

National Strategy for International Education 2025

Enabling Growth and Innovation Grant 2017/15

HPAIR Asia Conference Incorporated

HPAIR Asia 2017 Conference Report

Background

The Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations (HPAIR) is a student-run organisation in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. Each year in August, the organisation holds the HPAIR Asia Conference – the largest student-run conference in the Asia-Pacific region. Over the years, HPAIR has emerged as one of the most influential and highly regarded student leadership conferences in the world, attracting prestigious guest speakers including former United Nations Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Tawakkol Karman, CEO of Blackberry John Chen, first Deputy Managing Director of the IMF Anne Krueger, and Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

Universities from around the globe bid to host the event and last year, students at the University of Sydney won hosting rights for the 2017 conference, successfully bringing the conference to Australia for the first time in fifteen years. The conference was jointly organised by students at Harvard and the University of Sydney. A legal entity in Australia was established for the purposes of hosting the event – HPAIR Asia Conference Incorporated – which is registered as an incorporated association with the NSW Department of Fair Trading. Although two separate entities exist, the conference operated from a centralised budget under the one name – ‘Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations’ – with both Harvard and the University of Sydney receiving prominent branding and equal recognition.

Purpose of the Conference

The 2017 Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations Asia Conference brought together almost 600 delegates and 80+ speakers from over 40 countries in Sydney, Australia from 17-21 August to discuss some of the most pressing social, political and economic issues facing the Asia-Pacific region. Over the five-day program, delegates came face-to-face with leading figures across business, government and academia, had the chance to foster long-term relations with like-minded individuals from around the world, and exchange ideas on a range of international issues vital to our region.

The conference featured six unique panel tracks, business field trips, interactive panel discussions, a career fair, impact challenge competition, cultural events and diverse socials that provided delegates with ample networking opportunities, broadened interdisciplinary knowledge, developed practical problem solving skills, and acted as a forum to share ideas in order to enact real social change.

In addition to advocacy, catalysing change and youth empowerment, the conference also aimed to promote Sydney – and Australia more broadly – as an attractive study and tourist destination.



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Purpose of the Grant

The purpose of the grant funding – as outlined in the *Commonwealth Grant Agreement* dated June 2017 – was to support the 2017 HPAIR Asia Conference in Sydney. The \$20,000 grant:

- Provided funding to the HPAIR Scholarship Program, which aimed to increase the socioeconomic diversity of conference participants.
- Entitled the Department of Education and Training to a stall at the HPAIR Career Fair, held on day 5 of the conference, and provided day passes to staff to attend day 5 sessions.
- Provided government branding on official conference materials and on the HPAIR website.
- Funded operational expenses associated with staging the event.

Outcomes of the Conference

The HPAIR Asia Conference sets out to achieve three main goals:

- **Provide a dynamic forum of exchange on international issues vital to Asia**
 - Keynote sessions, hands-on seminars and interactive panel discussions gave delegates a greater voice in conference programming and allowed important issues to be discussed in an open and candid manner. Great effort was taken to curate a series of panels consisting of speakers from diverse backgrounds to ensure a multiplicity of perspectives and ideas could be shared. Our impact challenge competition provided a valuable opportunity for delegates to work on real world problems posed by sponsor organisations and pitch their ideas, helping to strengthen delegate teamwork skills and interdisciplinary problem solving.
- **Foster long-term relationships among young leaders from around the world**
 - The conference featured diverse social events in the evenings which allowed delegates to socialise with each other and form deep interpersonal relationships. There was also the opportunity for networking during lunch breaks and in between conference sessions.
 - Accepted delegates were invited to join a private Facebook group before the conference. The group provided a safe environment for delegates to interact with each other, introduce themselves and share interests, ask questions, arrange travel plans and maintain contact after the conference.
- **Connect talented delegates with some of today's eminent thought leaders**
 - Notable speakers at this year's conference included Rohan Mahadevan, CEO of Paypal Asia Pacific; Brad Bass, Nobel Peace Prize Winner; Ong Keng Yong, Former Secretary General of ASEAN; David Ritter, CEO of Greenpeace Australia; Bob Carr, Former Australian Foreign Minister and Damian Kassabgi, Director of Public Policy at Uber. Conference sessions included time for Q&A and networking so delegates could ask questions, enjoy conversations with esteemed guests and take photos.



In addition to the above founding objectives, the 2017 HPAIR Asia Conference also showcased Sydney to international visitors from around the world and promoted Australia's lucrative international education and tourism industry. HPAIR initiated partnerships with several government departments at the state and federal level, a tertiary institution and local tourism operators to help showcase Sydney throughout the conference program. Other outcomes of the conference included:

- **Promotion of Australian Higher Education**
 - o The University of Sydney served as partner host university for the conference. Day 3 was held on campus to showcase the university to prospective domestic and international students, mainly at the postgraduate level. The University was given prominent branding at events, official HPAIR online channels, and was allocated promotional stalls and information sessions at the HPAIR Career Fair.
 - o Study NSW (within NSW Trade and Investment) provided branded merchandise in conference tote bags and had a presence at the career fair. The Director of International Trade for the NSW Government also presented a welcome address at the Closing Ceremony Gala Dinner which outlined the importance of international education to the NSW state economy, the range of support services available to international students and provided links to online resources where interested prospective students could visit to access further information about studying in NSW.
- **Showcasing Sydney and NSW Tourism**
 - o HPAIR collaborated with a number of tourism operators including Merlin Entertainment, BridgeClimb and Destination NSW, who provided discount coupons to key attractions in Sydney. Sydney Guides were also provided in the conference tote bag so delegates could learn about the city and fully enjoy themselves before, after and during the conference.
 - o Our diverse conference program allowed delegates to experience the best of what Sydney has to offer to deliver a world-class conference experience and help encourage return visits. The conference was held at the brand new International Convention Centre Sydney, centrally located in Darling Harbour, which allowed delegates to easily explore Sydney on foot. Social events included a cruise on Sydney Harbour, Australia Night held at the historic Jones Bay Wharf, an International Night Carnivale which allowed our delegates to showcase the culture of their home countries, a Closing Ceremony Gala Dinner and an after party. Pre-conference tours were also run in the city and Manly Beach to showcase iconic Sydney attractions to international visitors.
 - o Field trips were organised which allowed delegates to connect more closely with industry and visit the offices of prominent organisations in Sydney. This provided a valuable opportunity for Australian organisations to showcase their work to an international audience across a range of industries including innovation and science, international security, humanitarian affairs and environmental sustainability. Participating organisations included the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Accenture, Amnesty International, Australian Institute for Nanoscale Science and Technology, Macarthur Centre for Sustainable Living and Parliament of New South Wales.



Financial modeling conducted by Business Events Sydney estimated the HPAIR Asia Conference generated \$1.2 million for the NSW state economy, indicating that for every \$1 spent on the conference, \$2 was generated for the NSW economy. This represents a remarkable return on investment and demonstrates that HPAIR served not only as a valuable mode of knowledge sharing, strengthening people-to-people relationships and promoting industry, but also delivered real economic benefit to Australia. Such an outcome demonstrates the importance that international events have to not only sharing ideas and facilitating collaboration, but also in driving local economic growth, and reaffirms the pragmatism of continued government support and investment in this area.

Conference Attendees

HPAIR attracted more than 700 attendees over the five-day conference program. The majority of delegates were 19-25 year old students, graduates and young professionals, 87% of whom were international. In total, there were 526 registered delegates from 46 countries. A breakdown of conference attendees and their origin is outlined in the table below.

Breakdown of Conference Attendees

Attendee Information	Total Number	Analysis of Origin		
		Number – NSW	Number – Interstate	Number - Overseas
Registered Delegates	526	48	20	458
Speakers	89	51	9	29
Sponsor representatives / exhibitors / other	38	33	3	2
Staff	62	25	5	32
TOTAL	715 (100%)	157 (22%)	37 (5%)	521 (73%)



The ten most represented nationalities in our delegate cohort are outlined in the table below. A delegate spreadsheet showing a detailed breakdown of country of origin can be viewed in [Attachment A](#).

Top 10 Most Represented Countries

Nationality	Number of Registered Delegates
Australia	68 (13%)
China / Hong Kong	52 (10%)
India	84 (16%)
Indonesia	29 (5%)
Japan	38 (7%)
Malaysia	15 (3%)
Philippines	138 (26%)
Taiwan	9 (2%)
United States of America	9 (2%)
Vietnam	11 (2%)
Other	73 (14%)

Outcomes of the Grant

Scholarship Program

One of the goals of HPAIR Asia 2017 was to improve the accessibility of our conference to increase the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of conference participants. Through the generous support of the Enabling Growth and Innovation Program, HPAIR was able to expand its scholarship scheme to the largest in the organisation's 26-year history, enabling us to provide life changing opportunities to students from around the world, particularly those from financially disadvantaged backgrounds.



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In addition to providing scholarships, the organising committee worked with several universities to offer 'sponsored' places for students to attend the conference for free. Financial letters of support were also provided and many delegates sought funding from their university, place of work, internships or even crowdfunding to cover their conference registration fee and associated travel expenses. These concerted efforts allowed HPAIR to move in a direction of greater inclusivity than in previous years to allow more students than ever to attend the conference, no matter their background.

HPAIR received 143 scholarship applications and made offers to 17 delegates totaling approximately \$25,000 in value. These scholarships ranged from \$500 - \$2000 with both merit and financial need being taken into consideration. Scholarship recipients also received complimentary conference registration. A number of applicants who ranked highly and demonstrated a strong commitment to positively contribute to the HPAIR community received free registration.

The application process consisted of three rounds:

1. **Written Application** – Applicants were required to complete a separate scholarship application form in addition to the conference application. Only those who were admitted to the conference were able to apply. The application assessed students on their ability to demonstrate resilience by describing a time they have had to overcome a challenge and how they managed the situation effectively to achieve a positive outcome; their ability to articulate how they would benefit from attending HPAIR; and a financial need statement. The top 30% of applications were progressed to the next round.
2. **First Stage Interview** – The first stage of interviews consisted of five questions. Applicants were marked on the quality of their answers, communication skills, enthusiasm, and the level to which they embodied the HPAIR values of passion, aspiration and empowerment. The top 40% were progressed to the final stage of interviews.
3. **Final Round Interview** – The final stage interview consisted of five broader questions. Delegates were asked to describe their future goals and aspirations, explain how attending HPAIR would help them to achieve these goals, discuss what they would bring to the conference and how they would continue to benefit and spread their learnings from HPAIR post-conference, and outline any fundraising efforts they have undertaken to date. Approximately 30 people made it to this stage with half of these applicants being awarded a scholarship.

The scholarship distribution details are outlined in the table below. Evidence of scholarship payment can be viewed in [Attachment B](#). Please note that the conference registration fee waiver was absorbed by HPAIR and not given to students as a physical transaction of money. Therefore, no financial record can be provided.



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HPAIR Scholarship Program

Recipient	Scholarship Amount (\$USD)	Registration Fee (\$USD)
Scholarship recipient 1	\$1,500	\$450
Scholarship recipient 2	\$840	\$450
Scholarship recipient 3	\$535	\$450
Scholarship recipient 4	\$800	\$450
Scholarship recipient 5	\$660	\$450
Scholarship recipient 6	\$785	\$450
Scholarship recipient 7	\$1,000	\$450
Scholarship recipient 8	\$1,250	\$450
Scholarship recipient 9	\$1,000	\$450
Scholarship recipient 10	\$750	\$450
Scholarship recipient 11	\$1,500	\$450
Scholarship recipient 12	\$1,250	\$450
Scholarship recipient 13	\$0	\$450
Scholarship recipient 14	\$0	\$450
Scholarship recipient 15	\$0	\$450
Scholarship recipient 16	\$0	\$450
Scholarship recipient 17	\$0	\$450
	Total = \$11,870	Total = \$7,650
		Grand Total = \$19,520USD \$25,412AUD (at \$0.77USD)

*Due to difficulties in obtaining a visa, the highlighted students were unable to attend the conference.



Career Fair

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training was provided with a stall at the career fair to promote the Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships Program. This allowed the Department to promote two-way mobility between Australia, the Indo-Pacific region and beyond via study, research and professional development opportunities funded by the Australian Government. The representative reported speaking to approximately 200 people at the conference, with students showing strong interest in studying in Australia. The booth also provided a valuable opportunity to promote outbound opportunities to Australian students who are typically under represented among scholarship recipients.

Department staff enjoyed conference catering, networking with other stallholders and access to the speaker lounge with complimentary food and beverages available.

Final Expenditure

The final breakdown of Commonwealth grant expenditure is outlined in the table below.

Commonwealth Grant Expenditure

Expenditure Item	Description	Grant Contributions (agreed)	Grant Expenditure (actual)
1.	Full and partial scholarships for students to attend the HPAIR Asia Conference 2017	\$17,000	Scholarships: \$8,000 Registration fee waivers: \$7,058 Total= \$15,058
2.	Australian Government Booth at Careers Fair (including day passes for staff on the booth)	\$3,000	\$4,942 (career fair booth, staff day passes, branding + operational expenses)
Total		\$20,000	\$20,000



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Due to circumstances beyond our control, there were changes to the distribution of Commonwealth grant funding to what was originally outlined in the agreement. Five scholarship awardees were unable to attend the conference due to difficulty in obtaining a visa. Recipients were not informed of their visa decisions until just before the conference, and due to this very late notice, HPAIR staff were unable to make alternative arrangements to award scholarships to other applicants. Any unspent funds of the allocated \$17,000 for scholarships were diverted to fund operational costs of the conference.

Australia's highly inefficient and exorbitant visa application process proved to be a significant barrier for students to attend the conference. In some cases, delegates waited more than three months and paid over \$100 for a visa and did not receive an outcome of their application before the conference so were unable to attend.

This was deeply disappointing, given the considerable effort made by the organising committee to increase the accessibility of the conference and attract delegates of diverse backgrounds. In order to ensure Australia remains competitive in the international event industry – and to support short-term educational mobility programs – it is imperative for the Australian Government to streamline visa application processes to enable wider participation and improve access to Australia for international visitors.

Conclusion

The 2017 HPAIR Asia Conference was a highly successful event and was one of HPAIR's largest conferences to date. While the conference is usually held in an Asian country, hosting the conference in Australia provided an alternative platform and lens through which to examine international relations in Asia and allowed delegates to better understand the complex role Australia plays in the international arena.

The conference saw collaboration from a wide variety of sectors including education, tourism, government, not-for-profit, technology and multinational consultancy firms to join our cause of empowering young people to make a difference, as well as helping to champion Australia on the world stage. The support we received allowed us to offer a truly life-changing, inspiring and memorable experience to our 500+ delegates that will have lasting impact for years to come.

The conference organising committee would like to thank the Department of Education and Training for their generous support.



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Statement of Acquittal

I, Mitchell Hunter, hereby declare that the Commonwealth Grant 2017/15, awarded to HPAIR Asia Conference Incorporated, was expended for the purpose for which it was intended.

Mitchell Hunter
5 November 2017