



THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE

*Within the University of Sydney*

## THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE WHOLE-OF-ORGANISATION PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PLAN

Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence

Prepared under the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence

Whole-of-Organisation Prevention and Response Plan

**Version** 1.0

**Plan Period** 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2029

**Approved By** The Women's College Council

**Responsible Officer** Principal (Higher Education Principal Executive Officer)

**Related Documents** Whole-of-Organisation Assessment (December 2025)

### **Purpose**

This Prevention and Response Plan sets out The Women's College's strategic actions to prevent and respond to gender-based violence over the period 2026-2029. It is informed by our Whole-of-Organisation Assessment conducted in 2025 and meets the requirements of the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence.

The Plan commits the College to specific actions with clear timeframes, responsibilities, and resource allocations to strengthen our prevention of and response to gender-based violence.

### **College Council Endorsement**

This Plan has been endorsed by The Women's College Council and commits the College to the actions, timeframes, and responsibilities outlined herein.

#### **Council Chair**

Signature:  Date: 22 December 2025

Name: Rowena Jane Newman

Title: Chair, College Council

**Principal (Higher Education Principal Executive Officer)**

Signature: J. Donnelly Date: 22 December 2025

Name: Tiffany Donnelly

Title: Principal, The Women's College

## **Implementation and Accountability**

- **Implementation oversight:** The Principal is responsible for implementation oversight, with support from the Vice Principal and Dean of Students.
- **Reporting to Council:** Progress reports will be provided to Council six-monthly, with a comprehensive annual report on implementation.
- **Review cycle:** This Plan will be reviewed as required by the National Code, emerging evidence, or significant incidents.
- **Resource allocation:** Resources required for implementation have been identified and will be allocated through the annual budgeting process.
- **Community engagement:** The College community, including students, staff, and alumnae, will be informed of this Plan and progress on implementation.

## **Statement of Commitment**

The Women's College is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all residents, affiliates, staff, and visitors. We recognise that gender-based violence is a serious violation of human rights and is fundamentally inconsistent with our founding mission to advance women's education and equality.

The Prevention and Response Plan represents our commitment to systemic, long-term cultural change guided by our founding mission to inspire, connect, and empower women.

The Plan strengthens governance, formalises response systems, and centres the voices of diverse cohorts across the College community, particularly those who are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, including women, LGBTIQA+ people, First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with disability.

We will work collaboratively with students, staff, the University of Sydney, other residential colleges, and specialist services to create a culture where gender-based violence is not tolerated and where anyone who experiences it receives trauma-informed, person-centred support.



## THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE

*Within the University of Sydney*

# The Women's College Whole of Organisation Prevention and Response Plan

addressing the

*Universities Accord (National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence) Act 2025*

[National Code]

# 1. Introduction

This Whole-of-Organisation Prevention and Response Plan outlines The Women’s College’s commitments in meeting the requirements of the *National Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education* (National Code). It establishes a coordinated framework to prevent gender-based violence, support those affected, and ensure effective, accountable responses across the whole organisation.

The Women’s College was established by an Act of Parliament in 1889, eight years after the University of Sydney decided to admit women to degrees ‘in complete equality with men.’ Women’s was the first residential college for women in Australasia, and over the course of its more than 130-year history it has remained true to its origins as a centre of tertiary excellence for women. It is now the only fully women-only College on the University of Sydney campus. The Women’s College currently has 300 resident students, 50 affiliate (non-resident) members, and 12 full-time staff. The Women’s College is governed by The Women’s College Council. We use the term “women” as a broad and inclusive term.

The Women’s College prides itself on its traditions of scholarship, leadership and community service. Through its alumnae and former principals, it has played a significant part in the history of women’s higher education and the fight for equality in Australia. As such, the founding principles of the Women’s College are aligned with the fundamental principles of the National Code.

This Plan has been informed by a Whole-of-Organisation assessment of the enablers, systemic risks and barriers to preventing gender-based violence in the Women’s College. This assessment is provided at Attachment A.

This Plan is structured into six key relevant focus areas that align with the National Code.

## 2. Accountable leadership and governance

### Mandatory requirements

	National Code Standard summary	Key actions	Evidence of compliance
7.2	A Provider must require a student accommodation provider to prepare, implement and publish on its website a Whole-of-Organisation Prevention and Response Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete Plan including whole-of-organisation assessment.</li><li>• A report will be sent to The University of Sydney confirming completion of the Whole-of-Organisation Plan and associated documentation are complete.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Plan will be endorsed by the Women's College Council and uploaded to the website by 1 January, 2026.</li><li>• The Respect@Women's web pages will be available from 1 January, 2026: <a href="http://www.thewomenscollege.edu.au/respectwomens">www.thewomenscollege.edu.au/respectwomens</a></li><li>• The Women's College Council has been briefed on the implementation of the National Code throughout 2025 (see Council minutes).</li><li>• The Women's College Risk Register has been updated to include compliance under the Code.</li><li>• In drafting the Plan, the Women's College's senior staff working group consulted with stakeholders including staff, students, and Council. Staff have established and continue to consult with a National Code Student Working Group comprised of student residents and affiliates whose identities and lived experiences align with those at the centre of the National Code. Membership of the Student Working Group will be updated each year. Staff also drew on historical documentation and data from previous cultural reviews and surveys (Broderick Review and 2022 Cultural Survey).</li><li>• Arrangements in place for staff and Council implementation of Plan in 2026 through training and monthly staff meetings.</li><li>• Arrangements in place for training of student leaders during Leaders Week and of all students during Welcome Week and Semester 1.</li></ul>
7.3	A Provider must require a student accommodation provider to monitor and measure the impact of the Prevention and Response Plan on an ongoing basis and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Annual review of the data collected in the previous year to measure impact of the Prevention and</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monitoring and evaluation activities includes regular reporting to College Council.</li><li>• Cultural reviews conducted in 2017, 2022 and cultural health check planned for 2026.</li></ul>

National Code Standard summary	Key actions	Evidence of compliance
<p>update the Prevention and Response Plan at least every four years.</p>	<p>Response Plan and monitoring via fortnightly wellbeing meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare data from before and after implementation of the Plan.</li> <li>• Review of relevant policies as per existing review cycle.</li> <li>• Reporting to Providers as per the Code requirements.</li> <li>• Full review and update of the Plan is due Jan 2030.</li> <li>• Ongoing consultation with Women's College staff and students.</li> <li>• Annual refreshing of student working group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wellbeing data including sexual harm collected since 2018. Review of this data has informed culture, practice and policy since that time.</li> <li>• Send documentation including sexual harm gender-based violence incident report referral forms to the University of Sydney.</li> </ul>

## Additional actions from whole-of-organisation assessment

- Council GBV training (first quarter 2026)
- Regular reporting to Council on GBV prevention and response

### 3. Safe environments and systems

#### Mandatory requirements

National Code Standard summary		
	Key actions	Evidence of compliance
<b>7.4a</b> A Provider must require a student accommodation provider to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>require its staff to declare any previous investigations or substantiated allegations of gender-based violence in similar roles</li><li>consider any declaration and associated risks in employment/engagement decision-making</li><li>consider any substantiated allegations found during a person's employment with the college in promotion/recognition processes</li><li>require staff to declare any existing or previous intimate personal relationship with a resident and manage and monitor any associated risks.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>All current staff and student leaders to sign GBV and Intimate Relationships Declaration form by 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2026.</li><li>All new staff complete the declaration as part of onboarding.</li><li>Develop declaration register for all staff and student leaders.</li><li>Senior Staff review declarations and conduct risk assessment for any positive declarations.</li><li>Any substantiated allegations considered in promotion or recognition decisions.</li><li>The Conflict of Interest Risk Assessment to be developed.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Developed GBV and Intimate Relationships Declaration form.</li><li>Developed Conflict of Interest form.</li><li>2026 Student Leaders have signed and submitted their declaration.</li><li>Staff and student declaration register completed by March 2026.</li><li>All employment and volunteer contracts have been updated to include declaration requirements.</li></ul>
<b>7.4b</b> A Provider must require a student accommodation provider to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>prohibit the use of a Non-disclosure Agreement, unless requested by the Discloser</li><li>if requested, ensure it does not stop the Discloser from sharing information as part of seeking support</li><li>ensure any settlement agreements do not contain a non-disparagement clause.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Non-Disclosure Agreements will not be used. College will adopt into its Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Policy the non-disclosure clause in the University of Sydney's draft Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Policy 2025.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Link to University of Sydney's Policy when it is live.</li></ul>

National Code Standard summary		Key actions	Evidence of compliance
<b>7.4c</b>	<p>A Provider must require a student accommodation provider to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adopt the Provider's policies and procedures on preventing and responding to Gender-based Violence OR have and implement their own that meet National Code requirements</li> <li>develop and review the policy at least every three years in consultation with relevant stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All relevant College policies to be updated and University policies to be referenced as a secondary source. Stakeholder group to be included in future policy reviews.</li> <li>Updated Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Policy to be reviewed in consultation with College stakeholder groups by 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026.</li> <li>Review and update Grievance Policy by 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026.</li> <li>Develop agreements with all other university Providers where our students are studying.</li> <li>Draft of agreement with Macquarie University to be reviewed by Council and signed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Policy updated.</li> <li>Critical Incident Management Plan updated.</li> <li>A legal and binding agreement has been signed with the University of Sydney (can be provided to Department of Education on request).</li> <li>Key policies reviewed annually.</li> </ul>

## Additional actions from whole-of-organisation assessment

- While a legal and binding agreement has been signed with the University of Sydney where 80% of our students study, we still need to develop agreements with the other universities where our students are enrolled.
- Mainstreaming knowledge of the National Code and its requirements and related Women's College policies to the Women's College community.
- Complete IT audit and security upgrades.
- Review and strengthen after-hours protocols.
- Strengthen intercollege collaboration on shared event protocols.

## 4. Knowledge and capability

### Mandatory requirements

National Code Standard	Key actions	Evidence of compliance
7.5 A Provider must require a student accommodation provider to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>require residents and staff to complete prevention education and training and responding to disclosures training that:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>meets requirements of Standard 3</li><li>is tailored to the student accommodation environment</li><li>is delivered or approved by the provider</li></ul></li><li>promote evidence-based prevention messaging tailored to the student accommodation environment</li><li>evaluate any initiatives and use findings to inform future activities.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Council, Staff, Leaders Week and Welcome Week training to be provided by University and University approved Providers and Code compliant. This training is tailored to The Women's College environment.</li><li>Ensure each university Safer Communities and related GBV training module has been completed by all students and students can demonstrate compliance.</li><li>Evaluation to include QR Code surveys, including following official training sessions; pre-College survey; annual review of number of cases; regular review cycles; quarterly review meeting to discuss/review cases and training.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Prevention education and training, including use of subject matter experts in Leaders Week and Welcome Week</li><li>Evidence-based messaging, including University of Sydney posters, SUSF, USU App briefing, to be displayed in prominent areas of the Women's College.</li><li>GBV prevention and response messaging included in Resident Assistant Handbook, Student Handbook, in-person briefings, policy briefings from senior staff, and resources available in Dean of Students' office.</li><li>Evaluation of initiatives will be added into reports to Council and university Providers.</li></ul>
7.6 A Provider must require a student accommodation provider to ensure risk assessments are only undertaken by people with expertise prescribed in Standard 3, and when internal capability is not sufficient, engage a person with the requisite expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Women's College is a member of University Colleges Australia, which has contracted Equality Partners to provide a Risk Assessment template complying with Standard 3 developed in partnership with Code Black Psychology.</li><li>Review risk assessment with Council subject matter expert.</li><li>Principal, Vice Principal and Dean of Students have</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Code Black Psychology Risk Assessment to be provided by mid-January 2026, with senior staff training to follow.</li><li>Principal, Vice Principal and DOS are experienced in taking disclosures and complaints, drafting trauma-informed policy and have undertaken a variety of training in responding to disclosures (combined total of 40 years' experience in taking disclosures).</li><li>The Principal of the Women's College holds a PhD in cultural feminism; the Vice Principal has research expertise in gender, gender-based violence, and</li></ul>

- considerable experience and training, but will receive enhanced and updated training including risk assessment.
- If internal expertise insufficient, Council subject matter expert engaged within 24 hours.

intersectionality, worked as a senior consultant on the Broderick Report into college cultures in 2017, and has taught gender studies at tertiary level; the DOS has decades of experience in teaching, diversity and gender equity policy, and storytelling.

## Additional actions from whole-of-organisation assessment

- Ongoing commitment to enhancing staff and student knowledge and capability through embedding explicit articulations of gender-based violence alongside the Women's College's strategy and mission for women's equality.
- Widespread messaging in Women's College community that sexual harm and gender-based violence are human rights and safety issues, and that prevention and response are cornerstones of the Women's College's commitment to women rather than compliance for its own sake.

## 5. Safety and support

### Mandatory requirements

National Code Standard	Key actions	Evidence of compliance
7.7a-c A provider must require a student accommodation provider to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>ensure its responses, practices and support services are safe, person centred and trauma informed</li><li>provide or facilitate access to support services to disclosers and respondents</li><li>promote and disseminate information on how residents and staff can access policies, procedures and support services.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Wellbeing program to be further developed for further proactive dissemination of support services for staff and students.</li><li>Additional staff training in responding to disclosures to be delivered by the University.</li><li>Review of relevant policies to strengthen trauma-informed language and accessibility, including for respondents.</li><li>Oversight from Council member subject matter expert in trauma-informed practices.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Subject matter expertise on the Women's College Council and in senior staff.</li><li>The Women's College partners with University of Sydney's Safer Communities to provide safe, trauma informed care for students.</li><li>Communities of Practice meetings held between senior Women's College and University staff conducted periodically.</li><li>The Principal is a member of the University of Sydney Student Safety Advisory Group.</li><li>A list of support services is included in the Women's College Handbook, Resident Assistant Handbook and College policies included on Woogle (student intranet).</li><li>Physical and digital notice boards utilised for displays of information and where appropriate, social media platforms.</li></ul>
7.7d A provider must require a student accommodation provider to undertake a risk assessment following every disclosure and formal report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Risk assessment conducted by trained staff for every disclosure and report.</li><li>Risk Assessment template to guide process.</li><li>Ongoing monitoring of identified risks through case management meetings.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Risk Assessment template provided by Code Black Psychology in January 2026.</li><li>Assessments undertaken by experienced staff only; subject-matter expert consulted as required.</li><li>Fortnightly wellbeing meetings between senior staff with confidential case notes maintained.</li></ul>
7.7ei Where a disclosure relates to behaviour occurring in residence or at an event organised by the residence, a provider must require a student accommodation provider to take all necessary action to manage risk, including relocation of the respondent where required and facilitating urgent access to support services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Develop plan for relocation of respondent, e.g. relocate Sydney-based student home. If not Sydney-based, refer to another accommodation provider at University of Sydney, a hotel, or a different part of the Women's College</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Updated Critical Incident Management Policy includes sexual harm and GBV, and protocols for relocation of respondent.</li></ul>

National Code Standard	Key actions	Evidence of compliance
7.7eii	<p>with restrictions on Dining Hall, etc.</p> <p>A provider must have arrangements in place with a student accommodation provider to enable a discloser to choose the provider to lead the response to a disclosure, and the student accommodation provider must cooperate fully and implement any outcomes decided by the provider.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreement with University of Sydney allows the Women's College or University to lead the response based on the choice of the Discloser.</li> <li>Process explained to all Disclosers at first contact.</li> <li>Liaison person at University of Sydney Safer Communities and other university Providers identified.</li> <li>Develop and sign formal agreements with other university Providers.</li> </ul>
7.eiii	<p>A provider must have arrangements in place with a student accommodation provider to enable a discloser to choose the student accommodation provider to lead the response to the disclosure, and the student accommodation provider must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>undertake a risk assessment within 48 hours and from this determine necessary safety measures (including relocation of the respondent) and immediately implement them</li> <li>manage and monitor risk</li> <li>share necessary information with the provider to protect safety of others</li> <li>implement support plans for both disclosers and respondents that meet requirements of Standard 4 within 48 hours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drawing on Critical Incident Response Plan, create a procedure/flow chart/check list to identify flow of responsibility. For student leaders, including prompt to escalate to senior staff immediately. Clear indication of when the 48 hour timeframe commences.</li> <li>Critical Incident Response Plan (with flow chart/checklist showing escalation points and responsibilities, including student leader prompts to escalate immediately).</li> <li>Risk Assessment Protocols (securely stored and based on Code Black framework).</li> <li>Information Sharing Protocols with the University of Sydney and specialist services.</li> <li>Procedures to meet 48-hour timeframes for risk assessment and support plan implementation.</li> <li>College Principal experienced in managing responses, including external investigations, and will ensure compliance.</li> </ul>

## Additional actions from whole-of-organisation assessment

- Strengthen affiliate integration and support

- Enhance respondent support pathways
- Improve promotion of support services
- Continue cultural monitoring (2026 cultural health check planned)
- Pilot approaches with other universities/Providers to support students who have experienced sexual harm and gender-based violence including to mitigate the impact on their studies.

## 6. Data, evidence and impact

### Mandatory requirements

	National Code Standard summary	Key actions	Evidence of compliance
7.8	A provider must require a student accommodation provider to collect and report data prescribed by Standard 6, where applicable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data collection protocols established to capture all required Standard 6 data.</li><li>• Data collected when students make in-person reports (type of GBV, location, relationship to respondent).</li><li>• Trauma-informed approach: demographic data not required during in-person disclosures if distressing.</li><li>• Data collected at point of entry (admissions) to support demographic detail.</li><li>• Secure, de-identified data storage system.</li><li>• Agreement with University of Sydney for data sharing as required.</li><li>• Agreement with Macquarie University in development.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data collection system documentation.</li><li>• Voluntary demographic data collection built into online reporting form.</li><li>• Data security protocols.</li><li>• Agreements with University of Sydney and Macquarie University regarding data sharing.</li><li>• Annual data reports (first due June 30, 2027)</li><li>• Privacy impact assessment completed.</li></ul>

### Additional actions from whole-of-organisation assessment

- Establish Standard 6-compliant data collection systems
- Develop systematic case management registers
- Conduct regular analysis enabling trend identification and informed decision-making



## THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE

*Within the University of Sydney*

# **The Women's College**

## **Whole of Organisation Assessment**

addressing the

*Universities Accord (National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence) Act 2025 [National Code]*

## **Executive Summary**

The Women’s College is Australia’s first university residential college for women\*, established in 1889 to advance women’s education and equality. This Whole-of-Organisation Assessment provides an evidence-based evaluation of our strengths, systemic risks, and priorities for continuous improvement in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

\*We understand and use the word “women” as broad and inclusive.

## **Overall Assessment**

The Women’s College demonstrates strong foundations to mitigate against gender-based violence including proven commitment to cultural change, comprehensive pastoral care with three resident staff members, and women-centred leadership with deep expertise in gender-based violence prevention. Since the 2017 Broderick Review, we have achieved significant reductions in bullying (reduced by 50%), hazing (reduced by 50%), and pressure to drink (reduced by 74%). However, sexual harm and gender-based violence rates remain static, data collection has not been systematic at the level now required by the National Code, and intercollege events continue to pose heightened risks. This assessment identifies priority actions to address these gaps while building on our considerable strengths.

## **Our Context**

The Women’s College houses 300 residents and 50 affiliates (non-resident members), supported by 12 full-time staff including the Principal, Vice Principal, and Dean of Students who all live on campus. Our founding mission—to provide a safe, inclusive, and secular environment for women pursuing higher education—aligns closely with the objectives of the National Code. Our women-only student body, women-only leadership, and explicit commitment to inspiring feminism in every student create a distinctive environment that works to prevent gender-based violence and presents unique opportunities for advancing gender equality.

## **How This Assessment Was Conducted**

This assessment has been developed by a senior staff working group and consultations with all staff; review of the 2017 Broderick Review and 2022 follow-up cultural survey; analysis of disclosure and formal report data from 2017-2024; and examination of our policies, pastoral care systems, physical infrastructure, and governance structures. The assessment will continue to be developed through consultation with a National Code Student Working Group representing diverse identities and lived experiences.

## Key Strengths (Enablers)

- 1. Proven commitment to cultural change:** The Women's College Council was the first of the University of Sydney residential colleges to sign up to participate in the Broderick Review. Our 2022 follow-up survey demonstrated significant improvements: bullying and hazing reduced by 50%, pressure to drink reduced by 74%.
- 2. Strong pastoral care infrastructure:** Three resident senior staff, a dedicated Dean of Students and Wellbeing Officer, 17 trained Resident Assistants located strategically throughout the College, and fortnightly wellbeing meetings enable us to know each student individually and intervene early before issues escalate.
- 3. Women-centred mission and leadership:** As a women's college with predominantly female leadership, staff, and Council, we have embedded gender equality into our institutional DNA. Our women-only environment reduces exposure to toxic masculinity, promotes women's leadership in all roles, and creates space for feminist development.
- 4. Deep expertise at leadership level:** Our Principal has 25 years of experience at Women's College and in the residential college environment working to promote cultural renewal. The Vice Principal has specialised expertise in gender studies, intersectionality, gender-based violence, and consent education, having been a senior consultant on the Broderick Review and helped develop Macquarie University's sexual misconduct policy and consent training module.
- 5. Comprehensive policy framework:** We have extensive policies addressing sexual harm and gender-based violence, alcohol harm minimisation, bullying and harassment, grievances, wellbeing, staff-student relationships, and codes of conduct. These are all regularly reviewed and updated following established cycles.
- 6. Strong external partnerships:** We have an established partnership with the University of Sydney's Safer Communities Office who provide specialist support and referral pathways for students including to the Sydney Local Health District Sexual Assault Service.

## Key Systemic Risks

- 1. Sexual harm and gender-based violence rates remain static:** While bullying, hazing, and drinking pressure decreased significantly after the Broderick Review reforms, sexual harm and gender-based violence rates in 2022 remained similar to 2017 levels. Even one case is one too many and staff continue to focus on prevention strategies. We do note that increased reporting and help-seeking since the Broderick Review suggest increased confidence in our processes.
- 2. Intercollege events pose heightened risk:** Historically, most incidents experienced by our students have occurred at other colleges or intercollege events, particularly those involving alcohol and held at colleges with bars. These create environments where gender-based violence can be more likely to occur and are beyond our direct control.

- 3. Variable understanding across community:** While the Women’s College leadership has strong expertise, not all staff, student leaders, and residents have consistent, comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence, its drivers, trauma-informed responses, and bystander intervention strategies.
- 4. Affiliate students face unique vulnerabilities:** Affiliates (non-resident members) may face increased risks as they do not benefit from the physical safety of living in College, constant presence of pastoral care staff, or full integration into support networks.
- 5. Data collection gaps:** While we have managed individual cases well with a trauma-informed, person-centred approach, and our data collection has been qualitative, it has not been systematic at the level required by Standard 6 in the Code.
- 6. Hierarchies and exclusion dynamics:** Natural hierarchies (year levels, student leadership positions, room points system) and potential for elite school cliques can reinforce power imbalances and exclusion—underlying factors that enable gender-based violence.

## Key Barriers

- 1. Structural and legislative constraints:** Our establishing legislation requires that Council members be elected by alumnae, potentially reproducing the historic demographics of the College and so limiting our ability to ensure diversity in governance beyond gender. Heritage buildings create physical infrastructure limitations including because not all buildings are enclosed within our main campus and some have accessibility challenges.
- 2. Student culture dynamics:** Students sometimes resist policy changes as “too controlling” or threatening “tradition,” not always recognising potential harms. Balancing student autonomy with duty of care requires ongoing calibration.
- 3. Privacy and surveillance tensions:** We must balance creating a home-like environment and respecting privacy with ensuring adequate oversight and safety measures. We appropriately do not have surveillance in private rooms or residential corridors.
- 4. Limited control beyond College premises:** When incidents occur at other colleges or off-campus, or involve members of the public, our ability to coordinate responses, share information, and ensure consistent standards is constrained.
- 5. Response systems not fully formalised:** Through a combination of senior staff and trained Resident Assistants living on site, we respond quickly and in a trauma-informed and person-centred way to any reports and disclosures. However, we have not had formal risk assessment templates, 48-hour protocols, documented relocation procedures, or systematic case management registers meeting National Code requirements.

## Priority Actions

Based on this assessment, The Women’s College will prioritise the following actions in our Prevention and Response Plan:

### Immediate priorities (2026):

1. **Formalise response systems:** Develop risk assessment templates (partnering with Code Black Psychology and Women's College Council expert), establish formal case management registers, implement 48-hour protocols, document clear relocation procedures, and strengthen respondent support pathways.
2. **Implement systematic data collection:** Establish Standard 6-compliant systems to collect, analyse, and report de-identified data enabling trend analysis and informed decision-making.
- **Enhance knowledge and capability:** Enhance comprehensive, ongoing training for all residents, staff, and Women's College Council on gender-based violence, trauma-informed responses, bystander intervention, and intersectionality.

#### **Ongoing priorities (2026-2027):**

4. **Address hierarchy and inclusion risks:** Roll out the student values framework explicitly incorporating diversity and gender-based violence prevention; review room points system for transparency; provide education about diversity in House Committee elections; strengthen affiliate integration and support.
5. **Strengthen intercollege collaboration:** Through the Heads of College and Deans & Deputies groups, continue working with other colleges to establish shared event protocols, coordinate responses to incidents involving multiple colleges, and advocate for consistent standards across all colleges.
6. **Continue cultural monitoring:** Conduct regular cultural health checks (next planned for 2026); develop and maintain review cycles for all policies; seek regular feedback from students on effectiveness of support services; ongoing consultation with the Women's College National Code Student Working Group.

## Introduction

From its very beginnings, The Women’s College has been a centre for women’s education and advancement. In 1889, a time when women had only recently been admitted to university study, the Women’s College was established and endowed by an Act of the NSW Parliament to give women students at the University of Sydney a safe, inclusive and secular place to live on the campus. Since the Women’s College opened to students in 1892, it has played a significant role in the history of women’s higher education and equality in Australia. The Women’s College has housed more than eight thousand young women undertaking tertiary studies, and had fourteen women Principals overseeing their wellbeing. It counts among its alumnae the activist Jessie Street and the first female Governor of NSW Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, and among its principals the first female Governor General of Australia Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO.

Currently, the Women’s College houses 300 residents and 50 affiliates (non-resident members). These students attend several universities in Sydney, with the largest proportion studying at the University of Sydney. The Women’s College has 12 full-time members of staff including the Principal, Vice Principal, and Dean of Students, who are supported by Finance, Events, Facilities and Housekeeping teams, and Admissions and Administrative staff, as well as part time and casual staff supporting students’ academic and co-curricular programs. In addition, the Women’s College contracts catering and cleaning teams. As part of our commitment to a vibrant and safe living-learning community, the Principal, Vice Principal and Dean of Students live in residence at the Women’s College.

The governing body of the Women’s College is the Women’s College Council, which consists of 10 Council members elected by the Alumnae and a number of ex-officio members. The College’s Act of Parliament and the By-laws are available on the website. The Women’s College Council meets quarterly, as does its three sub-committees: Finance, Governance and Building & Development.

The Women’s College strategy is centred on the idea that “everything we do is for and about women.” This commitment has been evident in our proud history of scholarship, leadership, and community service. It is also evident in our willingness to examine our own practices and culture to enhance our strengths and always improve. From 2016-2017, we participated in a formal review of our culture conducted by Elizabeth Broderick & Co, known as the Broderick Review, and developed policies and practices in response to its recommendations (which we discuss below). We followed up that review with a survey of students in 2022.

As such, the founding principles of the Women’s College and our ongoing commitment to women and gender equality are aligned with the fundamental principles of the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence. We welcome the opportunity to assess our organisation in alignment with the requirements of the Code. This whole-of-organisation assessment provides a clear and evidence-informed overview of The Women’s College’s strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement in relation to preventing gender-based violence and supporting victim-survivors. These are presented as enablers, risks, and barriers in accordance with the language used in the National Code.

The assessment will support The Women’s College’s strategic decision-making, guide future planning and ensure our alignment with national expectations and sector good practice.

This whole-of-organisation assessment is framed by our awareness of the gendered drivers of violence against women as articulated in *Change the Story*, Australia’s national framework to prevent violence against women. These gendered drivers underpin the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Australia’s national policy framework to end gender-based violence in one generation. These gendered drivers are:

- condoning of violence against women
- rigid gender stereotypes
- men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public and private life
- men’s peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

Other forms of discrimination and inequality – such as racism, homophobia, and transphobia – intersect with gender inequality to compound people’s experiences of violence. Further, *Evidence from Change the Course* (2017) and the *National Student Safety Survey* (2021) shows that residential colleges are high-risk environments for gender-based violence to occur. Evidence also shows that the likelihood of violence increases when men that hold discriminatory attitudes towards women and other people misuse alcohol.

The Women’s College acknowledges the collaboration, guidance, and support provided by University Colleges Australia and Equality Partners in the preparation of this documentation.

## **Area of operation: Leadership, culture and environment**

### **Leadership Structure**

The Principal is the Head of the Women's College and resides on campus along with the Vice Principal and the Dean of Students. The Principal has oversight of all Women's College operations. The Vice Principal is responsible for the academic care of students and the Dean of Students is responsible for student wellbeing. Other senior staff include the Business Manager, the Registrar, the Facilities Manager, the Events Manager, and the Executive Housekeeper. All senior staff report directly to the Principal. The Principal reports to the Women's College Council.

Elected and selected annually, the Student Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the House Committee, and the Academic Assistant and Resident Assistant teams. Together, the SLT comprises 40 students who receive specific training for their roles and are mentored by senior staff to support their professional and personal development.

The primary focus of all College leadership is the safety and wellbeing of students.

### **Staff Expertise in Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response**

**The Principal** Dr Tiffany Donnelly holds a PhD in Cultural Feminism and has lived and worked at The Women's College for 25 years, including 19 years as Vice Principal. She brings deep institutional memory, deep relationships across the Women's College and University communities, was centrally involved in facilitating the Broderick Review and has led cultural renewal initiatives since then. For the past six years as Principal, Dr Donnelly has been the primary point of contact for student disclosures of sexual harm and gender-based violence. She has managed every case personally, and has developed strong insight into patterns, risks, and effective responses. Her responsibilities include ensuring student and staff safety and wellbeing, overseeing all critical incident responses, and maintaining comprehensive records of disclosures and formal reports. This continuity of leadership, combined with her on-the-ground experience, ensures accountability and a values-driven approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence under the National Code.

**The Vice Principal** Dr Rebecca Sheehan holds a PhD in Women's History and has over 20 years' experience teaching in universities in Australia and the USA. She is a recognised expert in women's history, feminism, gender, gender-based violence, and intersectionality with research published in top-tier international journals. Dr Sheehan was a senior consultant on the Broderick Review, directed and taught Gender Studies at Macquarie University (2017–2025), and contributed to developing Macquarie University's first standalone sexual misconduct policy and Safer Communities consent training program.

**The Dean of Students** Meredith Garlick holds a BA (Hons) and MFA (Hons). Ms Garlick brings extensive expertise in education, cultural leadership, and safeguarding. She has taught in diverse contexts—including prisons, NYC public schools, and universities across Australia, the USA, UK, and China—and worked internationally as a filmmaker and screen executive. Her career spans Indigenous and LGBTQIA+ storytelling, complex global co-productions, and policy leadership focused on gender equity and diversity. With decades of governance and compliance experience, she combines trauma-informed practice with a strong commitment to inclusion and safety, making her well qualified to lead wellbeing and prevention initiatives under the National Code.

**Council member subject matter expertise** Dr Mary Stewart has a Bachelor of Medicine, a Masters of Public Health (Health Promotion), and a Masters of Forensic Medicine. She has a Graduate Certificate in the Medical and Forensic Management of Adult Sexual Assault and is a PhD Candidate in Law at the University of Sydney, focused on the patient experience of medical forensic examination after sexual assault. Dr Stewart is a medical forensic examiner for the Northern Sydney Local Health District Prevention and Response to Violence Abuse and Neglect Service and a Senior Staff Specialist and Medical Educator for NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence.

This concentration of expertise in feminist scholarship, diversity, policy, gender-based violence prevention and response at senior leadership level is a significant enabler of prevention and response.

## Culture and Environment

The Women’s College has undergone significant cultural renewal since the 2017 Broderick Review, which identified risks associated with hazing, alcohol culture, and barriers to reporting sexual harm. At that time, 20% of students reported bullying or intimidation, 19% felt pressured to drink, and 32% experienced sexual harassment—though most incidents occurred at other colleges. These findings highlighted the need for systemic change and informed a comprehensive reform agenda.

In response, the Women’s College implemented major cultural and structural changes: a standalone Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Policy, strengthened Student Code of Conduct, policies and education to eliminate hazing practices, redesign of O Week into Welcome Week, and harm-minimisation strategies for alcohol events. Student leadership selection processes were tightened, and education programs on consent, respect, and diversity became core components of student orientation and ongoing training. These measures aimed to dismantle harmful student hierarchies and embed values of safety and inclusion.

Follow-up data from a 2022 cultural survey demonstrates measurable progress. Hazing and bullying reduced by 50%, and pressure to drink fell by 74%, reflecting a healthier social environment. While rates of sexual harm and gender-based violence remain similar to 2017, increased help-seeking and formal reporting indicate growing confidence in Women’s College processes—a critical foundation for prevention and response.

Continued vigilance is required to address risks at intercollege events and prevent culture creep in terms of acceptability around hazing rituals, but overall trends confirm a strong trajectory toward a safer, more respectful community.

### **Sources of information**

- Governance records: Women's College Council agendas, minutes, and strategic planning documents
- Survey data: 2017 Broderick Review and 2022 follow-up survey using the same instrument
- Ongoing consultations: Discussions with current residents, staff, and student leaders conducted during the ongoing assessment process
- Cultural reviews and stakeholder surveys: Analysis of 2017 Broderick Review findings and 2022 follow-up data, and student and parent stakeholder feedback
- Alumnae survey (2022): Responses from alumnae representing every decade from the 1940s to the 2020s
- Wellbeing meeting records: De-identified records from fortnightly wellbeing meetings
- Policy documentation: Review of all current policies relevant to gender-based violence prevention and response
- Staff expertise documentation: Qualifications and experience of senior leadership team

## Leadership, culture and environment

### Enablers

- Senior leadership expertise in feminism, gender studies, intersectionality, and gender-based violence prevention.
- Small, close-knit community enabling early intervention and personalised support.
- Resident senior staff providing constant presence and safety.
- Women-only environment reducing exposure to gender-based violence and promoting female leadership.
- Established policy framework and cultural reforms post-Broderick Review.
- Evidence of cultural improvement from 2017 and 2022 surveys.
- Effective alcohol harm minimisation strategies with demonstrated impact.

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### Systemic risks

- Intercollege events at other colleges continue to have a higher risk, especially when alcohol is involved, and Women's College staff have less oversight.
- Annual turnover of student leaders requiring consistent training and culture transmission.
- Limited diversity in elected student leadership roles.
- Historical clustering of students from elite schools, creating risk of exclusionary cliques.
- Leadership work on safety not always visible to broader student community.

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### Barriers

- Inconsistent GBV education across staff, student leaders, and residents.
- No systematic incident register aligned with National Code.
- Lack of standardised risk assessment process.
- House Committee Constitution does not address diversity or GBV explicitly.

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**Key actions in response**

1. Roll out the student values framework, embedding diversity and gender-based violence prevention as core leadership priorities.
2. Strengthen systematic incident recording and risk assessment processes using the Code Black Psychology template to meet National Code standards.
3. Enhance diversity in student leadership through a revised House Committee Constitution and voter education initiatives.
4. Address elite school clustering via admissions caps and strategic room allocations.
5. Increase visibility of leadership commitment through regular communications on safety and inclusion.
6. Strengthen annual training for student leaders to ensure consistent culture transmission and knowledge about gender-based violence.

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## **Area of Operation: Structures, Norms, and Practices**

The Women’s College operates through formal governance, pastoral care, and student leadership structures, alongside informal norms such as traditions and social hierarchies that shape daily life. Our mission—to inspire, connect, and empower women—underpins policies, programs, and leadership conduct. The College’s women-only status and 135-year history create a distinctive culture that supports gender-based violence prevention while requiring vigilance to address risks associated with hierarchies, traditions, and cultural change.

Our pastoral care system centres on fortnightly wellbeing meetings between the Principal, Dean of Students, Vice Principal, and Wellbeing Officer (all resident at College; the Wellbeing Officer is a postgraduate student with appropriate pastoral training), supported by a dynamic Wellbeing Register. Students with complex needs receive individualised Wellbeing Agreements, while gender-based violence cases are managed personally by the Principal using trauma-informed approaches and referral pathways to University of Sydney Safer Communities and RPA Sexual Assault Service. The Dean of Students oversees 17 Resident Assistants (RAs), student wellbeing leaders who are allocated across floors and wings of the Women’s College and meets regularly with them to discuss student issues and their own wellbeing. Welcome Week provides comprehensive briefings on support structures, consent, sexual health, cultural diversity, and alcohol education, reinforced through ongoing Resident Assistant training in first aid, mental health, and first responder protocols.

Natural hierarchies—year levels, leadership positions, High Table tradition, and socioeconomic dynamics—are actively mitigated through cross-year programs, House Committee representation, and cultural reforms following the Broderick Review. Student-led diversity committees (Disability and Inclusion, Reconciliation, LGBTQIA+ & Allies, Feminist, Global) drive inclusion initiatives. Challenges remain: affiliates face unique vulnerabilities due to reduced campus integration; intercollege events can expose students to harmful norms; and some students resist oversight as “too controlling.” Legislative constraints requiring Council election by alumnae limit governance diversity while preserving the Women’s College’s women-only status. Ongoing vigilance ensures structures support safety, respect, and inclusion.

### **Sources of Information**

- Staff consultations on pastoral care and cultural norms
- Cultural reviews and survey data (2017 Broderick Review, 2022 follow-up)
- Governance documents and policy reviews
- Observational data from Welcome Week and intercollege events

## Structures, norms and practices

### Enablers

- Strong foundational values centred on women's empowerment and gender equality.
- Well-developed pastoral care structures with resident senior staff.
- Comprehensive Resident Assistant network providing peer support.
- Fortnightly wellbeing meetings for systematic case monitoring.
- Trauma-informed approach to gender-based violence response.
- Student-led diversity committees promoting inclusion.
- Significant cultural shift since Broderick Review reducing harmful hierarchies.

### Systemic risks

- Persistent hierarchies (year-level, room points, social status).
- Affiliate vulnerability due to reduced integration.
- Unrealistic expectations of Resident Assistant availability post-10pm.
- Exposure to harmful norms at intercollege events.
- Risk of "culture creep" and resistance to oversight.
- Council diversity constraints due to legislative requirements.

### Barriers

- Lack of transparency in room point system.
- No Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for staff wellbeing.
- Students unaware of all safety and mental health resources.
- Non-uniform cross-college coordination on Resident Assistant roles.

### Key actions in response

1. Strengthen affiliate inclusion: Embed affiliates in Welcome Week training and create wellbeing check-ins.
2. Increase transparency and equity: Review room point system for fairness.
3. Clarify expectations and responsibilities: Educate students on Resident Assistant roles and personal responsibility.
4. Enhance staff and student wellbeing: Implement EAP for staff and promote safety and mental health apps to students.
5. Address Women's College Council diversity: Apply skills matrix for appointments and explore constitutional options for diversity.
6. Maintain cultural vigilance: Continue zero-tolerance approach to hazing and monitor event proposals for risk.

## **Area of operation: Systems and infrastructure**

The Women’s College maintains comprehensive systems and infrastructure to safeguard student wellbeing, privacy, and safety. Our approach integrates physical security measures—locked perimeter, CCTV in common areas, controlled building access, and 24/7 staff presence—with robust case management and IT protocols. Disclosure and reporting pathways include multiple staff contact points, an anonymous online reporting form and email option ([respect@thewomenscollege.edu.au](mailto:respect@thewomenscollege.edu.au), received by the Vice Principal and the Dean of Students), and formal grievance procedures, supported by partnerships with the University of Sydney Safer Communities office and specialist services. Physical infrastructure includes secure buildings, fire safety systems, defibrillators, and alarms on external doors, ensuring rapid response capability without compromising the home-like environment.

Case management systems are designed for confidentiality and accountability. Sensitive records are password-protected, stored in locked archives, and subject to annual secure purging. Confidentiality protocols are reinforced through staff and student leader agreements, policy briefings, and regular training. IT security measures include multi-factor authentication, permissions audits, and annual reviews to strengthen data protection.

These integrated systems ensure confidentiality, rapid response capability, and compliance with National Code requirements for safety and privacy.

### **Sources of information**

- Staff interviews on case management, security protocols, and IT infrastructure
- Resident feedback on safety and privacy
- Security arrangements review (CCTV, door-locking, after-hours protocols)
- IT systems audit (data protection, access controls)
- Policy review (Confidentiality, Privacy, Digital Conduct)
- Operational records (event approvals, guest list monitoring)
- WHS documentation and Risk Register audits

## Systems and infrastructure

### Enablers

- Strong confidentiality protocols protecting sensitive information
- Multi-layered physical security (locked perimeter, controlled access, CCTV)
- 24/7 staff presence with senior leaders resident on campus
- Balanced approach to privacy and surveillance maintaining a home-like environment
- Regular reviews of IT security, physical security, and operational systems
- Event monitoring and approval processes with staff supervision
- Fire safety and emergency systems in place

### Systemic risks

- Staff have shared access to some personal information in legacy IT systems
- Social media monitoring gaps and risk of shadow accounts
- Student digital tracking beyond College control
- Physical vulnerabilities (door-locking weaknesses, some buildings not contained within closed perimeter)
- Ageing CCTV servers requiring upgrade
- Privacy vs surveillance tension requiring ongoing calibration
- After-hours incident escalation protocols needing formalisation

### Barriers

- Amending legacy IT systems requires significant time and resources
- Balancing privacy with safety remains a constant challenge
- Student digital behaviour outside College control
- Architectural constraints limiting physical security upgrades
- Resource constraints for comprehensive CCTV and IT improvements

### Key actions in response

1. Upgrade IT and security systems: Implement new file structure permissions, review and upgrade CCTV servers, and strengthen access controls. Changes to be completed by end February 2026.
2. Enhance digital safety: Update Social Media and Digital Conduct Policy annually, educate students on online safety and image-based abuse, and formalise protocols for social media oversight.
3. Address physical security gaps: Complete door-locking upgrades, assess lighting for buildings, and conduct regular security audits.
4. Formalise after-hours protocols: Document escalation procedures, train staff and Senior Resident Assistants, and conduct drills for critical incidents.

## Systems and infrastructure

5. Strengthen privacy protections: Maintain annual data purging, audit access permissions, and reinforce confidentiality training.
6. Maintain balanced approach: Review privacy vs safety measures annually with student input and prioritise natural surveillance through relationships and check-ins.

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## **Area of operation: Service delivery**

The Women's College delivers an integrated suite of services designed to support residents' academic success, wellbeing, and personal development. These services include academic programs, pastoral care, residential accommodation, social and cultural activities, catering, and facilities management. All services are guided by our commitment to gender equality, respect, diversity, and inclusion, and are delivered in ways that promote safety and wellbeing.

### **Academic Support**

Academic support is a cornerstone of service delivery and is overseen by the Vice Principal, supported by an Academic Project Officer and 12 Academic Assistants (senior students with strong academic records). Programs include:

- Academic Assistants for first-year students to provide transition-to-university support
- First-year Student Check-Ins to monitor academic progress and wellbeing
- Small-group tutorials in key subjects
- Mentoring programs for senior students

These initiatives aim to reduce academic stress, foster confidence, and connect students with peer and staff networks. Participation data shows strong engagement, and feedback indicates these programs help students manage university demands effectively and help them transition to the workforce with greater confidence. The Vice Principal works closely with students who are experiencing difficulties to support their education.

### **Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care is led by the Dean of Students and supported by 17 trained Resident Assistants and a Wellbeing Officer. Structured systems include fortnightly wellbeing meetings and individualised Wellbeing Agreements for students with complex needs. This model ensures early intervention and continuous support, contributing to a safe and respectful community.

### **Social and Cultural Programs**

Social and cultural activities foster inclusion and community without centering on alcohol consumption. Programs include:

- Formal dinners featuring speakers who champion gender equality
- Student-led committees focused on diversity and inclusion
- Events designed to build community and promote respectful relationships

## **Residential and Operational Services**

Accommodation is provided across three interconnected buildings and one separate but proximate graduate residence, supported by professional catering, housekeeping, and IT services. Facilities include accessible spaces, fire safety systems, and 24/7 staff presence to ensure security.

## **Continuous Improvement**

Regular safety audits and feedback from students, alumnae, and staff inform service enhancements, while participation data and policy documentation demonstrate alignment with Women's College values. Evaluation mechanisms include surveys, consultation groups, and structured reviews of academic, pastoral, and social programs.

## **Sources of Information**

- Student feedback: 2022 Student and Parent Surveys (90%+ satisfaction with physical environment and food service), House Committee input, and consultation groups
- Alumnae feedback: 2022 Alumnae Survey responses spanning decades
- Staff observations: Reviews by Principal, Vice Principal, Dean of Students, Business Manager, and service delivery staff
- Pastoral care documentation: Wellbeing meeting records, Student Handbook, Welcome Week materials
- Participation data: Event attendance, committee involvement, academic support utilisation, pastoral care engagement statistics
- Policy and program documentation: Student Handbook, Welcome Week schedule, Leaders Week training materials, formal dinner speaker records, committee reports

## Service delivery

### Enablers

- Collaborative on-site community: Enables consistent messaging on gender equality, respect, diversity, and inclusion across all aspects of College life.
- Multiple prevention touchpoints: Welcome Week education, formal dinners, committee activities, Leaders Week training, ongoing pastoral care, and inclusive social events.
- Strong sense of belonging: 80%+ of students report feeling supported by peers and staff, fostering ethical bystander behaviour.
- Early intervention capability: Small community with resident staff and trained Resident Assistants and Academic Assistants enables rapid identification and response to concerns.
- Safety embedded in operations: Secure buildings, staff presence, event monitoring, guest approval processes.
- Flexibility and responsiveness: Ability to adapt quickly to emerging issues and student needs.
- Values-driven programming: Services consistently reflect College values of inspiring, connecting, and empowering women.
- High satisfaction: 90%+ report satisfaction with physical environment and food; 80%+ report feeling supported by peers and staff.

## Service delivery

### Systemic risks

- Different levels of engagement: Some students are less involved in social and cultural programs, missing prevention education and community-building opportunities.
- Resident vs affiliate experience: Affiliates experience a varying level of integration and pastoral care presence, possibly increasing vulnerability.
- Variable service awareness: Not all students know about available support services, including academic adjustments and external resources.
- Event-based risks: Social events, especially those involving alcohol or intercollege interactions, carry inherent risks despite strong management.
- Culture of pre-drinking before events enhances risks.
- Physical infrastructure limitations: Heritage buildings present challenges including door lock limitations and partial accessibility.
- Time-intensive pastoral care model: Reliance on senior staff for intensive care creates risks during absences or peak periods.
- Academic pressure context: University demands can compound stress despite Women's College support systems.

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### Barriers

- Heritage building constraints limit physical modifications.
- No surveillance in private rooms, meaning concerning behaviour may go unreported.
- Competing demands on students' time reduce engagement in prevention education.
- Students can be hesitant or reluctant to provide frank feedback in formal processes.
- Limited control beyond Women's College premises.
- Staff-to-student ratio constraints for a 24/7 operation.
- Specialist services not available in person 24/7 (though phone lines exist).

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## Service delivery

### Key actions in response

1. Enhance Affiliate integration and support:
  - Develop targeted education and communication
  - Increase opportunities for participation in prevention programs
  - Assign Academic Assistants for regular check-ins
2. Strengthen promotion of support services:
  - Regular reminders via multiple channels
  - Visual guides showing support pathways
  - Multilingual information and reinforcement throughout the year
3. Expand after-hours support options:
  - Promote University and external 24/7 services
  - Clarify escalation pathways for students
  - Consider more consistent messaging about Senior Resident Assistant coverage
4. Improve physical safety infrastructure:
  - Complete door lock upgrades
  - Enhance lighting and conduct regular security audits
  - Gather student feedback on safety concerns
5. Enhance evaluation of services:
  - Anonymous surveys and contracted external facilitators for frank feedback
  - Act on feedback promptly
6. Strengthen inter-service coordination:
  - Ensure academic, pastoral, and social programs are integrated
  - Train staff on referral pathways

## **Area of operation: Policies and procedures**

The Women’s College maintains a comprehensive policy framework to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and promote a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment. Following the Broderick Review (2017), key policies were created or updated, including a standalone Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Policy aligned with the National Code. Our framework addresses drivers of violence identified in *Change the Story*—challenging gender stereotypes, addressing power imbalances, promoting respect and consent, and mitigating alcohol-related risks. Policies are reviewed on established cycles (typically every three years) and communicated through the Student Handbook, Welcome Week briefings, and the College intranet.

### **Policy Framework Overview**

Our policy framework includes:

Primary prevention and response policies:

- Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Policy – standalone, aligned with National Code
- Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy – guidelines and procedures
- Student Code of Conduct – prohibits hazing, promotes respect and consent
- Grievance Management Policy – procedural fairness, appeals
- Staff–Student Conduct and Relationships Policy – addresses power dynamics

Supporting safety and wellbeing policies:

- Alcohol Policy and Procedures – harm minimisation
- Critical Incident Management Plan – emergency response
- Student Wellbeing Management Plan – holistic wellbeing support
- Codes of Conduct for Staff, Stakeholders, and Visitors

Operational and governance policies:

- Confidentiality Agreement, Privacy Policy, Whistleblower Policy
- Work Health and Safety Policy
- Social Media and Digital Conduct Policies
- Event-specific guidelines (Formal, Spring Cocktail, Celebratory Dinners)
- Student Resident Charter – rights and responsibilities

- Student Leaders Guidelines  
(See 2025 Policy Register for complete listing.)

### **How Policies Address Gender-Based Violence**

- Evidence-based definitions and trauma-informed principles
- Multiple reporting pathways (informal, formal, anonymous)
- Procedural fairness and special provisions for complaints involving senior staff
- Clear consequences for breaches, from warnings to exclusion
- Integration across policies (e.g., Critical Incident Plan references Sexual Harm Policy)

### **Inclusion, Communication, and Accountability**

Policies should explicitly recognise diverse identities and experiences, including LGBTIQA+ students, First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, students with disabilities, and international students. Development and review processes must involve consultation with students, staff, Council, subject matter experts, and university partners. Policies written in accessible language and reinforced through multiple channels.

### **Data Gaps and Commitment**

Standard 6 requires systematic collection of detailed data we have not previously captured, including:

- Annual numbers of disclosures vs formal reports
- Breakdown by type of gender-based violence
- Demographics of disclosers
- Outcomes and timeframes
- Satisfaction measures from reporting students

**Our Commitment:** We are implementing systematic data collection processes (outlined in our Prevention and Response Plan) to enable comprehensive Standard 6-compliant reporting from 1 January, 2026.

### **Sources of Information**

- Policy Register 2025
- Broderick Review 2017 recommendations
- Student and staff consultations
- Legal advice on compliance

- Feedback from cases (shared with consent)
- Best practice guidance from sector experts

## Policies and procedures

### Enablers

- Standalone Sexual Harm and Gender-Based Violence Policy
- Framework addresses gendered drivers of violence
- Explicit zero tolerance for hazing
- Consultation with students, staff, Women's College Council, and experts
- Regular review cycles
- Multiple reporting pathways
- Integration across policies
- Accessible language and communication channels
- Consequences for breaches
- Comprehensive alcohol harm minimisation approach

### Systemic risks

- Safety measures must prioritise relocating respondents, not disclosers
- Policies need to address collective dynamics (group behaviours)
- Awareness gaps among students, affiliates, and casual staff
- Historically, in this women-only environment there have been very few reported respondents in residence and we have not developed strong support provisions
- Complexity of multiple policies may cause confusion

### Barriers

- Time required for policy amendments outside review cycles
- Ensuring consistent application across staff
- Awareness gaps despite communication efforts
- Balancing competing requirements (confidentiality vs safety, autonomy vs duty of care)
- External constraints (privacy laws, criminal justice processes, university procedures)

## Policies and procedures

### Key actions in response

1. Ensure full National Code Compliance
  - Update Sexual Harm Policy to include Code definitions
  - Strengthen trauma-informed language
  - Clarify relocation of respondents
  - Establish next review date in cycle
2. Strengthen respondent support provisions
  - Update Grievance Policy
  - Assign separate staff for discloser and respondent support
3. Address collective dynamics
  - Revise policies to include group behaviours and cultural norms
  - Develop guidance for multi-person incidents
4. Enhance Student Resident Charter
  - Explicitly address gender equality and inclusion commitments
  - Outline rights and responsibilities related to safety and respect
5. Improve policy awareness and accessibility
  - Create plain-language summaries and visual flowcharts
  - Provide regular staff training
  - Reinforce policy education throughout the year
6. Systematise policy review process
  - Maintain clear review schedule
  - Ensure student input in all reviews
  - Incorporate feedback from cases
  - Track emerging best practice
7. Create policy integration resource
  - Develop guide showing how policies work together
  - Clarify which policy applies in different scenarios
  - Track emerging best practice in the sector
  - Document how policies have been updated in response to feedback and learning

## **Area of operation: Management and governance**

The Women's College is governed by a Council established under the Women's College Act (NSW), providing strategic direction, financial oversight, and governance through sub-committees for Finance, Governance, and Building & Development. The Principal, as Higher Education Principal Executive Officer, is accountable for National Code compliance and leads a senior team responsible for operations, risk management, and student wellbeing. Governance decisions are guided by a five-year Strategic Plan prioritising women's empowerment, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and community.

The Women's College Council demonstrates strong leadership on gender equality and safety, recognising gender-based violence as an institutional risk in the Women's College Risk Register. It acted swiftly on all Broderick Review recommendations and continues to allocate resources for cultural reviews, training, specialist partnerships, and wellbeing staffing. Regular reporting on wellbeing and incidents, combined with student representation through the Senior Student, ensures informed and responsive governance aligned with the Women's College's mission to advance women's education and equality. Ongoing governance training and cultural health checks further embed prevention and accountability at the highest level.

### **Sources of information**

- Governance documents: Women's College Act and By-laws, Council meeting agendas and minutes (2017-2025)
- Strategic planning: Strategic Plan 2023-2028, annual operational plans, and progress reports
- Risk management: Risk Register with documented review history
- Women's College Council records: Governance Committee meeting records, Women's College Council sub-committee reports, skills matrix documentation
- Response to reviews: Women's College Council's consideration and adoption of Broderick Review recommendations (2017), implementation monitoring records
- Reporting records: Regular reports to Women's College Council on student wellbeing, incidents, cultural health, and diversity initiatives
- Cultural reviews: 2017 Broderick Review, 2022 follow-up survey, planning documents for 2026 cultural health check

## Management and governance

<b>Enablers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Female leadership and governance ensuring women's voices shape decision-making</li><li>Strategic Plan prioritises women's empowerment, equity, diversity, and inclusion</li><li>Gender-based violence recognised as institutional risk in Risk Register</li><li>Proactive engagement with cultural reviews (Broderick Review and follow-ups)</li><li>Resources allocated for prevention, training, and wellbeing staffing</li><li>Diverse professional expertise on Women's College Council including sexual assault subject matter expert</li><li>Student voice in governance via Senior Student's ex-officio membership</li></ul>
<b>Systemic risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Variable understanding of gender-based violence across Women's College Council members</li><li>Limited demographic diversity of Women's College Council members due to constitutional constraints</li><li>Risk that nostalgic alumnae narratives romanticise past traditions without acknowledging cultural reforms and current safety standards</li><li>Need for consistent proportionality in sanctions for misconduct</li><li>Balancing governance oversight with operational boundaries</li></ul>
<b>Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Constitutional limits on appointing specialist members</li><li>No formal metrics for Women's College Council's performance on gender equality leadership</li><li>Time constraints for volunteer Women's College Council members</li><li>Ensuring informed oversight without micromanagement</li><li>External factors (legal advice, privacy laws) influencing governance decisions</li></ul>
<b>Key actions in response</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Women's College Council training: All members complete gender-based violence and intersectionality training in early 2026; refreshers every two years.</li><li>Enhance diversity: Use skills matrix to identify gaps; encourage diverse alumnae candidates; explore co-opting expertise where permitted.</li><li>Strengthen student voice: Prepare Senior Student for Women's College Council role; ensure Women's College Council receives student survey data and feedback.</li><li>Clarify oversight role: Document governance responsibilities for prevention and response; define boundaries between oversight and operations.</li><li>Annual risk review: Include gender-based violence as standing item in Risk Register review; ensure adequate resourcing and monitor cultural health indicators.</li></ol>

## **Area of operation: Community engagement**

The Women's College operates within a network of communities that influence and are influenced by our culture and practices. These include alumnae, feeder schools, universities, other residential colleges, the local Newtown/Camperdown community, and professional networks. Engagement with these communities supports our mission to advance gender equality and prevent gender-based violence, while also presenting challenges that require proactive management. The majority of our students attend the University of Sydney, but we also have students at other universities including UTS, UNSW, and Macquarie.

### **Our Community Relationships**

- Alumnae: A network of 8,000+ graduates provides mentoring, role models, and governance input through Council elections.
- Feeder Schools: Applications come from diverse schools across NSW, Australia, and internationally, with increasing representation from public and regional schools.
- Universities: A formal partnership with the University of Sydney including via a legal and binding agreement for the care of students who have experienced sexual harm and gender-based violence. We are developing the same with UTS, UNSW, and Macquarie University and other university Providers. These agreements will support us to formalise arrangements for student support and access to specialist services.
- Residential Colleges: Collaboration on cultural change initiatives post-Broderick Review, alongside shared events and programs.
- Local Community: Embedded in Newtown/Camperdown, with students engaging in local charities, businesses, and services.
- Community Partnerships: Partnerships with Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC provides support for women and children experiencing family violence) and The Settlement (a community organisation that supports people from the local community, especially Indigenous peoples) strengthen social justice values and provide opportunities for student engagement.
- Professional Networks: Events such as Formal Dinners and Law Forums connect students with diverse women leaders.

### **Sources of Information**

- 2022 Alumnae Survey
- 2022 Student and Parent Surveys
- Admissions data on feeder schools
- Intercollege and University Colleges Australia meetings and conferences
- Event attendance and feedback
- Student committee reports on community engagement

## Community engagement

### Enablers

- Strong alumnae network providing role models, mentoring, and philanthropic support.
- Professional engagement through events featuring diverse women leaders.
- Strategic partnerships with organisations supporting vulnerable communities (e.g., WAGEC, The Settlement).
- Positive relationships with diverse feeder schools promoting gender equality.
- Collaboration with other colleges post-Broderick Review on cultural change.
- University partnerships providing specialist support services.
- Location in inclusive, socially progressive Newtown/Camperdown community.
- Recruitment aims to enhance representation of First Nations, CALD, and low-SES students.

### Systemic risks

- Feeder schools with weak gender equality cultures or elite-school dynamics fostering exclusion.
- Intercollege events as high-risk environments due to alcohol and male-dominated cultures.
- Public misconceptions about women-only colleges (separatism, tokenism) creating reputational challenges.
- Alumnae loyalty potentially limiting honest feedback on cultural issues.
- Limited engagement with local community and weaker partnerships with non-Sydney universities.

### Barriers

- Limited control over external environments (other colleges, universities, families, social norms).
- Resource constraints for extensive community engagement and feeder school education.
- Voluntary nature of alumnae engagement limits consistency.
- Competitive recruitment environment and historic school relationships creating path dependencies.

## Community engagement

### Key actions in response

1. Strengthen intercollege collaboration: Develop shared protocols for safe events, joint training, and consistent messaging.
2. Enhance diversity in recruitment: Expand outreach to under-represented schools, review marketing for inclusivity, and grow equity scholarships.
3. Leverage alumnae influence: Formalise mentoring, expand speaker programs, and communicate GBV prevention priorities to alumnae.
4. Deepen partnerships: Formalise sexual harm and gender-based violence care agreements with all universities attended by our students; maintain and expand partnerships with specialist organisations.
5. Improve public and community engagement: Develop clear messaging about the Women's College's mission, address misconceptions, and explore structured local partnerships.

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