

Meeting 07/2024

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 1:00pm – 2:26pm, Friday, 30 August 2024, in the MGA Meeting Room, Clayton Campus and by Zoom

MINUTES

The meeting commenced at 1:00pm.

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, Calvin Chow, Dhanya Menoth Mohan, Troy Lau, Vu Hiep Dang (Oliver), Jacob (Jaime) Heal, Kritika Arora, Isabel Kiryu (arrived at 2:06pm), Ummatul Siddique (left at 1:53pm, Mahima Choudhary (left at 1:54pm) and Beauty Nalwendo (2:15pm)

Apologies: Neharika Shah, Aakash Saraf and Mohammed Salehan (Zeehan).

In attendance: Janice Boey, Executive Officer
Charlie Li, HR & Finance Manager
Ying Xu, Advocacy Manager
Shinyi Chin, Marketing & Communications Manager
Leilani Hatfield, Student Engagement Officer
Ryan Edwards, Research Manager

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes of meeting 6/2024 July for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting July 06/2024 be confirmed.

Moved: Saham Hettiarachchi
Seconded: Ummatul Siddique
Carried with no objections.

2.2 Action sheet

The action sheet was noted with no comments.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's report was noted. Jonathan spoke to:

- The VC-SPAF event which took place on 27 August. Topics raised at the event included student association communications of global events, in particular a need for clear processes and clarifications on student association responses to events.
- The draft funding agreement between Monash University and the MGA has not yet been provided by the University, but the negotiation process is expected to commence soon.
- In the recent GRC meeting on 28 August, support was received for the suggested amendments to the PhD professional development credit requirements.
- The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) is expected to organise two upcoming focus groups to gauge the HDR student perspective on proposed changes to the doctoral program in September. The MGA will also have the opportunity to provide feedback across two 1.5 hour sessions.

Saham inquired regarding the CAPA meeting attended by Jonathan. Jonathan described that he is confident that the CAPA governance issues are now resolved, and reported that historical issues have been referred to the police, who are investigating the relevant former members of CAPA for their actions. CAPA has committed to release relevant information by the end of the year for transparency. Jonathan also confirmed that the MGA is now a non-paying voting constituent member, so long as the CAPA executive committee can demonstrate its commitment. No financial amounts will be contributed to CAPA until the MGAEC are satisfied of this.

3.2 Members' reports

Members' reports were noted.

3.3 Staff report

The staff report was noted.

Saham inquired about the orientation debrief and the issues experienced around the international student orientation events. Jan explained that feedback was provided by several stakeholders regarding the Monday delivery of Semester 2 Orientation, in particular issues of disorganisation and a lack of information and direction by the organisers. The University did not object to any of the feedback.

3.4 July 2024 profit and loss reports

The July P&L was noted.

3.5 July MGA Newsletters & Social Media Report

The Newsletters and Social Media Report was noted.

Shinyi highlighted that the MGA Sports post was the most popular on MGA social media channels, and received significant attention from the student cohort.

3.6 August Advocacy Report

The August Advocacy Report was noted.

Ying briefly summarised the report, outlining advocacy case numbers, advocacy support of graduate students at academic progress hearings, and welfare program outcomes.

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 MGA Orientation Report Sem 2, 2024

The orientation report was noted.

Jan noted that the newsletter conversion has been very successful, with the MGA seeing almost 40% of new enrolments signing in to the MGA Website.

4.1.2 MGA Retreat outcomes and Action Planning

Jonathan spoke to the action groups that arose from the MGA retreat, spanning the topics of diverse identities, engaging satellite campuses, funding allocation and transparency, future workforce, physical wellbeing and sport, and travel concessions.

Jonathan shared resources to direct and support the action groups, and encouraged MGAEC members to take on roles within each action group. Jonathan highlighted strategies outlined in the resources, including the implementation of a weekly action group meeting. Jonathan encouraged MGAEC members to make use of the available resources to help with their planning and duties within each action group.

4.1.3 Academic Board Vacancy

Jonathan spoke to the departure of the HDR student representative Jenn Wilson from the University Academic Board and the arising vacancy. Jonathan explained the functions and purpose of the Board and the frequency of meetings, with two meetings remaining in the year of 2024. The role is expected to be open for election in the following year. The MGA is in a position to nominate a student to sit in the position either for the remainder of the year. It is also possible that the appointment will be for the full term until the end of 2025, but this is pending confirmation from the University.

Ryan confirmed that the last meetings for 2024 are expected to occur on 1 October and 12 November 2024.

Uma asked for clarification on the expected responsibilities of the role. Jonathan explained that responsibilities would include reading the agenda, and attending each meeting which spans 2-3 hours. There are also matters unresolved at a committee level such as the GRC that would be discussed and resolved. The role would also involve engaging with agenda items and answering any questions that may be posed by other committee members.

Saham Hettiarachchi nominated himself for the Academic Board position.

No other nominations were put forward. The nomination of Saham was unanimously agreed upon with no objections.

4.1.4 Budget amendments

Jan spoke to the budget amendments, explaining the normal procedure of adjusting budget forecasts mid-year in response to real income.

In terms of the budget adjustments, Charlie noted extra \$10,000 in funding received from David Copolov and the cancellation of the MGA rewards program for 2024. Salary costs have also increased due to redundancy payment payouts in July, alongside the added role of a part-time migration agent, a new casual position for Law Chambers, and adjustments for recruitment costs following recent staff departures. Redundancy payments were paid out through cash reserves and not through the operating budget. However, the amount was not originally accounted for in the budget which necessitated the proposed amendments. There were no other major changes to budget line items.

Charlie also noted that the current month's P&L still reflects the previously approved budget. Additionally, Charlie explained that from August, the accounting system of MGA had been updated to one which better aligns with the MGA's purpose.

Uma asked for clarification regarding the \$2,800 income noted under PPA. Jan explained this is due to PPA charging for events which are directed to MGA accounts.

Jan further clarified the difference between redundancy payments being paid through the cash reserve, and salary budget coming from the operating budget. Both are separate funding pools, and the cash redundancy amounts which are required by law were set aside for the specific purpose of paying out redundancies. But we are still required to account for it going out through the P&L. Jan confirmed that staff salary is still at approximately 70% of the MGA budget.

It was moved:

That the proposed budget adjustments are approved.

Moved: Mahima Choudhary

Seconded: Jacob (Jaime) Heal

Carried with no objections.

4.1.5 Welfare Regulations amendments

Ying outlined the major changes to the welfare regulations, specifically to improve grant accessibility, improve clarity, remove duplication, repair formatting and referencing errors, updating wording to reflect the Advocacy Manager position, and adding a clear power for the implementation of grants with additional criteria.

Jonathan inquired regarding the reason the Monash Emergency Grant application requirement was removed. Ying highlighted that not all students who approach the MGA are in financial hardship face an immediate emergency. Students are still referred to the Monash Emergency Grant for support, however delays may arise in assessing and approving these applications, which will limit support being accessed by the students. The change is designed to improve accessibility to MGA Welfare Assistance.

It was moved:

That the proposed changes to the Welfare regulations be accepted.

Moved: Jonathan Robberts
Seconded: Mahima Choudhary
Carried with no objections.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Future Forte Conference

Jonathan discussed the upcoming conference and the opportunity for the MGAEC to support the attendance of MGAEC members at the conference on Friday 6 Sept.

It was moved:

That the MGA supports two MGAEC reps to attend the Future Forte Conference in Melbourne.

Moved: Saham Hettiarachchi
Seconded: Vu Hiep Dang (Oliver)
Carried with no objections.

Jonathan asked for expressions of interest to attend the conference, and explained that \$32.41 will be charged to the relevant office bearer budget line. Jan confirmed that an email will be sent out to the MGAEC to confirm interest.

4.2.2 SOTY & LOTY Review Panel

Jonathan discussed the purpose of the review panels and the impact of the awards, and encouraged MGAEC members to join the relevant panels. Panel members will be expected to commit 1-2 days of work in the three month period leading up to the award.

Uma, Saham, Calvin expressed interest for the SOTY Panel. MGAEC members who are interested are advised to email Leilani before the deadline.

4.2.3 Annual Information Statement Report for ACNC

The report was noted.

4.2.4 Climate Active Carbon Investment Report & Public Disclosure Statement

The report and statement was noted.

4.2.5 Global & domestic events impacting student welfare

Jonathan discussed the global and multicultural nature of the University and the challenges faced by these people are also concerns of Monash. Recently, two instances have come to MGAEC and staff attention, being incidents arising in Bangladesh and India. Students have requested MGA to appeal to relevant authorities in Australia and India. The MGA is also expected to make a statement on the

proposed international student caps which will impact both international and domestic students. The MGA has also received calls in the past for statements to be made on current issues.

Jonathan spoke of the need for a process to ensure the MGAEC's responsiveness to arising issues, as well as to identify the limits of what the MGA can do or state to support students.

Calvin asked for clarification on the request being made of the committee. Jonathan clarified that MGA should implement measures confirm the scope and nature of any actions it can take in response to current issues, for example, whether the MGA will write to foreign governments

Saham highlighted that this is something the MGA has faced in the past, and recommended the formation of a sub-committee on an as-needed or ad-hoc basis.

Calvin discussed the upcoming MSA student general meeting, and asked if the MGA should follow the lead of the MSA as best practice. Jonathan raised that it is best for the MGA to discuss and set its own processes instead of following MSA decisions. Jonathan supported the creation of a designated committee to establish procedures and time frames for responding to issues.

Saham recommended a temporary committee to draft a response document on current issues, instead of a standing committee.

Jonathan expressed interest in being part of the committee, and expressed it is worth considering the creation of an office bearer position that is outwardly focused on public affairs.

Calvin expressed that the creation of such a role may not best suit the MGA structure and purpose, and may duplicate existing positions such as the International Student Officer. Calvin emphasised that he believed that the MSA has set best practice and that the MGA can choose to follow the MSA's lead.

Saham asked Ryan and Jan regarding subgroups of constituents, and whether there was a way to distinguish the country of origin of the graduate student cohort. Ryan confirmed that this can be done, however the MGA only has access to 2022 data, and doesn't presently have access to current student data.

Jonathan expressed that as the MSA and the University have responded, the MGA will draft its own letter. Jonathan emphasised needing a process to ensure timely responses to international and domestic incidents which arise.

The committee agreed that a subcommittee may be established, and details of any MGA response and processes will be discussed at a subcommittee meeting.

It was moved:

The MGAEC will establish a subcommittee on international and domestic affairs.

Mover: Jonathan Robberts

Seconder: Saham Hettiarachchi

Members include Jonathan, Saham, Ryan, Jaime, and Calvin.

Jonathan discussed the proposed international student cap and its impact on Monash University and job positions. The legislation is expected to pass Parliament and will go to the Senate in the next few months, the cap is due to begin Jan 2025.

The MGAEC discussed the cap and agreed that the MGA will make a statement in support of Monash University.

4.2.6 MGA OH&S minutes 2024

The minutes were noted.

5. Other business

Jonathan noted the departure of Ash Finn from the MGA staff, and expressed thanks to Ash for his service and support of the committee during his time in the role of Graduate Policy and Liaison Officer.

Saham confirmed that a repeat of the ‘How to Lobby’ training session from the MGAEC Retreat will be provided as there was insufficient time on the day to cover all relevant content. Ryan is confirmed to assist with the delivery of the training..

6. Next meeting

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

The meeting closed at 02:26 pm.