

## Meeting 12/2023

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 10:00am – 12:00pm, Friday 15 December 2023, in the CCD Seminar room, Clayton campus and by zoom.

### MINUTES

The meeting commenced inquorate at 10.07am, and became quorate at 10.40am.

#### 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 & Apologies

Present: Saham Hettiarachchi, Phil Kairns, Ying-Xian Lai, Rachel Lee, Saral Gupta, Runali Patil, Maria Lammerding (arrived 10.13am), Calvin Chow (arrived 10.40am) and Arathy Kurup (arrived 10.56am).

Apologies: Ummatul Siddique, Jonathan Robberts, Grace Bennetts, Harshita Rathi.

In attendance: Jenny Reeder Executive Officer  
Zuzana Quinn, Senior Advocate  
Janice Boey, Student Engagement Manager (joined 11am)  
Charlie Li, HR and Finance Manager  
Ryan Edwards, Research Officer  
Ash Finn, Graduate Policy and Liaison Officer

Observers: Jenn Wilson, incoming Academic Board representative

##### 1.3 Consideration of the agenda

Saham welcomed Jenn Wilson to the meeting and thanked her for her interest.

No items were added.

#### 2. Minutes and Action sheet 10.10am

##### 2.1 Minutes of meeting 11/2023 for confirmation

It was moved:

*That the minutes of MGAEC meeting November 11/2023 be confirmed.*

Moved: Calvin Chow

Seconded: Maria Lammerding

Carried.

## **2.2 Action sheet**

Noted.

## **3. Reports**

### **3.1 President's report**

Noted.

### **3.2 Members' reports**

Noted.

Jenn inquired as to how committee members reported back on their activities to the graduate student community, given that members' reports were included in the agenda papers, but not the minutes. Saham explained that while the MGAEC agenda papers were confidential, the MGAEC minutes recorded the major discussions and decisions arising from any issues raised in members' reports, and minutes were posted on the website. There was a discussion about how the MGA could make details of members' reports more easily available, including a proposal that those reports could be posted directly to the website. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next meeting in February 2024.

### **3.3 Staff report**

Noted.

### **3.4 November 2023 profit and loss report**

Noted. Saham advised that the MGA was placing \$800,000 into a term deposit, noting that under the Enterprise Agreement, it was a requirement to set aside staff leave entitlements in a separate bank account.

### **3.5 MGAEC meeting attendance records**

Noted.

## **4. Business**

### **4.1 Business arising**

#### **4.1.1 MGA 2023 funding**

Saham referred the MGAEC to the VC-SPAF minutes and the conversation he had with the university COO, Peter Marshall. The MGA were scheduled to meet with Peter Marshall in February 2024.

Saham opened the floor for discussion. The current situation was that the University had not released the MGA's final 2023 funding instalment, and had applied an additional condition of release that was outside the original Funding Agreement conditions. The MGAEC felt that the demands made by the University were an abuse of power, and had placed the university in breach of the Funding Agreement.

Immediately after the election, the MGA had reviewed the election regulations and recommended changes to the regulations in response to the inappropriate actions taken by one group of students, who had weaponised the elections to punish a rival student group. Some of the changes suggested by the MGA had already been

implemented. It was noted that many of the recommendations made subsequently by the university auditor aligned with the MGA's own recommendations.

The MGAEC discussed the matter at length, concluding that although there was a strong desire to run a campaign to call out the poor behaviour of the university, the MGA was in a difficult financial situation and would not survive a lengthy fight. The committee noted that they had already experienced first-hand the university's punitive behaviour and disregard for the MGA's independent status. It was agreed to take a pragmatic approach to resolve the situation, while keeping open the option to lodge a complaint with the Victorian Ombudsman and/or Jason Clare, the Minister for Higher Education.

#### **4.1.2 Variation of MGA Funding Agreement to 2024**

Saham explained that every three years the MGA Funding Agreement was renegotiated by all MSOs. This year Monash had requested a one-year extension to the original agreement expiring in December 2023, taking the agreement to December 2024. In addition, the university had requested a variation clause be inserted into the agreement, which would allow the university to investigate any concerns they had about the MSOs.

The MGA had proposed two amendments to the variation, one of which had been accepted by the university. It was agreed that the MGA would accept the amended variation.

#### **4.1.3 Gaza email motion**

An email motion sent on 29 November 2023 to decide whether or not the MGA should make a public statement on this matter, failed due to being inquorate. Phil pointed the MGAEC to a Facebook link posted by a student on the MGA HDR FB account, which had a petition on the Gaza matter for those wanting to take personal action.

#### **4.1.4 Letter to CAPA & ACM report**

Saham sent a letter to the current CAPA President in response to the CAPA call out for affiliation. The MGA had not been paying affiliation fees due to the dysfunction of CAPA. The letter stated that until CAPA could demonstrate its adherence to its obligations under the constitution, and institute good governance and transparency, no affiliation fee would be paid.

The letter also complained about the behaviour of Anumant Senthilkumar, the CAPA Vice-President, who had interfered in an internal Monash university matter to the detriment of the MGA, and had made defamatory and false statements about the MGA. This was the same student who had also brought false and defamatory allegations against the MGA in relation to the running of the 2023-24 MGAEC elections. It was agreed that SCU should be alerted to the behaviour of this student given his actions were a breach of the Student Code of Conduct.

#### **4.1.5 Election regulation amendments**

A tracked change version of the MGA Election Regulations was provided with the agenda. Directives were needed from the MGAEC with respect to the following matters:

- a. Should visiting students from Monash's overseas campuses and affiliated institutions, who are enrolled at Monash University Australia for a limited period of time, be permitted to sit on the MGAEC? This was pertinent to the definition of 'student' in the Regulations. It was agreed that visiting students should be able to participate on the MGAEC, so the original definition would remain.
- b. What information should be disclosed in the public report of the Returning Officer? A detailed discussion took place about the pros and cons of disclosing the actual number of votes for each candidate. It was pointed out that the faculty and gender restrictions that were applied to the initial ranking coming from the automated optional preferential voting system, rendered any report of vote tallies meaningless; a faculty or gender restriction could result in a high-scoring candidate being removed in favour of a low-ranking candidate. This could create confusion among those graduates not familiar with the Election Regulations.

It was suggested that the highest number of votes received by an individual candidate, and the lowest number of votes received by a candidate could be disclosed to provide an indication of the range of the voting numbers. It was agreed to discuss this further in the February meeting.

- c. Given the election regulation restrictions on hardcopy flyers and use of electronic sites, how could the MGA provide a place for candidates to promote themselves? It was felt that providing a social media platform where candidates could post may be difficult to moderate. Instead, the idea of running a live Q&A session was supported, as was the idea of asking candidates to answer certain questions posed by the graduate student community, and posting those answers on the MGA website.

## **4.2 General Business**

### **4.2.1 MGA report on student SSAF**

The MGA had conducted a SSAF survey. An invitation to participate was extended to the undergraduate associations. Some interesting results were noted including a difference in responses from older students and international versus domestic students about access to direct services. The results would be placed on the MGA website.

### **4.2.2 Graduate Group regulations**

A copy of the Graduate Group regulations had been circulated with the agenda.

It was moved:

*That the MGA Graduate Group Regulations be accepted.*

Moved: Saral Gupta

Seconded: Calvin Chow

Carried.

### **4.2.3 Member accountability**

Held over.

### **4.2.4 MGAEC end-of-year dinner**

Saham agreed to send an availability request to the MGAEC for a tentative date in the second week of January 2024. A venue would be decided thereafter but would most likely be in the Melbourne CBD.

**5. Membership matters**

It was noted that Saral and Maria had completed their degrees and as such this was their last MGAEC meeting. Saham thanked them both for their input, passion and hard work in their respective graduate student representative roles and capacities and wished them well in the future. Saham called for interest to fill their office-bearer roles internally, prior to advertising more widely for cooptions to the committee. There was no interest from those present, but the matter would be raised again at the February 2024 meeting.

**6. Next meeting**

The next meeting would be held in February 2024 at a date and time tbc by committee members.

The meeting closed at 11.58am.