

Meeting 11/2020

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee**
was held from 4.00pm – 5.30pm, Thursday 11 December 2020
by Zoom invitation.

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, Jessica Lu, Wendy Febrita, Emily Pryor, Ailsa Webb, Roby Vota, Ke Xiou Tan, Aman Madaan, Mazaya Abidin, Preeti Mehta.
Apologies	Sam Miles, Hang Yu, Emma Kellaway (left at 4.15).
In attendance	Janice Boey, Jenny Reeder, Zuzana Quinn, Sarah Murphy, Ying Xu, James Breheny, Sara Fung, Suhag Arun, Rachana Manjunath, Karuna Balasubramanian, Decem Kwon, Chahana Patel.

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

No items were added.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes 10/2020 for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting November 10/2020 be confirmed.

Moved: Wendy
Seconded: Ailsa
Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

All written submitted reports were noted. In addition:

3.1 President's report

Caitlyn asked senior management again about the possibility of a course fee discount in light of recent publicity that some other universities were offering discounts. The university reaffirmed its position that it would not offer discounts on course fees to students. Caitlyn informed members that she would continue to monitor activity within G08 universities in relation to this issue.

The committee noted that the university seemed to be very defensive about this matter and further discussed the issue, considering other avenues such as FOIs to ensure the MGA was fully informed of the facts relating to the university's position. Caitlyn pointed out that the university's response was always centred on the fact that they had provided hardship grants instead of discounts. It was agreed that the university's precarious financial position was likely the main factor influencing their decision to refuse discounts.

3.2 Members' reports

Parkville - Jess reported that the 10 year anniversary of the SOBS symposium run in 2020 was very successful. She thanked the MGA for sponsoring 2 poster prizes and noted that the symposium had a good outreach this year due to being online and therefore offered an excellent opportunity to promote the MGA to graduate students.

It was also noted that the PPA (MGA Parkville branch) would elect their new committee at the next AGM, to be held the following week.

Off-campus and DE - Ailsa reported that a significant number of Law Chambers students had experienced technical problems with e-exams. Zuzana informed members that the MGA was representing approximately ten IT Faculty students with a request to Student and Education Business Services, the university section responsible for the e-exam roll-out. In response the university had given the students additional time but the whole process had caused a great deal of grief and stress for the students involved. Students were being told to make an application for special consideration but that process doesn't apply if students have started their exam. Even a deferred exam was not a good outcome for students. It was suggested that in these circumstances, the university should give students the average mark they have achieved across units that year. Ailsa noted that the technical issues were so wide spread among Law graduates that most students had not bothered raising complaints. Preeti added that it was a similar situation for IT Faculty graduate students. Zuzana reminded members to send individual students with complaints to the MGA advocacy service. Caitlyn and Ailsa agreed to take this matter to Kris Ryan as a matter of urgency.

It was noted that all technical issues experienced by students needed to be logged by the invigilators, and it was agreed that Caitlyn should request this information at Education committee. A working group was established by Ailsa and Preeti, with the intention that a call be issued to the wider graduate community for feedback on their e-exam experiences.

International - Preeti suggested that the MGA advertise on FaceBook how the advocacy service can assist them, aiming to have one graduate student per department engaged in the project. It was also noted that there were inconsistencies across unit information in Moodle in relation to uploaded content. Caitlyn agreed to raise this issue at the Student Experience Committee given they were the body overseeing the establishment of a minimum threshold of information on units in Moodle.

Graduate research - Emily reported that she had met with the GRC Chair and Faculty student representatives and had raised concerns about the statistical consulting service. The GRC

Chair had confirmed that individual consultancy hours would not disappear but he did not provide details about the total number of individual hours that would be funded. While GRC had initially indicated that they would look into applying blanket unpaid leave extensions to all candidates, they now appeared to have backed down on that inquiry. There was still a possibility that this request could be made to Academic Board, through the graduate HDR representative. Emily also noted that the Supervisor of the Year award had been held online by zoom, and the recipient Assoc Prof Steven Roberts was genuinely surprised to discover he had won the award for 2020. The Provost and Dean of Arts spoke briefly and the nominating students and their supervisor gave very moving speeches. Caitlyn thanked the MGAEC members who had formed the SOTY panel and had read and assessed all 105 nominations.

3.3 Staff report

The staff report was noted.

3.4 November 2020 profit and loss report

The November profit and loss report was noted.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

The meeting attendance records were noted. Preeti requested that the records be amended to show her as present at the November meeting.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising

4.1.1 December MGA office opening

It was noted that subsequent to the Vice-Chancellor's recent announcement that the university would allow some non-academic support services to reopen on campus in December, the MGA offices on Clayton and Caulfield campuses would reopen from 7 December 2020 to 18 December 2020 with a skeleton staff.

4.1.2 Term deposit

The MGA had investigated some of the financial institutions for their ethical and environmental records as well as interest rates, and had provided that information to the committee. It was agreed that the term deposit would sit with Westpac once matured on 18 December and the money would be moved once a decision had been made about the institution with which to invest. The long-term plan would be to move all the MGA bank accounts to a more ethical institution in late 2021.

4.1.3 2020 budget adjustments

The committee considered the proposed budget adjustments for 2020 and agreed to vote on this motion by email given the recent profit and loss report had been received only that morning.

4.1.4 MGAEC stipends

It was explained that the previous committee had committed to reducing their own stipends during 2020 due to the financial pressures on the association. That agreement was due to expire on 31 December 2020. The committee considered continuing the stipend reductions for a further year given the MGA budget was expected to be very low again in 2021 because of border closures affecting international student enrolments.

The current reductions in place were a 60% reduction on the President's and Vice-President's stipends and a 20 % reduction on all other members' stipends.

It was moved:

That stipends continue at the current reduced rates from 1 Jan 2021 to 31 Dec 2021.

Moved: Ailsa

Seconded: Aman

Carried.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 MGA End-of-year closedown dates

Committee members were informed that the last day of work for MGA staff would be 18 December 2020 and the first day back would be 11 January 2021.

There was a request to confirm the C2 lounge hours during lock-down.

Ke Xiou informed members that she had to leave the meeting, and thanked everyone for the opportunity to work with the Executive Committee. Caitlyn thanked Ke Xiou for her contribution, acknowledging the wonderful work she had undertaken in her role as Women's Officer, and wishing her good luck in her career.

4.2.2 CAPA awards

Members were informed about the annual CAPA awards presented to affiliate organisations and individuals who had made a significant contribution in a particular area. Last year the MGA had won the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Initiative of the Year for their hosting of the 20th anniversary NATSIPA conference as well as for running the inaugural HDR retreat for Monash Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduate students and developing the Acknowledgement of Country statement printed on business cards for ease of use by Monash students and staff.

This year the MGA had been nominated for the Welfare Initiative of the Year.

4.2.3 MGA feedback on Student Harmonisation

The committee noted the feedback provided by the MGA on the university's Student Harmonisation project, which was an overall review of the policies and procedures relating to census dates, grading schema, special consideration, intermission, withdrawal, withdrawn incomplete, remission of debt, student complaints, academic integrity, academic misconduct and discipline.

4.2.4 MGA feedback on Student Complaints policy

The committee noted the feedback provided by the MGA on the university's draft Student Complaints policy and procedures.

4.2.5 Sexual misconduct cases

The issue was raised of whether or not the university should be running its own discipline hearings on cases of sexual misconduct. Zuzana raised the quandary of whether or not MGA advocacy support should be provided for graduate students involved in sexual misconduct cases. In summary the concerns were whether:

- if by providing that support, the MGA would be assisting graduate students in a process that may lead to the student making incriminating admissions that could later be held against them in a court of law: and
- if by not providing students with assistance the MGA was in breach of its duties.

The MGA had initially written to the university raising concerns about the university's decision to run internal hearings on sexual misconduct matters, which are criminal matters and MGA believes should be dealt with through the criminal system. The MGA's position was that alleged sexual misconduct should not be subject to university internal procedures, and that the university had neither the authority nor the expertise to decide on such matters. The university contended that they had the authority and a duty to run such hearings and would continue to do so.

It was explained that in general misconduct cases, the MGA advocacy service had a duty to provide support for both the alleged perpetrator and victim if they were both graduate students. This is done by using separate advocates for each student party, with those two advocates prohibited from discussing or revealing anything about their specific cases with/to each other (otherwise known in law as a Firewall). This same advocacy system could be used to support graduates involved in sexual misconduct cases but because sexual misconduct is a criminal offence, cases heard by a university via internal hearings, could later be raised by students or the police through the courts.

Notes used for the university internal hearing could be subpoenaed to be used in a criminal justice system at a later date. Students accused of misconduct could sometimes make admissions as a way of getting the case over and done with but this may prejudice their case in the future. Advice given to students facing university hearings is different to the advice needed for students facing criminal proceedings. Both the student and the MGA may be compromised by this internal process. Because of this, other student association advocacy services have now refused to support students in sexual misconduct hearings.

The committee discussed this matter at length and asked that the discussion continue at the February meeting.

4.2.6 CAPA ACM

Emily, Preeti and Jess reported on their attendance at the CAPA ACM, held by zoom in early December.

There had been some complaints about the management of the event because it ran over 3 days instead of 2 days as advertised. The incoming CAPA President and Vice-President wanted a discussion with the MGAEC, so it was agreed to invite them to the next meeting in February 2021.

Emily stated that she had asked the speaker from the Department of Education and Training about some HDR issues, and he had agreed that it might be time to reconsider the fact that part-time candidates received only 30 days of additional paid leave over the course of their candidature, as opposed to full-time candidates who received 60 days.

4.2.7 Member resignation

Caitlyn thanked Wendy and Ke Xiou (in her absence) for their contributions in representing the concerns of the international student cohort in what had been an extremely challenging year.

5. Membership

Six applications for cooption to the International Students' Officer position had been received. Each applicant spoke to the committee for two minutes and answered committee member questions. The committee discussed the candidates and held a confidential vote.

Suhag Arun was elected to the position of International Students' Officer, and was congratulated by the committee.

- 6. Next meeting** – The committee members were reminded that there would be no MGAEC meeting in January. The next meeting would be held by zoom on Thursday 11 February, from 4pm – 5.30pm.

Caitlyn thanked all committee members and staff, acknowledging their hard work and the tremendous support they had given to the graduate community and each other during a very difficult year.

The meeting closed at 5.45pm.