

Meeting 08/2020

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 4.00pm – 5.30pm, Thursday 10 September 2020
by Zoom invitation.

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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 Attendance

Present	Caitlyn Neale (Chair), Stacey Coe, Julie Dao, Wendy Febrita, Damon Hu, Jessica Lu, Preeti Mehta, Samuel Miles, Emily Pryor, Ailsa Webb, Elliot Anderson, Mazaya Abidin, Aman Madaan, Roby Vota
Apologies	Ke Xiou Tan
In attendance	Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder, Zuzana Quinn, Emma Kellaway

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

Julie added item 4.2.6 Feedback from IT Faculty graduate students.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 07/2020 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting August 07/2020 be confirmed.

Moved: Ailsa Webb
Seconded: Roby Vota
Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

The President's written report was noted.

3.2 Members' reports

The members' written reports were noted, with the following additions:

Samuel Miles, General representative, noted that he was participating in the HDR mentoring program, which was of particular assistance to first year HDR students who were feeling very isolated and experiencing difficulties settling in. While this was not unusual for any newly enrolled student, the situation had been exacerbated by the COVID restrictions on face-to-face interactions.

Julie Dao, Clayton campus representative, informed members that she had been working with Preeti and Ailsa on developing the MGA sustainability week of events, which would include a number of internal and external speakers as well as activities and competitions. More information would be shared with the MGAEC once the program had been locked down.

Roby Vota, Queer Officer, announced that he was continuing to work with his advisory group, and encouraged all members to attend future events which included film nights, Karaoke evenings and well-being sessions with counsellors. Roby reminded members that all events were open not only to those identifying as LGBTIQ+, but to LGBTIQ+ allies as well.

Wendy Febrita, General Representative, noted that she had been working with Ke Xiou to help develop the Women's FB page.

Complaints about assessment had been received from graduate coursework students enrolled in Law. Issues included lack of detailed feedback, and feedback provided too late with some feedback received only 3 days prior to the exam. The matter was discussed by the committee and it was agreed that because the issue was specific to Company Law, Caitlyn would speak further about the matter with Ailsa outside the meeting.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 August 2020 profit and loss report

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 Connection with Malaysia campus graduate students

It was noted that the MGA had offered to MUPA a number of ways in which the connections between the two graduate student organisations could be strengthened. The President of MUPA had indicated her interest and would discuss these offers with her committee.

4.1.2 HDR forum results

Emily reported that the HDR forum had been held on 11 August, and a number of questions and concerns were raised during the discussions. A report back to the graduate student community had been prepared for posting to the MGA website. The

report listed the questions that were raised, and provided a response from the MGA to each item. Emily had also written to the Chair of GRC, Professor Matthew Gillespie, asking for additional concessions for HDR students – no response had been received to date.

Finally, to address faculty-based issues that were raised at the forum, Emily had written to each Dean with some recommendations to address the concerns raised by students at the forum. Several of the Deans had replied, indicating:

- support for tuition fee waivers for international students for the period of any candidature extensions and/or stipend extensions through GRCA they received;
- support for concessions for RTP scholarship holders to be extended to faculty and school-based scholarships;
- no support for the proposal to include HDRs students in staff emails.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Funding Agreement

It was explained that the MGA signed into a Funding Agreement (FA) with the university every three years. This document detailed the obligations the MGA must agree and adhere to in order to receive their funding.

The current FA would expire at the end of 2020, so negotiations with the university had recently commenced for the 2021 – 2023 FA. While negotiations would be carried out separately between the university and each individual student association, there was an initial meeting held with all parties to discuss generic issues. From that meeting the following items were of note:

- Each year the university attempts to impose more restrictions on the student associations. Of most concern are those that seek to fetter the MGA's independence and right to speak against the university. While other associations have conceded to these restrictions in the past, the MGA has successfully rejected them and will continue to argue against any impositions in the proposed FA that would compromise the MGA in their ability to represent student interests.
- The university wants to include in the FA the amount of funding to be transferred from the MGA to each undergraduate student association. The intention is that these amounts will have to be agreed between MGA and each undergraduate student association before the FA is complete. Last funding round the MGA negotiated successfully with undergraduate student associations at Parkville, Caulfield and Peninsula. Clayton undergraduates proved to be unwilling and incapable of entering into good faith discussions, resulting in a long-winded dispute. The committee were referred to the following website for background information: <https://mpa.monash.edu.au/your-voice/campaigns/>
- With the exception of the MSA(Clayton undergraduates), there was no appetite for an insertion in the FA forcing student associations to merge, so it was made clear by university senior management that while they would like to see the undergraduate student associations form a united body they will not mandate this.
- The MGA argued that the DVC(Education) should not be the final arbiter on disputes between the university and the student associations, as this position works

closely with the student associations. The MGA believes the arbiter should be independent; that it should be attached to a university position that does not work directly with student associations. Prior to the DVC(Education) arriving at Monash, the position was held by the Provost, and the MGA supports the arbiter position being returned to the Provost.

It was agreed that a working party should be set up to advise on the funding negotiations with the university and the undergraduate student associations. The following members expressed interest: Julie, Emily, Aman and Ailsa.

4.2.2 Graduate Coursework forum

Preeti provided a verbal report on the graduate coursework forum held that day at 1pm. In summary, the main areas of concern that had been raised and discussed were:

The desire for a course fee reduction – students complained that the quality of the courses had declined due to being online. They argued that the fees they paid were not just for the course, but for opportunities to interact with classmates and academics, the experience of learning to network, the use of university facilities and services, and the hands-on experience of fieldwork and practicals. Not having access to the whole package diminished the value of the experience, and students felt that this should be acknowledged and reflected by a reduction in the course fees.

The quality of the education being delivered – specific concerns about the quality of the educational experience included: recorded lectures can be static, uninteresting and sometimes dated and there is no time to interact with lecturers; in tutorials students tend to have their cameras off so there is no interaction between students; widespread poor English proficiency means that group work is extremely difficult; time differences between countries make it challenging meeting for group work; some tutors are unable to answer basic questions; and there is a lack of cultural diversity in some classes.

The committee discussed the appointment and training of tutors, given these positions are primarily drawn from the HDR cohort. It was noted that there was no central scheme to which students could apply – each faculty/school had their own processes for appointing tutors. Tutors were often poorly paid and not properly remunerated for the time taken to prepare and mark assignments and/or exams. They were not always qualified and there was sometimes a lack of support and training, resulting in poor performance. Selection was not always based on those who had achieved high marks, but rather those who knew the right people.

E-exams – students felt that the time allowed for exams was inadequate; there were numerous technical problems, some of which took hours to address; and in general, students found e-exams difficult, with exam questions often based on practical work to which students had not had access.

Students complained that the overall experience was stressful and contributed to a deterioration of their mental health. Hardship packages had been exhausted but students were continuing to experience genuine financial hardship. There was a lack of scholarships available for international students. Students were reticent to be identified as complaining, fearful that this would result in negative ramifications on their results and/or visa status.

4.2.3 MGA Supervisor of the Year competition

Members were informed that each year the MGA ran the Supervisor of the Year competition (known as SOTY), where students could nominate their supervisors for the award. The MGA award predated the university award of the same name and was differentiated by the fact that supervisors could not nominate themselves – they could be nominated only by students, and were judged by students. For more information on the award, as well as the SOTY Award Hall of Fame, members were directed to <https://mpa.monash.edu.au/get-involved/mga-awards/soty/>

This year's competition had been open to nominations for several months and was closing on 25 September. Interest was called for from the graduate research members of the committee to form a judging panel. Any students who had nominated their supervisor, or whose supervisor had been nominated for the award were excluded from participating on the panel. There were 27 applications received to date. Samuel, Elliot and Emily indicated interest in forming the judging panel.

4.2.4 Live chat function

It was announced that a new live chat function was being trialled on the MGA website. The purpose of this messaging function was to engage website visitors and provide a better user experience. The chat function would be run by staff who would assist students with any queries they may have or help them find content on the website. The aim was to have this function available Mon - Fri, 9:00 - 5:00pm.

4.2.5 Responding to disclosures of sexual assault

All MGAEC members were encouraged to ensure they were familiar with the appropriate process for responding to students disclosing sexual assault. The [Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Assault online module](#) was available through MyDevelopment and Respectful Communities had requested that all student leaders and staff complete the online module as soon as possible.

4.2.6 Feedback from the IT Faculty

Julie explained that several students from the Faculty of IT had expressed concern about the MGA's lobbying efforts. The committee accepted that not all students would be satisfied with the MGA's decisions about who and what to lobby for, partly because they did not have a complete overview of the situation and sometimes because they simply held a different view of how to best advance the situation. It was agreed that the MGA should continue to act in the interests of the majority of graduate students.

5. Membership

The International Students' Officer position was declared vacant due to Joel Samu's resignation, and nominations to the position were invited. Wendy nominated herself and was seconded by Julie. There being no further nominations, Wendy Febrita was declared elected to the position of International Students' Officer and congratulated by the committee.

One application from Emma Kellaway for cooption to the Indigenous Officer position had been received and was considered by the committee. Emma was invited to give a brief address to the committee and answered questions from members. Emma left the room while the committee

discussed the nomination and conducted a vote. Emma was declared elected to the position of MGA Indigenous Officer and was congratulated by the committee.

6. Next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held by zoom on Thursday 8 October, from 4pm 5.30pm.

The meeting closed at 5.35pm.