

ESU President's Report 2019 – Li-Enn Koo

2019 has been a year of evolution and strong progress for the Ex-Students' Union (ESU), as we have broadened our vision and what we offer to our members and the *Pymble* community. It is my pleasure to present my last President's report to our 2019 ESU Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Engaging each generation of *Pymble* ex-student

At last year's AGM, our members posed a question: **were we doing enough to engage each generation of *Pymble* ex-student?** They noted that the Committee members sitting before them were of relatively similar ages and may not have represented the many decades of ex-students that we have amongst our 20,000 strong membership, particularly our younger generations.

It was a fair challenge and cause for us, your Committee, to think about how we might increase our engagement with younger *Pymble* leavers, perhaps by adding more contemporary offerings to our important established traditions.

The result of this thinking was reflected in a new event that we held in May – the **Chair of College Council's Alumni & Mentor Networking Event**. Our aim was to connect *Pymble* alumni aged 18 to 30 years old, to those with more experience from our alumni and the wider College community of diverse industries and backgrounds. It was a wonderful evening that started with a panel comprising Christine Bartlett (1977, Board member), Chris Fydler (CEO and Olympic swimmer), Fiona Roughley (2001, Barrister), and Bronwyn Taylor (1986, NSW Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women), moderated by Romilly Madew AO (1984, CEO). They shared insights and tips on their careers and work-lives. Alumni and Mentors then networked in industry groups over drinks and canapes, whilst some young alumni attended skills sessions on 'Your Elevator Pitch' and 'Career Planning'.

Survey feedback from the evening was very positive with comments about how helpful and genuine the mentors were and the positive energy and excitement in general. Meaningful individual connections were made on the night and have continued on following the event. A video summary capturing the night can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45SEmSolVI8>.

Thank you to James Hunter, Chair of College, for his partnership and support for the event, including playing host at KPMG's stunning Barrangaroo venue, as well as Vicki Waters and the College for their generous support in co-sponsoring the costs with the ESU and the considerable organisation of the event.

An added benefit of the night was that it garnered a great deal of **interest in our ESU Committee** from ex-students and their desire to return to the College and to become more involved. I'm pleased to share that we have had several young ex-students join our Committee or express an interest in supporting future events. The **Committee for 2019/2020 is now represented across four decades of leaver** and we welcome continued diversification, not just in age but in skills, ability, culture and interests.

The Mentoring event allowed us to achieve one of the ESU's constitutional objectives, which is to support the wellbeing of the wider college community. It gave us the **ability to work collaboratively across the wider Pymble community: the ex-students, the College and staff, the Council and the parent body**. Our interests are inextricably linked to those of the College: supporting common interests benefits all of us as part of the wider College community.

I understand that addressing the under-representation of women in the corporate world is also one of Dr Hadwen's aims. She has written about how this starts at the outset with the issue of fewer female entry-level hires and continues with greater barriers to promotion than men (<https://schoolexpo.com.au/blog/tag/dr-kate-hadwen/>). The ESU looks forward to working more closely with Dr Hadwen on this shared aim.

Pymble ex-student representation on Council

At last year's AGM, our members also posed a challenge to our guest, the Chair of Council, James Hunter, on the issue **representation of ex-students on the Council**. Recently, the Council announced that ex-student Fiona Roughley (2001), a barrister, would be joining them. Fiona is a highly accomplished alumni and we are pleased to see ex-student representation on the Council. We hope to see more women and alumni appointed to Council.

2019 ESU events and grants

We held numerous other events this year. February saw another successful **alumNOW** art exhibition. ABC presenter, author and ex-student Sarah MacDonald (1983) opened the exhibition before a crowded Main Hall of art lovers. Our exhibition and sale of fine art by over 40 ex-students ran over the next three days and showcased more than 110 works. Artists ranged from recent *Pymble* leavers back to those who left in the 1950s, and included those who were both well-known and up-and-coming. It was wonderful to see representation from each decade, as well as the breadth of art, which included ceramics, paintings, sculpture, photography and jewellery. This was a terrific collaboration across our *Pymble* community. A big thank you to Gillian Ross-Edwards (1976) and Philippa Graham (1969) for organising and curating, to all who attended or exhibited and to the College for their generous support of the event.

In addition to our support for the exhibiting artists, some of the proceeds of alumNOW2019 go to our annual **ESU Artist-in-Residence grant**. This grant goes to a member of staff who will work with an external artist to deliver a creative program for our *Pymble* students. Over the past few years, artists have ranged from authors, to playwrights, painters, composers, chefs, choreographers and robotics experts. It is a special way for the ESU to work together with the College and it is our hope that these grants can ignite passions for learning in new, exciting and varied areas.

You may remember that the **2017 ESU Artist-in-Residence grant** went to sponsoring the mentors for the Pymble Pride Robotics team. Since then, the team have gone from strength to strength competing in two Australian Regional FIRST Robotics competitions: the Southern

Cross Regional and South Pacific Regional. In 2019, the team made it to the semi-finals in both competitions, placing ninth and third. Congratulations to the team on their success.

Our **2018 ESU Artist-in-Residence grant** recipient was Tamara Sweetman, who invited playwright, Richard Graham to mentor the senior Drama students to write and perform an original full-length play. The ESU committee were delighted to attend the performance of '17', which delved deep into the teenage psyche and highlighted issues facing today's youth in an entertaining and thought-provoking way. Congratulations to all the students who wrote, and went on to so confidently perform, the play.

Our **2019 ESU Artist-in-Residence grant** went to Christina Charalambidis, who invited guest artist, Jason Wing, to work with art students on the Ferguson Building stairwell project. Jason is an artist of both indigenous and Chinese heritage and he shared his expertise in "placemaking" through murals. Placemaking is about creating spaces that speak to their communities and inhabitants and centres around the connections humans form with their spaces. The students greatly valued the immersive learning experience and I encourage you to walk through the stairwell to view their artwork.

In a generational change at the College, we farewelled our eighth Principal of 11 years, **Vicki Waters**. The ex-students were well represented at her "**Longest Lunch**" farewell event in May and I was delighted to welcome her as an honorary ESU member and thank her with a gift from the ESU - an artwork by ex-student Emma Winch (2007) who featured in our AlumNOW art exhibition. The charcoal sketch depicted a lion, the animal chosen by Dr Marden for our Pymble coat of arms. The lion is leading a Pymble girl on her path to education, womanhood, wisdom and to strive for the highest.

This year also marked the beginning of our **Ex-Student Grant Program**, to support ex-students in their meaningful endeavours within the community and their career development. This new grant recognises the value of ex-students who are independently making their mark on the world, by contributing to their communities or developing their careers to become contributing citizens. The ESU committee will accept applications up to \$3,000 from eligible ex-students.

We held our annual **Commemoration Day chapel service**, which was well attended in a lovely warm winter's day in late July. We were fortunate to have our **new Principal, Dr Kate Hadwen**, speak to us on her reflections of her first weeks at the College and also to hear from our guest speaker, Mrs Gillian Moore, our seventh Principal. It was a delight to hear from Mrs Moore who was a role model for many of us, as a working mother and driver of change at the College. I thank our speakers for the day, the ESU Choir, the Reverends, Council and staff members, and our ex-students and families who attended.

Once again, we held our **Mothers and Grandmothers morning tea** in term 1, where two, three and even four generations of students share stories and memories of their time at the College. In March at the **Indigenous Scholars morning tea**, the ESU committee enjoyed bringing supporters of our Indigenous Scholarship Program together with the scholars, to showcase our ISP girls' learning and achievements at Pymble and to thank supporters for their ongoing interest in and enthusiasm for this life-changing program.

Looking forward to 2020

Looking forward to the coming year, we would like to put a call out to any members interested in joining a **sub-committee to discuss our overall financial strategy**. This will include our approach to funding, capital reserves, how we invest and spend these, as well as how we measure value and return from our activities (both financial and non-financial). If you are interested, please contact Helen Jarvis.

This is **my last AGM as President** after being on the Committee for four years, the last three in the role of President. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as leader of the ESU and am honoured to have been a steward of our traditions and a 'bridge' in the unending chain. Our traditions and customs are precious and many should be passed through the generations as they serve to connect and enrich us. I have enjoyed continuing, evolving and, at times adding, new traditions. I would encourage the next Committee to continue to challenge themselves in this regard so that we may stay relevant and adapt to the times whilst meeting the needs of all generations of alumni.

I would like to **thank my fellow Committee members** who have supported, challenged and encouraged me. They have been a great source of friendship, humour and generosity of spirit. I thank those leaving the Committee: Peppy Mitchell (1987), Kristen Faahan-Smith (1987), Carolyn MacDonald (1988), Joanna Bertoline (1988) and Gill Ross-Edwards (1976). I wish the best to those staying on: Zoe Wang (1994), Helen Jarvis (1989), Louise Kellaway (1988), Nicola Hoffman (1987) and Evie Murdoch (2012). I welcome those joining the Committee: Kate Soonius (2018), Angelique Wan (2012), Rowena Ditzell (1986), **Victoria Muller and Claire Plasto**.

I would also like to **thank the College**, in particular the Principals, Mrs Gillian Moore, Mrs Vicki Waters and Dr Kate Hadwen, Kelly Mancey, Katrina Corcoran and Meredith Coleman. Personally, they have provided me with much advice and encouragement. For the ESU, their support has meant that a voluntary association has been able to meet the needs of its members and work with the College on events that improve the wellbeing of our overall College community.

I would **challenge all our ex-students** to put your hands up to volunteer and get involved, maybe even for positions which may make you feel a little uncomfortable. Too many women, sometimes including myself, doubt our ability to do certain roles. Invariably, they have much more than the ability required – they just need to ignore that questioning inner voice and 'do it'! Not only do you have so much to contribute but you will also reap so many personal benefits and learning.

My education at Pymble set me up to be the person that I am today – my character, values and outlook – not just how to do maths problems (much of which has long faded). I am very thankful to the College for shaping me over the years and now shaping my daughter into a young adult. I am also thankful to my immigrant parents who put my education as a priority and paid for me to attend the College when cash flow was tight!

I look forward to continuing to support the progress of the ESU as a member instead of part of the Committee and wish the Committee all the best and my full support in years to come.

“ALL’ ULTIMO LAVORO”

Li-Enn Koo