

Meeting 02/2020

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 1.00pm – 3.00pm, Thursday 26 March, 2020
by Zoom invitation.

Jenny Reeder
MGA Executive Officer
jenny.reeder@monash.edu

MINUTES

The meeting opened at 1.08pm.

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 Apologies

Present Robyn Oxley (Chair), Roy Rozario, Julie Dao, Allison Ho, Nikhil Kathe, Jessica Lu, Caitlyn Neale, Roby Vota, Xinxin Yang, Pooja Bhageria, Joel Samu, Jordana Bragg, Georgia Dudgeon, Roby Vota.

Apologies No apologies received.

In attendance Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

Elections to the vacant office-bearer positions was added under Item 5.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 01/2020 for confirmation

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting February 01/2020 be confirmed.

Mover: Caitlyn

Seconder: Pooja

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

The action sheet was noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's report was noted. Robyn also informed members that CAPA was putting requests to various federal ministers on behalf of all Australian graduate students. The requests included: an extension of all scholarships by 6 months; a relaxation of policies in relation to cancelled visas of international students; financial grants for students having to set up an office at home; carer leave entitlements; and

clarity on the government stimulus package and encouragement that it include graduate students.

3.2 Office-bearer reports

The written reports were noted. In addition:

Caitlyn Neale, Off-campus and DE Officer

Caitlyn reported that students at the Law Chambers were unhappy about still being required to attend classes in person when attendance on all other campuses had ceased. None of the JD lectures had been made available online. The introduction of e-exams was being protested on the grounds that the exams were going to be run at specific times and this did not provide enough flexibility for students with children. A group of JD students had written to the Dean asking for leniency in relation to the e-exams.

Roy Rozario, Research Education Officer

Roy noted that the MGA had run an online workshop for 75 people and had a second online workshop planned for next month.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 Profit and loss report Feb 2020

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted. Caitlyn requested that the December 2019 meeting entry be adjusted to reflect the fact that she had submitted an apology.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 SSAF funds update

It had been confirmed that the university was not going to redirect 15% of the MGA funds to the MSA in 2020, as originally stated. Instead, the MGA would receive the full 40% of the graduate funding as per usual, and must re-enter negotiations with MSA to determine how much graduate funding should be donated to them in 2020. It was anticipated that the outcome would then also be applied to the 2021-2023 funding agreement.

The MGA had also been asked to develop a dispute resolution to be activated in the case where negotiations with undergraduate bodies were unsuccessful. A draft dispute resolution and inclusions in the funding agreement with the university had been put forward to the university. There had been no response to date.

4.1.2 Request for bulk email to graduates

Robyn reported that she had written to the Chief Operating Officer, Peter Marshall, requesting that the university allow each student association to send a bulk email out to their respective cohorts (newly enrolled and current) to provide information on how to connect to online activities and online student communities, in an effort to address

the increasing sense of isolation being felt by students. No response had been received to date.

4.1.3 Request for leniency on library loans

In response to a request from the MGA to the University Librarian, the library executive had agreed in principle that they would support a temporary leniency for all fines where students were unable to return books on time.

4.1.4 Student Association shared email

Members were informed that the proposed shared student association email address had been set up by the MGA, primarily to enable university staff to contact all student associations with a single email when seeking feedback on policies or procedures or wanting to consult with students. University staff often directed these types of requests to the MSA only, resulting in policies and procedures being developed which did not take into account the needs of graduate students or of undergraduate students on Caulfield, Peninsula and Parkville.

The MGA received the support of CCD and the PVC (Student Experience), and the following student associations agreed to be part of this initiative: Monash Graduate Association (MGA); MONSU Caulfield; MONSU Peninsula; MPSU Parkville; MUPA Malaysia; and MUSA Malaysia.

MSA Clayton decided not to participate so the MGA committed to forwarding to the MSA Clayton any relevant information that came through the shared email address.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Tax help for graduates

The MGA discussed the possibility of providing specialist assistance with tax returns for graduate students. The undergraduate student associations on each campus hosted a tax help service for all students, provided for free by the ATO. However this service could not help students who had more complex situations, such as those on scholarships and those in receipt of stipends and grants from overseas institutions. The advocacy team agreed to investigate further.

4.2.2 MGA response to APC online tool

The committee noted the feedback provided by the MGA on the draft APC online progress assessment tool.

4.2.3 COVID-19

A discussion was held on the COVID-19 situation at Monash University including:

- How MGA services had been/would be affected
- Concerns raised by graduate coursework students
- Concerns raised by graduate research students

It was agreed that the MGA should use the website and Facebook groups to maintain communication with the graduate student community and ensure that the MGA was pursuing the issues that were relevant to and raised by, our various cohorts.

Jan noted that the events team had already started several regular online events such as yoga and mindfulness and that some events would be run during the week-end.

Robyn explained that a letter had been sent to the Vice-Chancellor with a list of requests on behalf of graduate students. The Vice-Chancellor had informed the MGA that Prof Matthew Gillespie would reply in response to the HDR issues and that Prof Sue Elliott would reply in response to the graduate coursework issues. The MGA intended to continue raising further concerns with senior management as they were brought to the attention of the MGA by the graduate community.

The following points were made:

- the MGA should set up a LinkedIn page in line with other student associations;
- many newly enrolled Indian students were not accustomed to online processes and were thinking of discontinuing and returning home;
- families overseas had to use intermediaries to transfer funds to their children studying in Australia. With COVID-19 restrictions preventing people from leaving their homes many students were no longer receiving the financial support they relied on;
- the quality of online learning was poor with many tutors not knowing how to use zoom;
- many graduate students were losing casual jobs due to businesses closing down, and were experiencing extreme financial distress;
- some students were struggling with internet access and cost;
- moodle was the only platform that connected students with the university but it was not user-friendly. There was no consistency across units in the way it is used, and students don't know who to go to if they have a problem.

It was agreed that the MGA should:

- lobby the university to broaden the eligibility criteria for the hardship and compassionate grant, so that it met the needs of all graduate students, and not just those who had been affected by the travel ban;
- establish a resources page for students listing all the sources of financial aid including Study Melbourne, COVID hotline care packages and MGA welfare support grant;
- include referrals to mental health support services on the MGA resources page, as well as develop MGA online resources and send MGA advocacy information to counsellors;
- set up special online groups for Peninsula campus graduates;
- open a shared google doc for members to add ideas for additional online activities and resources.

4.2.4 AGM

Members were informed that the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the MGA had been set for 1pm-2pm, Wednesday 20 May, and reminded that they would be required to prepare a written report for the meeting. Reports needed to cover the previous 12 months activity and were due on Friday 8 May 2020.

It was anticipated that the AGM would need to be held online.

It was moved:

That in the event of the 2020 AGM not being able to be held on campus due to the ramifications of the COVID-19 virus, the MGA will hold the meeting online.

Moved: Robyn
Seconded: Roy
Carried.

5. Membership

There were no members eligible to take up the positions of Indigenous Officer or Disability Officer. Nominations were invited for the position of Coursework Education Officer. Joel nominated himself and was seconded by Pooja. Ke Xiou nominated herself and was seconded by Jordana. Each candidate gave a brief verbal presentation to the committee and answered questions. An election was conducted and Joel was declared elected to the position of Coursework Education Officer with an absolute majority.

- 6. Next meeting** – It was agreed that the next meeting would be held from 12pm – 2pm on 23 April, most likely by Zoom.

The meeting ended at 2pm.