

Meeting 03/2021

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** and **MGA Council** was held from 4.00pm – 5.30pm, Thursday 8 April 2021 by Zoom invitation.

MINUTES

The meeting opened at 4.03pm.

1. Formal matters

1.1 Acknowledgement of country

The MGAEC acknowledged and paid respect to the people of the Kulin nations as the original and ongoing owners and custodians of this unceded land.

1.2 Attendance

Present	Caitlyn Neale (Chair), Stacey Coe, Julie Dao, Emily Pryor, Roby Vota, Preeti Mehta, Hang Yu, Emma Kellaway, Elliot Anderson, Suhag Arun.
Apologies	Merve O’Keefe, Ailsa Webb, Aman Madaan
Graduate reps	Allie Nance, Ana Laraheyns, Andrea Cuestaclaros, David Tuck, Katharina Spaeth, Sadia Alvi
In attendance	Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder, Zuzana Quinn

Caitlyn acknowledged the presence of the MGA university committee reps and invited everyone to introduce themselves.

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

No items were added.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 02/2021 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting March 02/2021 be confirmed.

Moved: Preeti

Seconded: Julie

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted. Item 02/2021-3.2 could be marked as completed as this issue would be addressed through the various committees on which Caitlyn was a member.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's written report was noted.

3.2 Members' reports

Members' written reports were noted. Emily added that she was presenting a case to the next GRC for an increase in the HDR stipend, requesting that the Monash stipend rate be brought into line with the stipend rate currently offered by the University of Melbourne.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 February 2021 profit and loss report

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

3.6 Reports from graduate reps on university committees

Caitlyn explained that each year all graduate students who had been appointed to student representative positions on university and faculty committees were invited to participate in the MGAEC April meeting, also known as the MGA Council meeting. She welcomed everyone and invited each representative to speak briefly about their experiences on their committees.

Ana Laraheyns – MADA Faculty HDR representative

Ana noted that her committee was looking into facilitating collaboration between schools within the faculty by creating more spaces where collaboration between HDRs (graduate research students) and GPGs (graduate coursework students) could be enabled. There was a proposal to bring together coursework and research students together for joint workshops. Ana was looking into the provision of more informal spaces where students could discuss academic issues informally. It was suggested that Ana apply to the MGA for group funding to support her efforts to get her student cohort together for social events.

Katharina Spaeth - BusEco Faculty HDR representative

Katharina informed members that she had been appointed through a faculty-run process but had not been provided with any support from Faculty staff. Katharina was new to Monash as well as being an international student, so found understanding how the faculties worked to be quite challenging. She had run a few events in her own department but had not had any mechanism to reach out to other departments. It was noted that when reps were appointed this way, rather than through a process run by the MGA, they were often confused about their role and didn't know how to connect with graduate students in their faculty. Jenny offered to meet with Katherina to provide some advice on getting set up and connecting with the BusEco HDR cohort.

David Tuck – Standing Committee on Mental Health (SCMH)

David reported that there were only 3 meetings each year for this central committee and the first meeting for 2021 was scheduled for the following Monday. Last year he had reported on the results of his own PhD research in this area (tertiary student mental health) and hoped to have some of the recommendations from his research implemented by the university in their mental health service delivery. David commented that while the mental health support services at Monash seemed to work well for students, it seemed that students were not accessing those services. It was thought that this was because there was a gap in

communication and/or a lack of mental health literacy; students didn't know where to go when they needed that level of assistance.

As part of the Thrive research conducted by the university, Monash data showed that students were happy with level of counselling service, but had difficulty accessing the service during Covid. It was noted that the Thrive research produced by the university was heavily skewed to female undergraduate students, and that research produced by the MGA showed that graduate students were very unhappy with the counselling services. David reported that he was trying to get the university to offer more mental health services in the area of prevention, and intended to organise a meeting with the head of counselling and any interested MGA committee members and staff.

Allie Nance – Diversity and Inclusion Committee (DIC)

Allie noted that she had been the graduate student member on DIC for almost 2 years. This was a high level advisory group chaired by the Vice- Chancellor. The focus tended to be on undergraduates and she had had to specifically request the graduate data for several reports that had been tabled containing only undergraduate data. In instances when the graduate data was provided, it showed a very different story to the undergraduate data.

Allie informed members that she had presented a report prepared by the MGA on how Covid had affected graduates, especially those who were also parents, and this had been well received by the DIC who had accepted the results, giving Allie the opportunity to advocate on behalf of graduates who were also parents. She was currently also on an MGA working group looking at equity groups and graduate students, and aimed to have a report to put to GRC and DIC on graduate equity groups. The report would explore retention rates and access and compare Monash's performance in this area with other Australian universities. All Faculty Deans would be attending the next DIC so any report from the MGA would receive more attention.

Jessica Lu – Parkville Postgraduate Association (PPA) representative

Jess explained that the PPA were a subsidiary of the MGA, who planned social events for Parkville graduates to help students feel connected. It had been difficult for students who commenced last year under Covid and had been unable to meet other graduate students. The PPA had also promoted MGA mainstream events such as the bubble friendship program, and online events which had been a particularly effective way for Parkville students to connect with graduate students at the larger campuses.

Emily Pryor – Graduate Research Committee (GRC)

Emily reported having been busy with ongoing lobbying on behalf of HDR students over issues including candidature extensions, scholarship extensions, RTP stipend rates and HDR employment. All HDR Faculty reps were invited to attend MGA rep meetings held regularly to specifically discuss HDR matters. Emily emphasised that she was keen to receive feedback and information from HDR Faculty reps. Emily also intended to meet with the Associate Deans (Graduate Research) in each faculty, along with Sam, the HASS rep on GRC and the relevant HDR Faculty representative.

Julie Dao and Elliot Anderson – MNHS Faculty HDR representatives

Julie and Elliot reported that they had worked with the faculty reviewing mydevelopment modules so that they better suited graduate student needs. They had also planned an event where students could meet their graduate student representatives on the Faculty committee. Elliott added that he was a member of a steering group that had been formed to focus on

clinicians undertaking PhDs and identify any specific challenges this cohort may have. It was hoped that by addressing these issues the attrition rate for this group could be lowered.

Stacey Coe – APC working group

Stacey reported that she was working with the university to address any concerns arising from the updated APC processes. The process was led by Professor Sue Elliott, and a recently formed working group offered the opportunity for both MGA advocates and committee members to resolve concerns. An online program had been developed to engage students early if their academic progress was poor. Caitlyn added that MGA concerns had been raised about the inability of students to access advice from the MGA advocates during the automated APC process, and that a meeting with Rob Brooks would be organised to further discuss this.

Caitlyn Neale - Education Committee

Caitlyn informed members that the two main issues the MGA has been pursuing through the Education Committee were the e-exams and the hybrid models of teaching. Kris Ryan had established a working group of all student association presidents, and Caitlyn had been ensuring that graduate-specific issues were raised and discussed. Two issues would be raised at the next working group: a concern about a particular faculty that was not following the regulations when contacting students with allegations of cheating; and the lack of immediate access to a medical practitioner and counsellor for students accused of cheating during exams.

Roby Vota – Monash Sexual Health Network, Diverse Genders and Sexuality Group

Roby reported that he had been working together with other student groups to address a general lack of knowledge across the student community about sex.

The group wanted to develop the ally network, and change the use and management of names by Monash so that students would be able to have their preferred name recorded in formal documents; a change especially important for transgender people, as well as international students who often adopted an anglicised name. The group also hoped to include the “+” sign at the end of the acronym “LGBTIQA” in all Monash documentation and systems - while this was under consideration by the university they had indicated that it would be very costly.

The university had shared a form asking for feedback from students on the role that a diverse gender sexes Advisor should play. Roby had suggested to the university that they ensure all services and forms were inclusive. It was noted that the university does not have data on access and retention of LGBTIQA+ graduates. Roby agreed to audit the MGA’s services, forms and processes to ensure the organisation was inclusive.

Caitlyn thanked all the invited graduate representatives on university committees for attending and providing reports, letting them know they were welcome to stay for the remainder of the meeting.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 MET concession campaign update

Held over.

4.1.2 Response to University’s strategic plan

Caitlyn thanked members for input, and reported that the Vice-Chancellor would look at the MGA's notes and provide further opportunity for feedback as the plan progressed.

4.1.3 Election update

Members were informed that the MGAEC election nomination period for the 2021/2022 term of office would close on the following Thursday.

4.1.4 Dispute resolution process re undergraduate funding

Held over. Caitlyn noted that she had not yet received a response from the arbiter and would report back once this matter had been finalised.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 University proposal re graduate student tutoring

Emily informed members that the Vice-Chancellor had proposed a new arrangement for employing PhD students for casual sessional teaching, where casual contracts would be replaced with fixed-term contracts for students who currently held a casual contract and had twelve months or more left to completion. There had not been any consultation with students or the MGA but it was acknowledged that as this was a staffing matter, representation would be provided by the NTEU. Some students had approached the MGA about the proposal, expressing concern about losing flexibility and the loading applied to casual salary rates.

It was agreed that Caitlyn would write to the Vice-Chancellor seeking clarification on the details of what was being proposed.

Hang Yu raised a concern on behalf of Masters coursework students who completed mid-year but were not offered a graduation ceremony until the end of the year. In the interim student visas were likely to expire so students would be forced to return home and apply for another visa. Caitlyn reported that she had previously followed up on this matter and the university had responded that because of compliance with Covid restrictions, they themselves were restricted as to how graduation ceremonies could be timetabled. Caitlyn agreed to seek further clarification from the university on this issue.

Caitlyn noted the article in the MGA newsletter featuring the MGA Executive Officer and MGA Senior Advocate, and thanked Jenny and Zuzana for their committed service to the MGA.

5. Membership

No business.

6. Next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held by zoom on Thursday 13 May, from 4pm – 5.30pm.