

Alumni Priorities for the Future of Sydney University International House 2023-2024

Written on behalf of and in consultation with the IH alumni community and the SUIHAA Committee as an updated recommendation to what was submitted in 2019:

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Purpose

This paper outlines key priorities for consideration by the IH Project Control Group and the IH Council, representing the consolidated views of IH alumni; it is an update of a previous paper prepared in 2019 for the IH Future Directions Steering Group. The Sydney University International House Alumni Association (SUIHAA) represents over 6,000 former residents of IH over its 50+ years, people who have been inspired by its objectives and benefited from the IH experience. IH is a success story which enhances the University's domestic and international reputation.

Alumni ideas on the future IH are outlined: its program and culture; the spaces necessary for the community to flourish; how to engage with the university and the wider community. Sources are: SUIHAA strategic work, meetings and consultation since early 2017; correspondence with alumni; letters from alumni to the Vice Chancellor; a special meeting where participants focussed on three key 'things' they want to see in a future IH.

Alumni acknowledge that IH's Hall of Residence should grow, perhaps to as many as 500 residents, and the IH program must be further developed to accommodate this growth, and to spread its reach and relevance to the wider university community including international students.

Planning and timing are vital. IH would face an uncertain future if housed for an unspecified period in the Regiment Building. The retention and stability of the IH program will be a challenge. In meetings with Deputy Vice Chancellors (2017 and 2018) and memos to the Vice Chancellor in 2024, SUIHAA has urged the University to commit to a certain future for IH.

1. Program and culture

1.1 The core mission and values embodied in IH's constitution should be preserved: the provision of suitable residential and associated facilities and the promotion of understanding and friendship between people of different nationalities and cultures.

1.2 The IH Hall of Residence must remain a home for residents, not just a dormitory. Alumni and current residents all speak with emotion about IH as their home while at the university, characterised by safety, understanding and friendship, as well as fun and extraordinary cultural stimulation. This atmosphere has been integral to IH philosophy and a hallmark of its success over the years.

1.3 The IH program provided a rich experience annually for some 200 students. IH Residential Life Officer (2013-2021) Dr. Kunda and colleagues' 2018 evaluation reports improved student experience directly from IH versus before attending IH, and non-IH students. This emphasises the imperative of

opening IH as soon as possible to positively impact student satisfaction and wellbeing. Specific measures are needed to sustain this valued experience into the future with a larger number of residents and a potentially wider membership. A wealth of ideas – introductory events in smaller groups, group activities to promote engagement of all residents and a potentially broader membership – can be developed and discussed with residents and alumni.

1.4 Residents should continue to be a mix of Australian and international students, from diverse cultures and countries, and of post- and under-graduate students. Further diversity could be provided with family friendly accommodation. **Indigenous connections and scholarships** should continue to be fostered.

1.5 Non-resident membership could be re-introduced, taking account of the rights and needs of both residents and non-residents. IH could offer a home-away-from-home base for students from distant places living in rental accommodation and at risk of isolation. **Staff-student contact** was a valued part of the IH program. Its expansion and availability to non-resident members of IH should be considered.

1.6 The IH program should be further developed to ensure its attraction to a wide variety of residents, non-resident members and ‘villagers’ (see 3.1) – maintaining the present intellectual tradition and fostering of inquiry to complement the social and leisure aspects of IH and its surroundings. Visiting academic and postgraduate residents, as well as IH staff, can further enrich the program. Concerts, Roundtables, lectures and more, valued in the existing program, can be opened to a wider audience within the university and the community.

1.7 Governance of IH worked well, and should continue to reflect the stakeholder composition of the existing Council as set out in the constitution, including representation of residents and alumni. **SUIHAA** will review its constitution in the future, for example, Committee membership of overseas-based alumni or non-resident members, and fund-raising capabilities.

2. Spaces that enable community: physical design, facilities, infrastructure

2.1 The physical and social infrastructure of IH is key to its positive student experience and to the overall success of IH. Successful features of the residence should be built on, and potential new features researched, including those in other IH models around the world. Spaces that enable community connection must be designed into the future IH.

2.2 Communal dining opportunities are essential. Shared meals and the IH round tables have featured in alumni reminiscences and evaluations, as key promoters of mixing and understanding. Berkeley IH, with a resident population over 500, recognises the importance of ensuring there are good dining facilities for many social and cultural reasons; their dining hall has recently been redeveloped to seat 340 and offers extended dining times, serving some 1800 meals per day.

2.3 The heritage and aesthetic value of existing buildings designed by Walter Bunning (architect of the National Library of Australia), most notably the **Rotunda**, should be factored into future designs. **Public spaces**, as now provided by the Rotunda, should be carried over into the new IH, offering meeting and tutorial rooms and small-medium function/conference facilities. Some of these facilities could become profit-making enterprises of IH (as with other IHs).

2.4 The IH/SUIHAA log cabin in the Southern Highlands has the potential to be more widely used, following renovation, for specialist 'stays', for example, in small retreats, environmental courses and leadership programs.

2.5 Student-centric design is essential, to be achieved by effective consultation with current and recent residents.

2.6 Spaces that attract the university and wider community to IH must be designed in parallel with the redesigned and expanded program outlined above.

3. Outreach and relevance to the university and wider community

3.1 An International Village of selected cafes, retail outlets and other commercial enterprises, within the City Road precinct and adjacent to IH, would complement IH public facilities (cultural, social, meeting and seminar spaces). The Village would provide an integrated attraction for students and staff with its multinational emphasis, and would connect IH to the surrounding university community.

3.2 The new IH should be developed on the present site. An international village and residence is a highly appropriate gateway to the University of Sydney, sending a message to the wider public of the values the University promotes. Its proximity to Victoria Park and pool has been valued for many years by IH residents.

3.3 IH could also anchor a Global Engagement Hub. The hub would focus on practices that foster positive practical outcomes, including international engagement, understanding and friendship, via learning, experience and practice. Its relationship to other similar entities within the university, as well as its possible involvement in interdisciplinary research into the outcomes of the practices developed by entities of the Hub, could be further explored. **Visiting academics**, including residents of IH, would contribute to the intellectual life of the House and of this Hub or Centre.

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