

Meeting 08/2021

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 5.00pm – 6.30pm, Thursday 30 September 2021, 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

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| Present | Caitlyn Neale (Chair), Karyn Low, Priyanka Nathani, Elliot Anderson, Yingheng Tan, Philip Kairns, David Nash, Deven Kumar, Nathalie Farah, Pranay Prathivadi. |
| Apologies | Arjun Sanjeev, Elnaz Mokhtari |
| In attendance | Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder, Zuzana Quinn, Lisa Falla, Leilani Duong, Serena Ang, Natasha Raghuvanshi. |

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

In relation to action item 07/2021(3.2), Caitlyn noted that the university had indicated that the Academic Safety Net would be reintroduced in some form, and that there was a meeting scheduled for mid-October where the details would be discussed.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 06/2021 and 07/2021 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting July 06/2021 and August 07/2021 be confirmed.

Moved: Elliot

Seconded: Karyn

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

The action sheet was noted. Caitlyn informed members that graduate ceremonies could not be changed due to restrictions on numbers imposed on the university by the government as a result of Covid.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

Caitlyn spoke to two concerns raised in her written report:

Feedback had been received from students complaining about the poor quality of teaching online. Many teaching techniques did not translate effectively to an online format, especially

for delivery of the JD. Students continued to insist that the online experience was not comparable to an oncampus teaching experience.

It was explained that the MGA had received a few emails from students about the university's decision to make vaccinations mandatory for students wanting to return to campus. Most students supported the decision, being concerned about being back in classes with unvaccinated students and one student complained it was a breach of civil liberties.

After some discussion, the MGAEC announced their support for mandatory vaccinations as a means to protect the health and safety of the wider university community, and to support graduate students' wishes to return to campus for face-to-face teaching. However, it was noted that the university must ensure that unvaccinated students were accommodated to continue their studies online and supported through to completion.

Deven raised a concern that international students located offshore had reported a lack of support for mental health. It was noted that the university was providing additional counselling support specifically for this cohort, and that MGA members should ensure this information is passed on to students in need.

3.2 Members' reports

In addition to their written reports, the following matters were discussed by members:

Karyn reported that after having met with her MUPA counterpart she was considering holding a cultural exchange between Malaysia and Australia. The MUPA member had noted that as many Malaysia campus graduate students travelled to Australia as part of their degree, it would be beneficial to strengthen the connection between the two cohorts prior to travel. Karyn asked for ideas from the committee to help connect with Malaysia campus graduate students, as well as ideas for an online Halloween event.

Deven proposed that the swot vac be extended to two weeks. He reported that students were exhausted and when restrictions were lifted and allowed for socialising and travel, students would benefit from an extra week for relaxation. Caitlyn offered to raise this request with senior managers and through the student experience committee as a mental health initiative.

Zuzana reminded members that students with mental health issues could also be referred to the MGA advocates. In response to a question about assistance to students who had failed a unit, Zuzana explained the process for remission of debt. To be eligible students must fulfil certain criteria and MGA advocates could help students navigate their way through the appeal process. Deven responded that he felt many students were not aware of the remission of debt process, nor of the fact that they could seek assistance from the MGA advocacy team. He commented that students tended to shy away from appeal processes, viewing them as overly complicated, and that the university needed to make these processes easier to access.

Karyn queried why the mid-semester break had not been held mid-semester. She noted that all her assignments had been due before the break, and this had made weeks 6-9 extremely busy and stressful. Caitlyn responded that the break had been moved with the intention that students received a genuine break, rather than using it to catch up on assignments. Priyanka suggested that this strategy didn't work for many graduate students, who had major submissions due in weeks 11 and 12, and who would prefer a break in the middle of the semester. Caitlyn agreed to raise this concern with senior managers.

There was some discussion about Discord where an MGA presence had been recently established, with the idea that it could be used as a study tool for various cohorts, as well as for social purposes. It could also play a role in connecting graduates across the various domestic and international campuses.

3.3 Staff report

The staff report was noted.

3.4 August 2021 profit and loss report

The August profit and loss report was noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

The MGAEC meeting attendance records were noted.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 General Regulations

The updated MGA General regulations were presented for approval.

It was moved:

That the amendments to the MGA General Regulations be accepted

Mover: David Nash

Seconder: Karyn Low

Carried.

4.1.2 Email motion on 2021 budget adjustments

Members noted a vote conducted by email to approve the budget adjustments. Ten members participated and all voted in favour of the motion, which was declared carried on 6 September 2021.

It was moved:

That the 2021 budget adjustments be accepted.

Moved: Caitlyn Neale

Carried unanimously.

4.1.3 Email motion to coopt Queer Officer

Members noted a vote conducted by email to coopt to the Queer Officer position. Ten members participated and all voted in favour of the motion, which was declared carried on 6 September 2021.

It was moved:

That Philip Kairns be elected to the MGAEC to take up the position of Queer Officer.

Moved: Caitlyn Neale

Carried unanimously.

4.1.4 Graduations

In response to a query raised at the previous MGAEC meeting, Caitlyn confirmed that students would receive a refund should the university have to cancel graduations due to Covid restrictions.

4.1.5 MET concession campaign

Nathalie reported that she was working on restarting the MET concession campaign, which was aimed at obtaining a public transport concession for Victorian graduate students. Victoria was the only state that did not provide such a concession to their graduate students. Nathalie thanked Janice for posting on Instagram and FB. Jan reported that these posts had attracted a very high engagement from the graduate community, with many students expressing their thanks and stating they were keen to see the MGA take action in this space.

To date Nathalie had received interest from the RTBU (Rail Train Bus Union), as well as GSA at University of Melbourne. RMIT and Deakin were in the middle of student elections so would be approached later in the year. Nathalie invited members to contact her if they had feedback on strategies for the campaign, or would like to join her and Arjun on the organising committee. Elliot volunteered to join.

In response to a question about the cost to the government if graduates were to receive a public transport concession, Nathalie informed members that the last estimate made in 2018 proposed a cost of approximately four million. Nathalie reported that she had been in contact with her local Greens MP who had put a question about the lack of concession on notice for the Minister for Transport, and received the expected negative response.

4.1.6 MUPA-MGA Executive Committee member meetings

Feedback was requested from members who participated in the information-sharing sessions between individual MUPA and MGA Executive Committee members.

In summary the following issues had been raised by MUPA members:

- Students were finding it difficult to access mental health support provided by the university without having a Medicare card;
- Students reported being afraid of their teachers and therefore not wanting to raise issues of concern;
- Concerns about unnecessarily high workloads being imposed on students by their teachers despite campus rules around word length (eg cannot set more than 600 words for an assignment that is worth 2.5%, yet students were being directed to write 3000 words in the same timeframe);
- Long delays of up to two months to receive funding for an approved MUPA event;
- Discrimination by staff of non-Malay students.

The MGA would initiate further discussions with MUPA to investigate these concerns.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 CISA AGM

Caitlyn called for expressions of interest from international student MGAEC members who would like to attend the CISA AGM on 9 October 2021. Priyanka, Deven and Karyn expressed interest in attending.

4.2.2 Website for graduate career opportunities

The committee considered the merits of subscribing to PostAc, a career website pitched to HDRs and developed by Inger Mewburn from ANU (aka the Thesis Whisperer). The website focusses specifically on jobs in the non-academic sphere, and uses artificial intelligence to search the job market for jobs that require the skills gained from undertaking research. The proposal was approved in principle. Discussions with PostAc would proceed and a formal motion for funding would be brought back to the October meeting, at which time the PostAc website was expected to be fully operational.

4.2.3 Professional development sessions for committee members

In light of being unable to run the annual overnight retreat for the MGAEC, the committee was asked to consider whether they would like to have some online professional development sessions run for them by external providers and if so, which topics or speakers would be of interest. Simon Goodwin and Richard Harris were nominated as potential speakers. It was agreed that members would email further suggestions to Jenny and the MGA staff would follow up on availability and cost.

4.2.4 MGA feedback on Ombudsman policy

The MGA feedback to the university on the draft Ombudsman policy and procedures was noted.

4.2.5 Counselling support for overseas students

Members were informed that the university had employed two counselling-trained social workers to support international students who were unable to come to Australia and remained studying from overseas. Overseas students could call +61 3 9905 3175 during business hours or email counselling-clayton@monash.edu to make an appointment. Members were encouraged to let their graduate cohorts know about this service.

4.2.6 SSAF capital development submissions

It was noted that the university was calling for applications for the 2022 SSAF-funded facilities and amenities improvement projects. Committee members were encouraged to submit ideas for projects that would be of benefit to the wider graduate student community. All applications from the MGA would be coordinated through the MGA office, so proposals would need to be received by 22 October, 2021.

4.2.7 Use of pronouns for committee and staff

Phil encouraged members to display personal pronouns after their names when using zoom. He explained that while it was a small change to implement, it could make a big difference to gender-diverse people, helping them to feel included, and building rapport with the group.

4.2.8 Staff contract conversion to permanent

The committee conducted an in-camera discussion to consider the proposal that a staff contract be converted to a permanent appointment.

It was moved:

That the contract appointment of Yen Chau to the Finance Assistant position be converted to a permanent appointment.

Mover: Elliot Anderson
Seconded: Priyanka Nathani
Carried.

4.2.9 MGA office renovations

Members were informed that both MGA offices would be closed from early November to the end of 2021 (Clayton) and the end of January 2022 (Caulfield) for renovations funded from the 2020 SSAF capital development funds. Staff would continue to work from home during those periods and temporary on-campus accommodation would be arranged on specific days as required.

5. Membership

No business.

- 6. Next meeting** – It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in October 2021 at a time and date to be confirmed with members.

The meeting closed at 6.41.