

Meeting 04/2021

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 4.00pm – 5.30pm, Thursday 13 May 2021
by Zoom invitation.

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), Stacey Coe, Julie Dao, Emily Pryor, Roby Vota, Hang Yu, Elliot Anderson, Suhag Arun, Merve O’Keefe, Ailsa Webb, Aman Madaan, Sam Miles, Jessica Lu |
| Apologies | Preeti Mehta |
| Observers | Madhuni Herath, Arjun Sanjeev, Elnaz Mohktari |
| In attendance | Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder, Zuzana Quinn, Ying Xu, James Breheny |

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

No items were added.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 03/2021 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting April 03/2021 be confirmed.

Moved: Emily Pryor

Seconded: Ailsa Webb

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

In relation to meeting 03/2021, item 2.4 about the time disjoint between mid-year course completion and the graduation ceremony, Caitlyn reported that she had held a discussion with Hang and had subsequently raised the MGA’s concerns via email to Sue Elliot and Kris Ryan. Caitlyn was now waiting on a response. There were no other updates to the action sheet.

3. Reports

3.1 President’s report

Noted.

3.2 Members' reports

In addition to the tabled reports, the following was noted:

Emily apologised for not submitting a report. Julie noted the number of late reports circulated after the agenda papers and suggested creating a central shared document for the agenda papers so that members could upload their own reports. It was agreed to trial this for the next meeting.

Sam reported that he had attended the Arts Faculty GRC. A query was raised about the details of the new internship initiative in the recently released federal budget. It was agreed that this would be followed up to confirm the details.

Suhag informed members that the university had contacted all students from Myanmar and helped them form a student society under MONSU-Caulfield, with a view to the society facilitating peer support. The university was continuing to distribute hardship grants to those students who needed assistance due to their families having been affected by Covid. Not many applications had been received so it was believed that the majority of students did not know they were able to reapply. There was also an assumption that many students may be choosing to wait until after exams because they anticipated they would need the financial assistance later. It was agreed that the MGA could help to advertise the grants and raise awareness of the offer within the graduate community. It was noted that students needed to be onshore and to provide relevant documentation of hardship in order to be eligible. Suhag was pleased that in this instance university communication had been sympathetic and their approach had been appreciated by students.

On other matters, English connect had restructured their services and international students who wanted to develop their academic skills could do so through English connect and register that time as professional development hours.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 March 2021 profit and loss report

Noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 Outcome of MSA funding dispute

The MGA was pleased to report that after two years of lobbying, the university had finally conceded that the decision made in 2019 to transfer 15 % of the Clayton graduate SSAF to the Clayton undergraduate student association (MSA-Clayton) should be revisited. An independent arbitor was appointed by the university to make a decision based on the evidence presented by the MGA and MSA-Clayton. The arbitration process was based the principles of natural justice and therefore supported by the MGA. The arbitor allocated 8% of Clayton graduate SSAF to MSA-Clayton

for the period 2021 – 2023. While the MGA was disappointed with the outcome, having calculated the value of MSA-Clayton services to graduates at around 1% of the Clayton graduate SSAF, it was believed that the process was fair and independent and as such the outcome must be accepted.

Additionally, the MGA had recently been informed by the university that 10% of the MGA's 2020 Clayton budget would be allocated to MSA-Clayton. This equated to approximately \$81,000. By comparison the MGA's expenditure for services on Clayton campus during Covid was \$12,000, because no oncampus services could be delivered. The undergraduates were in a similar position, unable to deliver services except online, so their expenditure had been equally dramatically reduced. Caitlyn reported that she had protested this decision directly with Peter Marshall, University COO, and would report back once she had received a response.

4.1.2 PhD periodic employment proposal

The MGA requested details from the university about their proposal to introduce fixed-term employment for PhD students. The university was currently in negotiations with the NTEU, the body that represented all university staff, including casuals.

The university provided some information about the fixed-term contracts, in summary:

- The employment contracts were designed by the Vice-Chancellor to support and attract students to PhD positions within the university and were not developed in response to the changes in work legislation that requires employers to offer casuals employed for more than 12 months a path to permanent employment;
- The employment contracts would be offered to all PhD students who currently held a sessional position and had more than 12 months to completion;
- Employment contracts may be offered to new PhD students and current PhD students with more than 12 months to completion; and
- PhD students who qualified for an employment contract but chose not to take it up would not necessarily be offered further casual sessional work.

Emily informed the committee that any change to the EA would be put to a vote of all staff members. Members raised a number of concerns including that: not many HDRs were members of the NTEU and therefore would not have the opportunity to influence the NTEU's decision on the matter; HDRs in their last year may lose their only source of income; overall students would rather remain casual and receive the casual salary loading over any other benefit of a fixed-term appointment; and the flexibility of casual work suited HDRs in preference to a fixed weekly schedule.

4.1.3 Election update

Caitlyn welcomed incoming members present at the meeting and invited them to speak. Maddie Herath, Arjun Sanjeev and Elnaz Mohktari briefly introduced themselves to the committee.

Members were informed that the MGAEC elections had concluded with the following results:

Clayton campus rep: Elnaz Mokhtari

Caulfield campus rep: Arjun Sanjeev

Parkville campus rep: David Nash

Peninsula campus rep: vacant

General representatives:

Caitlyn Neale

Deven Kumar
Elliot Anderson
Karyn Low
Madhuni Herath
Merve O’Keefe
Nathalie Farah
Pranay Prathivadi
Priyanka Nathani
Sam Miles
Yingheng Tan

4.1.4 Funding agreement with the university

Caitlyn reported that negotiations over the MGA’s funding agreement (FA) which would determine the conditions under which the MGA would receive funding from the university, were progressing slowly. Of concern were some late inclusions by the university that changed the way in which the graduate funding was distributed to the undergraduates, the lack of an agreement between MSA-Clayton and the MGA, and the suggestion that the FA override the signed agreements between the MGA and MONSU-Caulfield, and MGA and MONSU-Peninsula, both of which were in place and operating smoothly. Caitlyn had requested a face-to-face discussion with the university to resolve outstanding points and to bring negotiations to a conclusion.

4.1.5 Email motion re bank account

It was noted that on 28 April 2021 the following motion, along with explanatory information was sent to members for a vote by email. By the closing date 9 members had responded, all voting in favour of the motion. The motion was therefore declared carried.

It was moved:

That the MGAEC approved the establishment of a new account attached to the MGA Westpac bank account, to hold funding allocated to MGA graduate groups.

Moved: Caitlyn Neale
Carried.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Planning for semester 2 events

The committee was informed that planning for semester two events was currently underway. Members were invited to provide feedback on the types of events offered by the MGA, by emailing Janice Boey by 20 May 2021. Janice planned to arrange a meeting with interested members to discuss the activities in detail.

4.2.2 CISA membership

The MGAEC had previously deregistered from CISA membership due to concerns over a lack of financial transparency and misogynistic practices within their committee. Since that decision a new committee had been elected. An email had been received from CISA asking MGA to reconsider their position, pointing to their amended constitution, new policy governing honoraria and willingness to provide audited reports. The membership fees for 2021 were \$528. Caitlyn noted that the previous MGAEC had wanted to see improved financial practices in place and support

for women to be part of the committee before considering rejoining. It was agreed that Caitlyn would request CISA's audited report.

4.2.3 CAPA membership

Caitlyn explained that in 2020 the committee had made a decision to cap the payment to CAPA at \$35,000, despite the fee levied being slightly higher. The 2021 affiliation fee had recently been received and had been calculated by CAPA at \$46,554.

It was proposed that the MGA write to CAPA to explain that the \$35,000 cap had been set, not because the MGA was unable to pay the full fee but because of competing budget priorities and the belief that Monash graduate students would not receive a direct benefit from additional funds being directed to CAPA.

It was moved:

That a maximum membership payment of \$35,000 be provided to CAPA for 2021, dependent on MGA membership to CAPA being granted.

Moved: Caitlyn Neale
Carried.

4.2.4 Budget adjustments

Several adjustments were required to the approved budget so that 8% of the Clayton graduate SSAF could be made to the Clayton undergraduates.

It was moved:

That the following adjustments to the 2021 budget be applied:

- *\$5000 from "Joint undergrad events", \$20,000 from Clayton events, \$20,000 from Caulfield events and \$16,000 from OB budgets be moved to "payments to undergrads" to cover the MSA-Clayton SSAF payment; and*
- *\$10,000 be moved from "staff development" to "minor purchases" to cover the cost of computer replacements.*

Moved: Jessica Lu
Seconded: Julie Dao
Carried.

Members were reminded of the requirement to attend the AGM, which was to be held by zoom at 1pm on Tuesday 25 May 2021.

4.2.5 Staff restructure

The committee considered a number of confidential staffing matters.

It was moved:

That the Finance Assistant position be increased from a 0.6 fraction to a 0.8 fraction.

Moved: Elliot Anderson
Seconded: Ailsa Webb
Carried.

It was moved:

That \$8000 funding from "graduate lounge consumables" be approved for two short term projects on sustainability and OHS.

Moved: Ailsa Webb
Seconded: Julie Dao
Carried.

It was moved:

That the proposed restructure of the MGA events staff section be approved.

Moved: Caitlyn Neale
Carried.

5. Membership

No business.

- 6. Next meeting** – It was agreed that the next and final meeting for this committee would be held in person on Caulfield campus, Thursday 10 June, from 4pm – 5.30pm.