

Meeting 04/2020 and MGA Council meeting

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 11:00am – 1:00pm, Thursday 21 May 2020
by Zoom teleconference

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

MINUTES

Meeting opened at 11:05

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 the unceded land on which Monash stands.

1.2 Apologies Present

Nikhil Kathe

Robyn Oxley (Chair), Jordana Bragg, Julie Dao, Georgia Dudgeon, Samuel Fisher, Allison Ho (from 4.2.1), Jessica Lu, Caitlyn Neale, Roy Rozario, Joel Samu, Ke Xiou Tan, Roby Vota, Xinxin Yang (from 4.2.3)

In attendance

Janice Boey, Yen Chau, Jessica Fimmel, Zuzana Quinn, Jenny Reeder

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

The following items were added to the Agenda:

4.2.5 CAPA SCM (Robyn Oxley)

4.2.6 Stipends (Robyn Oxley)

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 03/2020 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting April 03/2020 be confirmed.

Moved: Robyn Oxley

Seconded: Joel Samu

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's report was tabled at the meeting.

3.2 Office-bearer reports

Julie Dao's report was tabled at the meeting. All reports were noted.

Caitlyn Neale, Off-campus and Distance Education Officer

Caitlyn added to her report that she had met informally with Monash Talent about organising Career events with an aim to have separate undergraduate and graduate-focussed events. Julie noted that Monash Talent needed to promote themselves better within the graduate community, as many graduate students were unaware of the program.

3.3 Staff report

The committee expressed their thanks to all the MGA staff who had transitioned their work to an online environment during the COVID-19 restrictions. Robyn highlighted the supportive and encouraging outlook staff had taken during these times of change and expressed her appreciation on behalf of the MGAEC for all the work the staff had undertaken over the past few months.

The committee also gave a special thank-you to the MGA advocacy team for their support of struggling students during the crisis.

3.4 Profit and loss reports for March and April 2020

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 COVID-19 update

With restrictions slowly being lifted, HDR students were beginning to be allowed back onto the Monash campuses this week. It was noted that any HDR students who felt uncomfortable returning onsite, due to medical conditions or concerns about having to take public transport, should raise these issues with their supervisors in the first instance, as the university had indicated that the conditions under which students returned were negotiable. The committee requested that the MGA continue to keep the graduate student population updated on the easing of restrictions and opening of campus spaces through its social media channels and FAQs webpage.

For the moment, most University facilities remained in lockdown and MGA staff would continue to work from home until further notice. It was noted that any return to work for staff would be in line with the state guidelines which would likely mean a rotation of staff in the office in order to comply with social distancing practices.

4.1.2 SSAF funds update

It was announced that due to the reduction in SSAF charges this year and a fall in enrolments in 2020 due to COVID-19, the MGA had received a 33% cut to its 2020 income. A number of actions had been taken to mitigate this loss including: all staff reducing fractions by 20%; reductions to overall staffing; cancellation of all staff professional development; cancellation of the MGA car leases; applying for government financial assistance grants; and significant

reductions in a large number of budget lines including the events budget being cut by 80%. The university's decision to take 10% of the Clayton graduate SSAF (\$100,000) and give it to the Clayton undergraduate student association was also being challenged by the MGA. The MGA was likely to use up its moderate cash reserve over 2020 and 2021 to ensure the continuity of the organisation. The committee thanked the staff for their actions to implement these measures to safeguard the MGA during these unprecedented times.

4.1.3 MGA 2020 budget

In light of the reduction in income for 2020, an updated budget with extensive cost cuts was put to the committee. It was moved:

That the amended 2020 budget is accepted.

Moved: Robyn Oxley
Seconded: Joel Samu
Carried.

4.1.4 Email motion on staff fraction reductions

A motion was circulated by email on 11 May 2020:

That the MGAEC approve a temporary reduction of all staff fractions by 20%, to be applied to staff who are eligible under the JobKeeper scheme, from 18 May 2020 to 25 September 2020.

Moved: Robyn Oxley
It was declared carried on 14 May 2020.

4.1.5 MGA elections

It was announced that elections for the MGAEC 2020/21 campus representative positions had concluded with the results noted as follows:

Clayton campus – Julie Dao

Caulfield campus - Hang Yu

Parkville campus – Jessica Lu

Peninsula campus – Mazaya Windhiana

The General representative elections were currently underway and due to close that day, with the full committee to be publicly announced soon after. Roby noted that he did not find the election process to be user-friendly and that it was a time-consuming process to vote. He requested that the MGA review the system and platform it used to investigate the possibility of a better system, and one that could support video as well as written statements. It was noted that allowing candidates to upload video or photos as part of their nominations in future elections would require a regulation change.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 MGA Survey on Health, Family and Finances

Members were informed that the MGA Graduate Student Survey on Health, Family and Finances was almost ready to be publicised, awaiting a final review by the committee. The survey was designed before the pandemic, so had been slightly adjusted to include questions specific to COVID-19. Ideally

the survey (without the COVID questions) would be run every two to three years, though the committee suggested it should be considered being run as a series of shorter surveys, due to the possibility that the length of the survey would discourage students from participating.

The survey would have a number of monetary prizes available to ensure a more balanced response, given students with problems in any of the three nominated areas would be more likely to take the survey than those without.

4.2.2 HDR lobbying campaign

Recent concessions announced by the University for graduate students impacted by COVID-19 included the automatic scholarship extension for most HDR students to 3.5 years, and the introduction of a new completion award which would provide an additional 3 months scholarship to successful final year applicants. While these concessions were welcomed by the majority of students, it was noted that a number of HDR students (primarily from STEM), had expressed dissatisfaction with the concessions achieved. The MGA had been asked to continue lobbying for further concessions, including automatic scholarship extensions to 4.5 years for all PhDs, in line with the government's recent announcement that HDR candidature times were temporarily extended. The committee discussed the fact that the government extensions were for candidature only and did not provide universities with additional funds. With severe financial difficulties currently being experienced by Monash University it was highly unlikely that more funding would be committed to the HDR sector. Having achieved some success on behalf of the HDR cohort, the committee agreed that there were other cohorts within the graduate student community who could benefit from some assistance. The committee directed the MGA to lobby to expand the access and eligibility regulations governing the university's hardship grant. This was of particular significance for the international student community, many of whom were experiencing severe financial distress having lost their casual jobs which were only their only form of income and who were not eligible for government assistance.

4.2.3 Study Melbourne grant application

It was noted that a grant application submitted to Study Melbourne had successfully progressed through the first stage and was currently under consideration by the Study Melbourne selection panel.

4.2.4 Clayton undergraduate student association 2019 SSAF report

The Clayton undergraduate student association's report on their expenditure of 15% of the MGA's graduate funds (\$204,000) in 2019 was noted. The committee reiterated their extreme concern at the university's unprecedented decision to interfere with the MGA's funding, ignore the graduate student community's directives and transfer an amount to the undergraduates (MSA(Clayton)) that was over six times the value of the services being offered by them. The committee noted both the inadequacy of detail and inclusion of misleading and factually incorrect information in the MSA(Clayton) report. It was agreed that a response should be prepared and sent to all recipients of the MSA(Clayton) SSAF report.

4.2.5 CAPA SCM

Robyn announced that CAPA were holding their annual SCM on 30-31 May via Zoom. She invited committee members interested in attending to contact her for more information and reminded them that they would need to register for the event.

4.2.6 Stipends

In light of the extreme expenditure cuts at the MGA and the reduction in staff hours by 20%, Robyn proposed that the committee consider their honoraria. She offered to make a substantial reduction to her own honorarium as President, and the Vice-President followed suit. Robyn suggested that because of the very low value of the honoraria for remaining office bearers and campus representatives and the fact that many students had also been personally impacted by COVID-19, there was no expectation for members to reduce their honoraria. Nevertheless the committee discussed the matter and agreed to reduce their honoraria by 20% in solidarity with the staff salary cuts. Three motions were considered and moved as follows:

That the President's honorarium is reduced by 60% until the end of December 2020.

Moved: Robyn Oxley
Seconded: Georgia Dudgeon
Carried.

That the Vice-President's honorarium is reduced by 60% until the end of December 2020.

Moved: Robyn Oxley
Seconded: Julie Dao.
Carried.

That Office-bearer and campus representatives honoraria are reduced by 20% until the end of December 2020.

Moved: Robyn Oxley
Seconded: Julie Dao
Carried.

5. Membership No business.

6. Next meeting – It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in June 2020 at a date and time to be confirmed, most likely by Zoom.