

Meeting 02/2021

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 4.00pm – 5.30pm, Thursday 11 March 2021
by Zoom invitation.

MINUTES

The meeting opened at 4.05pm.

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, Ailsa Webb, Roby Vota, Aman Madaan (left after 3.2), Preeti Mehta, Hang Yu, Emma Kellaway, Elliot Anderson, Suhag Arun, Merve O’Keefe.
Apologies	Sam Miles, Jessica Lu.
In attendance	Janice Boey (left after 4.1.3), Jenny Reeder, Zuzana Quinn, Ying Xu, James Breheny (left after 4.1.3).

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: Ailsa

Seconded: Stacey

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President’s report

Caitlyn reported that she, Ailsa and Preeti has met with Kris Ryan. A submission from MGA on issues associated with the e-exams had been sent to Kris. Kris had agreed to meet with each President individually. A working group had been formed by the university but had

only undergraduate representatives at the first meeting. Caitlyn had subsequently successfully lobbied to have a graduate representative included on the working group. Ailsa would fill this role, and would then be in a position to feed graduate issues through to the working group. Caitlyn invited any further concerns from the committee on the topic of e-exams to be sent through to Ailsa.

It was agreed that once confirmed, Ailsa would send out the working group meeting dates via the whatsapp group so all members knew the deadlines for raising issues.

Caitlyn advised the committee that she had sent the MGA submission to the independent arbitrator regarding the transfer of graduate funding to the undergraduates on Clayton Campus; a long-standing disagreement that the MGA had been unable to resolve with the MSA.

3.2 Members' reports

In addition to submitted written reports, the following matters were noted:

Preeti reported having received a lot of negative feedback about classes conducted by mixed-mode, where some students were sitting side-by-side in the same room on campus, using their own laptops and microphones, and working with other students zooming in from off-campus. Sitting at the same table with other students while on zoom resulted in bad feedback from the microphones, affecting the sound and producing an overall poor experience. Students who complained were told it's was a "real world" experience, but this was clearly not how a zoom meeting would be conducted in a professional industry setting.

Caitlyn, invited Preeti and Stacey to collate information about the hybrid model so she could take this concern to the Education committee. Stacey noted that the MBA had been advertised as a very interactive course representing the best model for learning, then covid came along, everything went online, there was no interaction, and students were told that they were still receiving the best possible training. However, once the situation allowed for the return of face-to-face classes, students were forced to return to campus even where it was no longer convenient for them. A number of students were unhappy with the inflexibility inherent in being directed to return to oncampus classes. The MBA student cohort got together and lobbied to allow for some students to continue the course online. The school was now using a centralised microphone for students in room so that online students could hear questions and answers during lectures. The sessions had become more interactive, and break-out rooms could be set up for students on zoom or where there were only a few online students, those students could be connected to individual groups via phone.

Suhag informed members that Prof David Copolov had donated \$11,000 to the international students to spend on assisting the international student community. Suhag noted that a previous donation had been spent on undergraduate international students and suggested that the \$11,000 should go to supporting international graduate students. The university had requested that any queries received by the MGA from Myanmar students about the situation in Myanmar should be directed to central university so the responses could be coordinated. There were approximately 70 students from Myanmar enrolled at Monash University and the university was providing a number of concessions for that cohort, including offering them the opportunity to pay their fees after the semester.

Emily reported that she had established an HDR working group to discuss the ways in which Monash can support students from equity backgrounds. One student member had presented a government report showing the level of representation within different equity groups across various Australian universities. Monash was not doing well in terms of graduate numbers in the various equity groups compared to other Go8 universities. Emily raised the possibility of setting in place a systematic way to ensure reports such as this one was brought to the attention of committee members. After some discussion it was agreed that referrals to relevant websites where such reports were published would be collated and sent to committee members so that they could keep track of any new information published in their portfolio areas.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 January 2021 profit and loss report

Noted. The 2021 income would not be confirmed until mid-April when the total graduate student enrolments figures were known.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 Orientation report

Janice reported on the MGA orientation activities run during semester 1. Some early oncampus events had to be cancelled due to a potential lock-down, but all activities were designed with an online back-up version. The key delivery at Caulfield and Clayton campuses was a graduate village, which was a place for students to visit, find out more about MGA, relax, meet other graduates and play games. The staff used this opportunity to push subscription to the MGA newsletter.

There was a welcome party on Caulfield campus which was very quiet with attendance numbers around 60, and a welcome party on Clayton with numbers around 180. Overall orientation went well considering the restrictions on events as a result of covid compliance. A lot of faculties delivered their orientation online, which meant that many of those students didn't come to campus at all. It was agreed that were faculties to require oncampus attendance for their own orientation processes, student numbers at MGA events would increase.

The MGA worked with MONSU Peninsula to deliver orientation on Pen insula campus and ran a welcome event a week later, with very small numbers in attendance.

The MGA newsletter received approximately 300 new sign-ups, down by 50% from new subscriptions collected in semester one, 2019. The staff delivered 6 talks to GPG students, and 3 talks to HDR students as a part of the school inductions. Once again numbers were down because schools were running inductions online, and many wanted to keep online sessions short, so cut out most support services talks.

The MGA gave a presentation to 600 graduate students enrolled through Monash College. Of those students, 95% were located overseas. Janice noted that it would be

challenging for the MGA to deliver events in 2021. Caitlyn thanked Janice and her team for their hard work and dedication under difficult circumstances.

Caitlyn was following up with senior management to clarify what the university's plan was to support the return of international students to Australia. The MGA had been assured that there was a plan in place, but had not been provided with any details of the plan. Caitlyn commented that it was going to be a challenge to keep students engaged this year.

4.1.2 Strategy for MET concession campaign

A working group had been developed to determine the strategy for protesting the lack of a MET concession for Victorian graduate students. It was agreed to wait for a response from the relevant ministers before taking the campaign to the graduate student community.

4.1.3 Submission of e-exam concerns

The MGA submission summarising the main concerns of graduate students relating to e-exams was noted.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 LGBTIQA+ training

Roby encouraged committee members to undertake the LGBTIQA+ training offered by the university. He also noted that Monash was now in a position to offer training and certification internally rather than through an external provider. The training involved a lecture followed by an interactive session, where participants would be taught about how to intervene in and resolve explosive situations.

Roby offered to collect expressions of interest and organise a session for MGAEC members, most likely a hybrid delivery both in person and by zoom.

4.2.2 Response to University's strategic plan

The Vice-Chancellor had requested to meet with student presidents to receive feedback on the university's strategic plan. Caitlyn was unable to participate in the student presidents' group meeting so was scheduled to meet with Emily Spencer, the VC's Chief of Staff, on Friday 12 March. The VC had expressed particular interest in the HDR perspective on the strategic plan. As Caitlyn was a coursework student she had proposed to bring MGA Research Education Officer Emily Pryor to the meeting with her, but the VC's Chief of Staff would not permit this. The committee expressed disappointment with the lack of opportunities for genuine consultation between the MGA and senior management. Caitlyn subsequently contacted relevant stakeholders from the current and past MGAEC committees for feedback.

The committee held a general discussion about the strategic plan, noting the following points:

- attracting and maintaining high quality candidates means ensuring a competitive stipend rate, and ensures students don't have to work as much and can concentrate on producing quality research
- many HDRs were concerned about employment prospects, and wanted opportunities to lecture and teach, which would improve employment prospects

- the university need to improve collaboration between different departments – there was definitely a lot of double up with ideas and equipment between lab groups, and it was challenging to motivate different lab groups to work collaboratively together
- need to not just talk about diversity but demonstrate it through university's actions
- there was a need to drive education about Indigenous issues through the university
- the university needed to be more ambitious about attitude towards diversity and inclusion
- very little mention of graduate coursework students in strategic plan
- no mention of women's rights as a key point in the strategic plan, which was an oversight given the size of the problem within Australia and globally
- important to ensure university is 100% divested from fossil fuels industry

Caitlyn invited members to provide additional points to her prior to the meeting.

4.2.3 Elections

Caitlyn reminded members that should they want to remain on the committee past June 2021 they would need to run for a position on the incoming committee. The nomination period would open late March and be advertised to all graduate students via a bulk email from the university.

4.2.4 MGAEC social event

Stacey suggested that the committee meet for a Saturday brunch, and offered to develop a spreadsheet to determine the day and location.

The committee agreed that they were happy to continue meeting by zoom on the set dates, provided they also held regular opportunities for social interaction, as this was recognised to be an important part of helping members to work well with each other.

5. Membership

No business.

6. **Next meeting** – It was agreed that the next meeting would be held by zoom on Thursday 8 April, from 4pm – 5.30pm. The April meeting would be combined with the MGA Council meeting, where graduate representatives on university committees would be invited to join MGAEC members.

The meeting closed at 5.20pm.