

Meeting 09/2024

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 2:01 pm – 4:01pm, Monday, 21 Oct 2024, in the MGA Meeting Room, Clayton Campus and by Zoom

MINUTES

The meeting commenced at 2:01pm.

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, Neharika Shah, Jacob (Jaime) Heal, Vu Hiep Dang (Oliver), Mohammed Salehan (Zeehan), Calvin Chow (left at 3:33pm), Dhanya Menoth Mohan, Ummatul Siddique, Mahima Choudhary (left at 3.25pm), Aakash Saraf (joined at 2:18pm), Beauty Nalwendo (joined at 2.35pm).

Apologies: Kritika Arora.

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

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2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes of meeting 8/2024 August for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting September 08/2024 be confirmed.

Moved: Jacob (Jaime) Heal

Seconded: Vu Hiep Dang (Oliver)

Carried with no objections.

2.2 Minutes of the September special meeting 2024 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC September special meeting for 2024 be confirmed.

Moved: Calvin Chow
Seconded: Saham Hettiarachchi

Carried with no objections.

2.3 Action sheet

The action sheet was noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's report was noted.

3.2 Members' reports

Members' reports were noted. Jonathan recommended that member reports should include as much detail as possible, as it is for the broad student population.

3.3 Staff report

The staff report was noted. Jan noted that the MGA financial audit is soon expected to commence, and 2025 planning will start alongside staff performance reviews.

Charlie noted that the MGA has received initial contact from auditors and the process will continue through to April.

Saham inquired regarding the MGA laptop program and its popularity. Jan confirmed that the program continues to be popular and no laptops are currently available for students due to high demand.

Leilani also confirmed that the MGA has seen initial consultation regarding the refurbishment of the Clayton graduate lounge. MGA will push for refurbishment to take place during the December/January holiday where utilisation is lower. Requests were made for new furniture and expansion of the space to be more user friendly. The kitchen is also expected to be updated.

3.4 September 2024 profit and loss report

The September P&L was noted. Jonathan inquired regarding the staff salary variation. Charlie explained that the amount varied accounts for the whole year, and the associated figures will be closer aligned at the end of the year.

3.5 September MGA Newsletters & Social Media Report

The Newsletters and Social Media Report was noted. Shinyi noted that the MGA Zoo event was highly popular among students, and that students have also found advocacy and support type content to be helpful.

3.6 September Advocacy Report

The September Advocacy Report was noted. Ying noted that the dates were reflective of the previous month due to the cut off date for September being too early to allow reporting across two months.

Calvin noted that students have accessed the Domestic Violence Grant under the MGA Welfare Assistance Program, and inquired as to what follow up actions the advocacy team conducts in these situations. Ying explained that the MGA advocacy team primarily advises students regarding University processes, and are not trained to provide follow up and case management for domestic violence matters. In these cases, advocates will provide referrals to more appropriate support bodies where needed.

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 HSW Policy and Objectives

The committee had no questions or comments for the proposed HSW Policy and Objectives.

It is moved:

That the updated MGA HSW Policy and Objective be accepted.

Mover: Calvin Chow

Seconder: Mohammed Salehan (Zeehan)

Carried with no objections.

4.1.2 2024 Election Report

Jonathan opened discussions for MGAEC members to provide input on their opinions regarding the recommendations in the report..

In discussion, MGAEC Members raised several points and concerns:

1. Recommendation 1:

- Many candidates are not familiar or experienced with self-advertising, and that such a change may disadvantage these students.
- Disallowing excess advertising creates a level playing field for personal engagement, it is important to focus on the needs of students over campaign banners and slogans.
- Allowing students to campaign and self-advertise could be received poorly by students who feel harassed or annoyed by these efforts. The MGA should be conscious of the risk of subjecting students to spam or unwelcome content.
- Some form of promotion could be allowed as the current system is very restrictive. Alternative options such as briefing sessions, question and answers, or 'meet your candidate' forum events organised by the MGA may be able to achieve similar results.
- Candidates could be given the option of whether they would like their names or faces to be shown or to have a public or an anonymous candidate profile

- More general promotion by the MGA of the election and candidates may be a more appropriate alternative than allowing candidates to campaign for themselves.
2. Recommendation 2:
- Releasing specific voter numbers creates a risk of elections becoming a ‘popularity contest’, taking away from focus on student issues.
 - Misunderstandings may arise if numbers are released which affect the outcome of office-bearer elections, where members feel they should elect the person with the most student votes as President of the MGAEC.
 - It is more effective to release rankings over total counts, as to ensure that candidates are not discouraged if they receive a low number of votes.
 - If results are published, there may be negative effects on candidates’ mental health.
 - Candidates who were not elected already have a chance to view the results and can query the Returning Officer.
 - Release of results may lead to breach of student privacy around sensitive characteristics such as gender and identity.
 - Candidates could be given a choice to decide whether they want to see their numbers or rankings.
 - Candidates may opt-in and provide consent as to whether they are happy for results to be publicly released.

Due to differing opinions and perspectives on the returning officer's recommendations, the chair of the meeting proposed that the committee hold a vote on whether to consider the changes to the regulations.

Vote 1 - The MGAEC consider amending the election regulation permitting candidates to campaign and distribute election material (authorised by the Returning Officer) to the broader student body.

For: 7
Against: 5
Abstain: 0

Vote 2 - The MGAEC consider amending its election regulation so that the full notice of results may be accessed publicly upon the conclusion of the election process.

For: 8
Against: 4
Abstain: 0

4.1.3 CAPA Update

Jonathan spoke to a recent request by CAPA for the MGA to become affiliated with the organisation. Of note is a membership fee of \$45,030.15, or \$1.65 per graduate student enrolled at Monash, requested to be paid by the end of the financial year. Jonathan noted that this is a significant sum and that the MGAEC may require more

time to review documents provided by CAPA to determine whether the MGA is willing to re-affiliate.

The MGAEC discussed the factors that led to the MGA withdrawing their CAPA support, and the changes that have taken place since the original decision. The Committee acknowledged that CAPA is the main recognised representative body for Australian graduate students, and is consulted by the Federal Government regarding changes likely to impact Australian graduate students.

Saham inquired as to whether there is a possibility to negotiate the amount to a lower figure. Jonathan clarified that it would be possible to request an extension on the payment but CAPA would want the payment of the fees by June 2025.

Saham emphasised that the MGAEC must be able to justify to the constituents the value of CAPA if the MGA would choose to pay the membership fee for CAPA.

The MGAEC discussed that the MGA may consider observing CAPA's activities for the following year to determine if the changes made have truly addressed the governance problems originally identified. The Committee agreed that more time is required to consider the decision given the cost of the re-affiliation and MGA's current budgetary constraints, and the MGA's response will be determined following the November MGAEC meeting.

4.1.4 Funding agreement update

Jonathan confirmed that the MGA has received an email from Simon Kupec regarding the University's proposal for the current funding agreement to be extended for one additional year. Considerations cited by the University, include the recent University realignment, and the unclear impact of the pending international student caps in the coming year.

4.1.5 MGAEC Personal Branding Project

Shinyi explained the proposal has arisen as a result of discussions that arose in the MGA Retreat.

Aakash asked for clarification regarding the details of planned photo and video shoots.

Shinyi clarified that further information including agenda and details, alongside a calendar invite, will be sent out at a future date.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 2025 SSAF 20% Projects

Jonathan noted that MGAEC members are welcome to make proposals under SSAF for projects of benefit to the student cohort, and encouraged members to collect and pass on feedback and requests from students.

4.2.2 Casual employment changes impacting HDRs

Jonathan noted that PhD students have reached out with concerns regarding sessional work and teaching in future semesters. While the MGA is typically not involved in employment disputes, due to low stipend and the reliance on sessional work by HDR

students, this is a matter important to HDR students. The MGA hopes to highlight the financial impact of these changes to HDR students.

Jonathan explained that the topic has been included in the agenda for the upcoming VC-SPAF with Sharon Pickering. The topic was also recently brought before the GRC, and is waiting on information to be provided by Prof Allie Clemens.

Saham noted that the current concern is that casual employment would be abolished in 2025, as contracts were not renewed. Based on previous GRC representations, employment arrangements for HDR students are expected to change from existing systems.

Umma highlighted that each faculty is likely to be limited by their budget regarding who will receive offers of employment. She noted that there is a lack of clarity and information provided to HDR students regarding the employment situation in the coming year.

Jonathan confirmed no publicly available information at the present, and that MGA is asking for clarification.

4.2.3 Ways to enhance representation of OBs

Jaime spoke to a proposed new subcommittee to discuss the current responsibilities of office-bearers, and invited MGAEC members to join the sub-committee. Jaime discussed that there is a concern that the demands for certain office-bearer roles are too significant for one person to manage on a volunteer basis. This is especially of concern as the MGA represents students across several campuses, and leads to discrepancies and inconsistencies in delivery and engagement.

The sub-committee's goal will be to examine the best ways for office bearers and the MGAEC to utilise the power they have within their positions, and to identify how to best represent a diverse student cohort across multiple campuses. The sub-committee will investigate ways to decentralise power, empower student communities and alternative mechanisms to improve representation and engagement beyond established processes.

The MGAEC discussed current and possible options for engaging students and seeking improved engagement.

4.2.4 MGA Volunteer Awards

Leilani discussed an opportunity for MGAEC members to attend an upcoming event celebrating MGA volunteers who have completed more than 30 hours of volunteering. Jonathan encouraged all members of the MGAEC to attend, and support the MGA volunteers and the work they have completed across the year.

4.2.5 Postgraduate representation on University Council

The committee discussed ongoing concerns as to a lack of graduate student representation on the Monash University Council, particularly in light of the fact that the Academic Board has both a graduate and an undergraduate representative. Concerns have been raised to the MGAEC following recent elections where an undergraduate representative was elected. The Committee discussed the need for

direct representation of graduate students. The matter has been raised at the University Council and is expected to be discussed and discussed upon in an upcoming meeting.

4.2.6 Coursework Admissions Standards Committee vacancy

Ryan discussed an existing opening for a graduate student to sit on the Coursework Admissions Standards Committee.

Aakash expressed interest in joining the committee, and will be nominated by the MGA.

4.2.7 MIISON report to VCSPAC

Saham summarised key matters in the MIISON report, which reiterates existing issues faced by international students.

5. Membership matters

5.1 Resignation of Women's Officer

Following the resignation of Isabel Kiryu from the position of Women's Officer, the office-bearer role is open for nominations from current eligible MGAEC members.

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Women's Officer.

There were no eligible nominations. The committee agreed that given the MGAEC is currently short of a member due to the resignation, the upcoming co-option will give special consideration to individuals interested in the Women's Officer position.

5.2 Future vacancies on MGAEC

For noting.

- The current MGAEC President, Jonathan Robberts, is expected to complete his studies in two months, at which point he will no longer be a Monash student and no longer be a part of the MGAEC.
- Parkville campus representative Troy Lau is expected to complete his studies at the end of the year.
- Mahima Choudhary, General Representative is expected to complete his studies at the end of the year.

Vacancies on the MGAEC are expected to arise, leaving openings for co-option. The Parkville campus representative will need to be elected from the Parkville student cohort. The MGAEC will also need to elect a new President from its members following the end of Jonathan Robbert's tenure.

7. Other business

Jonathan provided an update to the MGAEC members that he and the Executive Officer, Janice, have met with representatives regarding a request for information on an internal matter. The meeting went well and further information will be made available once resolved.

6. Next meeting

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

The meeting closed at 4:01 pm.