

Meeting 10/2022

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 11.00am – 1.00pm, Friday 28 October 2022, in-person in Room B01, 24 Sports Walk, Clayton campus and by zoom.

MINUTES

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: Radhik Rammohan (Chair), Saham Hettiarachchi, Lily Wen, Anumanth Senthilkumar, Annie Roys, Maggie Gendy, Phil Kairns

Apologies: Sonia Daga, Michael Lin, Sarah May, Rose Huang, Ken Chiu, Maria Lammerding, Serra D'mello

In attendance: Jenny Reeder, Jessica Fimmel, Janice Boey

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

There were no items added to the agenda.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes of meetings 07/2022 for confirmation

Held over.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

Noted.

3.2 Members' reports

Radhik thanked all the members who had been involved in running and supporting events over the past year.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 September 2022 profit and loss report

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

3.6 Sustainability report

MGA now Climate Active certified

It was announced that the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) was the first and only student association in Australia to be certified carbon neutral by Climate Active.

Earlier this year, the MGA had undertaken an audit to examine the carbon emissions of the MGA operations. Emissions were mitigated by purchasing carbon offsets associated with the Australian Yarra Yarra Biodiversity Corridor project; a project that employed and supported the local Indigenous community. To ensure transparency of MGA's commitment to sustainability and determination to reduce emissions year-on-year while maintaining carbon neutrality, recognition was applied for from Climate Active, a government initiative that provides certification to businesses and organisations. The committee noted that this was an important achievement for the MGA and aligned the organisation with both the current values of the graduate students MGA represents, and the sustainability commitments of the University.

Be the Change Week

The *Be the Change* sustainability week was a great showcase of how students could make easy, small changes to their lives to live more sustainably. The event took place across three days in week 10 and included a broad range of activities including guest speakers, movie screenings and recycling initiatives, and culminated in a large festival on the final day. Each event was linked to the UN SDGs in alignment with the MGA's sustainability focus and to highlight how it contributed towards a sustainable future. The Festival included: sustainable catering (vegan BBQ and disposable cup-free coffee cart), sustainable transport advocacy (PTV concession campaign stand), sustainable period information stall, waste sorting game, native plant potting activity, unwanted supermarket produce giveaway, and a range of sustainable products and reusable merchandise for students to take-home. A number of external parties participated in the event including: Sustainable Solutions Monash student group, Monash Sustainability team from BPD, Precious Plastics Monash student group, Sustainability at Monash student group and Jobs Victoria. The event had hundreds of students and staff attend and received a lot of positive feedback, as well as requests for future collaborations.

Green Impact

This year the MGA had two staff teams participate in the University's Green Impact competition, a Clayton office team and a Caulfield office team. The competition ended with both MGA teams well-placed to receive Platinum accreditation for their actions undertaken and likely to be in the top five at Monash University, from a pool of over 100 teams. The competition has seen the staff incorporate sustainable actions across a range of workplace practices as well as activities that the MGA holds for students.

The committee thanked staff member Jessica Fimmel for her work in leading the MGA's sustainability efforts, and along with the MGA staff, achieving so many important outcomes on behalf of the MGA.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 Education Committee TOR

It was explained that there had been no response from DVC (Education) Sharon Pickering in relation to the MGA's complaint that the Education Committee's new terms of reference placed unreasonable restrictions on the MGA's capacity to nominate a graduate student representative to the Education Committee.

Ken noted that he had provided members with a copy of the report he had submitted to the last Education Committee.

There was some discussion about the fact that with only one student representative position on University Council, the graduate student community was at a disadvantage in elections compared to the undergraduates, because undergraduate students outnumbered graduate students two to one, and any election process would therefore always be weighted favourably towards the undergraduate candidates. However, a graduate candidate was the only student who could reliably represent both undergraduates and graduates, having experienced both roles. It was agreed that the MGA should write to the Chancellor to encourage the establishment of a graduate student position on Council.

4.1.2 PTV concession campaign update

The committee received a report on the progress of the PTV campaign including:

- *Be the Change* week had been a great vehicle for PTV campaigning and to raise awareness of the lack of concession for graduate students
- The Victorian Liberal Party had pledged to introduce \$2 capped fares and \$1 concession fares for all Victorians if successful at the state election
- The Victorian Liberals had been contacted to acknowledge that their capped fare policy would benefit the graduate cohort
- Daniel Andrews and Ben Carroll had been contacted highlighting the Liberal pledge
- Maria had produced a range of videos with student testimonials and an interview with Sam Hibbins, Green Member for Prahran. These would be on the MGA website shortly as well as MGA socials
- The "Find the Giant Myki" comp was running on Clayton Campus until Oct 31st with 2x \$100 Mykis to be won.
- The PTV petition was currently sitting at just over 1100 signatures
- MP Rod Barton (Founder of the Transport Matters Party) had been invited to visit Clayton to discuss concession fares with graduate students

4.1.3 HDR stipend campaign update

The committee received a report on the progress of the HDR stipend campaign including:

- The "Raise the stipend" campaign was ongoing with a peaceful "sit-in" and lunch planned for Friday 28 October at 1pm, outside The Chancellery
- Letters to all faculty deans were sent out but only generic responses had been received, with all responses indicating that the matter was already being discussed at higher levels
- A banner painting workshop had been organised for Monday 24 October at the MGA office Clayton to prepare signage for the sit-in
- Invitations for the sit would be issued to networks over social media and mailing lists. Members were encouraged to attend and to encourage friends and colleagues to attend.
- A press release about the campaign and sit-in had been sent out to media organisations.

- Unless the university came back with a reasonable offer in the interim, the sit-in would go ahead
- The current request was that the stipend be raised in line with minimum wage (after tax) which would lift it from \$30,000 to \$37,000. Melbourne University's stipend had been raised to \$34,400 for 2023.
- Stipend petition signatures were almost at 2000

Radhik thanked Saham and Emily Pryor (GRC representative) for their work on this campaign.

4.1.4 New OB positions

Lily expressed disappointment in the lack of interest from her course colleagues in sustainability issues and subsequently asked to withdraw her proposal to establish a Sustainability Officer position on the MGAEC, given that such good progress was being made by the MGA staff in this area. The committee argued strongly against this proposal, noting that it was very important to create an MGAEC Sustainability Officer position given the impact of climate change on the graduate community. It was noted that MGA research showed that over 62% of graduate students had said that it was important or very important for them that the MGA was a sustainable organisation. It was suggested that the lack of interest from some graduate students may be because many international students didn't know what sustainability was, and that this position was needed to help educate that cohort.

Lily explained that her ideas for the tasks that could be carried out by a Sustainability Officer were: prepare a booklet on sustainability; set out how to live in a sustainable way; encourage the university to create a central staff committee to oversee sustainability; and generally educate graduate students on how to be sustainable.

It was agreed that the MGA staff would help to finalise the position description for the Sustainability Officer position. The discussion about the Carer position was held over due to Rose's absence.

4.1.5 MGAEC office space

Anumanth reported that a trial of running an MGAEC office space had been carried out in a meeting room in the MGA Clayton Campus graduate lounge. Between 5 and 15 students had attended each session and the issues raised included: assignment help; health issues; incorrect subtitles for online classes; internships; loneliness; religious discrimination; and two students who were directed to the MGA advocacy service.

There was some discussion about whether or not staffing an MGAEC office-bearer space was worthwhile. Some members supported the idea, noting that they had received complaints about the lack of direct access to MGA representatives. Some members argued that many graduate students didn't have the time to sit in an office, but once approached could arrange to meet at an appointed time and place. It was agreed that the MGA had grown substantially over the years and it was a concern that the MGA currently did not have enough space to accommodate all their staff, in addition to having no space for their committee members.

The committee determined to submit a formal request to BPD asking for more space.

4.1.6 Health grant

The committee noted that the new category of “Health grant” had been added to the range of welfare grants available from the MGA. Students who were in financial distress and required assistance for emergency medical and/or dental procedures could apply for the grant via the advocacy service. Radhik thanked Maria and the MGA Senior Advocate for their work in establishing this grant.

4.1.7 Formal statement on Iranian issue

Further to the discussion in the September meeting about the death of a 22 year old Iranian woman while in police custody in Iran, the MGA had provided assistance and support to a group of Iranian graduate students, who had subsequently asked Maggie to pass on their appreciation to the committee. The following statement had been produced as the MGA official position on the matter:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1948, with Australia voting in favour. The Declaration remains the cornerstone of the endorsement and affirmation of human rights and in particular article 3 which states that everyone has a right to life.

The Monash Graduate Association (MGA) offers its support to all graduate students affected by the recent passing of Mahsa Amini in Iran. We acknowledge and share in the fears and concerns of graduate students from all regions and all people impacted, and those with connected family and friends.

The MGA stands in solidarity with those affected by the passing of Ms Amini. We understand that the graduate community may be distressed by the events. We urge those in need to contact the free University counselling service. For those students worried about their academic progress please contact Monash Graduate Association - Advocacy <mga-advocacy@monash.edu>

The committee discussed the complexities involved in the MGA as an organisation making public statements on various world events. It was agreed that this area required further in-depth discussion and a subcommittee was established to report back to the MGAEC with a recommended framework for future responses.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 University representative positions

The committee noted the appointment process of graduate students to University Committees, as set out in Section 10 of the General Regulations.

4.2.2 Food relief grant

Members were advised that the MGA and MSA staff had submitted a joint application for a Victorian government grant to fund a series of pop-up food relief markets for all students, based on the MGA’s current pop-up grocer model.

The application for \$25,000 was successful so MGA would now work with MSA to coordinate the best way to roll out the program within the allotted time frame. Four markets would be rolled out in Semester 1, 2023.

4.2.3 Better Together conference

It was agreed that in his capacity as Queer Officer Phil would attend the 2023 annual Better Together conference on behalf of the MGA.

4.2.4 CAPA payment

It was explained to members that the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) was the national body for all Australian graduate associations, and the MGA was a constituent member of CAPA. Usually CAPA was quite active in lobbying politicians on issues of national importance to graduate students, but the 2022 CAPA committee had not been in contact with their constituents, nor had they complied with their financial reporting obligations under their own constitution. There were concerns raised by the MGA, GSA and other constituent members in February 2022 about the legitimacy of the 2022 CAPA elections, which had not been satisfactorily addressed or resolved. As far as could be ascertained, the 2022 CAPA committee had not been active or compliant with their obligations. It was agreed that the MGA should not pay the annual fee to CAPA for 2022, as it was not considered to be an appropriate use of graduate student SSAF. A motion to that effect would be considered at the next meeting.

4.2.5 MGAEC awards

There was a proposal put forward to create awards for MGAEC committee members. It was explained that the MGA currently ran awards for graduate student volunteers. There was some discussion about what an MGAEC award might look like given unlike volunteers, elected members had an obligation to perform in their positions. It was agreed to form a subcommittee to discuss the matter further.

5. Membership matters

No business.

6. Next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in November on Caulfield campus at a date and time tbc by committee members.

The meeting closed at 12.40pm.