KPA Annual General Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 18th May, 2023 from 18-10-19-28 at CBA1.099/100 and online via Microsoft Teams

1. Welcome and Introduction to the KPA Committee

Rajkaran Singh (Chair Assn. Secretary), Abdelrhman Rayis (President), Rachana Dhaka (Vice President), Ola Olatunji (International Officer) (online)

Members present:

Bethany Edge, S.I. Ohumu, Leo Achaillet, Christopher Murphy, Puneet Prasad, Deepshikha Prasad, Mohineet Kaur, Aayush Batra, Harshit Mishra, Jyotika Bishnoi, Shasshank Mullapudi, Akash Narayana, Michel Ghrayeb (online), Sivakaran Navaratnam (online)

Not-confirmed or non-members

Veepi Sharma (joined online and left in five minutes), Sarah Andy (online)

2. Apologies: None

(no apologies from Rohan, the student trustee)

3. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 26.05.2022 were shared on the website

approved by members present here, no objections made by anyone present

4. Presentation by the President: achievements of the year

The President welcomed everyone to the KPA Annual General Meeting and emphasized its purpose as a forum to reflect on the year's progress and achievements. He provided an overview of achievements and challenges throughout the year.

- He noted the commencement of inductions in July 2022, including talks with new students.

- Discussed committee members' training for efficient association management and building relationships with the membership. Mentioned training received from Steven Davos on KPA's communication strategy. Shared insights into strategic planning, addressing social barriers, and basic issues, and empowering postgraduates.

- Highlighted the September survey, focusing on understanding members' issues, contributing to strategic goals, and governance strategy review.

- Reported successful events since October, resulting in increased postgraduate attendance.

- Noted November elections and positive member engagement, leading to a fully active committee.

- Acknowledged December's Christmas activities, including the Clubhouse's support for the cost-of-living campaign.

- Discussed January's governance initiatives, with the Constitution in its final stage.

- Collaborated with KDA for brainstorming sessions with PGR reps, emphasizing support and training.

- Outlined plans to combat isolation through membership tools and techniques.

- Emphasized diverse wellbeing-focused events via social media to empower postgraduates.

- Announced preparations for the PG celebration evening on June 20, 2023, and encouraged nominations for the Bob Beattie Awards.

- Expressed gratitude for experiences and knowledge gained at KPA and highlighted the association's remarkable support to the global community.

- Encouraged members to apply for similar opportunities and expressed hope for KPA's continued success.

5. **Reports from other officers**

Vice President, Rachana Dhaka, verbal report:

The Vice-President expressed gratitude for attendees and highlighted Abdelrhman's comprehensive overview. She highlighted the rest of the tasks which were broadly taken care of by her, such as:

- Managed university representation, addressing student issues, and participating in Education and Disciplinary Committee meetings.
- Ensured diverse voices were heard, tackling various concerns such as job guidance with the support of the University's Careers team, highlighted mental health issues and signposted to the University's wellbeing experts' team, academic schedules, and visa-related issues, and many more with support of the different departments at Keele.
- Appreciated the fact that the KPA members have trusted their committee.
- Collaborated with the Director of Student Experience to address cost-of-living challenges and guarantor issues for off-campus housing.
- Inclusive Representation:
  a) Gathered member views through postgrad and coffee morning sessions, forwarding concerns to relevant university committees.
  b) Engaged in discussions with the Director of Student Futures and career department, advocating for international students' job opportunities.
- Career Support:
  a) Discussed ongoing discussions with the career department to address international students' job availability concerns.
  b) Emphasized forthcoming support and changes in approach, focusing on internship opportunities and part-time jobs relevant to members' fields.
- Cultural Events:
  a) Organized theme-based events, ensuring inclusivity and participation of students from various backgrounds.
  b) Encouraged feedback on events to enhance inclusivity.
- Motivating Feedback:
  a) Urged members to share feedback, suggestions, or concerns openly.
  b) Acknowledged the committee's openness to constructive criticism and commitment to improvement.
- Mental Health Initiatives: Collaborated with the university's mental health team to address student concerns, especially related to domestic violence and single-parent issues.
- Acknowledgments and Recognition:
  a) Thanked Bethany and Alison for their support during the elections.
  b) Announced ongoing preparations for the KPA Postgrad Celebration Evening in 2023.
  c) Expressed gratitude to the brilliant Clubhouse team for their kind support and to the students supporting us as volunteers.
- Acknowledged a year of ups and downs, emphasizing the importance of member guidance and support.
- Discussed plans to address isolation concerns and provide solutions in the welcome fair message to new students.
- Highlighted successful elections and ongoing efforts for the KPA Postgrad Celebration Evening in 2023.

- Expressed gratitude for a year of learning and emphasized the committee's reliance on member support.

International Officer, Ola Olatunji, verbal report:

He expressed apologies for not attending in person due to an emergency. Acknowledged the challenges but emphasized the wonderful experience of teamwork.

- Mentioned about successfully fulfilled promises made during the election campaign and outlined in the manifesto.
- Proudly mentioned making KPA an attractive place for international students.
- He mentioned how he made efforts to bridge the barrier of inferiority complex among international students. Focus on bringing them together on a unified platform. Academic support provided to international students, including guidance on assignment corrections. Formation of a student team to assist peers in making their academic journey smoother.
- Accepted the challenges and shared plans accordingly: Acknowledged limitations, such as the inability to organize international trips due to ongoing academic commitments. Highlighted plans for potential future international trips once students establish their academic pace.
- Shared collaboration with visiting teams from overseas:
  a) Shared experience of hosting a team from Germany and their interest in KPA's operations.
  b) The visiting team pledged to replicate the model at the University of Northbrook, Germany.
- As an international officer, actively responded to University surveys, particularly in Italian and Spanish.
- Advocated for addressing the cost of living concerns faced by international students on a larger scale.
- Emphasized the importance of fighting for transparency regarding university expenses.
- Urged the university to address issues and feedback submitted by students through questionnaires.
- Language Barrier Support:
  a) Recognized the language barrier faced by international students.
  b) Appreciated Dr. Alison Long's support from the language department.
  c) Requested correction of submission materials to aid students facing language challenges.
- Concluded with gratitude to all for their kind support.

Association Secretary, RajKaran Singh, verbal report:

The speaker expressed gratitude for the interesting year, acknowledging the challenges and thanking everyone for their kind support. He highlighted his collaboration in improving communication with members, particularly through the KPA Digest. Due to low participation, they initiated twice-weekly reminders. As the secretary, he said he assumed responsibility for all KPA communications, encouraging members to participate in elections. The speaker mentioned his participation in various trainings and meetings, contributing ideas and presentations on the new constitution while acquiring new communication skills.

6. <u>Comments or questions from Membership</u>

<u>CM and BE:</u> Will the committee be able to summarize the changes made in the constitution? And also, when we can see this as well?

> <u>AR</u> provided insights into the significant changes, emphasizing a shift in the President's role from CEO to one more centered on engaging with the student community and addressing student issues. Changes were also made concerning student trustees and adjustments to quorum requirements for organizational decisions. The rationale behind these modifications lies in accommodating the substantial growth in the number of postgrads in recent years, ensuring flexibility for future changes based on evolving membership needs.

AR acknowledged the need for clear timing in response to the changes and expressed optimism about finalizing the document before the end of June. The May President's report is expected to provide more details on the changes, explaining the reasons and processes involved. AR expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work on the constitution, attributing the success to collaboration with current and previous committee members, with special thanks to Bethany.

BE raised concerns about the majority of communications originating from the clubhouse rather than the association, seeking clarification and plans for improvement.

RS responded by explaining the decision to transition from one weekly digest to two. The new approach involves sending a digest at the beginning of the week and another in the mid-week, ensuring pre and post-event notifications. The rationale behind the change is to enhance communication efforts, send reminders, and broaden their reach to the audience.

BE raised a question regarding what actions would be taken if people weren't engaging with the digest.

AR: responded by introducing a united social media planner. This software enables systematic scheduling of content across all social media accounts, providing insights into the effectiveness of each account for different activities. The planner facilitates a comprehensive overview of communication activities, allowing for better organization and performance evaluation. AR expressed hope that future committees would continue using this planner to enhance communication with members, as it enables advanced scheduling and collaboration among committee members for content creation.

SO raised concerns about excessive university emails and suggested consolidating KPA activities in a single email for mental health reasons.

RS discussed the transition to two weekly digests and the implementation of a unified social media planner for better organization.

MG inquired about communication methods between the committee and members, specifically addressing personal connections and how the committee understands members' needs.

AR acknowledged challenges in engaging members effectively, highlighted the need for proactive communication, and recommended research on members' social issues, cost of living crises, and accommodation-related problems.

BE emphasized the need for more effective communication strategies, expressing concern that emails might not be the best method.

SO suggested connecting with student voice reps from each postgrad course for more effective communication.

AR agreed with the suggestion and mentioned ongoing efforts to review onboarding experiences for PGR reps (PhD students representing their schools).

RD explained challenges with connecting to PGT reps (Master's courses) due to GDPR restrictions but mentioned recent access improvements.

BE expressed concerns about the lack of committee-organized events for postgrad students, aside from those related to specific cultural festivals.

The committee expressed gratitude for suggestions, acknowledged recent updates, and emphasized the importance of the next committee maximizing efforts for effective communication and event organization.

SO mentioned that we organised an amazing African Night event as well.

RD addressed concerns about event emphasis, highlighting a diverse range of cultural festivals organized by the association, including Diwali, Christmas, Easter, Lohiri, and Eid. Emphasized outreach to students from various backgrounds and the Clubhouse team's significant role.

Acknowledged challenges with Christmas and Easter events due to students being off-campus but highlighted the success of the African Night event, attributing it to strong volunteer involvement. Mentioned personal efforts, such as preparing Eid cards before annual leave, and demonstrating commitment to member engagement. Also, her participation in the Easter celebrations with student volunteers were rewarded for that.

BE acknowledged the efforts but expressed a desire to see more diverse activities throughout the year and questioned how the committee addressed postgrad isolation.

AR discussed plans for a new approach, seeking ideas and feedback directly from students and providing event management tools.

SO and BE recalled enjoyable trips and events but expressed a desire for more postgrad community-building opportunities.

Committee members acknowledged the need for better communication about events, apologized for past shortcomings, and pledged to focus on inclusivity and variety.

MG suggested more flexibility in volunteer roles and stressed the importance of creating a welcoming environment for students.

BE proposed more informal volunteer roles and recognition for volunteers to encourage participation and inclusivity.

MG emphasized the need for flexibility and less commitment in volunteer roles to encourage broader participation.

BE suggested involving non-committee members in the KPA events and brainstorming sessions.

AR discussed changes in the constitution, reducing the President's responsibilities to focus more on membership affairs.

MG stressed the idea of KPA as a community and the reward being a sense of belonging.

DP inquired about the capacity for volunteers and committee stress, suggesting a need for more hands-on support.

RD highlighted the success of events with student volunteers, emphasizing their contributions to the African Night event.

AR confirmed plans to explore new volunteer roles without a formal election process.

BE emphasized the need to acknowledge and reward volunteers to make them feel included and appreciated.

The committee explained that they have started it with the Afro night and will continue.

BE questioned why only a few events got more participation.

RD acknowledged a lack of communication within the team regarding various events. She highlighted that three specific events, for which she had total responsibility, received more attention due to regular posts on KPA social media and her social media accounts. This was because she was assigned full responsibility for those three events by the President. The speaker attributed the success of these events to the involvement of student volunteers. The speaker faced challenges, including the need to advocate for social media posts, which was not part of her usual tasks. While she was involved in other activities, she didn't contribute as much to other events because responsibilities were undertaken by other team members or leaders, and she prioritized other work at hand. Finally, she promised to make more efforts to avoid this gap in the future.

BE Suggested to have committee members attend clubhouse events consistently to facilitate communication, allow postgraduates to discuss issues, and provide a constant point of contact for attendees who may have questions or concerns.

AR: acknowledged the idea and cited the possibility that committee members wouldn't be present at all times; as a result, they pledged to hold a weekly online drop-in session. Therefore, if anyone would like to speak with us, we are always available to serve the membership's needs if they have any questions or would just like to speak with committee members directly. Our weekly digests always include the meeting's link and hour.

BE Requested to have it at different times so that it does not clash with the PGR students' teaching time.

AR Acknowledged the need and made it more agile.

MG asked about the capacity for member volunteers in the committee.

AR The number is three volunteer officers and one student trustee.

MG inquired about the capacity of non-committee volunteers, expressing concern about their ability to manage numerous activities and also raised doubts about the committee's workload and stress levels.

AR Most events are supported by clubhouse team leaders, and despite having some staff assistance, there is still a need for more capacity and support to effectively manage the events. This is where volunteers can help.

MG are there any student volunteers other than the committee?

RD yes, successful events were achieved through student volunteers outside the committee, particularly highlighted in the African night event. Their contributions in ideas, motivation, and practical assistance made it a success, leading to plans to motivate more students for future events. The effort is recognized with honors and facilitation in the Annual evening and a certificate with acknowledgment of their contribution.

AR There is an upcoming positive change in the constitution, aiming to relieve the President of CEO responsibilities. The focus will shift towards membership affairs, with the President concentrating on campaigning and addressing student committee challenges. The goal is to implement these changes before the next committee takes over.

CM Who will be the next CEO then?

AR: Several changes have been made in staff members' job descriptions, introducing a new role—governance and democracy coordinator—to assist in responsibilities. Plans are underway to finalize remaining responsibilities, with the hope of obtaining support for a full-time CEO in the future, which is considered the ideal scenario for the KPA.

MG Highlighted the importance of flexibility in volunteer roles, especially for students, and emphasized the value of providing a free chance for people to contribute without excessive logistical commitments. This approach will allow individuals to feel part of something and make a meaningful contribution in a less politically charged manner.

AR responded that we are proposing a more accessible approach to volunteer roles, emphasizing the benefits of open roles, individuals interested in volunteering can easily apply without the constraints of long-term commitments or formal elections. This approach aims to attract more efficient contributors and strengthen the team's communication. The speaker acknowledges the potential for additional options in this direction.

BE Suggests implementing a model similar to KDA's monthly brainstorming sessions for PhD students, where PGR students can contribute ideas and proposals. Aiming to increase involvement, the speaker proposes a brainstorming event to encourage participation and gather ideas, aligning with the concept of informal volunteers, as mentioned by Michel.

DP Basically, the activities officer and the other volunteer roles have their own roles and responsibilities, so they are also involved in with in addition to you in supporting the events. We haven't seen much of them.

AR So the challenge is, for example in the volunteer officer, because they are voluntary and they will be only committed for one one campaign per term.

BE Yeah, Ola took it up to support students as International officer, successfully.

AR Yes.

BE Emphasizes the importance of ensuring volunteers feel included and valued rather than imposing productivity measures. Suggests recognition, rewards, and acknowledgment, such as flowers, gift cards, or increased visibility during celebration evenings, to foster a sense of belonging and encourage active participation.

MG: Stresses that the reward of being part of KPA is significant, highlighting the organization as a supportive and communal space for postgraduates, offering a sense of belonging and camaraderie amid the challenges of being away from family and stable relationships.

AR Accepted the suggestions and expressed gratitude for the transformative experience within the KPA community during the postgraduate journey. Emphasizes the ongoing commitment to the KPA culture, ensuring its growth and vitality, and inviting further comments or suggestions via email for continuous improvement.

BE announced the ongoing elections, inviting engagement with candidates and encouraging participation in the voting process. The Chief Returning Officer (BE) highlighted the election process and addressed questions related to candidacy and terms.

RD reminded attendees about the Annual Event and urged nominations for the Postgrads Celebration Evening. RD apologized for the canceled activities and thanked students for their suggestions and participation. Also, invited volunteers to support events and will in turn promise a certificate of participation.

AR mentioned plans for organizing and preparing the Postgrads Celebration Evening in June and encouraged students to share ideas for June events.

7. **Approval of year ended 31st July 2022 Financial statements by the membership:**
   The Accounts for 2021-22 were circulated via email to all members in advance of the meeting for their consideration and were also made available on the KPA website. There were no queries or questions in the AGM. The accounts had already been approved by the KPA trustees.

8. **Any other business:** None

9. **Closing the meeting: The meeting ended at 19.28**

At the end, committee members thanked the members present and AR announced the closing of the meeting while inviting them for refreshment.

Minutes taken by: Rachana Dhaka, Vice President