Commencement Dinner Speech 2013
Dr Philip Dutton, Principal Burgmann College

Special guests, Mr Chairman and Gayl Mills, Members of Council and partners, my Colleague Dr Ian Walker, Head of Ursula and Toad Halls, fellow staff and friends, Deans, my wife Valerie and to my 300 plus fellow residents who make up this wonderful academic, residential community within this great university, The Australian National University.

Welcome to the 43rd Annual Burgmann College Commencement Dinner.

I would also like to reserve a very special welcome for our special guest and Commencement Speaker, the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Australian National University, Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington.

To Burgmann College she has already, in her first year at The ANU, formed a great friendship and both supported us and influenced us in what we set out to do at Burgmann.

She spent some time with me recently in extended private conversation about directions for the university and our developing place in that context. Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington has assisted us in bringing the combined resources of the university in underpinning our community life and, more recently, honored us by launching the inaugural Burgmann Journal just two weeks ago. Her enthusiasm, energy and sharp mind are both inspiring and infectious as is her company here this evening. Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in extending that special welcome.

To all residents, new and returning, may I offer this simple message for 2013. Our overwhelming aim as an academic community and for you must be to support and assist each other in achieving everyone’s highest possible academic potential.

There used to be an old saying amongst Heads of Colleges: that if you could get the food right you can get everything else right. However, I believe the main game for us is academic support; that is, if you get that right then everything else may fall into place including food. This is somewhat proven at Burgmann by the fact that when the food needed improvement a year or
so ago, residents still kept coming back because of our life as a true learning community. Not just a community where people reside to go to and from academic activities, but where learning of all kinds, especially direct academic support is put simply, the thing of all the things, the thing we do best. It allows us then to be distracted by the healthiest and best pursuits, those of lasting supportive friendship, true camaraderie and great events and nights just like this one.

Now, I have something else to add: Today is International Women’s Day.

Let’s, firstly, celebrate that this evening by ensuring that everyone has a most memorable evening because they are in the very best of company, your company.

Then let’s take our appreciation and understanding of gender differences and needs forward with new steps in 2013. I believe Burgmann has a good strong social health. But in a close community of 350 residents whose average age is 19 to 20 years, we ought not to be tempted into placing our heads in the sand. Whether, it is common or rare, the incidence of sexual harassment at a time in life when the search for and experience of intimacy in our personal relationships becomes a stronger force, presents us with a healthy and progressive challenge. It is quite often hidden from us in its privacy, its potential embarrassment and need for protection of victims socially especially in a close knit community.

The process has begun with the Deans, within our committees, our Men’s and Women’s Officers, previous and present, and a very valuable offer by ANU Dean of Students Professor Penny Oakes to take part.

As a challenge to this strong community, let’s work to ensure it is never tolerated through the development of understanding, effective protocols and sensitive but effective processes to do that, to deal with it as comprehensively as possible.

On a much broader front, the Burgmann Residents Association (BRA) President Simone Proctor and I have already begun discussions on the drafting of a ‘pledge’ around simple universal values based on honesty, trust and support for others to be signed possibly, depending upon where
discussions go, by all incoming residents in a Burgmann Book from year to year, thereby creating an historical record of all residents passing through our College and subscribing to high ideals in so doing.

In extending this welcome to all, may I also take the opportunity to thank our great leaders in BRA, our Residential Advisors, the Deans, our O Week Committee for a great start, to our staff who do a great job for us, take this evening for example, and to our often unsung and voluntary Members of Council, its Executive, Paul Street the epitome of gentlemanliness and Michael Wright, a young man who exerts excellence of principle and practice and especially our Chairman Greg Mills for his time, effort and vision all of which complements all the things we do and achieve as residents of Burgmann College.

I am predicting a great year for us all. The postgraduate residents have entered more into the life of the College than ever before, our returning undergraduates are community conscious and strong in leadership and our undergraduate newcomers are an extraordinary array of fine young people.

This is all the more reason to celebrate this evening so early still in 2013. Enjoy Commencement Dinner, drop by the guest table and say hello, enjoy the presentations and when the band strikes up a little later I hope you dance your socks off. Thank you for the part you will play in Burgmann life this year.