

Meeting 07/2020

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 4.00pm – 5.30pm, Thursday 20 August 2020
by Zoom invitation.

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

MINUTES

The meeting opened at 4.05pm.

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

Joel Samu, Aman Madaan

Attendance

Caitlyn Neale (Chair), Stacey Coe, Julie Dao Wendy Febrita,
Damon Hu, Jessica Lu, Preeti Mehta, Samuel Miles, , Emily
Pryor, Ke Xiou Tan, Ailsa Webb, Mazaya Windhiana

In attendance

Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder

On behalf of the committee Caitlyn expressed her sympathy to Joel Samu who had resigned suddenly due to illness. She thanked Joel for his passion and commitment to the graduate student community during his term in office, and committee members sent their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

Caitlyn added item 4.2.6 MGAEC meeting schedule review.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 06/2020 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting July 06/2020 be confirmed.

Moved: Ailsa Webb

Seconded: Jessica Lu

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Item 4.1.3 regarding setting up a process to pursue external grants in a systematic manner was discussed and it was agreed that Stacey would take on this project. Stacey requested that a staff member also be allocated to the project.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

Caitlyn announced that since the submission of her written report, she had met with the Vice-Chancellor and had successfully negotiated to have the Graduate Research Student tab on the University Fact Sheet moved to the front page, rather than being buried under a tab entitled "Changes to semester 2". The initial request had been raised in March and again in April and May. Caitlyn had also successfully opposed the introduction of an online process for APCs which would have prevented students from accessing advice from MGA advocates prior to submitting their responses. The form will remain as a downloadable pdf for the moment.

3.2 Office-bearer reports

The written office-bearer reports were noted, with the following additions:

Emily Pryor, Research Education Officer, reported that the HDR forum had been a good opportunity for HDRs to voice their concerns. Many HDRs were struggling with lack of time and money as a result of COVID-19 and were requesting that the MGA lobby to extend scholarships past the current maximum of 3 years and 6 months. There was some discussion about the matter and the committee agreed to support a lobby effort to extend scholarships to 3 years and 9 months. The MGA would also ask the university to reconsider additional concessions for carers. Emily added that she would follow up with the university to clarify their position on allowing HDRs to take advantage of government amendments to regulations which enabled universities to extend PhD candidature to 4.5 years and Masters Research degrees to 2.5 years.

Jessica Lu, Parkville representative, informed members that she had been appointed to an advisory board to CAPA (Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations).

Preeti Mehta, Coursework Education Officer, announced that along with Caitlyn she was planning to run a forum for coursework students, similar to the HDR forum. This would inform the MGA of the main issues of concern, and a short survey would provide some statistics to support the issues on which the MGA intended to lobby. Preeti also noted that CAPA had been sent some preliminary data from the MGA survey on health, family and finances.

Mazaya Abidin, Peninsula campus representative, reported that she had now met with Melinda Cafarella, Peninsula campus manager, to discuss the shuttle bus operations. Mazaya had also met with Jhanvi, the MONSU Peninsula undergraduate student association President, and would work with MONSU Peninsula to lobby to keep the shuttle bus running between Peninsula and Clayton campus.

Ke Xiou Tan, Women's Officer, informed members that she had held her first advisory group meeting, developed the idea of a women's seminar, was working closely with Respectful Communities and was helping to promote R U OK day. Ke Xiou also planned to make a short video compilation of students talking about mental health.

Sam Miles, General representative, noted that he had recently taken up the position of HASS representative on the Graduate Research Committee (GRC) and had been working with Emily on the various HDR issues that were raised at the HDR forum.

3.3 Staff report

Noted. The Executive Officer explained the MGA events team proposal that the MGA host a morning tea for the MSO office-bearers from all the undergraduate student associations. The committee agreed that this would be a nice gesture.

3.4 July 2020 profit and loss report

Noted. The Executive Officer responded to a question raised at the July meeting about the source of the “additional funding” of \$25,000 showing as income. It was explained that the university allocates 20% of the SSAF each year to capital development projects; a fund to which any group within the university can apply, but which must be spent on items that are of direct benefit to the student community. The MGA had been successful in having several items approved in the 2019 funding round and been directed to purchase the items from the MGA’s own funds. The \$25,000 was a reimbursement to the MGA for the purchase of these approved items.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 COVID-19 update

Caitlyn reported that there were no further changes to MGA operations under Stage 4 restrictions. The MGA would apply for the extended JobKeeper payments for staff, from October to March. Staff fractions were due to revert to 100% at the end of September. The committee agreed that any continued reductions in staff fractions needed to reflect a reduced workload. All areas of the MGA had been able to successfully convert to online, with the exception of events, where the workload was substantially reduced due to online events requiring less staff time to prepare and conduct. It was proposed that the four events staff fractions be maintained at the current reduced fractions for a further 4 months due to reduced workloads.

It was moved:

That the reduced fractions currently applied to the four events staff be maintained for a further four months from October to the end of January 2021.

Moved: Caitlyn Neale (Chair)

Carried.

4.1.2 LinkedIn account

Julie reported on behalf of the subcommittee looking into LinkedIn. The group had looked more broadly at social media and planned to survey students as to how they preferred their communication from MGA to be delivered. It was agreed that the student voice should be promoted, with students and in particular, MGAEC members, helping to promote activities and their own roles in MGA via posts on Instagram, Facebook and other social media platforms. To that end Julie proposed a rostered compulsory commitment from MGAEC members to develop content and engage in social media. The social media contribution from committee members would build on the regular baseline communications being provided by the staff through the newsletter, screens and webpages.

4.1.3 Graduate coursework student concerns

Preeti reported that she had received a large number of complaints from graduate coursework students across all faculties. The core issues raised were:

- requests for course fee reductions
- request for the implementation of blind marking for all exams and assignments
- the lack of quality of online courses
- the substandard skills of some academics when using zoom

The committee considered whether or not the university had provided training for academics in the use of zoom to deliver lectures and tutorials. It appeared that some faculties had provided training but on the whole, academics were learning on the job.

Ailsa and Ke Xiou agreed to assist Preeti at the forum.

4.1.4 Response from MSA re 2019 graduate SSAF

Noted. The committee noted that the undergraduates had not provided the information that had been requested of them but agreed not to spend any more time trying to extract the facts.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 MGA Welfare Assistance regulations

The final draft of the regulations governing the MGA Welfare Assistance were presented for approval. The regulations were considered by the committee.

It was moved:

That the MGA Welfare Assistance regulations be approved.

Moved: Ailsa Webb

Seconded: Julie Dao

Carried.

4.2.2 MGA feedback on RNA HDR modules

The MGA was invited to provide feedback on the compulsory Respect. Now. Always. modules under development for HDR students and their supervisors. The documents had been circulated to HDR committee members, Faculty HDR reps and advocates for comment. The feedback on the RNA modules was noted.

4.2.3 MGA feedback on GRSS policy and procedures

The MGA feedback on the Graduate Research Student Supervision policy and procedures was noted. The majority of changes recommended by the MGA to the procedures had been adopted. However a clause in the policy that allowed inexperienced supervisors to supervise up to 16 students had been objected to by the MGA, without success. The issue had then been followed up and raised by the graduate student representative on Academic Board, who expressed concern that the policy allowed such a large number of students to be supervised by a supervisor who may have had as little experience as 12 months in an associate supervisor role, and instead relied on individual faculties to regulate the number of students allocated to each supervisor. The university's response was that faculties would make reasonable

decisions on such matters. Academic Board subsequently passed the policy and procedures without further change.

4.2.4 Sexual Health Education committee

The MGA had been invited to provide a student rep on the Sexual Health Education committee. Two students expressed interest, Roby Vota and Julie Dao. Caitlyn agreed to request that both students be appointed to the committee, being run by Respectful Communities division.

4.2.5 Connection with Malaysia campus graduate students

The PVC (Malaysia campus) had asked the MGA to provide additional support to the Malaysian graduate student association. The MGA has been supporting this group for over 10 years, having assisted them in: separating from the Malaysian campus undergraduate student association; writing a constitution; developing office-bearer roles; accessing central university committees; and sharing ideas for events. It had been suggested that the following ideas could be implemented:

- MUPA committee members sit in on some MGAEC meetings
- Link MUPA office-bearers with MGAEC office-bearers
- Lobby the university to include the MUPA President in the annual meeting where the VC meets with student presidents from all campuses
- Run a social online event with MUPA and MGAEC
- Host a forum with MUPA for Malaysia campus HDRs

The committee agreed that some of these initiatives should be trialled.

4.2.6 MGAEC meeting schedule review

The committee reviewed the current schedule of MGAEC meetings and decided to move the monthly meeting to the second Thursday of every month at 4pm.

5. Membership

The Queer Officer and Indigenous Officer positions had been advertised. One application for the Queer Officer was received from Roby Vota. No applications were received for the Indigenous Officer, which would be readvertised.

Roby was invited to speak to his application and answer questions from the committee. Roby left the meeting while the committee discussed the application and a secret ballot was conducted. The committee voted unanimously to coopt Roby Vota to the position of Queer Officer. Roby rejoined the meeting and was congratulated by the members.

6. Next meeting – It was agreed that the next meeting of the MGAEC would be held on Thursday 10 September, from 4pm – 5.30pm.

The meeting closed at 5.40pm.