



MPA induction kit for postgraduate representatives on University Committees

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1. Preamble

Postgraduate representation at Monash University

At Monash University, postgraduate representatives are a valuable addition to university Committees. Active postgraduate membership on university committees provides an excellent opportunity for postgraduate involvement in important decision-making. Postgraduates are a major stakeholder group of Monash University. An elected postgraduate representative offers the committee unique postgraduate perspectives and views on various issues and aspects of university life.

Committees exist at all levels of the University. For example, some committees are university-wide, such as Council and the Academic Board, while others can be campus, faculty, department and/or school-specific. For a list of committees with postgraduate representation please refer to <http://mpa.monash.edu.au/representation/university-committees.html#>

In some cases the university will hold its own elections in order to select a postgraduate member. However, in most cases, the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) is responsible, as the peak postgraduate representative body within the University, for the nomination of a suitable candidate(s) for committee membership.

2. Committee basics

The role of a committee

In a nutshell, a committee represents an appointed group of people who are charged with the responsibility of performing a certain task. Within a university setting, the role of such a committee could be to develop, review and implement policy and regulations; to plan and organise events; to investigate a complaint or event(s); or to consider requests or reports submitted to the committee. In executing these tasks, decision-making plays a fundamental role.

The structure of a committee

In general, the committee will consist of a Chairperson (or "Chair"), voting members, and a secretary. The Chair is responsible for running the meeting. This will include opening and closing the meeting, directing the discussion of agenda items, and ensuring that the committee fulfils its responsibilities as prescribed by the Terms of Reference (TOR).

The voting members are the official members of the committee, who are usually selected because they bring a certain level of experience (or interest) to the committee. They are responsible for discussing the agenda items as directed by the Chair, and in some instances, deciding on certain outcomes or arriving at a consensus.

The secretary is responsible for the logistics of the committee. This includes liaising with the members and the Chair outside of meetings, compiling the agenda and any reports to be attached, coordinating meeting times and locations, and recording the meetings via the taking of "minutes". The secretary is non-voting and does not usually participate in meeting discussions, holding "observer" status only (see below). When necessary, they are able to advise the committee on proper protocol and procedures.

Some committees will involve more individuals than those already mentioned. For example, some committees may have non-members in attendance (typically referred to as "observers"). These individuals are usually invited to give advice and contribute to the meeting as experts in their respective fields, and/or in aid of personal interest. However, they do not have voting rights on the committee and merely observe the proceedings. Observers must obtain permission from the secretary prior to attendance.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (TOR) state the purpose of the committee, and its responsibilities, including that of its members. Most committees publish their TOR on the Monash website, together with their membership and meeting dates, which can be accessed by all staff and students. In the case where the committee website is confidential and/or requires an access code, the secretary can be contacted to obtain access. The Terms of Reference for various committees with postgraduate representation can be found at <http://mpa.monash.edu.au/representation/university-committees.html#>

3. The meeting

Agenda

The secretary will send the agenda to the members in advance of the scheduled meeting time. An agenda is a document that includes a predetermined list of items to be considered and discussed at the meeting. The secretary is responsible for compiling the agenda. In most cases, the secretary will call for agenda items from the members prior to the meeting. Agenda items may also be carried on from a previous meeting, or suggested by individuals outside the committee.

Preparation

Once the agenda has been sent out, it is expected that members read the agenda prior to the meeting. This allows the committee meeting to be productive, as members are already familiar with and have formed views on the items. For important items, it is good practice to find out what the background to the matter is. This can be achieved by contacting the secretary for copies of previous minutes, reports or submissions, which can provide useful information to be considered when discussing the item. Research into current policy and common practice can also help the decision-making process.

Dress code and meeting etiquette

For most university committees, a casual dress code is appropriate. For the first meeting, it's good practice to arrive a few minutes early so that new members can introduce themselves. Most members will be on a first name basis, unless the member is also a senior member of the university, i.e. Vice-Chancellor. If you have a good Chair, they will formally acknowledge and introduce you to the committee at the start of the meeting. During the meeting, it is important that arguments are presented logically and respectfully.

Quorum

In order for the proceedings of a meeting to be verifiable and valid, a certain number of members must be present. This is known as "quorum". The minimum number of members that must be present for a given committee vary, but an example is that more than half of the total membership must be present. The TOR for the committee should set out its quorum requirement.

Starring items

Some committees that conduct a significant amount of business will use the "starring" system. Prior to the circulation of the agenda, the Chair will decide which items are to be discussed "in-meeting" as indicated by a star, and which should be noted and/or passed without further discussion (no star). For example, committees with many subcommittees will often note the minutes of these subcommittees only, simply as a matter of procedure. This item would be "unstarred" as it does not need to be discussed.

If the starring system is used, at the start of a meeting, the Chair will provide members with an opportunity to star any unstarred items that they would like the committee to discuss. If no further items are starred, the Chair will then "move that" the unstarred items are passed, which then goes to a vote.

Motions and voting

In most cases, decisions and directions regarding a particular item will be made as a result of discussion and general consensus. At other times, a formal vote may be necessary. As part of the decision making process, any committee member can put forward a motion, i.e. "I move that...", which needs to be seconded by another member of the committee. All committee members are then asked to vote. Sometimes this will be via a secret ballot, but most commonly not. Members may vote "for" (agree with the motion), "against" (disagree with the motion) or "abstain" (choose not to participate in the vote). You may abstain because you do not have enough information to make a decision. For example, when approving the minutes from a previous meeting, you may abstain because you were not present at the meeting. You may also abstain if you have a conflict of interest.

Subcommittees

Sometimes, the committee will decide to form a subcommittee to discuss a certain matter or perform a certain task that is more detailed and involved than what the main committee has time for during regular meetings. In most cases, a subset of the committee will volunteer for the subcommittee and, will meet outside the normal committee meeting times. Once the subcommittee has achieved its goal, the findings will be presented to the main committee.

Minutes

The minutes are a written record of the meeting as taken by the secretary in-meeting. Minutes document the important discussion items and the final outcomes and decisions of the committee. The minutes will be available in the next agenda, and need to be approved at the next meeting. In some cases, minor errors will be recorded, and the members have an opportunity to suggest amendments before the minutes are formally approved. For example see Attachment A.

In any committee, members should always respect the privacy of other members' opinions and information (especially of individuals) that would not otherwise be open to the public. Confidentiality is a serious matter and must be upheld at all times. Breaching confidentiality can result in significant fines and/or penalties that may be borne by either the committee or individual member. Some committees, such as University Council, are confidential. This means that the general public cannot view information from this committee, including agendas and minutes. In some instances, certain agenda items will be confidential, which will be clearly marked. All members must respect the confidentiality of these particular items.

Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when an individual has multiple 'interests' that may affect the individual's ability to act in the best interests of the committee or the group they represent. Other interests may include financial or reputational gain. Conflicts of interest are common, and sometimes cannot be avoided. They can be either perceived or real. In all instances, members are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest to the committee at the time of discussion, regardless of whether or not the member believes that it will affect their decision-making abilities. Declaring a conflict safeguards a member's reputation in making unbiased decisions. For example see Attachment B.

4. Your role on the committee

The following sections are specific to MPA-elected representatives. However, if you are elected directly by the committee or faculty, we would welcome the opportunity to communicate with you regularly and list your details on the MPA website.

Representing postgraduates

As a postgraduate representative, part of your role is to represent current postgraduate views. In addition to your own experience as a postgraduate student, gathering postgraduate-specific information from other avenues will also help you actively represent postgraduates on your committee. This can be achieved by liaising with your fellow postgraduates and the MPA.

Time commitment

Some committees require more time commitment than others. Meeting regularity, duration, and preparation time can significantly vary depending on the committee. For example, some committees will meet monthly, while others will meet quarterly. Similarly, meeting times can vary from 1 hour to in excess of 2 hours. If the committee conducts a significant amount of business, which results in a large agenda, preparation times can also be notable. As a postgraduate, it's important that you consider your workload and availability, and apply for a committee that suits you. Please don't hesitate to contact the MPA for advice on the typical time commitments required for specific committees.

Attendance

It is expected that representatives make every effort to attend all meetings of the committee. Some committees have minimum attendance requirements, as set out in their TOR, whereby if a member fails to meet this requirement, the committee can revoke their membership. However, in the event that you are unable to attend a particular meeting, please forward your apologies to the secretary prior to the meeting. Please also advise the MPA by emailing the relevant MPA staff members at mpa-reps@monash.edu so that a replacement representative, i.e. proxy, can be appointed for the individual meeting where appropriate.

Placing and raising items on the agenda

Members can add items to the agenda by contacting the committee's secretary. This should be done well in advance of the upcoming meeting. Depending upon the individual committee's requirements, a short report or supporting information may also be submitted with the item for the committee's consideration. In some smaller committees, the Chair will also call for agenda items at the start of the meeting.

If you would like to raise an issue on behalf of the postgraduate community, please contact the MPA for advice. You can do so via email at mpa-reps@monash.edu, or by contacting the [MPA Executive Officer](#) directly. The MPA is aware of most issues on a university-wide scale and can give you useful background information, context to the overall issue, statistics and policies and strategies on how to raise the matter in an effective manner. For example see Attachment C.

As a member of the committee, making decisions will be one of your primary responsibilities. In representing the postgraduate community, you are encouraged to feel confident in voicing your opinions and making decisions. If you require any assistance in making a decision or in determining the best interests of the postgraduate community, the MPA is available to provide information and support to representatives before the meeting. Receiving the agenda in advance gives you the opportunity to consult with the MPA or other postgraduates so that you can represent the postgraduate community's views accurately. Please contact the MPA if

you need background information or advice on a particular issue that is about to be (or has been) raised on your committee. Time permitting, you may also like the issue to be raised and discussed by the MPAEC. In reality, however, you will often be required to make 'on the spot' decisions during the meeting. In this situation, you should vote as you see fit, being mindful of those postgraduates who will be affected by the outcome.

Postgraduate-specific conflicts of interest

As a postgraduate member, there are two types of conflicts of interest that may occur. The first is that you may not (or be perceived to not) be able to act in the best interests of the committee. For example, if the committee was responsible for outsourcing paid work, and you also had a financial interest in the selected company, then that would be considered a conflict of interest. In this case, where a decision is to be made by the committee, you should declare to the committee that you have a conflict of interest and refrain from contributing to that particular item at the Chair's discretion.

The second potential conflict of interest is that you may not be able to act in the best interests of the postgraduates. This may occur if you also hold a staff position, and the decision that is in the best interests of the postgraduates would be to the detriment of your staff position. As you are elected to represent postgraduates, the decision that you make on your committee should always be in the interests of the postgraduate community. If you have this type of conflict of interest then you are expected to declare any conflict of interest to the MPA so that you can receive advice on how best to handle the situation.

Representative reports

All postgraduate representatives are responsible for reporting and disseminating relevant information to the postgraduate community. Unless your committee is confidential, in which case no information is requested, the MPA would like to be notified about proposed postgraduate-specific changes or contentious issues. It is not necessary to report on the entire meeting or to provide the minutes, as these can usually be downloaded from the committee's website or in some cases are confidential. Information on postgraduate matters will be forwarded to the MPA Executive Committee.

5. Communication between MPA and representatives

Role of the MPA

The MPA is responsible for advertising representative positions, appointing representatives, liaising with university staff, ensuring the confidential storage of representative details and attending to other administrative representative matters. To contact the relevant staff member, please email mpa-reps@monash.edu.

The MPA also facilitates communication between postgraduate representatives and the MPAEC. Once you have been officially appointed, we liaise with you throughout the year and will respond to any questions that you may have. The MPA also ensures that important matters brought to our attention by committee representatives are communicated to the MPAEC, and keeps you up-to-date on issues that are important to your committee.

Representatives

Functions

If you are a newly appointed representative, we highly recommend that you attend an Annual meeting of all postgraduate representatives with the MPAEC. This is a great way to learn about representation, meet MPA staff, connect with MPAEC members and exchange information on current issues and strategies to assist you in your representative role.

The MPA also holds many social events for all postgraduates throughout the year. We encourage you to attend some of these to meet and chat to your fellow postgraduates to get a feel for what the current issues are in the postgraduate community.

We will advertise these events so we hope to see you there!

MPAEC meetings

As a postgraduate representative, you are very welcome to attend the MPAEC meetings. This gives you the opportunity to report in-person or to raise a particular topic for discussion. For meeting dates, check with the MPA Information Officer.

Contact details

If you would like to contact the MPA, here are some useful details to do so:

MPA Representatives Account	mpa-reps@monash.edu
MPA Executive Officer	jenny.reeder@monash.edu
MPA Information Officer	jessica.vangent@monash.edu
MPA website	mpa.monash.edu
MPA Clayton Office	(03) 9905 3197 Monday to Friday 9am-5pm
MPA Caulfield Office	(03) 9903 1880 Monday to Friday 10am-6pm

6. Application process

If you are not yet a postgraduate representative and would like to apply for an MPA-nominated position, the following section describes how to apply.

The application process for MPA nominated representatives

The MPA is responsible for advertising vacant postgraduate Representative positions on committees. Vacant positions are advertised via the MPA's online newsletter and may also be published by the faculties. Interested postgraduates are requested to send a completed [nomination form](#) to mpa-reps@monash.edu, unless otherwise stated in the position advertisement.

If there is only one eligible applicant and they fulfil all of the requirements of the position, the MPA will nominate the student to the committee. In the instance where there is more than one application for a position or if the applicant does not clearly fulfil all the criteria for the position, the MPA nominates via one of two methods:

1. Online election: An online election is held with an MPA staff member acting as Returning Officer; or
2. MPA subcommittee: A subcommittee is convened from the MPA Executive Committee (MPAEC) in order to render a decision. The subcommittee comprises the MPA Executive Officer or nominee and at least two members of the MPAEC.

An online election is the preferred method of nomination and is conducted where the MPA is provided by the university with access to a global list of the relevant postgraduate cohort. Where this is not possible, the subcommittee method is employed.

The MPA recommends the elected/selected postgraduate to the university committee. Once the university committee approves the MPA nomination and appoints the representative, the representative's name and university email address will be published on the MPA representation website at <http://mpa.monash.edu.au/representation/university-committees.html#> and on the committee's website if one exists. This will allow postgraduates to contact the representative directly regarding matters that concern the particular committee. The MPA ensures that all other personal information on the representatives remain confidential. The MPA will send the newly appointed representative this Induction Kit and will communicate regularly with the representative throughout his/her appointment.

At the end of the appointment (i.e. end of the year), the MPA will contact the representative regarding their ability and desire to remain as a representative in the following year. Pending the candidate's continued suitability for the position, the MPA will nominate the candidate for the position, whose reappointment is subject to the committee Chair's approval. Should the postgraduate member not be able and/or not wish to continue, the MPA will open the position to other applicants.

7. Glossary of acronyms

Internal

ADR	Associate Dean of Research
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CoE	Centre of Excellence
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
DE	Distance Education (also known as Open and Distance Learning)
ECD	Employment and Career Development
EFTSL	Equivalent Full-time Student Load
EFTSU	Equivalent Full-time Student Unit
ERA	Excellence in Research Australia
eSolutions	university IT support (formerly ITS)
FRM	Faculty Research Managers
GPG	Graduate Postgraduate (coursework postgraduates)
GRC	Graduate Research Committee
HDR	Higher Degree Research (research postgraduates)
IP	Intellectual Property
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LSA	Learning Skills Advisors
LTC	Learning and Teaching Committee
MAPS	Mature-Age and Part-time Students Association (undergraduate only)
MGE	Monash Graduate Education (formerly MIGR)
MONSU	Monash University Student Union (u/grad at Caulfield/Peninsula)
MPA	Monash Postgraduate Association Inc
MPAEC	Monash Postgraduate Association Executive Committee
MPSA	Monash Parkville Students Association (undergraduate at Parkville)
MQU	Monash Quality Unit
MRC	Monash University Research Committee
MRO	Monash Research Office
MSA	Monash South Africa
MSA	Monash Student Association (Clayton campus undergraduates)
MSO	Monash Student Organisation (inc. MPA, MSA, MONSU, etc)
MUBS	Monash University Berwick Students (u/grad association)
MUISS	Monash University International Students Services (u/grad MSA div.)
MUPA	Monash University Postgraduate Association (Malaysia campus)
OHSE	Occupational Health, Safety and Environment
OPO	Office of Planning and Quality
PPA	Parkville Postgraduate Association (formerly the VCPPA)
PROV	Provost
PVC	Pro-Vice Chancellor
SEN	Student Experience Network (Campus-based committees)
SESC	Student Engagement Steering Committee
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SSAF	Student Services and Amenities Fee
SVP	Senior Vice-President
VC	Vice-Chancellor
VP	Vice-President <i>or</i> Vice-Provost

External

APA	Australian Postgraduate Award
APAI	Australian Postgraduate Award Industry
ARC	Australian Research Council
CAPA	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
CSP	Commonwealth Supported Place
DDOGS	Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies
DET	Department of Education and Training
DIIS	Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students Act
FEE-HELP	Full-fee loan scheme
Go8	Group of Eight Universities (the top 8 research-intensive universities in Australia)
GSA	Graduate Students' Association (Melb uni. grad student association)
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme (now CSP)
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
HESA	Higher Education Support Act
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LUPA	Latrobe University Postgraduate Association
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
NUS	National Union of Students (undergraduates)
RPA	RMIT Postgraduate Association
RTS	Research Training Scheme
SUPRA	Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (formerly AUQA)
UA	Universities Australia
VSU	Voluntary Student Unionism

8. Attachments

Attachment A

Sample email where minor errors in draft minutes are reported.

"Dear Monica,

Thank you very much for sending me the draft minutes of our last committee meeting. I noted that Under Item 3.6 the Postgraduate Careers forum was to be held between 5-7 pm on the Clayton campus. My recollection is that it was to be held at Caulfield.

If you could please clarify this that would be great.

Kind regards,
name of MPA rep"

Attachment B

Sample email where a conflict of interest may occur.

"Dear Professor King,

Thank you very much for selecting me to be part of the subcommittee for the Supervisor of the Year Award. Upon receiving the nominations I have discovered that my own supervisor has been nominated and I wanted to alert you to this potential conflict.

Kind regards,
name of MPA rep"

Attachment C

Sample email and attachment of how to place an item on the committee's agenda.

"Dear (name of committee secretary),

Can you please include the attached report from the MPA in the next GRC Meeting Agenda. The report addresses the issue raised at the last GRC meeting concerning the issuing of staff-like email addresses to research postgraduates.

Kind regards,
name of MPA rep"

Sample attachment

"Extract from GRC minutes 2/2015:

The Committee heard that several complaints had been submitted to the MPA both from Malaysian and local Monash students around the lack of access to 'staff-like' email accounts. The Committee was requested to produce a statement to the effect that all Graduate Research students are entitled to 'staff-like' email accounts, and to publish these accounts on business cards and other professional material.

The Committee was generally in agreement with the principle of this, however, it was noted that this was outside the GRC's jurisdiction. The Chair requested that the MPA representatives submit their concerns in writing so that these could be followed up with the appropriate parties. Concurrently, the Director, MIGR will investigate whether it is feasible from a systems perspective for Graduate Research students to be provided with a staff-like email address that is not dependent on employment at Monash for use in lieu of a student email account. The outcome of this will be reported at the next GRC meeting.

MPA response on the issuing of staff-like email accounts

The IT system at Monash currently allows for HDRs to have one or two of the following email accounts:

1. All HDRs are issued with a **student** email account; and
2. All HDRs who are employed as staff are issued with a **staff** email account; or
3. HDRs who are not employed can request of the faculty that a **staff-like** email account be issued. (A staff-like email account looks like a staff email but does not have the equivalent staff-level access attached to it).

The idea behind providing HDRs with a staff-style email account is that when they approach and interact with external bodies and individuals, the email has the following advantages:

- a. the "*firstname.secondname*" system clearly identifies postgraduates by name, rather than a jumble of numbers and letters; and
- b. the "*@monash*" instead of "*@student.monash*" recognises them as junior research colleagues, providing them with a more professional persona.

In 2010, MIGR introduced a policy relating to the issuing of business cards, for the following reason:

"Graduate research candidates are valued members of the Monash University academic community who often interact with parties external to the University, including other researchers and industry and community partners."

The reasons for issuing a professional email address are the same and therefore should not be considered to be "outside GRC's jurisdiction".

The MPA encourages GRC to take up this matter to ensure all HDRs are provided with the same advantages, regardless of faculty or campus."

9. Appendix A: Tips on being a rep on university committees, from other postgrad reps

1. Understand that you are a full member, assume everyone else understands that too and act in that capacity. It's about the way in which you walk into the room, and the confidence you exhibit, even if you're feeling a bit intimidated inside.
2. Be well prepared - read the agenda papers before the meeting (many of the staff will not have read them so you'll be one step ahead of most members right from the start.)
3. Follow common procedure – if for example, no-one else puts up their hand when wanting to speak then you shouldn't either.
4. Being effective doesn't necessarily mean that you speak on every topic. If you have nothing meaningful to say then stay quiet. However if you never speak at any meeting that also sends the wrong message. So one thing you can do is to prepare something before the meeting, so that you have something to say on one item of relevance to postgraduates.
5. When you do have something to say speak quietly but confidently. Your opinion is as valid as anyone else's opinion. The reason you are on the committee is to bring in a student opinion so don't be surprised if you are the only one in the meeting with that particular perspective.
6. Understand your value. You are the only one in the room who knows how things work on the ground for postgrads. So that means you might see a potential ramification from a decision that no-one else has thought of - this is a good thing to speak up about. An example is when Monash decided to take expiry dates off student ID cards. The administrators did not realize the impact this would have on agreements that student associations had with external organisations for discounts – these companies wanted to see expiry dates.
7. Understand your power. Unlike many other committee members, you are completely free to speak the truth. Behind the scenes, many staff members will admit that they actually agree with the point you raised but they didn't want to be the one who raised it, for various reasons, primarily to do with departmental politics. You don't need to be concerned with that so in many ways this gives you more power to speak up.
8. If you are not sure about anything ask for clarification:
 - Excuse me but you've referred to the acronym GRC and I'm not familiar with that.
 - So just to clarify, the outcome of this discussion is that the committee is going to do x?
 - I understand the decision of the committee is to do x – has there been any consideration of the effect this will have on students?
 - My concern about this decision is that it will mean x for students.

10. Appendix B: key committees at Monash

For a complete list of MPA-elected postgraduate positions on university committees, please refer to www.mpa.monash.edu.au/representation/university-committees.html.

Figure 1 represents how some of the largest university committees fit in together. Each faculty will have both research and education/coursework committees .

For a list of other university committees, please refer to www.adm.monash.edu.au/excerv/committees/other-committees/index.html or contact your faculty.

Figure 1: Key Monash University committees with postgraduate representation

