

Meeting 06/2024

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 2:00pm – 4:10pm, Friday 26 July 2024, at the MGA Meeting Room, Caulfield campus and by zoom.

MINUTES

The meeting commenced at 2:00pm.

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: Saham Hettiarachchi, Jonathan Robberts, Ummatul Siddique, Aakash Saraf, Calvin Chow, Dhanya Menoth Mohan, Troy Lau, Neharika Shah, Beauty Nalwendo, Vu Hiep Dang (Oliver), Mohammed Zeehan Saleheen, Isabel Kiryu.

Apologies: Mahima Choudhary and Kritika Arora.

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

Observers: Laveenyah Preettha Yulvarajah, Co-option Candidate
Jacob (Jaime) Heal, Co-option Candidate

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes of meeting 5/2024 June for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting June 05/2024 be confirmed.

Moved: Calvin Chow

Seconded: Saham Hettiarachchi

Carried with no objections.

2.2 Action sheet

Jonathan explained that assignments will be made out to reaffirm mission and clarify organisation's values to ensure future decisions are equitable.

Jonathan acknowledged that MIISON TOR has been completed.

Aakash explained that he has met with Saham regarding the sponsorship proposal and further will be forthcoming.

All office bearer emails are confirmed as transferred.

Jonathan confirmed his upcoming attendance at VC-SPAF.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's report was noted.

3.2 Members' reports

Members' reports were noted.

3.3 Staff report

The staff report was noted. Jan confirmed that a full briefing on Semester 2 2024 orientation will be provided in the August MGAEC.

3.4 June 2024 profit and loss reports

The June P&L was noted. Charlie provided a high-level summary explaining to MGAEC members MGA's accounting processes, and how to interpret the MGA P&L report.

Saham inquired about MGA's current cash reserves and the MGA's ability to meet its financial obligations. Charlie explained that the MGA does have enough cash reserves to meet its legal requirements and cover amounts including redundancy payments incurred in the recent restructure.

Calvin asked to be updated on the remaining budget for office-bearers. Charlie explained that unspent office-bearer amounts in semester 1 of any year can carry over into semester 2, and that MGAEC members have access to the funds to perform their duties. Charlie will be sending out an email to MGAEC office bearers clarifying how much is left in each account for the year to allow for each office bearer to plan activities accordingly.

3.5 June MGA Newsletters & Social Media Report

The Newsletters and Social Media Report was noted.

Jonathan stated that a request will be made at VC-SPAF to have newsletters provided to the student in an opt-out system instead of the current process of requiring students to opt-in.

3.6 July Advocacy Report

The July Advocacy Report was noted. Ying noted that the welfare program has been reintroduced for Sem 2 and explained some changes to the welfare program. Specifically this included combining the accommodation grant with the emergency grant, the removal of the

graduation grant due to low student demand, and the removal of the visa extension grant with the plan to offer free visa advice once the migration service begins operation.

3.7 MGAEC meeting attendance records

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

The President thanked all the MGAEC members for completing their reports in a timely manner.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 MIISON TORs

Saham explained the current purpose and nature of MIISON as an advisory and non-representative body. The terms of reference sent out for consultation has received no objections and the amendments are now in effect. In particular, there is now separation of Monash ISE staff from their role in overseeing the student advisory body. Each student association will also provide some training and oversight to members of MIISON.

Ummatul asked whether student issues will go through MIISON to the student association, and if MIISON members will report to the associations. Saham explained that reports from MIISON will go to VC-SPAF, but student associations will have the opportunity to look at these reports before it is submitted.

4.1.2 Member accountability & Honoraria Regulations

Saham explained that the accountability and honoraria regulations are designed to update existing rules, and will clarify the obligations MGAEC members should meet to receive a full honoraria payment. The Regulations have been passed and now apply to the current and future committees.

Jonathan went over the MGAEC Member Engagement Checklist which outlines minimum expectations and commitment to the position.

Ummatul asked regarding the minimum engagement required of MGAEC members. Jonathan explained that members should aim to satisfy every requirement in the checklist. It was acknowledged that sometimes MGAEC members may not be able to make it to every meeting as ideal, but in those cases a report should be provided at a minimum.

4.1.3 MGA Retreat

The committee discussed the upcoming retreat. Ummatul encouraged personal introductions at the retreat by the MGAEC and the facilitation of connections among members. Jan discussed the informal networking opportunities available and agreed that an icebreaker activity will be included in the agenda. The agenda will be shared with the MGAEC early next week.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 MGA Debit card for Clayton Events Officer

The MGAEC considered the proposal to issue a debit card to the new Clayton Events Officer, Spencer Rey, to facilitate the performance of her job duties in organising and running student events.

It was moved:

That the MGAEC approve the issuing of a debit card to Clayton Events Officer, Spencer Rey.

Moved: Ummatul Siddique

Seconded: Calvin Chow

Carried with no objections.

4.2.2 Increasing PhD stipend petition (Federal)

The committee noted that the petition to improve Higher Degree by Research student conditions has concluded. The petition was open to domestic students and has received over 6000 signatures.

4.2.3 CAPA update

The committee discussed whether the MGA wishes to join or to financially reaffiliate with CAPA. CAPA has invited the MGA to sign delegate papers and to attend the CAPA special meeting on 27 July, and an opportunity has arisen to become a CAPA member again. CAPA fees are dependent on graduate student numbers in the relevant University, and to rejoin will result in an estimated cost of approx \$48,000 to MGA. Jonathan explained that the MGA had previously ceased its membership and contribution to CAPA due to CAPA's historical issues with financial management and governance. The MGA had historically requested an improved level of financial transparency and governance prior to affiliating to CAPA.

Calvin asked whether there are any penalty fees due to the missed years of membership. Jonathan explained that some past fees had been waived, and that as MGA was not affiliated and not members of CAPA, the MGA owed no money.

Ummatul asked about the benefits of being a CAPA associate, Jonathan explained that CAPA had historically been a very strong lobbyist and campaigner in Canberra. However, governance issues arose during the COVID pandemic which led to the withdrawal of the MGA from CAPA.

Aakash expressed concern over the amount required as a financial contribution to CAPA. The committee discussed that it is important for the MGA to assess whether there is sufficient benefit to Monash graduate students in contributing this amount to CAPA.

Saham suggested that the MGA can become a voting member but request for the membership fee to be waived until CAPA has demonstrated improvements in financial transparency and governance as requested.

The committee discussed that the MGA is willing to attend the meeting on 27 July, but will not become an affiliate member or pay any fees until there is evidence that governance has improved.

It was moved:

That the MGA will be affiliated with CAPA for the year 2024/25, however will not pay fees until improvements to the governance of CAPA have been demonstrated

Moved: Aakash Saraf

Seconded: Saham Hettiarachchi

Carried with a full majority.

4.2.4 Doctoral Handbook Review Submission

The committee noted the submission.

4.2.5 Monash Unit Credits for PhD Professional Development

The HDR academic board member has requested that the MGA support a proposal regarding changing Professional Development (PD) rules for PhD students. The argument behind the proposal is that the current program and rules around the 120 hour expectation is not fit for purpose and does not add value to PhD students. At present, only 20 hours can be substituted from other professional training a student undertakes. Student feedback has been that PhD students undertake significant amounts of external training more directly useful to their PhD compared to the limited Monash offerings. The MGA has been requested to lobby at the GRC for an increase in the number of hours that can be substituted with outside training. While the University has committed to changing the rules around PD for future programs, the request is that the rules should be changed now with immediate effect.

Ummatul also raised the adjacent issue that PhD students also have limited access to workshops and training opportunities in other faculties. Such opportunities are also often paid and not free for students. The committee discussed the importance of allowing PhD students to access workshops and activities from other faculties.

Saham asked about training equivalency and processes around the evidence of hours. The committee discussed existing processes.

The committee agreed to support and raise the issue at GRC.

4.2.6 MIISON VCSPAF Report

Saham spoke to the report, and stated that the report will be presented by the current president of MUISS under MSA.

The committee noted the MIISON VC-SPAF Report.

4.2.7 Student Volunteers Award Night

The committee considered whether funding from the office-bearer line should be used to purchase a table at the Monash Student Volunteers Award Night. Leilani explained that in the past the MGA had used budget from volunteering, mentoring, or the student representatives line to fund this charge. This year, more volunteering funding was allocated to volunteering events and training for the volunteering leadership

program, limiting funds available from the volunteer line. If a table is funded, MGAEC members are welcomed to attend to show appreciation for volunteers, and to engage with the student community.

It was moved:

That the MGAEC will fund a table at the Monash Student Volunteers Award Night from the office-bearer budget line.

Moved: Aakash Saraf.

Second: Mohammed Zeehan Saleheen

Carried with no objections.

4.2.8 Anti-Racism Committee

The current graduate representative on the University Anti-Racism has graduated and now left the Committee. This has opened up an opportunity for current MGAEC members to step into the position. Jonathan briefly introduced and explained the purpose of the Committee in making policy recommendations and facilitating change within the University..

Aakash inquired about expected time commitments of the Committee. Jonathan explained that meeting frequency will depend on the workload of the committee itself and if there are proposed changes or new policies requiring review. There are currently two more sessions remaining in 2024.

Aakash Saraf nominated himself as a representative for the Anti-Racism Committee.

Isabel Kiryu nominated herself as a representative for the Anti-Racism Committee.

The committee discussed that it is important that the potential student representative has the opportunity to look over the terms of reference and relevant information before committing to the opportunity.

Ash will send out the relevant information about the Anti Racism Committee to Isabel and Aakash. If either EC member is still interested to nominate themselves for the Anti-Racism Committee, they must respond to Jonathan by COB Monday 29 July 2024.

5. Membership matters

5.1 Co-option of additional member

Jan explained that there were five applicants for co-option following the advertisement of the opportunity. One of the applications was rejected as a result of applying for the role of international student officer, which is a position currently occupied by Saham. Two students were rejected due to considerations of the number of coursework and research students per faculty that should be in the MGAEC to allow fair and balanced representation, as required by section 9.4 of the MGA General Regulations, and the MGA Constitution.

The remaining two applications (Laveenyah Preettha Yulvarajah & Jacob (Jaime) Heal) were considered for the one vacant MGAEC position

Each candidate was given three minutes to speak to the committee and answer questions.

An election was conducted and the committee undertook a vote, and Jacob (Jaime) Heel was declared elected to the MGAEC as the Queer Officer. They were congratulated by the committee.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting would be held in August 2024 at a time and place to be confirmed by incoming member's availability.

The meeting closed at 4:10 pm.