

Meeting 10/2024

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 3:00 pm – 5:40pm, Thursday, 21 Nov 2024, in the MGA Meeting Room, Caulfield Campus and by Zoom

MINUTES

The meeting commenced at 3:00pm.

1. Formal matters

1.1 Acknowledgement of country

The MGAEC President 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 & Apologies

Present: Jonathan Robberts (Chair), Saham Hettiarachchi, Troy Lau (left at 3:52), Neharika Shah (arrived at 3:25, left 4:20?), Jacob (Jaime) Heal, Vu Hiep Dang (Oliver) (left at 5:010), Mohammed Salehan (Zeehan), Calvin Chow, Dhanya Menoth Mohan (left 5:33), Ummatul Siddique, Aakash Saraf, Beauty Nalwendo, Kritika Arora (arrived 3:38, left 5:33).

Apologies: Mahima Choudhary

In attendance: Janice Boey, Executive Officer
Charlie Li, HR & Finance Manager
Ying Xu, Advocacy Manager
Shinyi Chin, Marketing & Communications Manager (left 5:00)
Leilani Hatfield, Events Manager
Ryan Edwards, Research Manager (left 5:00)
Jesse Gardner-Russell, CAPA Board Chair
Hana Smajic, Co-optee
Yiwen Yuan, Co-optee
Ruisi Xu (Rose), Co-optee (left 4:55)
Janani Arunthavaratnam, Co-optee
Cecep Hasanuddin, Observer
Praditha Narayan, Co-optee
Yidi Luan, Co-optee
Supritha Ramakrishna Maiya, Co-optee

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes of meeting 9/2024 October for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting October 09/2024 be confirmed.

Moved: Saham Hettiarachchi
Seconded: Jacob (Jaime) Heal

Carried with no objections.

2.2 Action sheet

The action sheet was noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's report was noted. Jonathan spoke of his attendance at the TEQSA conference, which included a conversation with the Minister of Education Jason Clare on the matter of international student caps, as well as the need to improve HDR stipend rates, which received general support from the Minister. Resources on lobbying are also being developed and will be made available to the MGAEC in 2025 to support representation efforts. Further, the upcoming GRC will see an MGA submission to improve stipends in alignment with the University's obligations on students' academic wellbeing.

3.2 Members' reports

Members' reports were noted.

Saham noted that graduate student lounges on smaller campuses may be receiving an upgrade. In particular, the Parkville lounge may be expanded, and MMC may receive a new student lounge. Travel grants - VC recognises increasing in facilitation of PD of HDR students. Hesitant to agree to 2026 increase.

3.3 Staff report

The staff report was noted.

3.4 October profit and loss report

The October P&L was noted.

3.5 October MGA Newsletters & Social Media Report

The Newsletters and Social Media Report was noted.

3.6 October Advocacy Report

The October Advocacy Report was noted. Ying noted an offer has been made for the role of Migration Agent following the conclusion of the interviewing process. Service delivery is expected to commence in February 2025 in time for Semester 1 2025.

3.7 MGAEC meeting attendance records

The MGAEC meeting attendance records were noted as true and accurate.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 Changes to Election Regulation

Jonathan spoke to the background of the recommendations received by the MGA and the MGAEC regarding the amendment of the Constitution in relation to how elections are conducted. The MGA has consulted external Returning Officers who have provided background on current practice at other student associations. These recommendations proposed an introduction of a ‘meet the candidates’ forum as an appropriate middle ground in light of the concerns voiced by MGAEC members in previous discussions.

It is moved:

That the recommendation to request the Returning Officer to facilitate a virtual “meet the candidates” session for the nominees be accepted.

Moved: Jacob (Jaime) Heal

Seconded: Vu Hiep Dang (Oliver)

Carried with no objections.

Jonathan spoke to the gender quota and the risk of breach of privacy if the MGA publicly discloses vote numbers. Considering this, it would be important to seek legal advice on what this change might mean and how it may interfere with our privacy obligations. The MGAEC discussed the risks associated with disclosure and considerations of consent., and the possible harm that could arise.

It is moved:

That the recommendation to seek legal/professional advice prior to proceeding with any changes to the election regulations regarding releasing election results to the public at the conclusion of the election process be accepted.

Moved: Calvin Chow

Seconded: Jacob (Jaime) Heal

Carried with no objections.

4.1.2 Reaffiliation with CAPA

Jonathan spoke to the background of MGA’s previous decision to stop its affiliation with CAPA, and highlighted a current lack of clarity as to the MGA’s funding going into 2025.

Jesse Gardner-Russell, the CAPA Board Chair, was invited to speak to the MGAEC on the issue of MGA funding and to answer questions from the Committee.

Jesse discussed the significance of CAPA as a national level representative body for graduate students and its capacity to bring together graduate associations and combine knowledge and expertise. Jaime highlighted that missing support and resources from Go8 Universities impacts CAPA’s effectiveness and network.

Saham noted that the amount asked for by CAPA is significant at approximately \$45,000, and expressed concern regarding CAPA's ability to deliver value. Saham gave an example regarding a lack of action by CAPA on the issue of government changes to the 485 visa, and explained that the MGA may find it hard to justify such an expense. Saham asked whether the contribution amount could be reduced.

Jesse responded that coming from previous governance concerns, the current board has made governance a priority, which has meant some other key issues did not receive as much focus. Jesse explained that other members have requested discounts and were granted. However, the proposed budget is designed to balance sustainability and transparency, with the hope of including a staff member and Executive Officer as a part of the organisation.

Uma asked as to what are the two important steps CAPA would be taking on in their agenda.

Jesse highlighted that serious poor practices by the previous board have been addressed and put to bed, and new policies developed. Professional bookkeepers have been engaged, tasks have been spread out and delegated across a team, and transparency has been generally improved.

Saham asked what the expected FTE and income of the proposed staff member would be.

Jesse explained that the staff member would be expected to work 2 days a week, and highlighted that CAPA is in the process of cancelling its Enterprise Agreement from 2001 which has severely outdated clauses that could no longer be supported, and that CAPA would move to the tertiary education Award rate.

Saham asked what the CAPA reserve is at the moment.

Jesse answered that this is \$230,000, but noted that the Committee is reluctant to further drain the critical reserve that was impacted by a lack of income for two years.

The MGAEC had no more questions. Jonathan thanked Jesse for his time. Jesse departed the meeting, and the MGAEC moved into discussions.

The Committee discussed whether the MGA should pay the full amount proposed by CAPA. Committee members expressed general concerns regarding CAPA's high stipend rates for office bearers, which is budgeted to increase in future years. Jan noted that affiliation with CAPA is not accounted for in the current proposed budget.

It is moved:

The MGA will reaffiliate with CAPA at a reduced cost of \$10,000 for the year 2025, to be confirmed.

Moved: Aakash Saraf

Seconded: Calvin Chow

Carried

4.1.3 2024 Off-campus events

This item was held over to the December meeting.

4.1.4 2025 SSAF 20% Projects submitted

This item was held over to the December meeting.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 MGA Budget for 2025

As the MGA budget discussions are confidential, the co-optees present were moved to a breakout room virtually or asked to leave the physical meeting room.

The Committee discussed the proposed budget and the need to build a financial reserve to facilitate future MGA operations.

Aakash proposed the funding saved from the returning officer choice could form part of any MGA contributions to CAPA.

As per the prior motion regarding CAPA, an additional expense for CAPA is budgeted at \$10,000 for 2025.

Umma requested clarification regarding Parkville line items, and Jan explained that the small Parkville allocation is for MGA delivery while there is a separate line to capture the payment to PPA.

Umma requested an increase to the budget for Peninsula to facilitate more frequent events. Jan highlighted that while budget is important, there is also a question of staff resources and whether there is enough capacity to deliver the events. The events officer role for Parkville and Peninsula is being readvertised at the moment, but the staff member is not solely dedicated to the Peninsula campus. The incumbent would also be responsible for looking after events at Parkville and smaller off-campus sites. Umma highlighted the importance of having a more significant presence by MGA staff at Peninsula. Uma requested that the Peninsula events budget be increased to \$25,000.

Jonathan asked to increase the PPA budget by \$3,000, in acknowledgement that Parkville has seen growth in student numbers.

It is moved:

That the MGA budget for 2025 be accepted pending the agreed changes.

Moved: Calvin Chow

Seconded: Ummatul Siddique

Carried with no objections.

4.2.2 Sem 1 2025 Orientation Plan

This item was held over to the December meeting.

4.2.3 Speakers for faculty orientation needed

Leilani to email the EOI to MGAEC members.

4.2.4 Appointment of Returning Officer

Jonathan spoke to the requirement to appoint an external returning officer in coming years following an agreement reached with Monash University in early 2024. The MGA has received two quotes and the MGAEC is to decide on which to proceed with. Jonathan noted that the cheaper quote received does not facilitate a tribunal for dispute resolutions, but does include the facilitation of the 'meet the candidates' town hall meeting. Jan noted that she is making queries if Monash can facilitate a tribunal process.

Jonathan also noted that all other Monash Student Organisations currently engage external Returning Officers, and in the interest of good governance, the MGA is expected to continue engaging external returning officers.

The MGAEC discussed the quotes received and noted the significant difference between the amounts quoted.

It is moved:

That the MGA will accept the quote received from AQE.

Moved: Saham Hettiarachchi

Seconded: Ummatul Siddique

Carried with no objections.

4.2.5 MGAEC end of year event

Jonathan to follow up with the MGAEC members directly to organise this event..

4.2.6 MGAEC Honoraria Q2

Calvin to follow up with the MGAEC members directly regarding the Q2 Honoraria.

5. Membership matters

5.1 Co-option

Jan explained that there were ten eligible applicants for co-option following the advertisement of the opportunity. The applications for consideration were:

- a. Rochelle George, Master of Public Health
- b. Hana Smajic, Graduate Certificate of Business (marketing)
- c. Devashree Yogesh Kulkarni, Masters of Banking and Finance
- d. Yiwen Yuan, PhD, Faculty of Education
- e. Veda Kokate, Master of Business
- f. Yidi Luan, Master of Global Business and Advanced Finance
- g. Janani Arunthavaratnam, Master of Pharmaceutical Science
- h. Supritha Ramakrishna Maiya, Master of Business
- i. Praditha Narayan, Master of Business
- j. Ruisi Xu, Master of Professional Accounting

Rochelle George, Veda Kokate, and Devashree Yogesh Kulkarni failed to appear at the MGAEC meeting, and thus were no longer eligible for the position and would not be considered.

Each candidate present at the meeting was given two minutes to speak to the committee and answer questions.

An election was conducted and the committee undertook a vote. Yiwen Yuan was declared elected to the MGAEC as the Women's Officer. She was congratulated by the Committee.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held in December 2024 at a time and place to be confirmed by members' availability.

The meeting closed at 5:40 pm.