Board. They worry that Board Members who happen to be alumni cannot necessarily represent the views of the alumni community, because an insufficient amount of 'legwork' has been done to understand the alumni community's perspectives on decisions relevant to them.¹³ For clarity, nobody suggested that current alumni on the Board have not performed their role – the concern lies in the absence of a designated mechanism to authentically incorporate the alumni perspective in decision-making processes. Alumni relations is a subject of *Chapter 6: Working on Alignment*.

Senior Management

Much like in any organisation, the leaders are seen as more than employees or managers, but symbols and ambassadors of the College's values. Their actions are closely scrutinised, and stakeholders draw larger inferences from their observable behaviour than any other actors at the College. Stakeholders' evaluations of these leaders, as expected, were a combination of praise and criticisms, but the themes within each were consistent across various groups of stakeholders. These are summarised below.

Principal

The current Principal is respected and admired in most directions. Having commenced shortly into the unfolding of the Covid-19 pandemic, and having no direct experience in residential colleges, he was presented with the unenviable challenge of gaining a nuanced understanding of the College while concurrently steering it through the enormous external threats presented by the Covid-19 pandemic (and later, the Southern Queensland Floods). In the corresponding period, the Principal and the leadership team (with the support of the Board) have transformed the operating model of the College and, during the brief ensuing period of stability, they have initiated major forward-looking and strategic initiatives like the

¹³ Currently three of the seven Board members are alumni.

Emmanuel College Master Plan and this culture renewal process. All stakeholder groups were grateful to the Principal and wider leadership team for their tireless efforts through recent challenges and recognised that these accomplishments will buttress the long-term sustainability of the College.

There was an obvious correlation in the feedback on the Principal: those stakeholders who worked closely with him (and particularly in a lateral relationship) were overwhelmingly positive, lauding the Principal as *“super authentic”, “focused on the right things”, “full of the stuff you just can’t teach”,* and as *“a leader among the Heads”* who *“gladly shares his strengths, like his commercial acumen, with the group”*. Those with fewer interactions or who had interacted from a less powerful position voiced more frustrations, often interpreting the Principal’s style as overly business-like and overlooking important intangible aspects of the College.

Critics acknowledged commercial realities in running an independent residential college but found recent speed and breadth of commercialisation difficult to reconcile with Emmanuel College's spirit. They felt the connection between an improved financial position and an improved student experience remains unexplained; they expressed concerns that the emphasis on a more commercial approach undervalues the substantial role of volunteer power in sustaining important functions of the College (discussed in the previous chapter); and more generally that the community-minded style of people’s current participation in College life could ultimately be supplanted by something more transactional. Some of this critique was ascribed to the leader purely because of his career background in banking and finance, but some behaviours have also solidified the perception, such as: emphasising the CEO half of the job title, discussing business management more often and passionately than student development, and not getting to know students individually (enough). The current distance felt by students from the Principal is leading them to question the role’s relevance to student experience. One second year student holding no leadership role typified the student viewpoint with the comment:

“Whatever [the Principal] is doing, it’s very behind the scenes” (student)

Senior Management Team

The other members of the Senior Management Team (SMT) were subject to a similar correlation. They were held in extremely high esteem by many stakeholders being described as *"intelligent"*, *"passionate"*, and *"amazing people"* who have a *"depth of understanding of both colleges and young people's issues."* They were seen as leaders in the profession, being emblematic of the kind of courage and sensitivity that can move the entire residential college sector forward. And taken together with the Principal, the College's overall Senior Management was seen as having a most enviable mix of skills in a group of just three people.

Student opinion was, of course, more divided. Many students appreciated the SMT members' skill in dealing with matters important to young people, citing moments where this awareness tipped the balance in towards a positive outcome in key situations. Students also recognised the SMT members as an incredible resource – but not necessarily as a resource which is easily accessible to them. There was a significant enough perception that all members of the SMT were *"not present in day-to-day college life"*. Students expressed sentiments like *"I see them barely ever"*, *"most people haven't even spoken to [them]"*, and that *"they only get to know the leaders"* or that they only get to know you when you are *"in trouble"*. This perception could be creating a barrier between SMT and the average student (*"there's a massive distance between what actually goes on and them"*) which can limit how much students are engaging them early for advice or support.

In their interactions with the overall SMT, student leaders and staff described a recurring challenge – the perception that their ideas are dismissed too often. This perception was rarely attributed to character traits. It was more often attributed to the pace of operations, where the timelines for decision-making does not allow for open-ended discussion of, or changes to, the decision SMT may already have in mind. This led to a sense that ideas or feedback shared with the SMT can too often be met with responses that seemed dismissive. When exploring the reasons behind this, respondents attributed it to *"just rushing"* and *"attempting to manage too many tasks simultaneously"*, resulting in the SMT underestimating the inputs required to produce high-quality outputs, or not affording the staff/students involved enough autonomy to find the best approach to a task, both of which were a key source of motivation for many people.

One underlying problem that will have a limiting effect on the relationship between management and non-management members of the College is that people in both groups

are holding different conceptions of what a college is, what impact it has (or ought to have) on students, what then constitutes the real 'work' to be done, what the outputs of that work should look like, what outcomes those outputs lead to, and how to evaluate if the College is altogether succeeding. The absence of a common language or reference point for the collective production of the group is not uncommon in the context of residential colleges and university residences, nor is it preventing the College from functioning well, but it does place a ceiling on how effective the College can be.

Recommendation #3:

The College should develop an agreed-upon framework that articulates a Theory of Change (ToC) for how attending the College affects students. It should parse the goals, outcomes, activities, inputs, and assumptions involved in producing the College experience. Such frameworks can be very effective at achieving alignment when the work of an organisation's members is specialised and/or decentralised.

Staff

In a college, staff are more than just employees. They are role models, mentors, advocates, and wear many other hats in shaping the student experience. The notion of role modelling in particular is crucial because the qualities staff choose to exemplify is how standards and values are set for the entire community.

"Example setting is so fundamental... You bring people up by presenting a standard, from the top down, that holds everyone to a high expectation" (internal stakeholder)

The staff at Emmanuel College exuded passion for student development and success whenever they discussed their roles in this review. It is evident, through the weight of comments in the data, that students picking up on this passion is a pivotal factor in establishing credible contact between the student and staff groups.

In essence, students are very attuned to authenticity, which paves the way for more open dialogues. When they need advice or support, students said they turn to those staff who seem genuinely invested in their success, bypassing all job titles and organisational charts

in the process.¹⁴ Their approach is straightforward: connect with someone who cares, and if needed, rely on that that person to help navigate the organisational processes and landscape.

“I would never go to [a staff member] because it of their job title. I will go to the person from Admin who is most genuine” (student leader)

While this tendency is understandable, it poses challenges where staff may be pulled away from their designated roles or end up with an uneven workload when students bring a multitude of issues to them. Moreover, it can impact the overall functioning of the staff organisation when members of the group possess varying levels of knowledge and awareness of issues affecting the College.

Inverting this issue presents an exhilarating prospect: it is easy to imagine a potential ‘tipping point’ where most students were cognisant of staff’s commitment to them, which could really invigorate the student and staff experience. In this environment, students might become more sensitive to specialised staff roles, efficiently approaching the ‘right’ team member for specific issues, while also enjoying a wealth of role-modelling, fellowship and wisdom from all the staff members; who would then derive further job satisfaction as well.

Recommendation #4:

College Staff, including the Senior Management Team, should more visibly display their care for students by being more involved in the everyday life of the College, verbalise their appreciation of students’ stewardship of the College often, and get to know students individually as much as possible.

¹⁴ As a corollary to this, students often mentioned they do not know what many of the different job titles mean and do not understand much about what the different staff members do.

Student members of the College

Emmanuel College is home to a vibrant and diverse student body and, frankly, all other stakeholders marvelled at their potential. They were consistently described by various onlookers with terms like *"determined"*, *"worldly"*, *"resilient"*, *"smart"*, and *"kind"*. Their aspirations extend beyond academic success; they are known to be *"people who want to do well in various ways"* which, naturally, also makes them want to be active participants in shaping the culture and the decisions of the College.

"For many years I watched Emmanuel College consistently turn out great people"
(external stakeholder)

A recurring theme echoed by students across the survey, submissions, and consultations is the desire to be treated as adults. This sentiment is rooted in a fundamental need for respect and acknowledgment of their capabilities and perspectives. Students expressed a yearning for more meaningful consultation on decisions that affect them, exemplifying their desire to be regarded as colleagues rather than merely as young people. In the survey, for instance, only 11% of respondents disagreed with the statement *"students respect and listen to the management of the college"* whereas 42% of respondents disagreed with the statement *"management of the college respects and listens to students"*. They were also very clear in their qualitative feedback, which was to treat them as adults and recognise their potential to contribute positively to the college community.

"Giving the students the benefit of the doubt is so absolutely fundamental to running a college. Otherwise, the genuineness is gone. They are smart enough to know when they're not trusted, and you get the best out of them by being treated like an equal."
(SMT member)

However, the fact the students yearn to be treated as adults highlights a gap between the respect they desire and their current reality. As simple as it is to blame the power imbalance for this, the students must also consider the possibility that they're contributing to a credibility gap between their perceptions of themselves and those held by professional members of the College.

For instance, an observation by professional members of the College who have worked with young people for a long time was that students of recent years appear to have less moral independence than generations of students before them. Enough recent residents, it seems, have exhibited a tendency to engage in behaviours they know are against the rules. In these cases, they *“seem to delight in getting away with something they know is wrong”* treating the potential punishments *“as a shopping list”* or a *“demerit point system”* where a forecast of the punishment is sought in advance of the transgression to calculate if the thrill outweighs the cost.

“Colleges here are becoming ‘year 13’ of school.” (External stakeholder)

This behaviour, while not representative of all students, serves as a cautionary tale. If a significant number of students deviate from expected conduct, it can influence how the broader community perceives them. This reality is communicated not as a critique but as a call for self-reflection among the student body.

The message is clear: both individual and collective actions shape perceptions. If more students embody maturity and responsibility, the collective credibility of students will be enhanced resulting in more students being treated more like adults more often.

Student leaders

A subset of the student body assumes leadership roles as the Executive and the Wing Leaders, as well as several officer/convenor type roles.¹⁵ These student leaders play a crucial role in shaping the college experience for their peers and influencing decisions that impact the entire community. How they engage with the professional members of the College canvassed earlier in this chapter (the Board, Senior Management, and Staff) plays an outsized role in setting the credibility of all students.

¹⁵ This section generalises about student leaders over the past few years. Not all comments apply to the current 2023 leaders who have stood out to many other stakeholders as a particularly good batch of student leaders.

The Executive of the Emmanuel College Students Club

Elected to represent the student body, the Executive holds a position of significant responsibility. While securing a majority vote is essential to becoming elected, representative roles carry a humbling responsibility to represent all students, regardless of their voting preference. At Emmanuel, elections often favour the same types of students each year, leaving other types feeling consistently unrepresented when their leaders do not consider them.

Another drag on the Executive's perceived credibility can be when they choose not to consult with the administration on unofficial events and clubs. This practice undermines their own insistence on being consulted. Transparency and open communication are essential for furthering credibility with the administration, especially as the group entrusted with being the bridge between the overall student body and senior management. If transparency is lacking, senior management is required to take a more active and cautious role, which causes dissatisfaction on both sides and potentially leads some students to see the more active stance as controlling or suffocating:

"[T]he employees of Emmanuel, particularly those making the decisions, seem to always be fighting against our executive team." (student)

Recommendation #5:

The College should arrange mentors for the leaders of the Students' Club Executive from outside the College. This gives the leaders access to advice about how to professionally engage in disagreements with Senior Management and the Board.

Wing Leaders

Wing Leaders, though volunteers, play a crucial role in shaping the wing culture, which in turn contributes significantly to the overall college experience. Because they are appointed by the administration, they are an important bridge between the students and the staff of the College. This dual role places them in a delicate position, where they need to manage

two potential credibility gaps – between themselves and the students, and also between themselves and the administration.

While they excel in most aspects, there are instances where their application of community standards in small moments within the wings has faltered, disappointing both groups. The upcoming chapter will delve deeper into wing culture, where the role of Wing Leaders is discussed in some detail.

Student credibility

In conclusion, the credibility of students and student leaders is a key variable which significantly influences the relationships within the college community. Students are encouraged to reflect on how their actions contribute to the overall perception of the student body, while student leaders are reminded of the importance of transparency and consultation in maintaining their credibility. Ultimately, a collective commitment to embodying maturity, responsibility, and open communication will contribute to a positive and respected student community within Emmanuel College.

Working on Reform

Values

For the College's values to truly unite members, they must be unequivocally clear. At Emmanuel there is a core set of values people do appear to genuinely embrace and live by, and many others at the periphery. One challenge Emmanuel is experiencing is that the College has a multitude declared values and, in addition to those, individuals are integrating their personal values with the College's, claiming them as part of the institution's shared values, resulting in an uncommonly large set of values (see Box 6 below).

Box 6: An inventory of possible values at Emmanuel College

The College has many espoused values:

During the first desktop review, when recording Emmanuel College's values (to keep front-of-mind in the later consultations), the sheer abundance of potential values stood out. The Emmanuel College website offers three four of words that could be interpreted as the College's values *"The College is a community shaped by values of inclusivity, teamwork, diversity, self-respect and consideration for others. We expect honesty, accountability, trust and responsibility from our students and our staff. As a community of scholars we emphasise academic excellence, integrity and respect for the views and knowledge of others... a culture where everyone can contribute to a more equitable society through compassion, community service and respect for all" (emphasis added).¹⁶ The Student Handbook lists the college values as *"Respect (for self, others and environment); Integrity; Service; Equity; Striving for excellence."**

Excluding those which could be seen as synonymous, there are at least ten distinct values listed between these two sources. This departs from the common practice of among other organisations to have fewer values which are repeated often.

¹⁶ Retrieved from the College website <https://www.emmanuel.uq.edu.au/about> on 20 July 2023

Conversely, there are enacted values at the College (identified in the *Chapter 3: Strengths of the Current Culture*) such as 'humility' and 'supporting each other' which are keenly felt and practised by the College community but were not formally acknowledged anywhere.

In addition, students added yet more potential values of the community via the survey, which asked them to *"list the values of Emmanuel College (without looking them up)"*. Most respondents identified "respect" as one of the values and offered 2-3 other words which varied enormously. About half of all terms entered corresponded with ones listed in College publications and the other half did not (a word cloud of these is provided in Figure 3 below). A significant number of students answered along the lines of 'I don't know'.

Figure 3: Word cloud of Emmanuel College values recalled by student survey respondents.



As there was a shared aspiration among all stakeholders to create a self-regulating community, grounded in principles rather than rules, it will be essential for the College to unite around a some sharp and widely held values.

Recommendation #6:

The College should embark on a comprehensive process to clarify its values. The process of discovering and affirming the values should attract broad participation and reflect what the community wants

Wing Culture

Emmanuel College's residential buildings, known as wings, encompass 11 discrete structures (see Figure 4 below) and accommodate a mix of genders, year levels, schools, degrees, and hometowns.¹⁷ These wings serve as the fundamental building blocks of the College's community. Residents typically forge primary friendships within their wings before expanding their social circles.

Figure 4: Map of Emmanuel College - residential wings are located at 4, 7, 8, 13, 31, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, and 46.



¹⁷ One wing, McGregor (#11), is a dedicated wing for postgraduates. A postgraduate-only wing was re-established this year and the re-formation of the postgraduate community at the College is in a nascent stage.

This strong wing culture carries several benefits: most residents have at least a few strong friendships in their wing, combatting potential loneliness; friendship groups at the College tend to span year levels; and the initial distinctions between Freshers and returners breaks down somewhat quickly after O-Week, thanks in large part to the cohesion of wing communities.

"It's weird that you are thrown into a wing with strangers, and being thrown in with strangers is part of the appeal – to make friends with people you wouldn't have otherwise. Forming those new friendships is what draws people to college in the first place." (student)

As a result, much of college life revolves around the wings, both formally and informally. Residents spend significant time in their wings, engaging constantly with one another. The social norm of residents leaving their room doors open (whenever possible) enables and encourages this. Some residents described how their wing will gather before most college-wide or inter-college social events and leave from the building together. Several others mentioned that their wing groups regularly take meals together, leaving for the dining hall the same time, sitting together, and returning to the wing together.

Even as part of this review, in trying to ask students about small things that make up daily life at the College, it was very rare for anyone to speak about the College life overall. Nearly every time, the answer started with *"in my wing..."*

The downsides of wing culture

However, the wing culture appears to be so mighty that it carries some unintended side effects. Some of these were: becoming close with those physically closest seems to reduce the incentive to venture into other wings; the main opportunities to build relationships between wings are not always effective; or only suit those who would have made these connections anyway; and residents expressed how, altogether, this means people's friendship groups are getting 'locked in' too early in their College experience. They spoke of how, later in their first year, when trying to break into new groups, those groups have been set for longer, making them harder to penetrate. These residents used the language of having a *"window of opportunity"* in the early days at College which you must jump through, regardless of whether you're socially 'out there' or not, to be comfortable in

multiple social circles later on. Crucially, they were not aware the window of opportunity was limited while it was still open.

This siloing effect of the wings can significantly shape a resident's entire College experience. When you find yourself in the right wing, the experience is incredibly enriching; you form close connections with wonderful people and, as one resident noted, "*[i]f you are in a good wing, you just get closer and closer with great people.*" However, when the wing is not a good fit, it can be unnecessarily isolating. After O-Week (a time when everyone is socialising beyond their wings and does not feel the full effects of wing culture yet), those initial cross-wing friendships can dwindle quickly, and residents can suddenly find themselves feeling confined to their wing in loneliness. The siloing effect of wings can also affect residents' year-to-year experience. For some returners assigned to new wings, failing to connect with their new wings saw their involvement in College life plummet to near zero. This is especially the case in smaller wings where pre-existing social circles are more tightly knit.

Finally, the most concerning consequence of wing culture is its potential to distort the overall college culture. Wings can easily develop distinct brands or sub-cultures that deviate from the broader college identity. For example, if only a few wings were competing to be known as the most prolific in drinking, it could significantly impact the overall drinking culture at the College; and such an (informal) competition could inadvertently introduce dozens of Freshers into a sub-culture they would not have chosen otherwise. This underscores the need to assess and refine the influence of wing culture on the College's overall culture.

Diversification of 'interdigitation'

One of the strongest sentiments in the student survey about what ought to change at the College was sentiment about "*making friends with people in other wings*" which is seen as a way to "*ensure the entire college is fully connected*" because "*most people do not know the majority of the college*".

Getting networked with people beyond their wings is a process called "Interdigitation" by residents (and to be fair to student leaders, this is something they strongly encourage).¹⁸

¹⁸ The term "interdigitation" has a second layer of meaning which is outlined in the Dictionary at the beginning of this report. Within this section, only the first layer of building friendships across the Campus and University is intended to be applied here.

The main ways residents are expected to accomplish this is through active participation or support in sports and cultural events, as well as engagement in inter-wing social activities. While successful for some, particularly those with outgoing personalities or distinct interests, the balance of the feedback provided highlights that there are some limitations to these avenues. They seem to rely on individuals being outgoing enough to approach other entrenched friendship groups during events, and favour people with a strong interest in a specific sporting or cultural pursuit.

To be clear: there is no reason to wind back the existing opportunities – they do help residents to ‘interdigitate’ – but they are not sufficient on their own. Emmanuel would do well to diversify the community-building strategies at work around the College to mitigate the unintended downsides of its powerful wing culture. These need not be more events or programs either. For instance, at several others around Australia, there is a rule in the dining hall that residents must always fill each table entirely before starting a new one. This spurs a lot of low stakes but high-quality discussions between residents who may not have interacted otherwise.

Recommendation #7:

The College should diversify the strategies it uses to help residents form new friendships outside their wing. Those strategies should be evaluated and regularly refined.

The role of wing leaders

Given the substantial influence of wing culture on the overall community, it is essential to also examine the role of Wing Leaders.

Wing Leaders are an important layer in the student wellbeing support system. They are acquainted with every resident in their wings, and they are often the first to suspect or become aware that someone might not be coping with college or university life.

While this provides valuable awareness to the administration of student welfare concerns, it places significant responsibility on Wing Leaders. As the primary interface with the student, they can guide residents towards more specialised assistance, and the success and timeliness of this intervention can profoundly shape the trajectory of someone's university experience (and life). Wing Leaders can feel this, and the heavy burden, along with the

potential for vicarious trauma, can put their own wellbeing at greater risk. Despite the College's intention to limit their responsibility, some young people of the Wing Leaders' age and work experience level can shoulder more of the emotional labour than is intended.

"at the end of the day the heavy majority of us at Emmanuel are adults and there seems to be too much reliance on 19 and 20 year olds to look after people 1 to 2 years younger." (student)

The College is diligent in mitigating these risks. The Wing Leader role is defined by a documented role description; clear expectations are set during the recruitment and selection process; those who are selected undergo training commensurate with industry standards; and both the upfront training and the ongoing guidance provided to Wing Leaders throughout the year are frequently reviewed and refined. However, despite these measures, there is a residual risk that the demands of the role (in its current format) might overwhelm a Wing Leader.

Moreover, there will occasionally be Wing Leaders who are ill-suited to the role, and even competent ones will mishandle a situation from time to time. The para-professional nature of the role and tricky social status of being a peer-but-with-seniority demands immense social skill and internal fortitude to do the role well. Mistakes, both small and large, tend to expose the downside of how pivotal their role is. If, for example, this allegation that *"[t]he wing leader fostered a culture of bullying and exclusion, chose favourites from the first years almost immediately, and made everyone else feel like they were not part of the wing"*¹⁹ was even partially true, the harm to the affected students can be enormous.

At the heart of the challenge lies this: the two core responsibilities of the Wing Leader role can too easily come into conflict. The first, focused on building community, requires the Wing Leader to regularly involve the majority of their residents in enjoyable activities. In practice, this requires the Wing Leader to be well-liked by most people in the wing and to be seen as a reliable source of fun. On the other hand, the pastoral care aspect of the role involves keeping people safe, which requires the Wing Leader to be unpopular at times. Here are a few illustrative examples of situations which members of the College community have expressed concerns about the inherent conflict in the Wing Leader role:

¹⁹ Comment is from a former resident from approximately 3-5 years ago.

- The Wing leaders organise some of the community-building traditions at the College (discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter called *Informal Hierarchies*), and try to maximise participation in others, but are also involved in supporting those who are damaged by those same traditions.
- If inappropriate (for example, homophobic) jokes are being made around a wing, the Wing Leader has a duty to call out that unacceptable behaviour – in the moment – to set community standards and protect those who are offended. But to do so risks their popularity with those who find the jokes funny. This can result in neutrality in the moment and whispered support to those offended after the incident.
- Wing Leaders are expected to discourage Freshers from “*drinking themselves to death*” but may heavily drink themselves, or binge drink with the Freshers, undermining the message.
- In critical cases of student wellbeing where the at-risk student and administration disagree on next steps (one such example provided was when the student does not want the administration to know the severity of a problem, but the administration would want to know about any such problem of that severity), it is unclear who the Wing Leaders must be loyal to, leaving many to make a personal choice about what to do.

While some of the submissions received criticise the choices of Wing Leaders, implying better leaders is needed, I do not agree. In my professional opinion, the fault is in the design of the role. The dual responsibilities of getting residents involved in social activities and being the first layer in the pastoral care system ought to be separated out. If they cannot, or the dovetailing of these responsibilities is ultimately the most effective model, then the wellbeing-related functions of should be explicitly privileged.

Recommendation #8:

The College should review the role of Wing Leader with the aim of professionalising it and privileging the pastoral care/wellbeing-related functions of the role.

Alcohol Culture

Alcohol consumption is one of the most pronounced aspects of student life at the College. It was the most frequently commented on topic in almost every channel, and the collective feedback from all stakeholder groups underscored the idea that alcohol use is tightly woven into the social fabric of the College.

A reason alcohol was so front-of-mind appeared to be because of the associated risk. Of all stakeholders consulted (including students and non-students), only one did not rank the potential consequences of the existing, known levels of alcohol use as one of their top concerns for the College. And for most people, this was their single greatest concern.

Experimentation with alcohol by this cohort is both expected and understandable. This is normal behaviour for traditional age undergraduates (18- to 24-year-olds) who make up a large percentage of residents at the College. It is also somewhat natural for young people who have suddenly acquired significantly more autonomy to increase their alcohol consumption, which is the case for many residents who have moved away from their parents' home into an adult living environment for the first time. Moreover, drinking has long been seen as major feature of wider Australian culture, and partying has been seen as a ritual part of going to university for generations. Taken together, these factors can explain – but should not *explain away* – excessive consumption of alcohol in a college environment.

“There are always students who have issues with alcohol. It’s often a case of having structure taken away and finding new limits the hard way.” (staff member)

Alcohol is addictive, dangerous in excessive amounts, and as many staff pointed out, the strongest predictor of unacceptable behaviours at the College. Most staff estimated 90% of all student behaviour that attracts discipline at the College was intoxicated behaviour, and one participant close to the process suggested that it may even be 100%. Therefore, while alcohol may not be the sole cause of unacceptable behaviour at the College, it is present in instances of unacceptable behaviour so often that addressing it is an imperative.

Community comments on the prevalence of alcohol use:

While this review did not attempt to quantify the prevalence of drinking at Emmanuel, the descriptions of prevalence provided to the review indicate it is quite high.

The consensus among students is that *"there is a big party culture at Emman."* Alcohol is present at most events, large and small, and it is a focal point in developing the program of student-run events throughout the year. While there are some events without alcohol, *"the only ones that get hyped"* as a group of students observed, are those where alcohol is a major or defining feature. *"There's not the same sense of anticipation"* for the non-alcoholic alternatives. Despite what appeared to be a genuine desire to avoid this by the organisers of social events, many students confirmed that *"there's lots of pressure to drink"* and described how the resulting level of drinking had taken a toll on their (or their friends') finances, health, relationships or studies with comments like *"it has significantly impacted my academics"* and *"it's literally not healthy."*

By most accounts, some residents follow a consistent rhythm of three to four drinking nights per week, which is sustained throughout the year. Onlookers highlighted how strange it was to them that students at (all the University's) colleges *"get smashed all year round"* and were astonished that there isn't more bystander intervention from within the students. One participant in the review, when asked if they could change any single thing about the College, wished the residential wings had elevators because it would then be easier to carry residents who had passed out to bedrooms on the upper floors.

It is crucial at this point to acknowledge the earnest attempts made by both the SMT and student leaders to make the alcohol culture at the College safer. Alcohol risks have become a cornerstone of event risk management for student leaders, who should also be commended for embedding a principle that alcohol use (and other potentially harmful social activity) must be opt-in rather than an opt-out. The SMT have, among other things, collaborated with the University's Centre for Youth Substance Use Research on an innovative alcohol education program. The success of this program at Emmanuel College has led to its implementation in other university colleges and student residences.

“I can’t stop young people from taking risks, but I can put up safeguards and educate them in the process” (SMT member)

While these efforts have produced good progress, the culture around alcohol is still perilous, and there is still a need for the College to go further. Achieving further progress may not be easy or linear, but the College should recognise that addressing the challenges posed by alcohol culture is akin to an endurance sport — one that demands long-term commitment and iterative solutions.

The most significant changes in alcohol culture will come from within the student body. This places a considerable responsibility — fairly or otherwise — on the students and their leaders for reform. Student leaders should engage in more open discussions about the prevailing drinking culture; consistently model enjoyable experiences without alcohol; refrain from assuming that past attendance at big drinking events accurately reflects preferences; recognise that some individuals may not voice their opinions; and be courageous enough to stake more of their resources and political capital on compelling non-drinking events.

Recommendation #9:

The students should develop an alcohol culture taskforce (and an ensuing strategy) to embed genuinely optional and healthy enjoyment of alcohol as a social norm at the College. While such a taskforce could easily be coordinated by the administration, the role of staff should be contained to an advisory one for as long as possible, to keep the ownership of the strategy as student-led as possible.

Informal hierarchies

Within the student body at Emmanuel College, both formal and informal hierarchies play a significant role in shaping power structures. These structures wield tremendous influence over the College culture, particularly when power is exercised over newer and younger peers. This dynamic can greatly accelerate someone's sense of belonging but, equally, carries the potential to inflict significant harm. It can also influence the pace of culture change at a college.

The challenge lies in the informal nature of this power. When power is held informally it remains unclear how to assess its responsible use and how frequently such assessments are needed. The informal hierarchy at Emmanuel College appears to centre around the duration of time spent at the College (though not exclusively). While not explicitly categorised as such, there seems to be an unspoken division of residents into three classes: Freshers, returners, and student leaders (who are drawn from the returner group).

Box 8: The nature of informal hierarchies at the College

Informal power structures apparent in the review:

Although it would have been impossible to uncover all the power dynamics among students, several obvious ones emerged during this review:

Upon joining the College as Freshers, students do not start on an equal footing with returning residents. The Freshers' lower status is most pronounced during O-Week (when Freshers go through a structured itinerary of activities organised by student leaders) and gradually diminishes over the course of the academic year. 'Full membership' of the College, for lack of a better term, is attained at the end of the Fresher year.

Beyond the simple Fresher-returner dichotomy, there are more granular levels to the informal hierarchy, which appear to be a function of (i) time spent at the college (e.g., third years vs. second years) and (ii) active involvement in College activities. Additionally, there are some explicit but informal social clubs at the College with controlled entry. Admission to these comes through doing some challenges together at an informal event, usually held off-site.

These hierarchies are not simply inert, they are felt most when they are practiced. They are put into practice most through college traditions, of which some are Initiations, and some of those can devolve into Hazing.²⁰ The following sections examines, from a culture perspective, the risks, and rewards of maintaining traditions predicated on an informal hierarchy.

The case for hierarchy

As simple as it would be to dismiss any form of hierarchy in residential colleges as inherently negative, students participating in the review offered a more nuanced perspective, which is worth contemplating. The majority seemed to view traditions based on hierarchies as inherently positive, with the potential for negative effects when misused or when traditions are poorly executed.

One notable example is the long-standing tradition of Fresher names, where newcomers are given a nickname almost immediately upon arrival which they become known by thereafter (and for the remainder of their College residency if they so choose). Although the staff of the College vet the names, the secret meaning behind them may not be obvious or subsequently revealed to either staff or the student which, as one student articulated, is *“potentially problematic because... you don’t know if they’re hurtful or not”*. To outsiders this practice may be automatically perceived as stripping someone of their identity. However, most participating students saw it as a great equaliser in the community. As one recent resident wrote:

“Despite the potential for this to be viewed as a form of hazing, for me to receive a Fresher Name alongside the rest of my peers did two very positive things. Firstly, it instantaneously created a sense of equal community; no longer were we defined by our status, but we looked at each other as ‘the same’. And secondly, it provided me with a completely blank, malleable identity which I could forge – it came with a permission to explore my identity, experiment with new interests, and experience opportunities which I had never before.” (recent resident)

²⁰ The terms “initiation” and “hazing” were defined for participants for clarity throughout the process. See the Definitions section at the beginning of this report for how these terms were used in the review process.

Similarly, the ongoing power difference that exists between Freshers and returners throughout the year drew no complaints from students. In contrast, they were quick to point out that, if you create your own artificial hierarchies (albeit imperfect ones), these can be less cruel or mystifying than the hierarchies of the outside world. Another recent resident explained this rather well:

“The truth is, social pyramids do inevitably come to exist at institutions such as this.... I can assure you that being arbitrarily grouped in with your year group is a hell of a lot more fun than the hierarchy we fall into when year level “privileges” are taken away. I’d much rather have a third year leader cut in the dinner line (prompting some consequent bonding with the rich boys behind me) then have no third year “privilege” culture, and watch those rich boys cut in line just because they can” (recent resident)

The case against hierarchy

But, even if, as the students point out, these traditions are rooted in good intentions, the level of risk is still problematic. There are still at least two formidable challenges with traditions predicated on informal hierarchies which need to be overcome:

1. good practice is extremely fragile; and
2. the stakes are extremely high.

“The people who have a horrible time at a college, they are truly broken.”
(external stakeholder)

Moreover, the review was presented with sufficient evidence to indicate that traditions do indeed go awry. Among the most serious issues prompting residents of the colleges to seek help from the University, Hazing was identified as the most prevalent one. Only 55% of participants in the survey disagreed with the statement *“Some freshers experience humiliation or mental or physical harm before they are fully accepted (regardless of whether or not this was intended)”*, and 40% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“Hurtful rumours about students are spread around the college from time to time”*. Current and recent residents of Emmanuel College shared accounts during the review process of instances where Initiations or other traditions went wrong, resulting in serious

and usually lasting impacts on them.²¹ While the details of specific incidents have been omitted here to preserve anonymity, the harms these residents experienced (and witnessed others experiencing) were completely unacceptable by societal standards – if they occurred in a school or workplace, they would result in instant expulsion or dismissal respectively.²² The impacts on the victims in these cases were lasting and severe. In the worst such case, the person later attempted to take their own life.

If you or anybody you know needs support call
[Lifeline](#) 131 114, or [Beyond Blue](#) 1300 224 636.

“there’s a big speech at the start that you can just say stop, but it feels like you can’t actually say stop. They come and ask people afterwards if they are okay, but afterwards is not good enough” (student)

Recommendation #10:

The College should re-institute its exit survey for non-returning residents and raise awareness of the availability of exit interviews to gather more data and a deeper understanding of the buildup to instances of Hazing, bullying, or any other unacceptable peer-to-peer behaviour.

Safeguarding safety

For the continuation of traditions predicated on informal hierarchies to be feasible, Emmanuel students will need to find ways to make safety inviolable. Moreover, if the primary concern about informal hierarchies is that the way power is exercised goes unchallenged, then they will need to find ways to *guarantee* that the exercise of power is continuously challenged.

²¹ None of the incidents meeting this description occurred in the current year.

²² This statement presumes the accounts were described to the reviewer in perfect accuracy, which were taken at face value (or on the balance of probabilities where there were multiple accounts of the same incident).

Individuals within the College who play a role in shaping and perpetuating such hierarchies (who are often the ones exercising the power) will need to establish a stance of constant and extreme vigilance, which must include an openness to being challenged.

“It’s not just about leadership, it’s about the ballast. Working on leaders is the easy part. It’s much harder to move the status quo when traditions are verbal and not written down” (Head of another college)

The current student leaders have implemented some promising changes to the way certain traditions operate. Much of this has been achieved by using their esteem in the community to socialise some straightforward and memorable ground rules. Take the tradition of 'Chopping,' for instance — a prank involving disordering someone's room, whether by turning every item upside down, wrapping all their possessions in newspaper, or recreating their room in the quadrangle (it could be anything). This tradition had a history of spiralling out of control with cycles of 'revenge Chops,' contributing to a sense of fear and insecurity among residents. One Fresher was visibly terrified at the prospect of being Chopped. This year's leaders have made a concerted effort to de-emphasise Chopping, removing the social gratification that was previously tied to aggressive Chops and, in parallel, introduced ground rules such as 'never chop someone you don't know' and 'only chop your mates.' By socialising these clear and memorable principles, there has been a noticeable reduction in aggressive Chops, and the whole community has a new standard that can be used to call out inappropriate Chops.

“Evolving traditions is what keeps them sustainable. They survive by being updated” (student leader)

The SMT has also played a significant role in enhancing the safety of traditions at the College. Building on the growing trust between student leaders and staff, they have been able to workshop some long-standing student traditions together. Staff have assisted students to deeply interrogate the purpose of these traditions along with the intended benefits of sustaining them, to redesign the actual activity for better safety and alignment to the tradition’s original purpose.

Some key staff members, drawing on their knowledge of either working with young people or the wider higher education sector, advocate for sustained incremental improvements to traditions rather than any sudden large changes, for fear of driving the organising of these events back 'underground'. This approach, while practical, was criticised by key external stakeholders for prioritising predictable outcomes over the fundamental principle that no college traditions should compromise safety. As one stakeholder put it: *"this [incremental] approach is flawed, because there are students still being impacted in the meantime."*

"Students are the victims of hazing, and students are the perpetrators."
(external stakeholder)

As much as progress is positive, in this domain, progress is not the goal. Safety is. As outlined in the beginning of this section, safety needs to be sacrosanct and subject to extreme vigilance. Going forward, both students and staff must be very cautious to avoid substituting the objective of categorical safety with the more attainable goal of 'progress'. Being safer than last year is not necessarily 'safe', and being more respectful than last year can still fall short of 'respect'. Once a minimum standard is defined, it needs to be treated as such, and whether a modest step or a major stride is needed to reach the standard, then that is precisely what is needed.

Recommendation #11:

The students at the College, with the assistance of staff expertise, should adopt an ethical framework for traditions. The framework should be easily verbalised and memorised, and known to everyone at the College, so it can be used by any member of the community to initiate authentic discussions about adhering to it. The framework should be frequently challenged and refined.

Inclusivity and allyship

In Chapter 3, the review highlighted the robust ethos of mutual support within the student community, evidenced by accounts of students rallying around each other during times of need.

However, amidst this unity, instances of intolerance did surface during the review, with a notable concern surrounding homophobia. Varied stakeholders conveyed firsthand and second-hand accounts of incidents in recent years that demeaned queer residents, which has affected their overall enjoyment of College life. In the student survey, the share of non-heterosexual students in bottom quartile of respondents (in terms of their overall positivity about the College) was 27%, whereas the share in the remaining three quartiles consisted of only 8%, 4% and 4% respectively. A number of LGBTQ+ community members, drawn from both current and recent residents, felt they could not be themselves at the College – with 45% of non-heterosexual respondents in the survey disagreeing with the statement *“I am the same person in the dining hall, at a tutorial, or social event as I am when I'm in my room with my close friends”* compared to 20% of heterosexual respondents. Several residents identifying as allies were also deeply troubled by an incident which occurred at a high-profile College event this semester.

Regrettably, a recurring theme in the accounts of these incidents was the perceived inaction of several student leaders during critical moments. In these cases, those leaders refrained from taking a position during moments of friction between marginalised groups (mostly LGBTQ+ individuals) and those expressing homophobic views. Something which was clear in the feedback was that people do not necessarily expect all student leaders to be cheerleaders for every minority group – the concern was that they did not take issue with the obvious violation of respect which had just occurred. They were expected to act more decisively in such situations.

Encouraging a climate of respect is a collective responsibility within the community and, while leadership plays a crucial role, every member has the capacity to contribute. As one stakeholder pointed out, achieving critical mass is key. When more individuals have the confidence and skills to instigate small changes, and apply them across various spheres, their collective impact is both substantial and sustainable. A critical mass of such residents might also eventually influence the outcome of student elections. Presently, the College has four Diversity and Inclusion Officers which, while commendable, are spread too thinly across

all the possible sources of diversity. Further, by concentrating the leadership on matters of inclusiveness in so few roles, this could accidentally convey the message that, while diversity and inclusion can be aided by all, the actions should be left to those who are most keen. Exploring avenues to involve a greater proportion of students in initiatives related to diversity and inclusion would be beneficial for the College.

Recommendation #12:

The College should consider introducing ally programs to have more people generating more moments of everyday advocacy for respect and inclusivity. The programs should be open to any resident to complete. This will also give ordinary residents a gateway leadership experience, widening the pipeline of potential Wing Leaders and Executives for the future.

As a contingent recommendation, if the collective impact of all recommendations outlined in this report (as summarised in Chapter 7) does not distinctly enhance the climate of tolerance and, ideally, *inclusion*, within the College, it is advisable for the College to consider seeking expert advice on further strategies which could be employed.

Student-led events

Events breathe life into the student experience and act as an important conduit for transmission of the culture. Given that student-organised events constitute the majority of events at Emmanuel, the development and execution of these events wields substantial influence on the overall culture.²³

The way events are developed is a meaningful input into all the other aspects of the culture discussed in this report, namely: event production is the biggest ‘battleground’ between students and the administration, where people’s credibility is questioned; the College’s values are signalled and reinforced through events; wing culture is shaped by events (and vice versa); alcohol is supplied and consumed at most events; and most traditions at the

²³ The term “events” is intended to be as broad as possible here, including sports and arts competitions, O-week, social events, and even unofficial events, where they involve planning and coordination.

College are centred around an event. A change in the way events are produced will have effects on many different aspects of the College culture.

One feature of event production that need not change is students leading them. This was clear feedback from the community. According to the data gathered, students taking charge of most events is considered to be most beneficial for them and the College. The responsibility imparts a wide range of valuable skills to students (which may be one of the top contributing factors to the perception that students from residential college are highly employable graduates). Student-led events are also believed to attain higher engagement levels, as students possess an inherently better understanding of what their peers will find interesting and worthwhile attending.

However, considering students are not event management professionals, this model has its drawbacks. Participants in the review identified two main areas where event management could be improved to enhance college life overall:

- Better risk management.
- More purposeful and creative events ideas.

Risk management for events

Events with planned elements that pose a high level of risk, such as the presence of alcohol or a significant number of external guests, do undergo scrutiny by the College administration. In instances where the administration can exert control over the design of the event (which are primarily events held on-site or events it co-funds), modifications to the event plan are sought before approval is granted. However, if the administration's modifications are perceived as too extensive, this can prompt students to relocate the event off-site where the riskier elements can be retained. As detailed in *Chapter 4 Working as Colleagues*, when the administration's requested changes seem unpredictable or inadequately explained to students, it erodes the administration's credibility with student leaders (and by extension, its relationship with the student body). Similarly, when students move a risky event out of the purview of the administration because they know it would not agree to the details, their credibility is diminished as well.

Improving event risk management would yield some immediate benefits for the College, including heightened safety for both organisers and attendees, reduced liability risks, and increased visibility for the administration into events carrying the College name. Beyond

these immediate gains, more robust risk management is essential to the long-term sustainability of many College traditions. One notable example provided for this was the unfortunate discontinuation of a treasured Rugby 7s tournament which the Students' Club had organised for a long time (with support from the College at times). This was a highly regarded tournament which attracted entries from far and wide and was the special kind of college tradition which doubled as a service to the broader community. The tournament never recovered from a basic event planning error which would almost certainly have been prevented by a firmer commitment to stress-testing event plans, especially regarding risk.

Recommendation #13:

The College create a standing set of event guidelines which provides the criteria for event approval and the reasons for those criteria. The guidelines must be available to residents to assist with the planning process and guidelines should be updated continuously as lessons are learned.

Such guidelines could eliminate a lot of time and discomfort from the process for both students and management if they are subject to continuous improvement. An elaboration of how these guidelines might evolve with practice is provided in Box 9 below.

Implementing clear guidelines for event management would significantly address the issue of (perceived) unpredictability in decisions, which was affecting students' and management's credibility with one another. These guidelines would serve as a valuable resource to everyone, providing clarity and stability for this important functional area.

Furthermore, it is peculiar that the individuals overseeing many dozens of events in a year, totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars of expenditure (the Executive), do not receive training in event management. They do receive handover documents from the previous Executive team – which is certainly helpful – but could be augmented by direct training in skilful event management.

Recommendation #14:

The College should source some appropriate event management training for the incoming Executive each year.

Continuously improving event guidelines:

Let's say a large social event which brought 500 guests into the quadrangle the previous year had gone poorly, and management of the College was not intending to approve the event this year, the event guidelines could instead be updated to include a rule of *'no more than 400 guests for events held in the quadrangle'*. Perhaps the initial reasoning for this was a concern that the area cannot be evacuated appropriately in the event of a fire or other emergency, so it would be accompanied by the reason *'because the safe capacity of that venue is 400 people.'*

Then, let's say, in the next iteration of the event, there were only 399 guests, but some property damage was caused by external guests. Management might add a guideline that *'external guest should not exceed 200 people'* with the corresponding the reason: *'for better crowd control at large events.'*

In the next iteration, both sides may realise the real issue was that *'external guests should not outnumber our own residents at an on-site event'*, and subsequently update the second guideline to reflect this.

The type of guidelines recommended by this review ought to be a living document which is updated as lessons are learned so student event organisers have access to the latest thinking from management during the planning stage of the event.

Dynamism in the program of events

Annual turnover of student leaders already poses a challenge for the Students' Club in meeting the community's expectations, particularly when many of the events throughout the year are existing traditions, which carry a heavier weight of expectation. Over time, the combination of these two factors can lead to stagnation in the events provided to students.

"For the student clubs, it's monumentally easier, cheaper and safer to repeat last year's events than it is to try something new" (Head of another college)

Repeating the same program every year can stifle creativity, limit engagement, and impede the overall evolution of the College culture. Experimentation and trying new things, even if they fail, are crucial for a vibrant and evolving community.

A standard question in consultations was how the proposals from typical residents (i.e. those not holding any position at the College) are raised, discussed and ultimately converted into experiments. The review was also interested in how those students get coached to succeed, how they evaluate their initiative at the end of the experiment, and how many of those field-tests become new traditions. Nearly every participant was taken aback by the line of questioning and could not retrieve an example of this happening in the last few years.

The Executive felt that, while they would be delighted to have ideas presented to them, they felt the program of events they 'had to' deliver (by tradition) was too busy to accommodate new events not organised by the Club. They also pointed to some of the basic procedures in running an event (such as booking a space for certain types of events) as processes only known to student leaders and therefore ones that prevent ordinary students from being able to complete their own event ideas.

Creating some space for other residents to surface their ideas and providing them with the infrastructure to trial new types of events could provide some relief to the Executive and inject some dynamism into the annual event program at the same time.

Recommendation #15:

The College should consider quarantining some amount of funds for a contestable 'student experience innovation' fund where any student, regardless of position, could seek funding to run a new type of event. To the extent there are practical barriers to a non-leader organising an event, they should be provided with coaching and other support in addition to the funding.

Working on Alignment

During the review process, people put forward different visions of how to take Emmanuel College to new levels. Such divergences seem natural, particularly when people are so invested in seeing the College thrive. When exploring these aspirations, it became evident they were often centred around a few key areas of College life and, for each of these areas, there were multiple compelling yet mutually exclusive roadmaps for what the College ought to do.

Unlike the highly actionable areas discussed in the previous chapters, these aspects do not call for immediate action. They call for discussion. They are the kind of areas where, if College members could align more, they could start bringing these visions to life.

This brief chapter serves as a guidepost, highlighting areas where individuals hold aspirations that could benefit from more discussion and alignment. The expectation is that, as the other recommendations in this report are implemented and reshape dialogues at the College, the community will find it easier to align on shared aspirations for the College and collectively move towards realising them.

Recommendation #16:

The College's Senior Management Team should search for ways to spark more open discussion of ambitious and long-term ideas for the future of the College, possibly by making such discussions lower stakes, or with creative approaches to facilitation (for example: holding an 'innovation day' in addition to a planning day each year).

The areas for alignment at the College are explored briefly in the following sections of this chapter.

Academic character of the College

Differing opinions exist regarding the appropriate level of academic expectations for students and the balance between supporting degree completion and fostering overall intellectual development.

While the College is renowned for its academic focus, with a reputation possibly surpassing that of other colleges at the University (though many Colleges emphasise academic achievement – see Box 10), the foundation for this reputation is a matter of debate. Some argue for the College to be a bastion of intellectual inquiry, expanding beyond academic support directly tied to students' program of study (e.g., tutorials), and engage them in varied intellectual pursuits. To others, it is all about choices. They believed residents should have the autonomy to nominate how high performing they wanted to be (or not – as long as students are progressing in their course) and saw the College's role as help the student calibrate their effort to match this level, and to also provide a 'safety net' that prevents them falling below it.

"It is unclear if the student body as a whole does well because they wanted to or because the Handbook said they had to." (internal stakeholder)

Another misalignment the College must eventually clarify is the primacy of wellbeing or achievement. Both are seen as highly desirable, but there were different conceptions of the relationship between the two and, in particular, which one ought to take priority when the two are in conflict. To some, high academic expectations were seen as a stressor which might threaten the ultimate goal of wellbeing, whereas others saw wellbeing as a precursor to the ultimate goal of high achievement (i.e. how to stay well while you really challenge yourself).

The asymmetry of college impact on academic performance:

Residential colleges at the University (and more generally) are outwardly proud of the academic performance of their residents, with many claiming a causal connection between the college environment and their results. However, at the University at least, after controlling for residents' pre-university academic performance, the impact of the college environment on these students may be far less clear, and it is possible the environment is placing downward pressure on students' academic performance.²⁴

Because Emmanuel is selective, and prior academic performance is significantly weighted in its selection criteria, the College begins each year with most of its students as high performers. As a result, it is extremely difficult for colleges to *improve* on these students' existing track records, and just a few missteps could lead to a decline in students' academic performance during their time at college.

Alumni involvement at the College

As highlighted in Chapter 3 on *Strengths of the College culture*, people forge strong bonds during their time at the College, and many alumni feel a lasting connection the College itself.

However, the administration's management of alumni engagement has been inconsistent over the past ten years or so, which has seen fluctuations in the strategy and intensity of alumni relations. This inconsistency may pose a larger challenge than is immediately obvious, as some alumni spoke of how sudden surges in communication (possibly compensating for previous periods of relative quiet), are met with scepticism.

While all participants wanted to see greater alumni engagement at the College, there were different views on the path to achieving this. Some stakeholders advocated for an alumni association with its own executive committee and dedicated resources, while others

²⁴ This representation is based on analysis performed by the University, which I did not access, but was summarised for me.

supported a professionalised alumni relations function controlled by a specialised member of staff. I understand the College has been holding a review of the alumni relations function concurrently to this review, which may serve as a trigger for further discussion and alignment on the best path forward.

Interestingly, current students consistently express a desire for increased alumni participation in College programs, identifying compelling roles for different types of alumni. They valued the chance to hear the wisdom of older, more accomplished alumni as speakers at events; and they were particularly eager to interact with younger alumni (who have had about 3-6 years outside the College) to discuss their career and life choices after College.

Diversity of student backgrounds at the College

By most accounts important elements of student diversity at the College are in decline. While there are many ways to measure the variance in a group, and diversity has been increasing along variables like ethnic heritage and sexual orientation, the variable of greatest concern was the growing concentration of residents already from Southeast Queensland with privileged backgrounds. A number of potential drivers were identified for this, and many are outside the College's control, but nearly all accounts of the trends linked back to the affordability of residential colleges. Several knowledgeable stakeholders believed the College is crossing, or has already crossed, the threshold where *"it is out of reach to 'normal' people."*

"There is no doubt the student body here is financially privileged" (staff member)

Although this concern may have manifested rather gradually at the College, some stakeholders asserted it will soon become urgent. They fear a feedback loop may accelerate the trend – where greater numbers of local, privileged school leavers are more likely to be encouraged by their networks to apply to Emmanuel while, simultaneously, greater numbers of talented but less advantaged school leavers will self-select out of the application process. An acceleration of the trend in this way would leave the College with a less diverse applicant pool and fewer options to reverse the trend. Diversifying the applicants was seen as a crucial first step to diversifying the student body for many. As one

staff member involved in resident selection said *“you can only pick from the pool you’re fishing in”*.

Proportion of third years at the College

Third years wield a profound influence on College culture, a sentiment nearly universally agreed upon in the review.

Third year students occupy many of the formal leadership positions, but collectively, all third years serve as leaders within the community because of their influence on the much larger cohorts of first- and second-year students.

To some, a greater proportion of third years would be a categorically good thing. A higher number of third years ensures a continuous transmission of the College’s culture from one generation to the next in a way that preserves progress made in any given year. A former student leader reflected on how the extra agency of third years makes them a positive force in the community:

“During my time on Emman’s leadership team, I learnt that it was mostly the third years who would and could take action against our college’s downfalls, and who actively worked to improve our campus. They were the ones who knew the most about our issues, had the maturity and experience to design solutions, and the deepest connection and motivation to enact them. They were the most likely to break our toxic traditions, and do so in a way that offered healthy alternatives — but they also carried knowledge of our college’s past, had witnessed what worked and what hadn’t, and could keep the best of our traditions alive.” (alumnus)

Third years can also play a crucial role in maintaining a positive campus atmosphere. They often intervene when first-year students are on the verge of making poor choices, leveraging the significant leap in maturity most people gain from the first 1-2 years after high school. As one resident expressed:

“The issue with losing so many third years every year is that pride usually comes with age. Your sexuality or gender identity isn’t something you’re born knowing — it comes with experience, and it really only becomes prominent after puberty. I personally became secure in my identity because I came to college and saw all these young 20-somethings who had already figured themselves out, and I learnt from their example.”
(recent resident)

However, the impact of third-year students is a double-edged sword, as observed by several non-student stakeholders. While they generally contribute positively to a college’s culture, there is a recognition that they can just as easily perpetuate the negative aspects of its culture. Their concern was that a significant drop in maturity of a single large cohort of third years could lead to a regression in important areas – particularly those of safety and inclusiveness. For some this meant that the College needed to design a mechanism that would grow the cohort of third years in a way that filtered for those with emotional maturity and leadership qualities.

Conclusion

To close out this report, I would like to briefly re-state the recommendations proposed throughout this review and extend my sincere gratitude to the Emmanuel College community for the spirit of their participation.

List of recommendations

Working as Colleagues:

1. The College should consider creating a RACI matrix covering all stakeholders. This would stabilise people's expectations about how much consultation should occur and who the final decision rests with. Such a matrix should be developed collaboratively to maximise its own credibility.
2. The Board should experiment with different formats of involving the students in decision-making that provides them with visibility over the nature of upcoming decisions and a realistic opportunity to contribute. Students should give honest, on-time feedback on the effectiveness of each iteration and offer to co-design each subsequent iteration.
3. The College should develop an agreed-upon framework that articulates a Theory of Change (ToC) for how attending the College affects students. It should parse the goals, outcomes; activities, inputs, and assumptions involved in producing College experience. Such frameworks can be very effective at achieving alignment when the work of an organisation's members is specialised and/or decentralised.
4. College Staff, including the Senior Management Team, should more visibly display their care for students by being more involved in the everyday life of the College, verbalise their appreciation of students' stewardship of the College often, and get to know students individually as much as possible.
5. The College should arrange mentors for the leaders of the Students' Club Executive from outside the College. This gives the leaders access to advice about how to professionally engage in disagreements with Senior Management and the Board.

Working on Reform:

6. The College should embark on a comprehensive process to clarify its values. The process of discovering and affirming the values should attract broad participation and reflect the current, enacted values of the community as much as possible.
7. The College should diversify the strategies it uses to help residents form new friendships outside their wing. Those strategies should be evaluated and regularly refined.
8. The College should review the role of Wing Leader with the aim of professionalising it and privileging the wellbeing/pastoral care function of the role.
9. The students should develop an alcohol culture taskforce (and an ensuing strategy) to embed genuinely optional and healthy enjoyment of alcohol as a social norm at the College. While such a taskforce could easily be coordinated by the administration, the role of staff should be contained to an advisory one for as long as possible, to keep the ownership of the strategy as student-led as possible.
10. The College should re-institute its exit survey for non-returning residents and raise awareness of the availability of exit interviews to gather more data and a deeper understanding of the buildup to instances of Hazing, bullying, or any other unacceptable peer-to-peer behaviour.
11. The students at the College, with the assistance of staff expertise, should adopt an ethical framework for traditions. The framework should be easily verbalised and memorised, and known to everyone at the College, so it can be used by any member of the community to initiate authentic discussions about adhering to it. The framework should be frequently challenged and refined.
12. The College should consider introducing ally programs to have more people generating more moments of everyday advocacy for respect and inclusivity. The programs should be open to any resident to complete. This will also give ordinary residents a gateway leadership experience, widening the pipeline of potential Wing Leaders and Executives for the future.
13. The College should create a standing set of event guidelines which provides the criteria for event approval and the reasons for those criteria. The guidelines must be available to residents to assist with the planning process and guidelines should be updated continuously as lessons are learned.

14. The College should source some appropriate event management training for the incoming Executive each year.
15. The College should consider quarantining some amount of funds for a contestable 'student experience innovation' fund where any student, regardless of position, could seek funding to run a new event. To the extent there are practical barriers to a non-leader organising an event, they should be provided with coaching and other support in addition to the funding.

Working on Alignment

16. The College's Senior Management Team should search for ways to spark open discussion of ambitious and long-term ideas for the future of the College, possibly by making such discussions lower stakes, or with creative approaches to facilitation (for example: holding an 'innovation day' in addition to a planning day each year).

The recommendations are further summarised in *Appendix C: Review Summary Card*

Thanks

Finally, I would like to convey my sincere thanks to the College.

I feel compelled to comment on the spirit in which all members of the College community participated in this review. My experience in conducting the review was that every stakeholder group unequivocally trusted and embraced the process. People were thoughtful, respectful, candid and sincere. All participants offered a mixture of praise and critique, where critiques were overwhelmingly anchored in a love for the College and a desire to see it succeed. It was a privilege to assist the community through this review process.

Appendix A: Student Survey Response

Survey Design

The primary purpose of the student survey was to understand students' attitudes and perceptions of different aspects of college life. It was used to identify similarities and differences between participants in consultations and the wider student body.

The student survey asked residents about seven areas of College life:

1. Their transition to College life (3 questions)
2. Their sense of belonging (6 questions)
3. Their perception of informal hierarchy among students (4 questions)
4. Their perception of behavioural standards (4 questions),
5. Their perceptions of sexual safety and respectful relationships (6 questions)
6. Their perceptions on the prevalence of alcohol and other drugs (4 questions)
7. Their perceptions of leadership styles and behaviours (5 questions).

Respondents were invited to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with a number of statements in each of the above areas using the following 5- point Likert scale:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

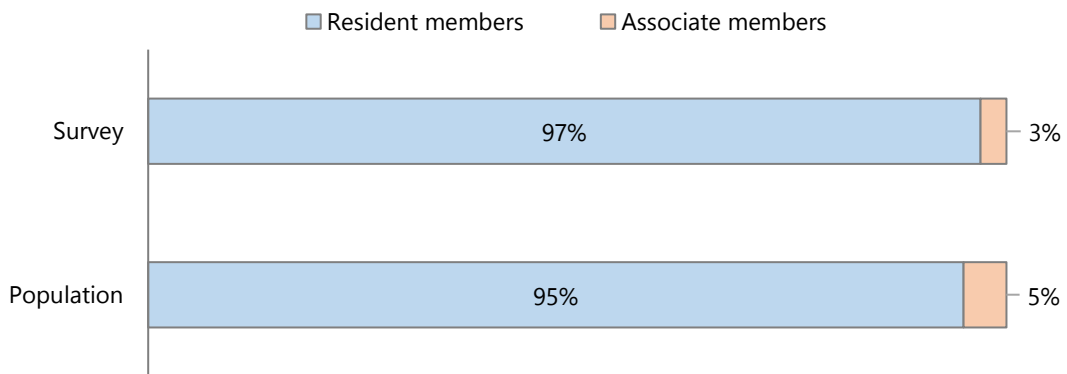
-Questions about sexual safety were accompanied by the option of "I prefer not to say".

Each grouping of questions was accompanied the opportunity for the respondent to provide a free-text comment elaborating on their selections, and five open-ended questions were posed at the end of the survey. All free-text comments throughout the survey were optional.

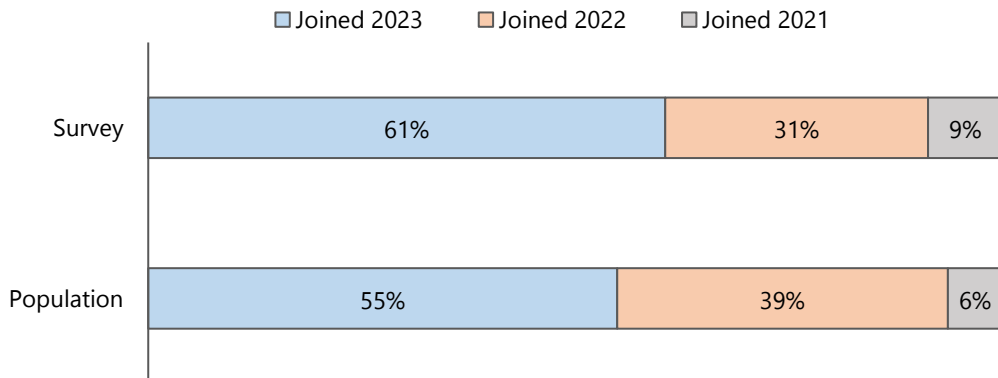
Survey Respondents

Respondents were also asked 10 questions about demographic variables, which are used in the figures below to summarise the sample of residents who participated. The sample is compared to population data wherever possible.

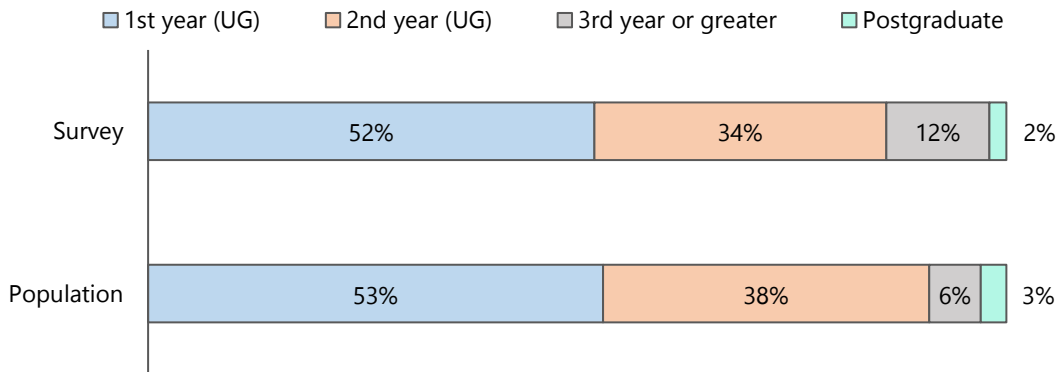
Response Rate



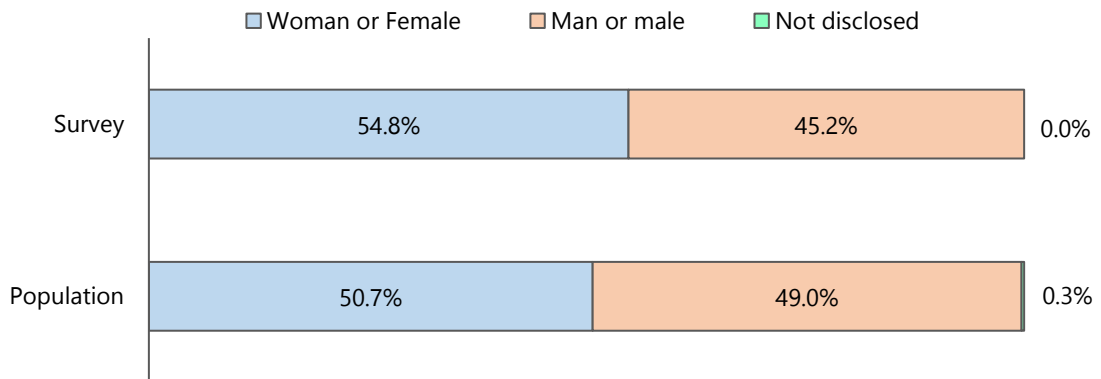
Time at College



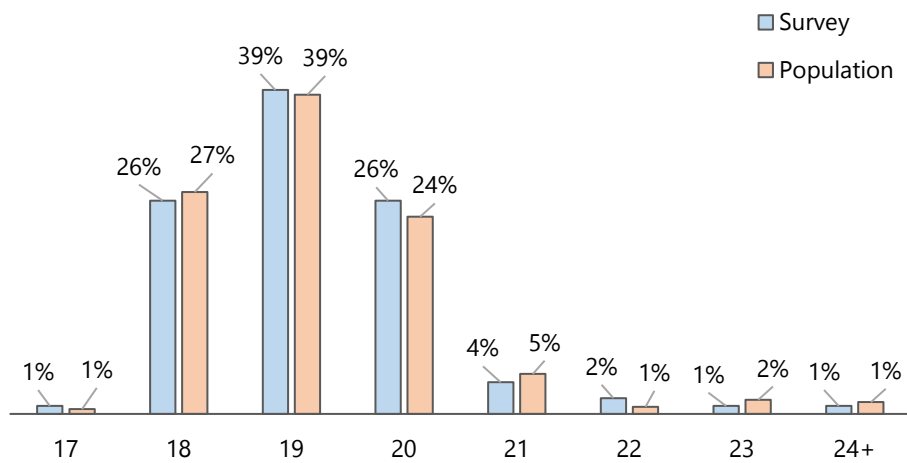
Academic Progression



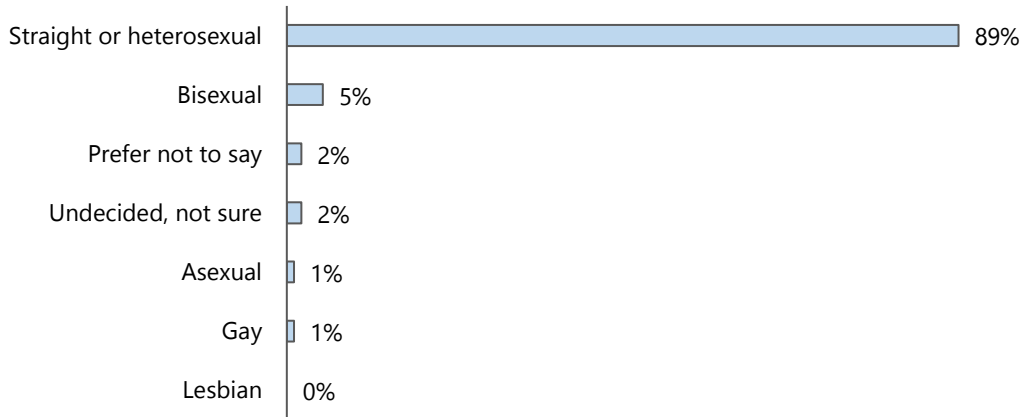
Gender



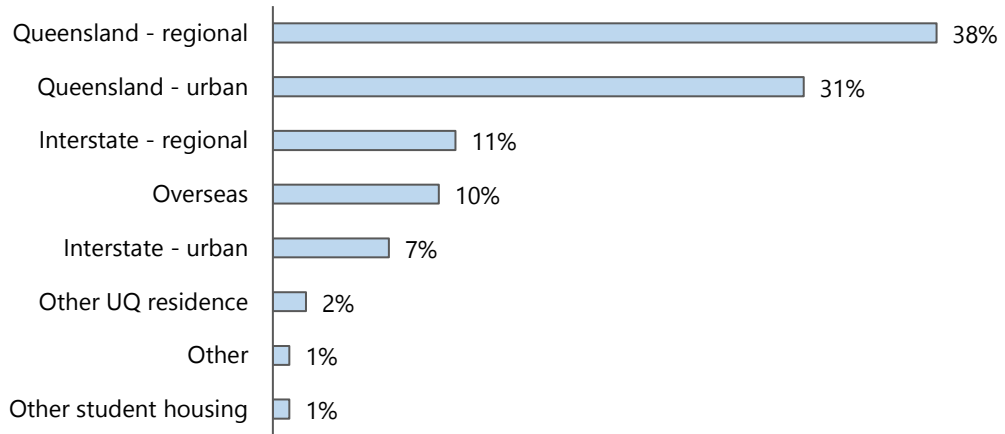
Age



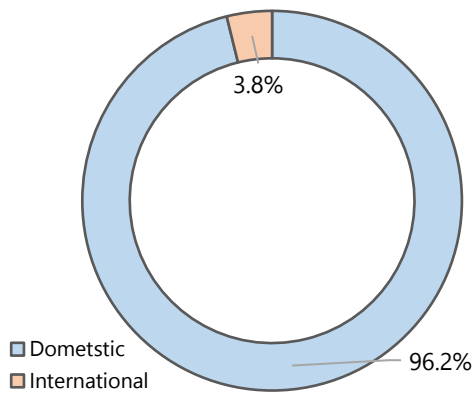
Sexual Orientation



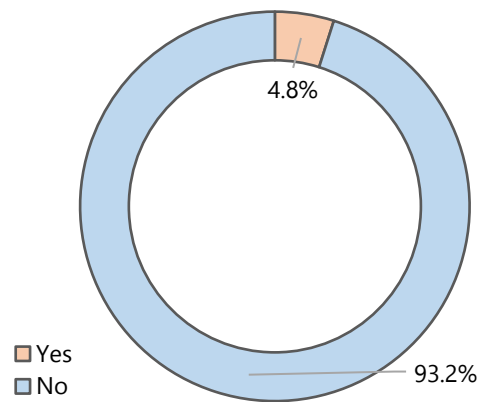
Address before Emmanuel College



International students



People with disability



Appendix B: About the Reviewer

Cam Bestwick

Cam is a consultant, trainer, educationalist, and school and university administrator. He has been a leading figure in the university residences sector, having led housing and residential life functions at some of the most prominent universities in Australia, and has matured the profession through his leadership roles in the sector's peak bodies.



Contact:

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Appendix C: Review Summary Card

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The Emmanuel College Culture Review on one page:

The mission of Emmanuel College is:

To provide a world-class collegiate experience that gives Emmanuel residents the greatest chance of success in their chosen careers while also developing well-rounded and respected citizens of the world.

The purpose of the culture review was:

To ensure that as a community we are relevant, forward looking, pursuing best practice, and ensuring the wellbeing of the community

The scope of the review included:

- Collecting information from interviews, focus groups, submissions, survey, observation, and document reviews.
- Evaluating the Awareness, Opportunities, Motivations, and Capabilities affecting people's propensity to live desired values and behaviours at the College.

Some core values of the community appear to be:

Respect | Integrity | Inclusivity | Excellence | Humility | Mutual Support

Some guiding principles for culture reform are:

- Respect must be permanent and universal.
- Traditions must be tested "wisely and well".
- Fellow Collegians are colleagues who are credible and worthwhile collaborators.
- Reforms should be co-designed and co-produced by students and non-students.

Some elements of the culture to protect are:

- Fostering a strong sense of community.
- Helping people to form lifelong bonds.
- Believing in and supporting one another.
- Encouraging roundedness in people.
- Accumulating prestige indirectly, through quiet distinction.
- Maintaining a spirit of voluntarism and stewardship.

Some elements of the culture to renew are:

- Clarifying the College's core values.
- Developing an overall student experience framework.
- Embedding an inviolable ethical framework for traditions.
- Developing a RACI matrix for consultative decision-making.
- Reforming the alcohol culture via a student-led taskforce.
- Crafting a standing set of event management guidelines.
- Providing event management training to student leaders.
- Creating ally programs to decentralise advocacy.
- Establishing a contestable student experience innovation fund.
- Creating new avenues to openly discuss ambitious, long-term ideas.
- Diversifying the ways residents build relationships outside their wing.
- Arranging mentors for the leaders of the Students' Club Executive.
- Making staff more visible in the everyday life of the College.
- Reviewing the role of Wing Leaders to resolve tensions between duties.
- Increasing student leaders' input into board-level decisions.
- Raising the awareness and participation rates for exit surveys.

November 2023

By Cam Bestwick

