

Meeting 03/2020 and MGA Council meeting

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 12.00pm – 2.00pm, Thursday 23 April 2020
by Zoom invitation.

Jenny Reeder
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Minutes

The meeting was opened at 12:07pm

1. Formal matters

1.1 Acknowledgement of country

The MGAEC acknowledged and paid respect to the people of the nations on which the committee were joining from via teleconference, as the original and ongoing owners and custodians of this unceded land.

1.2 Apologies

No apologies received.

Present

Robyn Oxley (Chair), Pooja Bhageria, Jordana Bragg (left at item 4.2), Julie Dao (arrived at item 3.2), Allison Ho (arrived at item 3.2), Nikhil Kathe, Jessica Lu, Caitlyn Neale, Roy Rozario, Joel Samu, Ke Xiou Tan, Roby Vota

MGA reps

Isaac Pincus

In attendance

Janice Boey, Ryan Edwards, Jessica Fimmel, Zuzana Quinn, Jenny Reeder

Observers

Samual Fisher, Karan Mehta

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

No items were added to the agenda.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 02/2020 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting March 02/2020 be confirmed.

Moved: Robyn Oxley

Seconded: Jess Lu

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

Robyn noted that at the last VC-SPAF meeting, it was announced that the University had determined that 10% of MGA's Clayton funding would go to the MSA in 2020. The committee were very disappointed with this decision for the following reasons:

- The MGA had been informed in February 2020 that the university would not interfere with the MGA-MSA funds transfer again in 2020 and that the MGA should begin negotiations with MSA to determine the amount to be transferred;
- The MGA had started those negotiations with only two meetings having taken place;
- There had been no consultation with the MGA prior to the university's sudden reversal of position;
- The facts did not support the fraction of SSAF being transferred;
- The university's reversal of position indicated yet another deferral to the demands of the undergraduates, and a complete disregard for the demands of the graduate student community in relation to their own funds;
- The 10% equated to \$100,102 of graduate funding which was three times the amount of the actual value to graduates in a normal year, let alone in a year in which the MSA could not provide any of the activities for which they were being funded;
- The MSA could not be held accountable for the expenditure of the graduate fees as there was no funding agreement in place with the MGA, in the way there was between MGA and the undergraduate associations on other campuses;
- Because the university had given the undergraduates 15% of the Clayton graduate funding in 2019, and this was also taken out of the MGA's budget in 2020, a total of \$300,000 was taken from the MGA 2020 budget in a year where the MGA could least afford it;
- The MGA's own 2020 budget had been cut by 33% due to the university lowering SSAF fees, leaving the MGA with a Clayton events budget of \$10,000, ten times less than the amount of graduate fees given to the MSA for Clayton-only online activities.

Robyn noted that the MGA fully supported graduate students receiving a reduced SSAF fee, and appreciated the university's efforts to compensate student associations by increasing their share of the SSAF from 40% to 60% for 2020 only. However the resulting decrease in funding to the MGA would have a significant effect on events and staffing, making the large amount of funding being transferred to the undergraduates all the more inappropriate.

3.2 Office-bearer reports

Noted.

Caitlyn Neale, Off-campus and DE Officer

Caitlyn explained that the JD student cohort were disappointed with the proposed schedule for the upcoming Law Faculty exams, and that she had been speaking with a number of disgruntled graduate students about the issue, as well as referring them on to the MGA advocates to lodge formal grievances. Caitlyn added that she had raised some of the concerns with the Education Committee, who agreed to distribute information to all faculties on the extended time required to read web-based vs paper-based slides.

Caitlyn noted that after student concerns were raised with the University, it was decided that the invigilation software used during semester one exams would not be

provided by a third party. However, for some subjects invigilation was a necessity and in these cases it would be carried out by Monash staff.

Additionally, there had been a request for a fee decrease due to the decreased quality of the online course delivery and no access to facilities. The University declined this request, but has instead created a \$15million hardship package for which students can apply.

Caitlyn also noted that there had been discussion about more flexible entry pathways for Indigenous students. Robyn suggested that this was likely to be undergraduate student-focussed as there were already a number of programs in place for graduate degrees.

It was raised that the University of Melbourne had made generous concessions for student WAM calculations from Semester 1, 2020. Caitlyn said she would compare these to Monash's own amendments and the MGA would lobby for Monash to adopt the same concessions should they prove to be more beneficial for students.

Julie Dao, Clayton Campus Representative

Julie noted that she had been meeting with graduate reps from other STEM HDR areas to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on lab-based work. She noted there was a lot of disappointment in the lack of communication from MGRO specifically for research students. It was noted that a Town Hall or Q&A session with senior MGRO staff would be well received by these students.

3.3 Staff report

It was noted that due to COVID-19, there could be no on-campus events. In light of the new restrictions, MGA staff had created and run a broad range of both social and academic online activities, to help graduate students connect and socialise with each other, with more planned throughout the semester.

3.4 Profit and loss report March 2020

Held over.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

3.6 MGA reps on university committees reports & discussion

Isaac Pincus, STEM Graduate Research Committee student representative, reported on the current issues for STEM HDR students.

Allison Ho reported on current Peninsula activities, including the impact of COVID-19 on student placements.

Jessica Lu, reported on current Parkville activities and praised her Faculty for their open communication on the rapidly evolving changes over the past month.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 COVID-19 update

To keep graduate students updated on the latest information relating to COVID-19 changes, a dedicated COVID-19 section had been created on the MGA website. The website brought together all the information graduate students have been seeking including: MGA lobbying efforts and the responses from the university; an FAQ for research and coursework graduates; updates on graduates spaces open on campus, information on financial assistance and advocacy; online social and academic events. The webpage addresses were provided for members:

Landing page for all COVID-19 graduate student related content

<https://mpa.monash.edu.au/covid-19/>

Lobbying updates

<https://mga.monash.edu.au/mga-action/>

Online social activities

<https://mga.monash.edu.au/get-involved/social/>

Online seminars and programs

<https://mga.monash.edu.au/get-involved/seminars/>

Support on finances, mental health and medical support

<https://mga.monash.edu.au/covid-19/useful-resources/>

4.1.2 SSAF funds update

The committee were advised of the adjusted income of the MGA for 2020, which represented an overall decrease of 33% from 2019. Additional income could be claimed through JobKeeper and a revised budget would be presented at the next MGAEC for approval.

4.1.3 MGA elections

By close of the nomination period, twenty-eight graduate students had applied for the 15 available positions on the MGAEC 2020/21. Once eligibility checks had been completed, online voting would commence with elections due to be completed by 31 May 2020. The newly elected committee would commence their term of office from the conclusion of the June 2020 meeting.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Request for MGAEC support to stand for CISA elections

Karan Mehta was invited to speak to his request to be endorsed by the MGA to stand in the upcoming CISA elections. The committee considered his request.

A number of concerns were raised about the operations of CISA over the past four years including: lack of financial transparency; inability to provide an

audited report when requested; sexism; and dysfunction within the executive committee. In light of the concerns raised, the committee agreed that the MGA would no longer support CISA and would therefore not be eligible to nominate a student to run for a position on the incoming committee.

It was moved:

That the MGA disaffiliates from CISA until further notice.

Moved: Robyn Oxley
Carried.

In light of the decision to disaffiliate, Karan was notified that MGA was not able to endorse him for a role on the CISA executive committee.

4.2.2 MGA 2020 budget

An updated budget would be presented at the May MGAEC meeting, providing time for updated funding figures from the University to be considered and a plan created for operations to be scaled back accordingly.

4.2.3 MGA approach to discipline hearings during COVID-19

An internal staff plan for interactions with students during hearings was noted.

4.2.4 MGA feedback on Academic Integrity Register

MGA feedback on a draft Academic Integrity Register from the University was noted.

5. Membership

A cooption application for the position of Indigenous Officer was received from Samuel Fisher. Samuel was provided the opportunity to introduce himself. The committee considered his application and he was elected unopposed to the position of Indigenous Officer for the remainder of the 2019/20 MGAEC term of office.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held in May 2020 at a date and time to be confirmed. It will likely be held via Zoom in line with any COVID-19 restrictions and directives.

The meeting closed at 1:41pm.