

# **HAWKER COLLEGE 40 YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG**

## *51 MURRANJI HAWKER ACT*

Hawker College is 40 years old this year and the extended college community over those years will be celebrating this milestone at the College in April/May 2016.

### **HAWKER COLLEGE EARLY PHOTOGRAPH**



### **HAWKER COLLEGE IN THE MODERN ERA PHOTOGRAPH**

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### **THE FOUNDATION YEARS**

John Edmunds, the founding principal of the College, claimed ‘that the seed for the idea of separate colleges was the movement in the 1960s in the ACT for an independent education system after years of being part of NSW Education.’ As a young teacher at Narrabundah High School in the 1960s, John Edmunds was involved in community planning meetings for the independent system. After much debate the ACT Schools Authority was established in 1973 and as part of this, the college system for separate years 11/12 was planned, broadly based on the college system operating

in Tasmania although much broader in curriculum. The colleges were to be state of the art institutions with world's best practice at educating that age group.



The secondary colleges were conceived not as narrow matriculation senior schools but as open post-compulsory institutions catering for the broad range of educational interests and abilities of the considerable proportion of ACT high school students who proceed into senior secondary education. Of course this has changed over the years with the ACT government increasing the school leaving age that makes it compulsory to attend college, and the increasing interference of governments into wanting to have centralised control of the curriculum.

To return to John Edmunds and Hawker College. After stints at Broken Hill and Barham High Schools, John Edmunds returned to Canberra as the early identified principal of Hawker College at the start of 1975, charged with the responsibility of getting the brand new college up and running. He was part of a larger planning group that was to set up four colleges: Hawker, Phillip, Narrabundah and Dickson. At that time, Kim Beasley (Senior) was Federal Minister for Education (and as such in charge of the new ACT Schools Authority) and Gough Whitlam was Prime Minister. By the time the College was officially opened on 18 September 1976, Malcolm Fraser was Prime Minister and Senator John Carrick was the Education Minister. The Chief Executive Officer of the ACT Schools Authority at that time, Hedley Beare, took a keen interest in and was highly supportive of the College's development and especially in the use of computers for administrative purposes.

John Edmunds remembers that time of planning for the new College to be the high point of his professional life. He started with the premise of involving the community in the College and gaining the support of what is now known as the stakeholders – parents, students and staff. All were involved in the planning and later all parties were represented on the College Board that approved policies and curriculum for the new College.

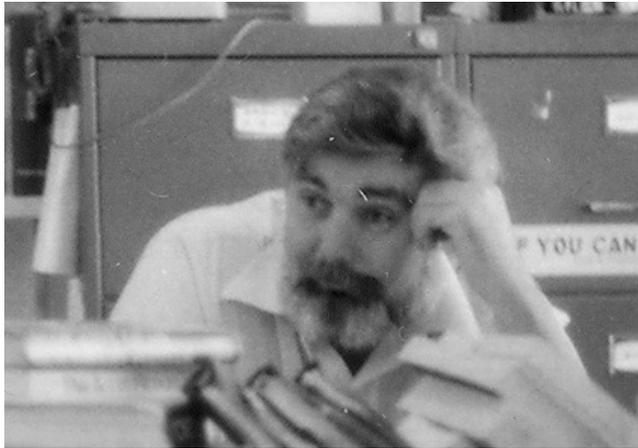
Ian Boxall in 1975 was 'early identified' as a senior teacher at Hawker College and assisted in the planning and opening of the College. When interviewed recently he said that 'those times were exhilarating and the pinnacle of his teaching career. There was a huge amount of energy and commitment from new staff writing new curriculum

for the College and planning its opening. The times were magic in education with a brave new world of community participation in schools'. According to John Edmunds, '16-19 year olds were no longer to be treated as young children. There would be an educational system based on mutual trust and educational principles. The community, through the College, would determine educational directions without the rigid departmental structures and strictures of the past.'

The Canberra Times of 15 August 1975 had a full two page spread about the new college system that featured articles from the four principals of the new colleges. John Edmunds wrote that 'the courses at Hawker College will be as exciting and as challenging as the new buildings'. According to Kim Beasley 'I am sure that all ACT residents share my hope that the secondary colleges should get off to a successful start in 1976 – successful in meeting the needs of young adults for diversity, interest and relevance in educational opportunities.' However, later in the year John Edmunds was involved in the fight against government cutbacks with the headline in the Canberra Times 'Cuts harm College: principal.' So what has changed since then? Various governments at both ACT and Federal level have repeatedly cut staff and resources to Colleges and it is a tribute to the staff and college communities that the colleges have continued to be successful.

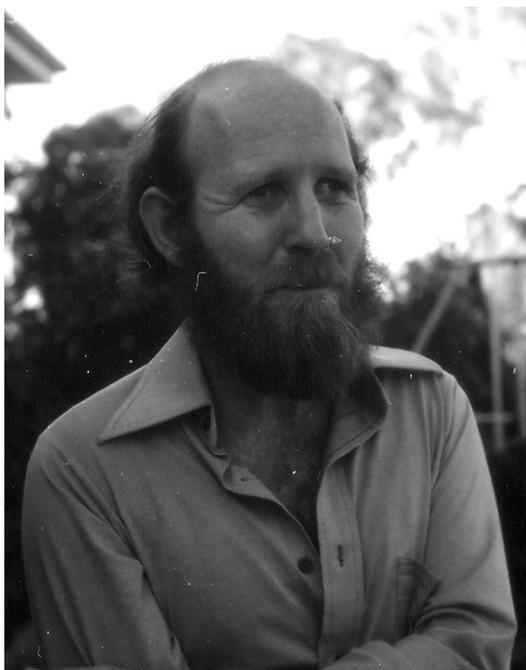
When Hawker College opened in 1976 it was the first ACT College to have a computer-based administration. A partnership with IBM resulted in Ian Boxall being able to attend a staff gathering at the Lake in December 1975 brandishing a sheaf of computer printouts of timetables and class lists – the start of a brave new system that is now taken for granted with the ease and use of computers. There were no Apple Macs or IBM clones around and only primitive personal computers. All computing had to be done with expensive main frames. Ian Boxall recalls going to the main IBM offices to input data and doing the administrative work for the College. When the computer programs needed updating late in 1976, a year 11 student at Hawker, Julian Byrne, (where is Julian now?) rewrote all the Hawker College programs.

Talking to teachers who were at Hawker College at the time it opened made it clear that the College opened with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of efficiency and goodwill on the part of everybody who was involved. In 1976 all the students were oriented towards tertiary studies with little evidence of the work-oriented courses of today. According to Susan Vidler, another 1976 teacher 'the students were keen to be part of the new system and were highly motivated to succeed. There were less behaviour problems and alienation from the school environment than had previously hindered their advancement in high schools.'



A foundation teacher at Hawker College, Jack Geary speaks of his impressions of Hawker College in those early years. Jack had come to Canberra after teaching elsewhere in Australia and in Canada. He was involved in 1975 in volunteering to write course outlines for the new college and in attending a myriad of meetings over that year. He was offered and accepted a position to teach English. ‘At the beginning teacher student relationships were at a premium. Most of the staff were quite young and had a commitment to doing things differently. The students were politically aware and motivated having just come through the Whitlam era and the Vietnamese war. So both groups found it easier dealing with the relaxed environment of the College. Teachers were known by their first names and the Student Council had a major influence on how the College operated. For example, they held a vote each year as to where, if at all smoking was permitted.’ Jack remembers fondly the first janitor Bill Seebohm who was renowned as the one person who knew all the students and all the secrets of the College.

Staff democracy was another matter. Jack tells a story of a staff meeting to decide on a timetable. ‘There was conflict between young parents (teachers) who did not want to start early and others who wanted an 8am start. There was a third option basically to retain a modified high school type approach to the timetable. It came to a vote and there was an equal number of votes for the first two options. John Edmunds, the Principal and Chair of the meeting said he had the casting vote and would decide on option 3. It turned out to be an inspired and wise choice as that timetable has endured despite many attempts to change it.’



On the same theme Frank McKone, another early identified drama teacher, has this to say: ‘On timetabling, Jack Geary’s remembrance of the original meeting in which John Edmunds decided on Plan C, when the staff were split on Plan A and Plan B, has left out an important point. Plans A and B incorporated morning tea into the timetable, but Plan C was simply based on lessons on the hour. It took two years to change to the complicated arrangement of including morning tea and starting lunch at 1.10pm – in my view far too late for my blood sugar level. At a later time there was a strong move to extend the hours to 9 or 10pm. This was to allow for the increasing numbers of students who had day-time jobs, often over the lunch period, and it was thought it would provide a better chance for adults to take College courses in the evening. Staff voted against a formally organised arrangement which would see some teachers working at quite different times and on different days from others.’

Continuing from Frank McKone ‘Another big change was from 13 week terms (which had become 12 week units with a week for assessment) to semesters. Hawker College held out against the change for some time. At the time I was assisting the Curriculum Coordinator and researched what the effect would be on the diversity of courses chosen by students over 6 terms as opposed to 4 semesters. I showed that the 6 term system was used by students to make up highly individual packages, and gave them excellent opportunities for changing away from courses they found didn’t suit them without damaging their final results. The semester arrangement provided much more limited choices and opportunities to make changes – but this battle was not won. I saw this as an imposition largely from bureaucrats, while other teachers thought it would mean less assessment workload. I don’t know the current situation (which was made much worse when the 19 hours load was brought in), but before I left the semesters were often divided into two, effectively making 8 terms for assessment rather than only 4 – and more of a load than 6 had been).’

Jack Geary remembers another administrative saga very well. He was renowned as a union supporter and at each staff meeting moved that the College have speed humps

at the front for OH&S reasons. It was always defeated but did eventually pass and speed humps were installed. Much later the humps were removed.

Jack remembers the benefits of school based curriculum and the freedom to have continuous assessment rather than end of year examinations. ‘With continuous assessment you could gauge the student’s progress over the semester and provide feedback and support. Students worked hard over the whole year rather than in bursts just before an exam. There were problems with competing deadlines by various teachers, a lot of work came in late and students had competing priorities.’

When Jack was asked what his best recollections were about Hawker he replied. ‘Those were very happy years. There was a lot of freedom for teachers and students. This fostered an independence among students and increased the motivation of teachers. There were no formal exams. No computers and everything was done in hand writing. All students were catered for, including those with special needs and those who did not want to follow an academic path. There was a good balance of an academic and a non-academic curriculum.’

Frank McKone brought drama teaching to the mainstream of the College curriculum from the beginning. Of the early identification he says ‘I had applied for early identification for the college system, and found myself in 1975 teaching my own brand-new course in drama at Ginninderra High School, based very much on new ideas about “creative drama” from Britain and Canada; while also writing courses for English and Drama for Hawker College to start in 1976. Overload (and the extra work above our full-time teaching load was never paid for) it may have been but it was the most exciting, exhilarating and I still believe the most important work in education.’

On the education system Frank again: ‘The key to its success was the ACT Schools Authority, which operated as a Canberra Community Education Management Committee, with seconded teachers (not conventional bureaucrats) administering and implementing the curriculum being written by teachers for their school boards – also community based committees. The new system was radical not just because it was new, but because it worked quite differently.’ Later in his career ‘though by the 1980s forces in the ACT under self-government squeezed the system back into a more old-fashioned bureaucratic departmental structure, I am proud to note that Hawker remains a Community College, true at least in name –and I hope in nature – to the cooperative principles we established there 40 years ago. It’s that approach which provides the motivation for students to be engaged as the Don Anderson research showed.’

We talked with two students from the 1976 intake, Alistair and Sonia Grocock, who had gone on to get married. Their children had just completed year 12 at Hawker College in 2005. They remembered that “starting College was very exciting but the first day was just a talk from Mr Edmunds in the theatre and then we were off to classes. The real buzz was that it was our choice to be at school, our choice of subjects to study and our decision to work hard or not to work. We had a great time at Hawker College and our children felt the same 30 years later.’

## HAWKER COLLEGE 10 YEARS ON

In 1986 Bill Donovan (the author) was Principal and the College had consolidated to about 800 students. I remember this as the best of times in my professional career. The College Board made the basic approval decisions on teacher designed curriculum. The College Board and the College administration had school-based control over the College operations. We had some degree of choice in the teachers coming to Hawker and the teachers we did have were a great bunch of professionals with some of the best teachers in Australia. Parent support and financial contributions were at an all time high, teachers were being delivered a large amount of staff development, the College sports teams were very successful and its graduates were by now making a major impact on the universities and workplace inside and outside Canberra. Across Australia the college system and Hawker College were known for the quality of the schooling provided. After 10 years the College had developed a paper based system of communication with its stakeholders and was on the brink of entering the computer age. In this era two outstanding students Marc Mowbray-Darbela and Ben Butler had written a musical called Alexander. I remember financing them to the tune of \$2000 (high risk for a student production). The play took the College by storm and repaid the investment and even had a short series of its own at the Canberra Playhouse. In the same era the College Board was home to some activist students. One who attended Board meetings in ragged jeans held together by safety pins was renowned for driving through the canteen at year's end in a Mini. He later became a great actor, presented on ABC Playschool and even was the guest speaker at a recent Hawker College graduation. –Rhys Muldoon. That period saw the first student in the ACT to chair a College Board (Jean Chalmers). Later, when I finally retired from being principal of two colleges, I was quoted in the Canberra Times 'It has been far easier being a Principal for 800 students than being the father of three boys who also attended Hawker College in my time there'. My three sons Andrew, Michael and Gregg did their year 12 studies at Hawker while I was principal and it was an interesting experience for all of us. They all enjoyed the college life and the professionalism with which teachers and even their own father related to the principal's sons.



Over 250 ex-students turned up to a reunion to celebrate the first ten years of Hawker College. We asked each to fill in a card about their lives. This is a rich source of data for a future historian of the College. I had this to say in Kama, the College magazine: 'To listen to the ex-students talking about the college was to open a window on those innovative, challenging and exciting early times when Hawker blazed a trail through the stifling senior years of traditional high schools of the time. In their place was introduced a student-centred environment that allowed for academic excellence, the fostering of success for all students and, above all, a place where young people could grow and develop into mature, young adults. Hooray for Hawker College and the ACT Government School system.'



### **A BOARD MEMBERS VIEW**

Dr Ravi Sood, an astronomer, was a parent at Hawker in the late 80s early 90s. He served as a College Board member for 4 years. I asked him first, what the College was like for his children. 'It provided a well balanced education that in retrospect was as good as any private school in the ACT. They have become all-rounded citizens who benefitted from the social structure of the College and the demand for the students to be self sufficient and to learn from their failures as well as their successes. They found the College a very positive experience, full of diversity of student population, high quality teachers and a curriculum of wide choice and suitability.' As far as the College Board was concerned Ravi found this also a positive experience. 'The College Board operated smoothly, without the divisions and rancor of some academic and public service communities. Members of the Board were involved in approving the College curriculum and other policy matters and felt they were involved in something worthwhile as well as an opportunity to give something back to the community.'

In that second 10 years when Sandra Lambert became the third principal of Hawker College she had already played other major roles in two previous appointments at the College. As a very young English teacher at Campbell High School she was teaching the last of the traditional year 12 classes in 1976 when she was appointed to Hawker for 1977. In 1985 she was appointed as Faculty Head of the English Department. Like all the early college teachers, Sandra was enthusiastic about those first years with the major challenges of adapting to a new system and the innovatory roles expected of her. Sandra was excited by the calibre and enthusiasm of the students, by the professional energy and expertise of the teachers and by the involvement of the student body in College affairs. She was inspired by John Keneally, her faculty head, a person with great knowledge of curriculum, strong leadership skills and an outstanding teacher. The quality of teaching and leadership across the years has been acknowledged by many and is the second part of the twin plank of success together with the quality of the students.

In 1992 Sandra became principal and set out her priorities for success - Hawker College needed to retain its student-centered focus and staff were to continue the tradition of excellence in curriculum development and delivery supported by the provision of innovative professional development opportunities. Some highlights from these years included: consolidation and expansion of vocational education, the enhancement of the staff development program, homeless students' support network, additional counseling support, a strong student voice in the administration of the College, securing the funding for redevelopment of the theatre and dance studio and opening up the College for examination by the wider community - for instance, by establishing a tradition of Open Nights outside enrolment processes which showcased the College's strengths and achievements and used both current and former students as ambassadors. In her work as principal, Sandra played particular tribute to the deputy John See, who was appointed to this position from a Senior Science post, and to the excellent support provided by the College administrative staff.

Sandra Lambert left Hawker College in 1996 to make her mark as a senior public servant in the ACT and later as Chief Executive of a Government Department. She attributes much of her later success to skills developed and refined as a teacher and school leader at Hawker College.

## **HAWKER COLLEGE 20 YEARS ON**

By now the first woman Principal of the College, Sandra Lambert had moved into the ACT Department, John See was acting principal and Terry O'Keefe was to be appointed late in 1996. Anne Fletcher was President of the P&C. The Board Chair was Steve Burroughs whose son Damien (a 17 Year old student at Hawker) went on to win a Gold Medal at discus in the disabled Olympics at Atlanta later that year.



Industrial disputes ravaged the College for much of the year and their final resolution was a welcome relief for all involved. Despite this dispute that hindered many activities the College tried its best for normality.

Newshawk as a student newspaper was launched that year and chronicled an active student body that held socials, SRC camps, put on a soup kitchen in assessment week, a Melbourne Cup lunch for the staff, designed and launched a College football jumper and raised money for a variety of charities. There was no single drama production. Rather a group of students put on seven plays in November, including two written by

students: 'Each Alone' by Natalie Olsen and 'London Dry Gin' by Natalie Hawkes and Lisa Oldham.

Terry O'Keefe had this to say in the Year Book. 'In the short time I have been at Hawker College I have been impressed with the outstanding quality of the students and the high level of commitment from staff. Over the years, Hawker College has produced many successful students in a whole range of academic, sporting and cultural areas.' In the same magazine John See: 'This year has been a challenging one for everyone involved in education.' It is a credit to all involved that the College continued to be so successful.

I talked recently to Terry about his six years at Hawker College. When asked what he thought of his time here he said 'my 6 years as Principal of Hawker College were perhaps my most satisfying time during my 37 years as a teacher. My fond thoughts of Hawker are prompted by my memory of the wonderful people I worked with and the energy, skill and enthusiasm of the Hawker College students. My outstanding Deputy Principal, Jan Glasby, the Executive Team and the dedicated teaching and non teaching staff all made my job as Principal easy. Collectively these people loved working at Hawker College and their commitment to the College community made it all the more special. I will always feel privileged that my teaching career came to an end at such a wonderful school and in the presence of such exceptional people.' He recalls one of his key initiatives was to introduce some fun into College life. 'One consultant at the end of a 2 day planning session was quite complementary about the College and the commitment shown by staff. During our car journey back to the airport he added a comment- with your ageing staff, don't forget to keep some fun into being at the College. In response to this comment I recruited a couple of younger staff members to be in charge of "fun". It sounds a bit artificial but organising the occasional fun activity really made a difference to the spirit and camaraderie within the College. Laughter is wonderful medicine.'

Terry believed that his time at the College were a time of major change. Some of the many challenges facing Terry when he arrived were the introduction of enhanced school-based management, changes to the staffing formula, the change to a semester system, resourcing the College for the IT age, updating the tired school buildings, greater accountability from the Department and parents and the pressure on colleges to reduce the drop out rate of year 11 students. Facing these challenges required great support from staff, many of whom had been at the College for many years.

Students put on a spring Fiesta.



## **HAWKER COLLEGES 30 YEARS ON**

The third generation of the College was in part lead by Richard Powell as principal from 2002-2008. He had come from Deputy Principal at Canberra High School. As he said recently: ‘I saw my role as a metaphor of building on the strengths of an already successful school. I followed some of the strongest principals in Australia let alone the ACT and I was very reliant early on the documented systems set up by my predecessor Terry O’Keefe. At that time the success of the College was based on its high achieving students and I like to think I built on that.’

Richard went on to say: ‘Terry O’Keefe left the College in the best of positions. There was money in the bank, we had over 900 students, overseas students were bringing in extra revenue and school-based management was in full swing.’ In his time Richard saw an increase in VET programs, 500 students per year in work experience, the involvement of many students in Certificate 1 & 2 courses and an uptake in school-based apprenticeships. The College also set up a partnership with Telstra and won a \$100,000 grant to set up a business in schools partnership. With

the decline in inter-college sport a salvation was the sports administration course which gave students experience in managing programs at local schools and in the community. Also they specialised in a scuba diving program that was good for the College and a great example of the fabulous learning experiences colleges can provide.

Some of the challenges that Richard had to face over the years proved more difficult to tease out. Because Hawker College was such a good school, teachers tended to stay because it was such a good professional job and fun to do. Regeneration and professional development of staff was a big challenge. In his time teaching loads were increased to 19 hours and all teachers had to teach 4 main lines. Apart from the extra load on teachers many of the optional extras that teachers had been involved in were no longer offered. In one year thieves broke into the library and stole a great deal of technological equipment. When it was replaced they broke in again and stole all the new equipment. The College had to replace all the gear from its own budget and without insurance or head office support. It was a huge strain on the College financially. On a more positive note Richard was a great supporter of theatre and drama at the College. So much so that the students joked that they needed to give him a set of pillows because he was spending so much time with the productions. According to Richard 'the College productions were a highlight of each year and culminated in a magnificent performance of Grease.'

#### *Some Statistics*

In 2006, the Principal was Richard Powell although for most of the year Phil Beecher was acting Principal and he gave the graduation address. The top academic student that year was Vijayendra Nandagiri and an English Honours program was launched. The Board Chair was John Stockbridge who himself had been a teacher earlier in his career and whose wife Sue Stockbridge had been a long term teacher at Hawker College. By this time ex students of the College had become themselves teachers at the College and some students were children of former students of the College. There were 831 students enrolled with 80.9% of year 11 students of 2005 completing year 12 this year. There were 67.6 teachers at the College and 14.6 administrative staff. It is interesting to note that 20% of the staff held post graduate qualifications indicating a highly credentialed teacher group. The total income for the year was \$1,070,270, the expenditure \$1,110,513 and after taking into account accumulated funds left a total balance of \$394,072. The current administration would love to have even part of this type of surplus. In sports seven students were awarded Academy of Sport scholarships, 110 students were selected in Australian teams and 17 in ACT teams. Obviously the sporting tradition lives on and the sports Hall of Fame acquired many new members that year. I found out all of this because in the modern era much more accountability is expected of schools and the annual report to the Minister is very detailed.

By now Hawker is home to many fee paying overseas students who help make the college so culturally diverse and academically challenging.



Also by 2006 Hawker had made almost a full transition from a tertiary dominated curriculum into the 50/50 academic and vocational program.



## **THE MODERN ERA**

In the current 10 year period the era started under the principalship of Stephen Gwilliam. As deputy principal of Calwell High School and with a previous professional career in design he came to the College as deputy principal in 2008 and became Principal the next year. He saw a challenge in the need to rebuild and renovate the buildings and make them more suitable for the modern generation of students and their learning needs. First though he developed the College as a leader in ICT education and worked in partnership with Microsoft to make this a reality. Part of this was to make ICT equipment widespread in the College with wireless access

and mobile computing for increased online learning opportunities. His term coincided with the Australian Government 'Building Education Revolution' and he was able to move swiftly with plans to improve the College campus. Among works begun and completed were Chino's café and integration of this into the Library; the front office entry upgrade; a boardroom development; the upgrading of the commercial kitchens and the rebuilding of Donovan's restaurant and proposal for the new Bakery.

Part of the student focus of this time was the establishment of a student leadership group with the special task of bringing students' ideas and priorities to fruition. Another part was the development of an overseas student program. These both helped to internationalise the College and to bring in the additional income to enable many developments to be funded.

When asked to describe the highlights of the College program of the time he said 'that the College had a special focus on high performance, for example, in the blended, self-paced, interactive learning program in Mathematics. Hawker was recognised as a leader in the Creative and Performing Arts, in its Maths extension program with local high schools and in ICT education.'





**What is Hawker College like in 2016?**

If you took a helicopter shot of Hawker College today it would look somewhat different to the College site of 1976. While the building structure remains basically the same there have been additions to the theatre and music wing and rather than being surrounded by almost bare grounds and to the north by bare paddocks, there are now a line of townhouses and the extension of Hawker suburb down to Belconnen Way.

The outside of the College is much more colourful and the new entrance is only two years old with a Hawker College sign at the western end. Students of the 1976 era would still recognise their College inside although the carpet is a different colour. In 1976 all the colours in the College were Departmental dull. Now they are bright and cheerful. The Library that used to be chock-a-block with books is now given over mostly to computers and sitting areas and opens out onto a café in the old corridor. Student lockers are now works of art compared to the old grey metal cupboards.

The Maths classrooms have been replaced with an open area and the Science laboratories are enclosed where they were originally open plan. There is restaurant in the old Home Arts room and the old kitchens have been replaced with plenty of stainless steel kitchen gear for budding chefs, a bread making oven and a coffee shop.

In the staff room there is a rogue's gallery of staff over the past 40 years. The seven principals who have guided Hawker College grace the corridor outside the current Principal's office.

There is a sports hall of fame gathering numbers over the years and there is a lot of art on the walls around the College. But the big difference is the atmosphere around the College. The current population of around 450 is spread over a large area and everything seems very quiet and orderly: sometimes it is hard to find a concentration of students. In the early days the College got to about 900 students and there were classes in the Gym, the refectory, the Library and anywhere else there was space. The feel was of a big, bustling, busy school, almost hyperactive.

Peter Sollis began as Principal in 2013, coming to Hawker from years as a teacher in the college system and the sports program of the Raiders Rugby League Club. Peter had this to say. 'On commencing my role as Principal of Hawker College in 2013, I immediately became aware of the culture of the students and admired what they brought to the college. I liked that students continually strove to contribute to their social, cultural and academic outcomes and to their education and training; that they aimed for excellence in all they undertook. When you walked the corridors and learning areas of the College there was an atmosphere of purpose, of industry, of achievement.

I was always impressed by how articulate students were, their independence of thought, and the manner in which they accepted the opinion of others and the breadth of knowledge they demonstrated. The voice of the student body is taken seriously at Hawker and valued. 2013 saw the emergence of several student initiated conscience and activist groups such as the Sustainability group, GAIA, a mental health support group and SIA; students for inclusivity and autonomy. The success of these groups resulted in an increase in student self belief and prestige, excellent PR for Hawker College across the system and in the wider community.

A school that has a sound pastoral care program establishes the environment for good student progress in their academic, vocational, social and personal wellbeing. Students acknowledged and highly valued the support that they received from staff in tracking their vocational and academic packages. To enhance this support, in a more holistic manner, Hawker College became the first college in Australia to be a fully accredited MindMatters school in 2013. Led by Crystal Mahon, Executive Teacher of Student Support, this program embedded and promoted a positive environment for students to perform better, attract and retain more students and build a strong reputation in the community.

Hawker College has been actively involved in the BRIDGE program since 2012; the initial partnership was with the Indonesian school, SMA Petrus in the West Kalamantan (Borneo) Province. BRIDGE schools participate in an in-country experience alongside their Australian/Asian partner school. This experience provided deep insight into the social, cultural, historical and educational aspects of the partnership country. It provided the opportunity to build personal and professional relationships and plan for partnership activity. The links between the two schools were based around the Mathematics Faculty and environmental sustainability, led by Sheikh Faisal, Executive Teacher of Mathematics and the environmental GAIA student group. Students from all schools participated in video conferencing on a regular basis, benefiting their mathematics and primarily their intercultural experience. It remains a springboard for students to experience the opportunity of being a global citizen.

In 2013 it was recognised that students no longer saw the Library as the sole depository of information, the Library had to get people coming in for different reasons. Students needed somewhere to socialise, create things and collaborate. A survey for students and staff was conducted by the Student Leadership Group and critical teachers. The broad response from the survey was that the Library needed to have more flexible opening hours, less rigid conditions for use, more areas where students can mingle and collaborate in a surrounding environment of books and a greater range of digital media. Funding was sourced and a major renovation took place which ensured that the Library is a place where students want to be with a flexible learning environment, more comfortable and intimate furniture setting and direct access between the Library and the Resource Room.

In 2012 Hawker College's new blended learning Maths program attracted much community comment. As with any new approach to learning which breaks away from convention, it attracted its share of accolades and criticism. 2013 saw a comprehensive review conducted resulting in a new model of delivery that combined traditional face-to-face classes and online learning - students now have a choice about the style of learning that best suits their needs. Overwhelmingly students responded positively to this change. Hawker College is now recognised as delivering a contemporary and successful range of Mathematics courses that is accepted by all levels of the community and is seen as a positive asset to the college.

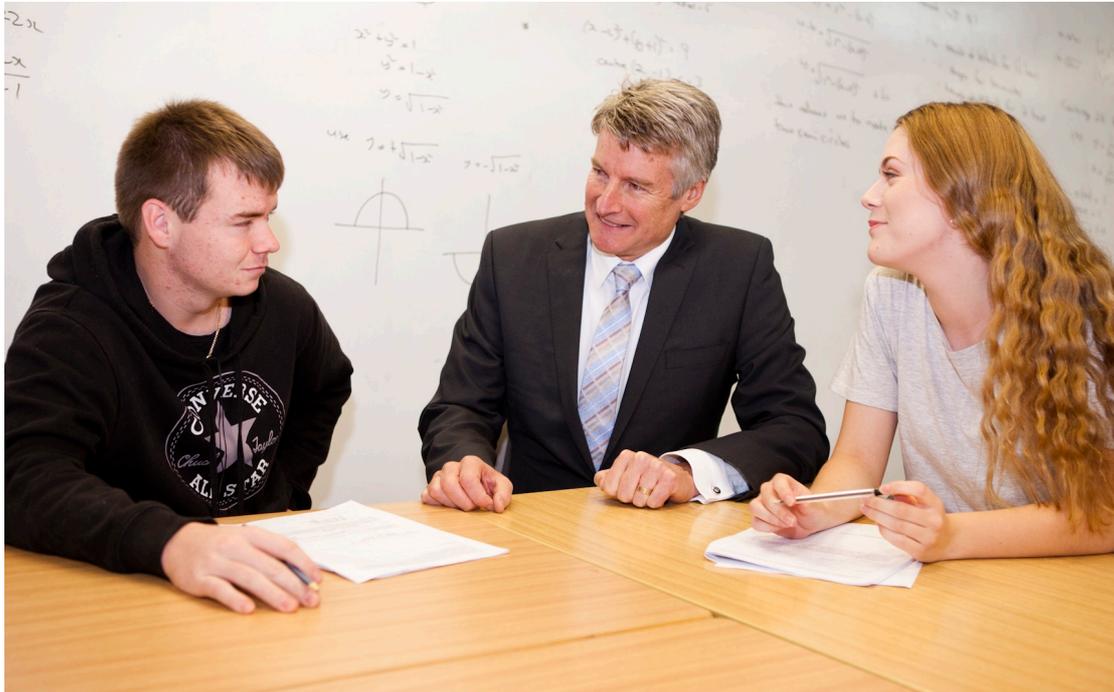
In 2014 the College responded to the increasing number of students with identified learning needs by channelling greater resources into employing specialised staff, renovating and increasing the physical access to the Resource Room and adjusting the

delivery of the curriculum across the college. This has resulted in a broader range of skills acquired by teachers and an educational program that supports a diverse range of student need.

The contribution that the teachers made to the development of the students at Hawker College as learners through a balanced education of the whole person was always apparent and recognised by students and parents. I personally applaud the impact that the staff at Hawker College made in providing every student with sustained opportunities to learn and striving to extend their learning boundaries.’

Peter Sollis has been on leave while this work was being compiled and I talked extensively with Frank Keighley the current Acting Principal. Frank has been a long serving teacher in the ACT and remembers the colleges in the early days, although he has only been at Hawker for the past few years. Frank is of the view that much of the rationale for the establishment of the college system is still the rationale for today. ‘Colleges are excellent for the age specific education that best suits 16-19 year olds. The setting required for year 11/12 students is much different from those in years 8/10. Colleges provide the environment where young people can flourish and develop as individuals in a non-threatening and collaborative environment. Colleges provide the place where highly capable, subject specialist teachers can provide a curriculum that both provides a pathway to tertiary studies and to vocational education and training.’

When asked what are the keys to the success of Hawker College Frank had this to say: ‘The curriculum suits the 50/50 mix of tertiary and vocational students. Within this broad provision the College has specialities in the performing arts and in the teaching of mathematics in a self paced learning environment. The College is further highly regarded for the well-being of students, the provision for diversity among them and for providing a sense of inclusiveness in an environment where student voices are heard. The students see freedom of individual and collective action, the respectful relations with staff and the freedom to make their own choices on key aspects of the College’.



Hawker College obviously has some limits because of the smaller number of students but still manages to provide an adult-like climate where students and staff are interactive, learning from each other, with students listened to in a level playing field of mutual trust. A big change from the past is the curriculum. Early on the curriculum was all developed by the teachers at the College with the curriculum approved at the College Board level and given an imprimatur by the ACT Education System. Now the curriculum in Maths, Science and English is basically the Australian National Curriculum and that in the other subjects collaboratively developed by teachers from all colleges. This imposes limits on teacher command and control of the curriculum but as consummate professionals they adapt these outside influences to the needs of their students.

I asked Frank how modern parents are engaged at Hawker College? 'The big difference from the early years is that broadcast email has transformed the interaction with parents. Communication is almost instantaneous with links put up to newsletters, special communications and information is sent direct. In the old days of printed newsletters, parent meetings and snail mail the information turnaround took much time.' In the early days all communication was in black and white. All the early photographs on record are in that black and white. Imagine how the easy use of colour has also transformed the transfer of and accessibility of information. According to Frank 'the role of the P&C has also been transformed. They have become more active especially in the use of social media and their meetings become forums switched on to issues on how to rear teenagers away from the College environment'. Of course the very nature of parents has changed. In the early years they were almost all of Anglo-Saxon and two parent families. Now the parents come from a wide range of cultural, colour and socio-economic backgrounds. In the early years most parents expected their students to study for tertiary entrance and it was hard to convince many that their child's needs were best met in the vocational area. Currently while parents of year 10 students start off expecting tertiary studies by mid

year 10 this starts to change and by the start of year 11 large numbers of parents and the students themselves are supportive of studying vocational subjects.

The question was asked about how teachers fared at Hawker College? Frank thought 'that teachers had a higher formal teaching load than in earlier years, were subject to much higher levels of accountability than teachers from the 1970s, sometimes struggled in staying registered as a teacher but were still positive about their experience'. Teachers liked the same things that students liked: the calm, purposeful and collegiate nature of the College. They like being able to teach in their special area of expertise, and particularly like that students show interest in their subjects, see the subject matter as relevant, and specifically choose their subjects or classes.

### **So what do teachers of 2015 think about their roles?**

I talked with some teachers in 2015.

The College is very small compared with even just a few years ago. However, there are increased numbers coming through local primary schools and the College will grow again in the future.

The students are about 50/50 between tertiary and accredited as students found their level despite high expectations from parents that nearly all should be aspiring to university study. Even though attendance is now compulsory to 17 there are students who just V grade along waiting to leave school and it does not seem to be any better motivation than freedom of choice to attend, which was the case in the past. The student body contains a fair number of fee paying overseas students and a sizable group of students with special needs. There is also a group of about 15 students studying a school based apprenticeship in a variety of disciplines.

The changes to curriculum choice seemed to be that English, at least for a minor, is compulsory and that very few students do the highest level of Maths. The advice that teachers give to students is to take subjects that they are good at, are passionate about and that they really want to do. This will maximise their results for the year 12 Certificate. This is similar to teacher recollection of the early years' expectations.

The teacher load is 5 classes totalling about 19 hours, although some have lesser loads and other responsibilities in the College. Thus they teach mainstream classes, while recreational and other extra curricular activities are not accorded much priority. Teachers are under a heavy load of academic rigour and accountability to the administration and to the Department that is seen as unnecessary in many instances. Teachers basically have a tenure of 5 years and this is reviewed before an extension is granted. Many of the teachers now at the College work part-time.

When asked about Departmental student satisfaction surveys, they thought the response rate was low, and did not go up much despite teacher promptings. So it is regarded as a very biased survey and nothing should be concluded from the results.

## **STUDENTS OVER THE YEARS**

With a consistent enrolment of between 450 and 900 students over the 40 years, Hawker College has more than exceeded the early expectations. Large numbers of students have gone on to successful tertiary education and careers in a wide range of fields. The introduction of work-oriented curriculum choices from the 1980s have furthered broadened the appeal and success of the college.

Of course not all success is purely academic. Hawker has produced an above average quota of successes in other fields. Bradley Clyde became a Raider and Australian legend in Rugby League the year after leaving Hawker. The wall of sporting fame at the College shows over 50 students making Australian youth teams of their day and many went on to represent Australia at the senior level. Bronwyn Calver represented Australia at both cricket and soccer and the Powell sisters (Katrina and Trudi) won Gold Medals at the Olympics with the Australian women's hockey team.

Ben Butler (son of Federal Education Minister Susan Ryan and Tasmanian Governor Richard Butler) went on to fame as a rock musician and now has a business career in New York. Steve Rodgers became a well-known actor and is now an established playwright. Another graduate is the manager of the rock groups Grinspoon and Airbourne, while another is a highly regarded pet photographer and many others run their own businesses. Graduates of Hawker fill many senior positions in companies and government departments.

The College has less than 450 students in 2016 compared to 700-900 in the early days. This has been caused by the changing demographics in the feeder suburbs and the opening of a new state of the art college in Gunghalin. This will change in the years ahead as the feeder suburbs are being regenerated by young families and the greater enrolments in the local primary schools.

### ***Student Attitudes to College***

In 1972 Don Anderson, an ANU academic conducted a survey of student attitudes among ACT high school students and the results contributed to the way the colleges were set up. In 1979 Don Anderson was commissioned to test student attitudes again. He found that attitudes had changed considerably. In particular, senior students felt that secondary colleges provided greater opportunities for student independence and personal responsibility. Colleges also provided a more satisfying curriculum, quality of teaching and preferred assessment procedures.

At Hawker College in the late 1980s the same Anderson surveys were conducted among year 11 and 12 students as part of school-based research led by the then principal, Bill Donovan who had come to the College from being Head of Research & Evaluation at the ACT Schools Authority. Most of the work in conducting and analysing the surveys was done by College teachers lead by Richard Gorrell and Paul Couzens.

## **What did the students say about Hawker College at the time?**

**1989**

“The College looks pretty relaxed at times, but other times, during assessment weeks things are hectic to say the least, but it looks relaxed for those who come from high schools.”

“New students like it here. College offers a lot of freedom which is a bit hard to get used to at first. I couldn’t believe it, calling teachers Frank or Sonya, no bells, lines off, being able to choose units and being able to come here and relax with mates.”

“If you want to get a lot out of College you can’t afford to slack, skip classes or fail to hand in assignments. Some do turn College into a big bludge but they have to end up explaining to their parents their poor reports. Besides teachers around here keep rolls and if your attendance is poor you get called up to the Den.”

“My parents expect a lot from me. They have shown a lot of concern too that I get stressed out at assessment time. I try explaining to them that it’s not my fault, that it’s just that many teachers expect things to get handed in around the same time.”

“Some worry that their teacher does not like them and will mark them hard. However, I have found teachers around here are very professional and besides assessable work is moderated or marked by a second teacher and you can always appeal.”

“Still I am happy in general with the way teachers assess my work and explain my grades. They are always willing to sit down and talk and go out of their way to be helpful. You’ll find the teachers here are really friendly both in class and outside.”

## **What do the researchers say about student attitudes?**

**1980 Don Anderson ANU**

“The great majority of students find deep satisfaction in the freedom experienced in College, the opportunity for personal decision-making and general control over their own affairs.”

“The Colleges have played a major part in bringing about a much higher level of satisfaction with schooling than was present among senior students in 1972. The changes which have been observed are associated with the change in student-teacher relations, a move away from the traditional teacher dominance towards a relationship based more on cooperation, in which students have a measure of independence and self-responsibility.”

“More students in 1979 than in 1972 saw their teachers as good at communication and as being expert. Students overwhelmingly saw the College idea as a chance to learn in an environment more appropriate to their status as young adults.”



### **1986-1989 Hawker College Student Surveys      Richard Gorrell**

“In 1986, 79% of Hawker Year 11 students thought that their maturity and sense of responsibility had been recognised. In 1987, the figure was 75%, in 1988, 84%. In 1989, the figure was 94% for Year 11 and 93% for year 12.”

“In 1988, 78% of year 11 students got along well with their teachers in class and the figure for year 12 students in 1989 was 88%.”

“It is clear from the survey data that year 12 students are likely to be more positive about their college education than year 11 students. It is apparent from the data that they are more confident, more comfortable with and more approving of Hawker College having had over a full year’s experience of it.”

What did 1989 students like about Hawker College?

- Increased freedom and responsibility
- Choice and variety in curriculum
- Good teacher-student relationships
- Friendly atmosphere
- Social interaction out of class time

What did the 1989 students want improved about Hawker College?

- Spread out assessment to reduce workload stress
- Improve college facilities, cafeteria, gym, technology area, air-conditioning
- Improve intra-college communication
- Provide organised activities for lunchtime and lines off

## What about students of the modern era – what do they think? 2015

To the same questions the students of 2015 had this to say:

What they liked:

The community feel – small college so can know most people, people are friendly and supportive

Teachers are helpful, treat students equally and are on friendly terms with students as well as first name basis

The self paced mathematics lab that allows students to work independently but with a lot of help

Freedom of choice and wide curriculum

What did students want improved:

Netbooks should be improved and made faster

Canteen not very welcoming and microwaves do not work properly

Heating system needs improving

Exam weeks should be dedicated to exams

Science students should be better acknowledged



In general discussion with a small group of students some general points are of interest.

They knew of the Student Leadership Group who they saw as self nominated, small in number and not having a clear role in the College apart from chairing meetings.

The College is very multicultural these days certainly different to 1976 when it was basically white, Anglo-Saxon in character.

There are a number of fee paying overseas students

They saw few problems between students or with staff and were very happy in the small College environment.

If they were around for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations they would be keen to see a time capsule from the various decades of what the College was like.

It would be good to acknowledge students from all areas by displaying work around the College and not just Art. This would help to value all students and all students work equally across the College.

Modern day students were asked what they would put in a time capsule to compare to each of the generations of past and future students.

cell phone  
earphones  
year 12 footy jumper  
Hawker College app  
picture of Maths lab  
year 12 breakfast photo  
Hairspray video



## FINALE

What does the future hold for Hawker College?

The long term future looks very robust with the regeneration of the local suburbs with many young families moving in. The primary schools are getting towards full enrolments again and in due course the high schools and College will be the centre of a growing number of students. In the meantime the current College is looking to take account of the refurbished buildings, the quality of local and overseas students and the quality of its program to consolidate and move forward. Who really knows what another 40 years will bring. I suspect that schools and colleges as they are will no longer exist and that a radically different form of education will have come into being as the internationalisation of countries continues and newer technologies are discovered.

## **HAWKER COLLEGE PRINCIPALS**

John Edmunds 1975-1983  
Bill Donovan 1983-1991  
Sandra Lambert 1991-1996  
Terry O'Keefe 1996-2002  
Richard Powell 2002-2008  
Stephen Gwilliam 2008-2013  
Peter Sollis 2013-2016

This has been researched and written for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary by Dr Bill Donovan the second and longest serving principal of the College.

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