

Meeting 07/2021

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 5.00pm – 6.30pm, Saturday 28 August 2021, by zoom.

MINUTES

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), Arjun Sanjeev, Karyn Low, Priyanka Nathani, Elnaz Mokhtari, Elliot Anderson, Yingheng Tan.
Apologies	No apologies received.
Observers	Philip Kairns, Serra Dmello.
In attendance	Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder.

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

Caitlyn noted that the meeting was inquorate so any motions would need to be held over. She invited additional items for the agenda. An online event for R U OK day was added to the agenda at 4.2.8.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 07/2021 for confirmation

Held over.

2.2 Action sheet

The action sheet was noted. Caitlyn informed members that the graduate ceremonies could not be changed due to restrictions imposed on the university by the government as a result of Covid.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

Noted. Caitlyn announced that she would be meeting with several senior managers over the next month.

3.2 Members' reports

All tabled reports were noted. In addition the following matters were raised:

Arjun queried whether students would receive a refund of the \$150 graduate fee if the December 2021 graduate ceremony was cancelled. He also asked whether the deadline for registration for the ceremony could be extended. Caitlyn agreed to inquire into this issue.

Elnaz reported that many HDR students in her faculty were concerned about qualifying for a scholarship extension as there had been delays to their lab work, but students were not confident that the delays could be documented to the satisfaction of the university. Jenny assured members that provided students were progressing, they could be confident of receiving a scholarship extension to 3.5 years, and that MGRO had made it clear they would be very supportive of students seeking extensions due to delays created by Covid.

Karyn noted that the university had ceased providing Covid assistance in the form of adjustments of marks, and queried whether the university was considering revisiting this in light of the Victorian lockdowns having recommenced. Caitlyn responded that the reintroduction of the academic safety net was currently under consideration by the university and she would keep committee members updated on the outcomes of those discussions.

Elliot inquired about the call for judges for a music competition being run by the university. Jan announced that the competition had subsequently been cancelled due to the extended lockdowns.

3.3 Staff report

Noted. There was some discussion about ways to engage students online, although it was widely acknowledged that students were suffering from zoom fatigue, given all their educational activities were also being delivered in this manner, and the idea of then reconnecting with zoom for social purposes was not particularly appealing.

The MGA was having success with small group events involving games and activities to help graduate students make genuine connections with each other, and using gift packs and competitions with prizes to attract students to join.

3.4 July 2021 profit and loss report.

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 MGAEC office-bearer election results

Noted.

4.1.2 Connecting with Malaysia campus

It was noted that the MGA had connected with MUPA in the following ways:

- MGA staff had given a talk to Malaysian students summarising the seminars, workshops and student fora that the MGA could run and/or facilitate for HDRs on Malaysia campus.
- an invitation had been extended to HDR students on Malaysia campus to join the MGA HDR FB page
- MGA staff were in the process of matching MUPA members with MGAEC members for a single trial session to share experiences and ask questions. Members would receive an email introduction to their MUPA counterpart within the next few weeks.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Health, Wellbeing and Stress Report

The MGA report on Graduate Student Health had been very well received, having been widely disseminated to individual senior managers and included on the agenda of central university committees. The MGA was now working with various university sectors to implement as many of the recommendations as possible.

4.2.2 Legal action request on coursework fees

The committee considered a request from an individual graduate student who wanted the MGA to take legal action against the university to force the university to waive all fees for coursework graduate students. It had been explained to the student that while the level of course fees being charged by the university may be seen as unethical or unfair, it was not illegal and therefore a law suit would be certain to fail. The student had been provided with several other avenues through which to lodge a formal complaint, with the assistance of the MGA advocacy service. The committee discussed the matter and supported the initial decision that no legal action would be taken.

4.2.3 Industry internships

It was noted that the 2021-22 Federal Budget had included a financial incentive for universities to enrol research PhD students in industry internships as part of their degree. A government consultation paper on internships has recently been published but had very little detail so it was not yet clear exactly what an internship would look like and how it would be delivered. It was clear that PhD degrees without internships could and would continue to be offered by Australian universities.

Coursework members noted that they would like to see industry placements embedded in graduate coursework degrees.

4.2.4 General regulations

Held over.

4.2.5 MGA 2021 budget adjustments

Held over.

4.2.6 Student Volunteering

Members were informed that the MGA had engaged Vollie, a business that connects professionally-skilled volunteers to community-based organisations, for an initial 12 month trial. Graduate students participating in the trial would be matched with organisations that needed a specific online project completed. The student would volunteer their time and in return would develop skills, gain experience in the Australian workforce and enhance their job opportunities, at the same time helping out an NFP, charity or social enterprise. A call for interest in participating in the program would be advertised in the coming weeks.

4.2.7 Call for SOTY panel

An invitation was extended to HDR committee members to sit on the judging panel for the MGA annual award for Supervisor of the Year (SOTY). It was explained that the award was unique in that supervisors could be nominated only by their students, and nominations were judged by a panel of HDR students, unlike the university version where supervisors could nominate themselves and were judged by academic staff. The competition closed on 30 September and approximately 60 nominations

were expected to be received by the closing date. Elliot and Elnaz volunteered to be part of the panel.

4.2.8 R U OK day

Caitlyn invited staff and committee members to attend an event she was running for R U OK day, where she had invited staff and committee members from all undergraduate student associations across all Victorian campuses, as well as the undergraduate and graduate student associations on Malaysia campus, to share their tips for de-stressing and looking after their mental health. She asked members to wear something yellow on the day. The event would be run by zoom at 2pm on R U OK day, 9 September 2021.

5. Membership

One application had been received from Philip Kairns for the position of Queer Officer. Phil was invited to give a brief presentation to the committee. Given the lack of quorum it was agreed to conduct this cooption vote by email as soon as practicable after the meeting.

6. Next meeting – It was agreed that the next meeting would be held by zoom in October 2021 at a time and date to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 6.31pm.