

### **Meeting 09/2023**

A meeting of the **Monash Graduate Association (MGA) Executive Committee** was held from 2.30pm – 4.30pm, Tuesday 26 September 2023, in the Boardroom, CCD, Campus Centre, Clayton campus and by zoom.

### **MINUTES**

The meeting was opened at 2.36pm.

#### **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, Maria Lammerding, Ummatul Siddique, Calvin Chow, Ying-Xian Lai, Harshita Rathi, Jonathan Robberts, Rachel Lee, Mahima Choudhary, Runali Patil and Saral Gupta.

Apologies: Phil Cairns, Arathy Kurup, Grace Bennetts and Prashansa Chadha

In attendance: Jenny Reeder, Executive Officer  
Zuzana Quinn, Senior Advocate  
James Breheny, Advocate  
Leilani Duong, Student Engagement Officer  
Ash Finn, Graduate Policy and Liaison Officer

Zuzana Quinn, Senior Advocate, gave a ten minute presentation on Conflicts of Interest.

##### **1.3 Consideration of the agenda**

*Item 4.2.6 Discussions with GSA* was added.

#### **2. Minutes and Action sheet**

##### **2.1 Minutes of meeting 07/2023 for confirmation**

It was moved:

*That the minutes of MGAEC meeting August 08/2023 be confirmed.*

Moved: Calvin Chow

Seconded: Jonathan Robberts

Carried.

##### **2.2 Action sheet**

Noted.

#### **3. Reports**

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

Noted.

### **3.2 Members' reports**

Noted.

Umma asked for more supplies for Struan House, including milk and coffee pods. She offered to use part of the Peninsula budget for the purchase.

Jonathan met with Adam Bandt, leader of the Australian Greens and MP for Melbourne, and Mehreen Faruqi, Australian Greens Senator for NSW, as they had both expressed interest in supporting three issues that were of concern to graduate students:

1. the cost of living and base value of the RTP stipend
2. parental leave to support graduate students with children
3. the cost to students of attending course placements

There was a discussion about the appropriateness of engaging with one political party over another, given the committee was keenly aware that their constituents' interests sat across all political parties, and it was not the MGA's role to promote a particular political party. It was agreed that provided the MGA focussed on the issues of interest to graduate students, and not the politics, it was appropriate to engage with any and all political parties who were prepared to support those interests.

### **3.3 Staff report**

Noted.

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

Noted.

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

Noted.

## **4. Business**

### **4.1 Business arising**

#### **4.1.1 Allegations of election breaches**

The university staff member appointed to look into the MGA elections briefly went over the final report with the MGA Executive Officer to ensure that there were no factual errors. The report was very positive and found that the MGA had, at all times, followed their own regulations in terms of running the elections, and that all the Returning Officer's decisions had been reasonable, equitable and based on the available evidence.

It was noted that this process had taken up a significant amount of staff time that would otherwise have been directed to providing services to students. It had also resulted in a delay in releasing the MGA's funding. The committee once again expressed their concern and frustration that the university's inappropriate response to a frivolous and vexatious complaint from a single student had resulted in such a waste of the MGA's time and resources, and ultimately negatively impacted the provision of services to the wider graduate student community.

#### **4.1.2 PPA budget review subcommittee**

Saham reported that the PPA subcommittee had not yet reached a decision. It was suggested that the subcommittee would try to come up with an interim solution for 2023, but could not give a long term commitment until the MGA finances for 2024 were known.

#### **4.1.3 SOTY panel review subcommittee**

Members were informed that there had been 55 submissions received to date, with the closing date for submission set for 29 November, 2023. The judging panel would then convene to read through the submissions and decide on a winner.

### **4.2 General Business**

#### **4.2.1 MIISON**

The committee was informed that MIISON was originally set up as network where International Students' Officers from each MSO could meet and share information and ideas. Last term the MGA International Students' Officer, Anumanth Senthilkumar, became the Spokesperson of MIISON and proceeded to change the structure of the organisation to MISA (Monash International Student Association) as well as change the terms of reference to give MISA representative functions, against the directives of the MGAEC.

The change of MIISON from a network to a representative body has given rise to a potential conflict of interest, where a graduate student who was sitting on both MIISON and the MGAEC would be beholden to two representative bodies at the same time. This potential conflict of interest was realised earlier this year when MIISON and MGA had differing views on the funding of the shuttle buses that ran between campuses. The same conflict of interest would affect other MSOs, so there was wide agreement among MSOs that this change should be reversed.

It was agreed that Calvin, as the new International Students' Officer, should work with the undergraduate MSO International Student Officers to revert MIISON to the network it was intended to be.

#### **4.2.2 MGAEC statement on the Voice**

Calvin asked that the committee consider supporting a 'yes' vote on the Voice referendum. While there was general support on the committee for a yes vote, there was some discussion on the matter and Maria proposed that given the Indigenous Students' Officer position on the MGAEC was vacant, the committee should contact the Indigenous graduate student community at the William Cooper Institute to establish their views. There was a concern that not all Indigenous graduate students may be in support of a yes vote, which complicated the committee's decision as to whether or not to take a formal position on the matter. It was agreed to follow Maria's suggestion to consult with the Indigenous graduate students, and hold further discussions prior to confirming a position.

#### **4.2.3 LOTY judging panel**

Graduate coursework committee members were invited to form the judging panel for the 2023 Lecturer of the Year competition. It was explained that each application would need to be read and ranked, and a one-off meeting would be held for panel members to compare results and determine the winner. The total time commitment was estimated to be 5 hours. The judging process would take place after the closing of the nomination period for LOTY which was Monday 23 October 2023.

Saral, Rachel and Harshita expressed interest.

#### **4.2.4 SSAF capital development funding**

It was explained that each year the university set aside 20% of the SSAF collected from all students, to form a pool of funding to be used for capital development projects. Ideas for projects could be submitted to the university and some would be granted funding, to be spent in 2024. The committee was invited to submit ideas for projects to the Executive Officer so that MGA projects could be centrally coordinated.

#### **4.2.5 Conflict of Interest regulations**

A draft set of regulations setting out the MGA's responsibilities regarding the identification and disclosure of conflicts of interest was considered by the MGA.

It was moved:

*That the Conflict of Interest regulations be accepted.*

Moved: Rachel Lee

Seconded: Ummatul Siddique

Carried.

#### **4.2.6 Discussions with GSA**

Saham informed members that he had scheduled a meeting with the President of the Graduate Student Association (GSA), University of Melbourne. He intended to invite the GSA to join the MGA's PTV campaign, but also asked if there were any other matters that the committee would like to see raised at the meeting.

### **5. Membership matters**

No business.

### **6. Next meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in October at a date and time tbc by committee members.

The meeting closed at 4.36pm.