



KPA Annual General Meeting Minutes
Thursday 29th May, 2024 from 17:00
WM0.01 and online via Microsoft Teams

Attendance was as follows:

Michel Ghrayeb (Vice President and meeting Chair)

Rachana Dhaka (President and Note-Taker)

RafiqKhan Lohani (E&D Officer)

Members:

Luis Felipe Velandia Dorta

Anne George George

Sandra Suresh

Abdelrahman Rayis (Online)

Maria Banigbade (Online- joined midway)

1. Welcome and introductions

Michel opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and ensuring everyone could hear us. Then he introduced himself as the Chair of the AGM for the day. Then made sure that everyone present received the documents Rachana had shared before this AGM, such as the Agenda, Minutes of the last AGM, and Accounts for approval. The members present responded in the affirmative.

2. Apologies

Apologies received from Janani Rayan (International Officer) due to her sickness.

3. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 18th May 2023

This was already shared with the members on the email or the AGM and again with the reminder. And members present agreed to have seen it.

4. Officer Reports (Verbal Updates)

President, Rachana Dhaka, verbal report:

Hi all, welcome to the KPA Annual General Meeting. This is an opportunity for us to come together as a community to hear from everyone, and to look at our challenges, and achievements of the year. As a President, I want to share broader things we have touched upon during the year or have gone through. These are the things other than regular stuff we do, but if you have any questions or doubts regarding anything you can ask me anytime, right now or later on, online or in person.

We have taken care of the fact that our regular events remain regular, such as, KPA Study sessions on Mondays and Coffee Mornings on Thursdays. Additionally, we have added study sessions to Thursdays. We also tried



to make sure that at least four kinds of things happen every month including Cultural events, sports events, well-being sessions, and a trip to different places to be aware of the UK culture and give our members some 'me time'. This was about the community making or making the PG community stronger at the Keele, so that our members can get a space/place to come together and share ideas, opinions, experiences, and support each other. For example, many PhD students have supported/guided Masters students during the study sessions. Apart from this Michel, our VP, can share with you the efforts we have put towards the academic support of our members. But, I have also been there to support our members on any issue they face as Keele PG students, as they might feel comfortable with any one of us or not so comfortable with the other one, though I cannot get into details of these individual cases as they are confidential matters.

Other than this, we have signposted our members to the right services on campus, whenever possible, so that they can seek expert support and we do not have to duplicate things. These services were mostly, student services mental health support, student records issues, visa support, finances support, career support, write direction support, or referred to team ASK, when needed.

Now, if we look at our vibrant Clubhouse and its team, they have supported our events and we have tried our best to encourage more PGs into the clubhouse, as per our objectives. Members interaction and events were visible to you all but there have been a lot more things we have been doing behind the scenes. Such as our Constitution - changes have been taking place to change our legal status and now the final draft of our new Constitution is ready and approved by the Governance team and it's now in the hands of our lawyer for the final review and submission to the Charity Commission. Committee members will have more time to focus on communication with members and seek more feedback and represent the PG community in the different university platforms. Our proposed CIO status will make the KPA a legal entity. And we hope it will attract more trustees for the organization, once they see the role has fewer risks attached. The change to our legal status has been the biggest positive change and took most of my time and attention in the last five months.

Other than that, I have taken student concerns and feedback to the University Council and other related platforms whenever needed, also Michel can throw some light on how he has helped our members. He has taken many things to the Education and Faculty Education committees and some places such as the Keele 100 platform, KDA, 10 years planning meetings, and Sabbatical Officers drop-in sessions we have both shared our concerns. Then I have taken your issues to the Council, Senate, Race, Equality and Inclusion Committee, University Student Voice Committee, Governance Committee, curriculum design meetings, transportation and commutation meetings, academic misconduct meetings etc. Most of them have been international student issues as the changing visa rules, language and cultural and weather differences make it harder for them to cope with the changed academic and work environment here. However, it does not mean that we have ignored other members, rather we have taken up their cases too. Most of the home student issues were connected to feelings of isolation or wellbeing whereas students from abroad faced more of academic, accommodation, and health issues.

Throughout the journey, our university executives, student services, visa team, finance team, ASK team and our KPA committee and Clubhouse team have been a big support. Katie Laverty was my regular contact to bring student concerns to their attention, in cases where I was not able to find out the right way to the crucial issues in front of me. There are a lot more issues in the pipeline for updating once they get the final shape, but I cannot talk about them right now due to GDPR or confidentiality concerns.

Apart from this at times students just need someone to listen to them who they can trust and this is how we have got lot of individual students visiting the KPA office or Clubhouse. Also, one-to-one talks were really helpful as per their feedback along with the online drop-in sessions every Tuesday that were started by us this year, were a great success for our student members who have opted for the online courses. Some of the issues raised will be shared with the new committee in our handover documents in June, along with the challenges and ways out for certain concerns. With this I will say this is it for now but as our reputed member, if you want to ask anything anytime during my association with KPA, you are more than welcome to.



Vice President, Michel Ghrayeb, verbal report:

Hi all, thanks for coming today to join us. In addition to the regular events and representation in the several committees we have prepared for the KPA elections since March, the Handbook and marketing materials, is where lot of my time was invested in last two-three months. The election Handbook was a crucial part of the preparation for the elections. Then I created a guide for the volunteers to be appointed for the KPA, to lead the managerial structure for anyone who wants to join as a KPA Volunteer or voluntary officer.

This will facilitate the task for the future committees in how they address their recruitment and communication with them. All they need to do is to take action accordingly. Sometimes we need to better reach to broader numbers and represent both the PGR and PGT sections of KPA and also part time and remote student sections. Also, we initiated the KPA Talks but due to low participation, we have paused it for a while now and see ways out for better engagement.

These kinds of things will be discussed with the new Committee to address the points of weakness and how may be strengthened. Like Rachana has explained we have always delivered the promised events and this year more events have been organised. Also, during the holidays, so that we have a consistent place for the students to go and get rid of isolation.

We have also updated the organisational structure and guidelines for the new Committee and that will make the roles less confusing and easier for practical purposes.

If any questions we can take it now.

5. Election Results for 2024-25 – welcome to the new KPA Committee!

Everything related to elections has been shared on our website immediately after the elections finished. We have got a new elected Committee now and we welcome them to be part of the KPA. The full-time and part-time paid roles have been filled but there are some vacancies for the volunteer roles and we hope for them to be filled in the bye-elections.

Here we want to take a chance to thank all the candidates to be part of the KPA elections process and want to congratulate the elected officers who are going to take on the challenge for the next year. Good Job.

6. Members' comments/suggestions/feedback/questions

MG: Do you have anything that you want to share with us or ask us to be kept in mind for the next year, so that we can share with the new committee? About student representation or what they need to do for the postgrads' need.

RD: Just to further explain, we can update those things in our Handover document. Anything you have observed lacking on our part or you want to appreciate, any gaps where we need to fill in the gaps or you think there is a better way to do certain events or things we have been involved with because none is perfect and might not have got time to reflect on certain things, therefore, there is always a scope for improvement. It's not targeting someone, but rather part of the process, and we accept constructive criticism.

AG: I have a few suggestions can we share it during the handover period?

RD: Yes, you can do that even now or later, so that we can reflect upon it and share with you what has been the practice and what we have missed out on or took action for something and you can connect the dots to make the full picture.

AG: We do not have anything now, will have to think over it.

RD: That's fine, you can share now or later on, we can discuss things during the handover.



AR: I have no questions but thank you Michel and Rachana for sharing these updates with me and others and for the great job you all have done. I hope that the next committee will continue to contribute to the Postgrad experience as you have done.

MG and RD: Thank you Abdelrhman, for the kind words.

AG: What is the difference between the officer or non-officer volunteer role?

MG: Basically, at times if you do not have enough volunteer officers or otherwise you might need some more people to help you, someone who can take initiatives, in their own areas and will be able to back the KPA. This will strengthen our feedback process at the university. So the more ears and eyes you have towards your members, the better reports you can share with the university committees, otherwise, you might not cover all the areas. Because the university is large and we have lot of programs and schools in three faculties, and with the increasing number of Postgrads, it is helpful to have more hands to support. So this is a good backup plan for you and what you need to take care of is the reporting mechanism, such as when to report, how and to whom, which will be addressed according to this document. How actually the communication between the committee and the volunteers will take place, is covered here. This area of structuring needed to be solidified, so the first step to do that was to write it on paper, to have someone to go to when you get lost. This way you have more time focus on the action in hand rather than just combining all the pieces together.

LF: Whether they will be a trustee to the KPA?

MG: No, they will not be a Trustee. Even the officer volunteers are not trustees and only the student trustee is the trustee along with the external trustees and President, VP and Secretary. Right now the student trustee position is vacant and will be open in bye-elections.

AG: When do Bye-elections happen?

RD: Around the end of October or the start of November, when the new intake settles down a bit.

MG: We will sit with the new Committee and can work on the timelines and so long the preparation is done, we are good to go. Follow the timeline and all will fall in line.

AG: Whether all the posts will be vacant during bye-elections or just those vacant?

RD: Yes, only those that are vacant.

MG: Any more questions?

All: No.

7. Adoption of 2022-23 KPA Accounts by the membership

MG: Do we accept the financial report or KPA accounts shared with you for the year 2022-23?

LF: I want to ask certain things before the adoption of the accounts, why there is a gap between the income and expenses where the deficit is more, and where from we get that amount to spend? Please elaborate on this.

RD: Ok, so what we have as income is the grants from the University and the income of the clubhouse sales. And we could spend more because we had some savings from the previous year. Also, the reasons for the deficit is that the cost of food had increased heavily in the mid-year and that is how our plans did not work additionally, we paid some back dues to our earlier Senior Manager and as the cost of living increased, we paid more to our staff.

LF: Are there any efforts to break even and not to spend more than the earnings in the year, as the cost of food and living are constantly on the increase? Like, inflation is just a norm now.

RD: yes, we are having a close look on this profit and loss issue more frequently than earlier so that we can nip the issue in the bud. Also, we have come up with certain new policies to deal with these finance-related things and tried to change certain practices, such as we have become more sustainable and wiser in waste management. And also the back pay and major staff changes are not the scenario this year. Though gradually



after taking some measures we have got less of a loss but our efforts are constant to go towards profit from the loss situation, that will be in front of you next year, what impact these changes could make. As these are the accounts from last year.

Please let us know if any further concerns regarding accounts.

LF: No, all sorted, thanks.

AG: Was the measure reason, for staff salary?

RD: Yes, as lot of money went into back payment for our senior manager and the new staff payments.

AG: Who takes care of our finances?

RD: Earlier it was with the University Finance Services department but now they have transferred to us only. We are seeking help from some accounts services outside and also we have our own Finance head who takes care of things for us. And for the Association our Coordinator looks at and keeps records. Before we submit accounts to the Charity Commission we seek the help of the experts to arrange and explain them in a better way.

MG: Are we good to go with the adoption of accounts?

All: Said yes and raised hands.

8. Motions submitted by the membership – none were submitted

9. Any other business

LF: we want to see less deficit next year.

Thanks.

10. Closing remarks

MG: This being the last General Meeting for me, I want to thank you all and also thanks for accepting us at the KPA for one year. Thanks to Rachana for the support.

RD: Thanks Michel, thanks everyone for being there.

All: Clapped, Thanked, enjoyed Pizza, and left. (two more members joined after the meeting was concluded).

The meeting ended at 17.40

Rachana Dhaka, President