

Meeting 02/2022

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 6.00pm – 7.30pm, Wednesday 23 March 2022,
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), Elnaz Mokhtari, David Nash (left after 4.1.4), Karyn Low, Philip Kairns, Amir Abyaneh, Melinda Krebsz, Maddie Herath
Apologies	Merve O'Keefe
Observers	Ummatul Saddique, Shaira Nasari, Gagan Chordiya, Sumayyia Abbasi, Sahampath Hettiarachchi
In attendance	Jenny Reeder, Zuzana Quinn, Janice Boey

Caitlyn welcomed the observers to the meeting.

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

No items were added.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 01/2022 for confirmation

There were no corrections to the minutes.

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting February 01/2022 be confirmed.

Moved: Phil Kairns

Seconded: David Nash

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

Caitlyn gave a verbal report on her activities, in summary:

- Met with the DVC (Education) to lobby against the coursework fee increase, see item 4.1.2 for details
- Met with Prof David Copolov to discuss a range of graduate student matters
- Provided feedback on the MGA's experience during semester one orientation to the VC-SPAF meeting where all student Presidents met with the VC. The MGA report acknowledged the positive interactions MGA staff and volunteers had had with graduate students through the MGA events, as well as the largely negative experience the MGA had had with the university last-minute changes to the overall orientation event structure as well as the recently introduced central booking system.
- The MGA's discussions with BPD regarding the cuts to the Clayton-Peninsula shuttle bus had resulted in the early run from Clayton to Peninsula being reinstated, which would accommodate Clayton-based GPG students on placement at Peninsula.

3.2 Members' reports

Noted.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 January and February 2022 profit and loss reports

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

3.6 MGA Sustainability report

The sustainability report was noted and the three proposals for action were discussed.

All three proposals were supported:

- that the MGAEC supported changes to the constitution and election regulations to compel the MGAEC to comprise at least 50% women. It was noted that this could not be applied to the current election which was already in progress. Additionally, this required a constitutional change which could only be authorised by an AGM.
- that the MGA transition to vegetarian-only catering at MGA events, with the aim of reaching 50% vegetarian by the December 2022, 75% by July 2023 and 100% by December 2023. The transition was put in place to give the MGA time to work with existing caterers to encourage them to expand their vegetarian range (which was currently inadequate to support large events) as well as for the MGA events team to source new local vegetarian-friendly catering companies.
- that the MGA transition to Australian-made merchandise, with the aim of reaching 50% by the December 2022, 75% by July 2023 and 100% by December 2023. The transition was put in place to give the MGA time to source local merchandise providers who could provide sustainable products at a reasonable cost. It was noted all printing was currently sourced locally. It was also recognised that purchasing sustainable goods locally would be more costly overall, and as such, additional funding may need to be allocated to this line item.

It was suggested and agreed, that it would be a show of support for the Indigenous community if the MGA were to involve Indigenous providers for services and merchandise where possible.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 CAPA ACM update

No further update available.

4.1.2 Increase in coursework fees

Caitlyn reported that along with the MGA Executive Officer she had met with DVC (Education) Prof Sharon Pickering and Prof Kris Ryan to discuss the 2022 increase in coursework fees. Sharon had stated that the fee increases would not be rolled back. The points made by the university in defence of the coursework fee increase were:

- the fee increase was not applied to all courses; and
- the university did not raise course fees in 2020 and 2021 during Covid when other universities had imposed course fee increases; and
- the university offered course fee discounts to some newly enrolling students so not every student paid the advertised fee.

The MGA noted that many students survived on very tight budgets and even a small course fee increase made a difference to those who had worked out their expenditure in advance based on the original course fee. The MGA requested that the university not apply the fee increase to students who were mid-way through their course in Jan 2022, to allow those students to complete their degree under the cost that was in place at their time of enrolment, as opposed to the 2022 student intake who were aware of the new fee level when enrolling. Sharon agreed to look into this although warned that it was unlikely the university fee charging system was sophisticated enough to allow this selective charging to be administered.

The committee asked Caitlyn to follow up to clarify the criteria for offering course fee discounts; what was the value of the discount, to whom were they offered and under what circumstances? Many members did not know of the existence of such discounts and proposed that the university should be more transparent about this process.

4.1.3 PostAc subscription

The committee was informed that the PostAc subscription was now live and members were encouraged to join and look through the website:

<https://postac.com.au>

All ADGRs had been asked to circulate information about the website to their students. Careers Connect had been advised that all students and staff had access to the website.

Training sessions on PostAc were now available free to all students and staff. It was reported that the MGA had applied to MGRO have all the PostAc training sessions and workshops accredited for the purposes of the HDR professional development program (MDP).

4.1.4 Financial contribution to HDR Thrive project

The committee were informed about the THRIVE portal which had been developed by a team of researchers led by Professor Kim Cornish, HOS Psychology, as a web-based set of evidence-based resources for students to access to prevent and combat mental health concerns. The MGA had been working closely with Prof Cornish on the development of a THRIVE portal specifically for HDR students. Prof Cornish's

research results aligned closely with the MGA's research in this area, which had been used to guide the development of the portal contents. The HDR portal was currently unfunded and the Psychology research team was seeking \$30,000 to employ two research assistants to finalise the project. Prof David Copolov had agreed to provide \$8,000 and it was proposed that the MGA contribute the remaining \$22,000 to ensure this project was completed.

It was proposed:

That the MGA contribute \$22,000 to the development of the HDR THRIVE project.

Moved: Karyn Low

Seconded: David Nash

Carried.

4.1.5 Orientation report, semester 1

The committee noted a report on the MGA's semester one orientation activities, which involved running on-campus events across all four campuses, as well as a series of online events to cater to graduate students still located overseas or interstate. Mentor schemes for course work and research graduate students were launched, as were social groups on the off-campus sites. Smaller functions concentrated on creating genuine connections between participants so as to offer students the opportunity to come away from the event having made a friend.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Food relief programs with NHH

It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had been challenging on university students, in particular international students, who relied heavily on donated support. The MGA and the Notting Hill Neighbourhood House (NHH) community had banded together to provide support in the form of Food Relief funded by a grant from the Victorian government.

Students were able to book online and pick up a free cooked meal every Friday from the Notting Hill Neighbourhood House which was located five minutes walk from Clayton campus. The program started on 25 March and would end when funding is exhausted, expected to be in June 2022. Students could book for a free meal at: <https://www.trybooking.com/BXTLB>

The NHH had also coordinated volunteers to collect unsold bread from various Baker's Delight stores, and deliver the bread to the MGA once per week, to be distributed for free to students (both undergraduates and graduates). The bread has been placed outside the MGA Clayton lounge every Thursday morning and offered on a first-come first-served basis.

The committee inquired as to whether a similar arrangement could be put in place for the other Victorian campuses. The MGA staff would investigate this proposition.

4.2.2 New staff positions

It was proposed that two new staff positions be created within the MGA:

1. Graduate Policy Officer

It was reported that this full-time position was designed to appoint, train and support our graduate representatives on university committees. There were over 60 rep positions to fill and maintain, and the potential to develop and improve connections between student reps, faculty networks and the MGAEC. The incumbent would be expected to build up an expertise in university policy and procedures relevant to graduate students, and use that expertise to support and advise graduate representatives on the various committees in an effort to progress change through the university committees.

2. OHS & Facilities Officer

This part-time position was designed primarily to oversee the OHS compliance of MGA operations with MGA policies, university policies and state and federal legislation. Duties included incident and hazard reporting, induction of staff members and oversight of risk management on all events, including those events run by our graduate groups. The incumbent would also manage all the facilities including liaising with BPD, making purchases of items funded by SSAF capital development money and submitting requests for maintenance and minor works.

The attached position descriptions were considered and the committee approved in principle the establishment of both positions. It was agreed to vote on this matter by email given quorum had been lost.

4.2.3 UQ graduate association flood relief fund

A request had been received from the Association of Postgraduate Students at the University of Queensland (UG) to help the Association's efforts to support victims of the Queensland floods. It was agreed that the MGA would help to promote the UQ Postgraduate Association's Food Drive campaign to raise money for flood victims, see [GoFundMe project](#).

4.2.4 Support for Ukrainian & Russian graduate students

The committee discussed issuing a public statement condemning the war in Ukraine. The MGA advocacy service had been approached by some Ukrainian students concerned about their ability to access funds to pay for next semester. It was anticipated that this may be a problem for both Ukrainian and Russian students going forward, so the MGA would ensure support for both cohorts and would advocate for course fee reductions and/or exemptions from the university for individual students, where appropriate. MGA's past experience with students suffering because of war in their home countries suggested that the university was usually very responsive to requests from the MGA on behalf of these students.

It was agreed that Caitlyn and Phil would work on a public statement that recognised this particular conflict as well areas of conflict in other countries that were not receiving as much media attention.

5. Membership

Five applications for cooption to the committee had been received. Written statements were considered and each applicant who was present was given the opportunity to briefly address the committee and respond to questions. Voting was held over to an email vote being circulated to the committee after the meeting.

6. **Next meeting** – It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in April 2022 at a time and date to be confirmed.