



## **University Colleges Australia**

### **Annual General Meeting**

#### **President's Report**

#### **Via Zoom**

**24 November 2021**

#### **Introductory comments**

This report covers the seven months of the Association's activity since our postponed AGM on 20 April, with both the postponement and indeed the period since affected by the continuing impact of the COVID pandemic.

I want to begin by acknowledging with deep gratitude the depths of resilience that members have drawn on and displayed during 2021; for the determination to keep the doors open, the soup hot, and the welcome warm, for our communities during these last two difficult years. For the many students who had no better option, indeed no other option, colleges continued as we always have, to provide a safe and congenial home, a community of connection, and a strong sense of belonging. We witnessed in colleges across the country, some wonderful examples of innovative thinking to adapt programs to the online space, just so that we could maintain, indeed strengthen, those connections.

#### **1. COVID continues its impact**

Many of those "in-person" connections that form the core of our way of working in colleges have again been severely constrained by the ongoing impact of COVID. Meetings with partner organisations, our Graduate Residences Network, the annual Forum, Executive meetings, to name just a few, have all proceeded without the vital human element of in-person contact. Nevertheless, we have worked hard to maintain and indeed enrich contact and support opportunities through innovative solutions, and some examples are detailed throughout this report.

The challenges presented by the Delta strain, together with the delays associated with vaccine availability caused a return to lockdowns in some university settings, with many of the constraints we experienced in 2020 returning again to curtail much collegial activity.

## **2. Further professionalising the management of the Association**

The April 2021 AGM provided a strong statement of support from the membership for the proposition that the Association move to a further professionalising of the management of our business, including the endorsement of a 30% increase in membership fees, following a decade of no increases, in order to sustainably afford the employment of an Executive Manager.

The Executive has thought carefully about proceeding with a sustainable model which permits this change of direction, whilst ensuring a continuing careful management of members' funds. I am grateful for the sensible moderation in this conversation of Executive members, and particularly that of Treasurer, Mark Sampson. Very good work has gone into position description, key performance indicators, term of engagement and other structural arrangements, and we are ready to go to market in the search for a suitable appointment.

In consideration of this careful and sustainable approach, I foreshadow that an item of General Business will propose a 30% increase in fees for the 2022-2023 financial year, to enhance our capacity to more comfortably pay for this important change of direction, and I encourage members' support.

## **3. Deans and Deputies Network launched**

We are delighted to announce the formal launch of the new Deans and Deputies Network. James Hardiman – Dean of Students at St Hilda's College, University of Melbourne – launched the network on the first day of the Forum on 23 November. Deans and Deputies have formed the core of the Association's associate membership for some time, and we look forward to the creation, curation and rollout of many more opportunities for professional development in preparation for future leadership capability that the network will bring.

## **4. Online Forums**

This very successful initiative, begun during 2020, was continued this year, curated to deliver each month some important professional development opportunities, such as –

Strategic planning in Colleges – Wayne Erickson

Working with your Student Club – Joanna Rosewell

The Universities Australia Student Safety Survey – Renee Hamilton, UA

College-specific COVID Policies – Q&A

College Governance and Working with Councils (including invited Chairs) – Rose

Alwyn and Helen Darch

Restorative circles: a practical approach – Nerilee Flint

## **5. Conversations with Colleagues**

Monthly online conversations with fellow Heads continued during 2021, facilitated by Vice President Joanna Rosewell. These are another important opportunity to come together in, naturally, conversation, but also in mutual support. I am aware of a number of important one-on-one conversations in either mutual support or in mentoring which flowed from these discussions, as a further example of the power of the peer-to-peer network.

## **6. GST tool – conversations with the ATO**

Following advice that December 31, 2021 would see the retirement of the current GST tool, the Executive has engaged with the Australian Taxation Office to ensure that the concerns of the colleges and halls sector about Goods and Services taxation certainty going forward are considered. A collaborative working group has been established by the ATO, which includes on-the-ground practitioners in colleges as well as Executive representation, with a view to ATO constructing an alternative mechanism to assess compliance in the sector that provides certainty and no disadvantage. This is expected to be completed during the 2022 calendar year, ready for rollout sometime in 2023. Interim arrangements for 2022 will be put in place which will provide certainty and no disadvantage.

## **7. Relationships with partner organisations**

During the year, members of the Executive met with key leaders of our partner organisations:

Universities Australia – the valuable opportunity to meet one-on-one with Chair, Professor Deborah Terry, Policy Director, Dr Renee Hamilton, and recently appointed Chair, Professor John Dewar, has significantly strengthened this organisational relationship, and allowed us to further articulate the many great strengths that colleges can add to the on-campus experience of university students.

Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) – following the formal engagement through memorandum of understanding during 2020, we have sought to maximise limited opportunities to come together by our presence and participation in online forums. Contributing to the conversation about colleges' place in the trajectory of the educational journey of students from school to higher education is a rich field and we look forward to strengthening this important partnership in-person in 2022.

Asia-Pacific Student Accommodation Association (APSAA) – we have engaged with Marion Bayley, President of APSAA, to reinvigorate the memorandum of understanding which exists between our associations, and to explore areas of mutual interest. UCA's focus on leadership in colleges can of course add great value to these conversations, but so can APSAA's focus on the detailed operational aspects of student accommodation.

Collegiate Way International (CWI) – Barbara Green and Ian Walker have continued to carry our connection with this global network of collegiate communities, albeit while CWI has experienced a COVID-inspired hiatus. Some new green shoots of interest are starting to appear, with a newsletter and promise of a restart to a conference conversation. I am delighted that Barbara and Ian have agreed to continue as our links, despite in Ian's case his departure from the Executive.

NAAUC – the work of this student-led organisation, relying as it does on the in-person conference experience, has also been significantly impacted by COVID. Despite this, I have held regular discussions with President, Georgia Hayward, and we look forward to a return to normal engagement in 2022.

Finally in this regard, I was pleased to participate in John XXIII College's (ANU) Strategy Workshop in May, and to engage in lengthy conversations over dinner about the strategic future of the college. I look forward to engaging with other colleges in similar settings, adding value (I hope!) to these important strategic discussions.

## **8. Executive Committee**

I want to record my sincere thanks to fellow members of the Executive for their expertise and energy, and for their forbearance during the continuing challenges posed by COVID. The workload as detailed above tells a story of their commitment to enriching the collegial links between colleagues, and their careful attention to the current and future management of the Association's business is a mark of their commitment to the continuation of the relevance of colleges and our potential for contribution to Australia's higher education sector. Thanks are therefore in order to -

Vice President	Joanna Rosewell
Secretary	Rose Alwyn
Treasurer	Mark Sampson
Committee Member	Bill Peirson
Committee Member	Jeremy Boland
Immediate Past President	Barbara Green

## **9. Forum**

Despite the frustration attached to again having to postpone the in-person opportunity of the long awaited gathering-together in Melbourne, Forum convenors Bill Peirson and Brenda Holt set about curating an outstanding virtual forum. They engaged with excellent speakers who brought topical and informative research-based presentations, in a format which allowed for local chapters to come together in a hybrid online/in-person form, sharing lunch for example, where possible. I extend my sincere thanks to Bill and Brenda, and also to Executive Officer Deborah Pugh for her great skill in managing the logistic and operational aspects of the Forum.

The Forum's focus areas – youth mental health, the needs of the future world of work, pastoral care and wellbeing, and respectful relationships and creating positive cultures – represent an affirmation of the Association's work in the recent past, as well as a clear indication of our future direction.

## **10. Farewell**

This is the last AGM for our long-standing Executive Officer, Ms Deborah Pugh, who retires from serving the Association in this role after over a decade in office. This an outstanding contribution – carrying the burden of keeping the Executive leadership functioning and keeping the membership informed, through six Presidencies! Truly a remarkable effort over a sustained period. Deborah had indicated a wish to retire earlier this year, but in a clear indication of her allegiance to the Association and her care for the work we do on behalf of the members, she was persuaded to remain in post until the end of November, providing her usual high standards of support to Bill and Brenda in the curation of the Forum. A successful

capstone event to an outstanding long-term contribution to a grateful Association. On behalf of us all – many, many thanks, Deb.

### **Concluding remarks**

I recall the comments of Professor John Dewar in his opening address to the Forum, when he drew an optimistic forecast for universities as we emerge from COVID. He spoke of the enthusiasm of international students for return, the opportunity to incorporate further innovation in our offerings to enhance the student experience, and in particular, a rediscovery of the importance of the social connection afforded by the in-person, on-campus experience, and the place of the residential community in enabling this. I recall most vividly the remarkably aspirational pivot from “world class universities” to “universities for the world”, and it struck me that all of these opportunities are firmly in the hands of colleges and their leadership as well! What a challenge to grasp as we too emerge from the dark into the light!

Thank you for your continuing support, and as we come to the end of the 2021 academic year, allow me to wish you all the very best for a brighter 2022.

Wayne Erickson  
President  
November 2021