

Meeting 02/2024

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 2.30pm – 4.30pm, Wednesday 27 March 2024, in the MGA Meeting room, Clayton campus and by zoom.

MINUTES

1. Formal matters

1.1 Acknowledgement of country

The MGAEC President 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 & Apologies

Present: Saham Hettiarachchi, Ying-Xian Evelyn Lai, Rachel Lee, Runali Patil, Calvin Chow, Arathy Kurup, Ummatul Siddique, Jonathan Robberts, Grace Bennetts, Aakash Saraf, and Kritika Arora.

Apologies: Phil Cairns, Harshita Rathi, Mahima Chowdhury

In attendance: Jenny Reeder Executive Officer
Zuzana Quinn, Senior Advocate
Janice Boey, Student Engagement Manager
Charlie Li, HR and Finance Manager
Leilani Hatfield, Student Engagement Officer, Clayton
Ash Finn, Graduate Policy and Liaison Officer
Tina Huang, Marketing and Social Media Assistant

1.3 Consideration of the agenda

No new items were added.

2. Minutes and Action sheet

2.1 Minutes of meeting 3/2024 March for confirmation

It was moved:

That the minutes of MGAEC meeting March 2/2024 be confirmed.

Moved: Jonathan Robberts

Seconded: Rachel Lee

Carried.

2.2 Action sheet

Noted.

3. Reports

3.1 President's report

Noted.

3.2 Members' reports

Noted.

Vice-President

Jonathan noted having hosted a recent HDR strategy session which would be discussed later in the meeting.

3.3 Staff report

Noted.

3.4 January and February 2024 profit and loss reports

Noted. Aakash queried the cost of the auditor fees. It was explained that the MGA had recently changed auditors and in the process had obtained a number of quotations and compared prices from companies familiar with NFP organisations; the current rate was the consistent with market prices. The fee was calculated on the size of the association and the financial complexity of transactions. However, if the committee wished to review auditing costs, they could do so for the 2025 audit.

3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records

Noted without amendment.

4. Business

4.1 Business arising 2.55pm

4.1.1 Member accountability and Honoraria Regulations

Saham explained that one of the MGAEC's functions was to ensure that the SSAF funding entrusted to the MGA was spent responsibly. To that end Jonathan and Saham had drafted amendments to the Honoraria Regulations which included:

- ensuring members' monthly reports were made public;
- clarifying members' minimum responsibilities; and
- developing a process for evaluating members' performances prior to making the honoraria payment each quarter.

Attached to the agenda for this meeting were the proposed changes to the draft Honoria Regulations. Saham summarised the provisions in the regulations and their intended operation. The establishment of the Evaluation sub-committee was yet to be inserted. The regulations would also contain a mandatory review period after one full-term and an amendment would be inserted to this effect.

It was moved:

That the MGA Honoraria regulation amendments be accepted.

Moved: Jonathan Robberts

Seconded: Ying-Xian Evelyn Lai

Carried.

4.1.2 AGM Motions

Saham explained that any amendments to the MGA Constitution needed to be made at the forthcoming MGA AGM and must be advertised in advance in accordance with the mandatory time frame. The AGM had been scheduled for Thursday 16 May 2024 to be held by zoom. It was suggested that the AGM be hybrid to also allow in-person attendance. Members were reminded they had to prepare their annual reports for the AGM and they would have an opportunity to speak briefly to those reports at the meeting.

4.1.3 Misuse of the MGA's ABN

The MGA ABN had been used without the MGA's permission or notification and without observing the proper process for raising invoices. The MGA had subsequently written to the University CFO. CCD had since acknowledged that the proper process had not been observed. Additional processes had been put in place by the University to ensure this error did not occur again. Any student groups approaching University staff to raise an invoice or pay the group additional funds would be informed by University staff to go through the usual MGA processes.

4.1.4 2024 MGA Budget

The MGA Budget passed last year by the committee for 2024, was currently in deficit. The MGA currently held no reserves, having spent those reserves during 2022 and 2023 to keep the organisation running, in light of the GPG enrolment numbers at Monash having failed to bounce back after Covid. Reserves would need to be rebuilt, and it was agreed that the MGA needed to work towards decreasing the staff budget which was now taking up a sizeable portion of the budget, and increasing the events budget.

The MGAEC was supportive of rebuilding the reserve and reducing the percentage of the budget spent on staff salaries.

It was moved:

That the amended 2024 MGA Budget be accepted.

Moved: Jonathan Robberts
Seconded Ummatul Siddique
Carried.

4.1.5 Associateship Program

Jonathan informed committee members that he, Ash and Saham had recently hosted an HDR representatives' strategy session. Jonathan explained that the MGA was comprised of the MGAEC, being the governing body but also had volunteers, and that there was a gap in the MGA's representative function, with insufficient communication between the MGA and its nominated representatives sitting on various University central and faculty committees. These committees were important decision-making bodies and as such the MGA representatives occupied important governance and leadership positions. The representatives' strategy project included setting up a network so that information from representatives could be used to inform the MGAEC's decisions. The MGAEC needed to look at how to best work as a network. By providing representatives with opportunities to develop their leadership skills and by offering incentives of associateships, the network would strengthen.

Discussion followed on how to better involve HDR representatives, and how to formalise a long term HDR strategy network. Currently, workshops were run as well as a representatives' induction for newly appointed representatives. What was needed in the longer term, was a training program for MGA representatives, which may also include mentorships. The focus of this program would be on development and training, so that the MGA offered more benefits for volunteers and representatives and also more opportunities for graduate student engagement. The intention of this program was to be inclusive.

The MGAEC gave in-principle support for this network going ahead.

4.2 General Business

4.2.1 Semester 1, 2024 orientation summary

The summary of orientation events and results was noted. Members were advised that the orientation sessions were very well attended. Saham thanked the MGAEC members who volunteered to help at orientation events and commended the MGA events and marketing staff for a job well-done.

4.2.2 EC Engagement

This item was held over to the April meeting.

4.2.3 MONSU Peninsula and Caulfield funding

It was explained that the MGA had a Funding Agreement with Monash University, under which the MGA agreed to provide some graduate SSAF funding to the undergraduate campus-based associations. This recognised that some graduate students can and do access the activities and resources offered by the undergraduate associations on each campus.

Monash University automatically takes out 8% of the SSAF paid by Clayton-enrolled graduate students and pays it directly to MSA-Clayton. While the MGA believes this to be significantly over and above any value that Clayton graduates receive from MSA-Clayton-run services, the amount was dictated by the university and cannot be changed for 2024.

In 2021, the MGA had negotiated directly with MONSU-Caulfield and MONSU-Peninsula to agree to an amount to be transferred, and this more accurately reflected the value being received by graduate students on those two campuses. Because the Peninsula graduate cohort numbers had increased since the beginning of the MGA's Funding Agreement with MONSU-Peninsula in 2021, MONSU-Peninsula had asked for an increase from \$4000 to \$5,500. Umma noted that graduate students at Peninsula often participated in the MONSU-Peninsula events, especially free food events. The MGA had a very good relationship with MONSU-Peninsula and often worked collaboratively to run jointly-funded events. After some discussion the committee agreed to provide a \$6000 grant to MONSU-Peninsula for 2024 in recognition of their work supporting graduate students and their limited 2024 budget.

It was moved:

That the MGAEC allocate the sum of \$6000 to MONSU-Peninsula for 2024.

Moved: Umma Siddique
Second: Jonathan Robberts
Carried.

4.2.4 Clayton Event – Meet your rep

Rachel advised she recently ran a three week program in the form of a weekly ‘meet and greet event’ on Mondays at Clayton. Some students who had arrived late and missed orientation found these events very helpful. Rachel had the opportunity to chat with the students at the events, who provided useful feedback for the MGAEC. In summary:

- Some international students reported they were unhappy with the new graduate visa policy.
- Students with families and students with disabilities were very concerned in particular. They felt isolated and reported that there was a lack of support from EDI. They were also disappointed that they were not eligible to access the NDIS scheme. Overall, they felt Monash was not supportive enough.

Rachel intends to reach out to some of the students she spoke with and inform them about Ash’s working group, as well as offer other forms of support available from units within the university.

4.2.5 2023 Audit Documentation

The draft audit document was noted by the committee.

4.2.6 MIISON

Calvin advised that the MSO Presidents met recently and agreed that MIISON needed to operate as a network which was the intention when MIISON was formed, and not as a separate student association. It was also agreed that MIISON should be operating under the auspices of the MSOs not under university staff. It was planned that the MSOs should support and administer MIISON, and staff members from the relevant university units such as ISE, should be regularly invited to speak at MIISON meetings. The revised terms of reference would be circulated to all MSOs.

4.2.7 Joint Campaign with NTEU re parking prices

The MGA had agreed to support the NTEU’s open letter to the Vice-Chancellor which requested that the university reverse the parking increase, which had been doubled for the first few weeks of semester. At the last VCSPAF meeting, the Vice Chancellor had rejected MGA’s request to lower the parking costs. The NTEU had made an FOI request to Monash University for documents detailing its discussions on the matter. There were also some OHS concerns in certain carparks where lifts did not work properly.

4.2.8 NTEU request for MGA support

The NTEU had composed a letter to University Council members complaining about a range of topics including the cost of the previous VC’s farewell event. The MGA had been asked for their support. Saham had responded to the NTEU saying that their letter was not entirely aligned with the MGA’s approach and that it needed clarification. Some MGA constituents would be impacted by the staffing matters

raised within the letter but the language used was inflammatory. Discussion took place about implications of signing the letter.

It was agreed that Saham would work on an addendum to send to the NTEU to include with their letter. The MGA's support would be qualified with the provision of an addendum and the MGA's specific concerns could be included as well as a willingness to participate in discussions.

5. Membership matters

5.1 Excluded member and consideration of Honoraria payment

It was noted that Prashansa Chadha had been excluded from the MGAEC for missing six meetings and failing to submit member reports. The MGAEC decided that as Prashansa had failed to fulfill the minimum duties required of an MGAEC member, no honorarium would be paid under the circumstances.

It was moved:

That no honorarium will be paid to Prashansa Chadha for the last quarter of her term with the MGAEC.

Moved Jonathan Robberts
Seconded Umma Siddique
Carried.

5.2 Cooption of additional member

This item was held over to the April meeting.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting would be held in April 2024 at a time and place to be confirmed by members' availability.

The meeting concluded at 4.34pm.