



Australia Awards



Year in Review 2025

Australia Awards
– South Asia & Mongolia



Highlights of 2025

In 2025, Australia Awards continued to support development in South Asia and Mongolia by equipping emerging leaders with the skills, networks and leadership experience to drive meaningful change. It was a year of growth, with increases in new Scholarships offered, Short Course completions, Australian Professional Opportunity (APO) participants, and participation in scholar enrichment and alumni engagement activities.

In total, more than 940 Australia Awards scholars, fellows, and Short Course and APO participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka undertook education, training and professional development in 2025.

Of these, 144 scholars completed their degrees and have returned home to contribute to their respective countries' development.

During 2025, 159 scholars commenced their master's degree-level study in Australia, making a total of 312 scholars from South Asia and Mongolia who were in Australia at some stage of their Scholarship during 2025. Reflecting Australia's commitment to equal opportunity for all people, regardless of gender, disability status or background, 58% of this scholar cohort were women and 5% had a declared disability.

A comprehensive schedule of enrichment activities enhanced scholars' professional capabilities and facilitated networking with senior Australian leaders. Across a suite of 23 enrichment initiatives, scholars participated a total of 503 times (with some scholars participating in more than one activity)—an increase of nearly 40% compared to the level of participation in 2024.

Following a rigorous selection process, 180 Scholarships were offered and accepted for study commencing in 2026. This is 8% more than offered and accepted for study commencing in 2025, and fully 25% more than for study commencing in 2024.

As targeted short-term training opportunities to strengthen sector-specific capability and regional collaboration, Australia Awards supported 317 participants (181 women, 136 men) to complete or commence Short Courses—an increase of 150% over the 2024 number—and delivered 21 APOs, supporting a total of 174 recipients (130 women, 44 men)—an increase of 71% on 2024.

For alumni, Australia Awards significantly expanded opportunities for professional development and networking, offering 99 activities reaching 3,787 participants—compared with 67 activities engaging 2,318 participants in 2024.

Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni. From left to right: Suhag Chandra Saha (Bangladesh), Bibika Rai (Bhutan), Zoha Shakir (Pakistan), Manoj Raut (Nepal) and Uswath Ahmed (Maldives).

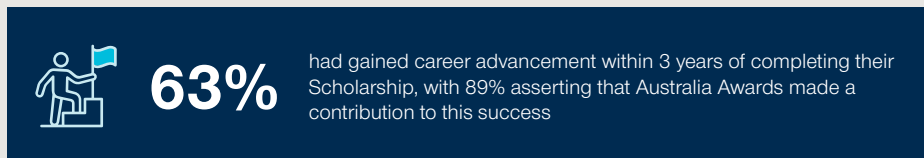
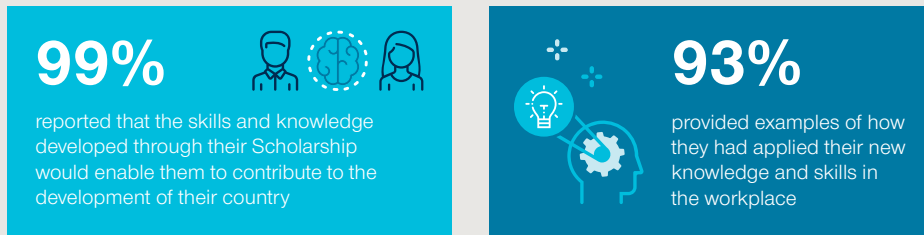
Image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni. From left to right: Md Tanvir Alam Himel (Bangladesh), Shehara Stephnie (Sri Lanka), Shailee Chaudhary (Nepal), Adeela Hafeez (Pakistan) and Enkhbayar Jambaldorj (Mongolia).



Outcomes at a glance

Outcome: Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:

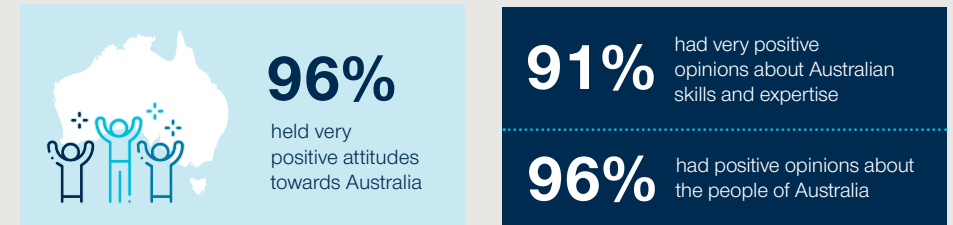


Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni surveyed:



Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni surveyed:

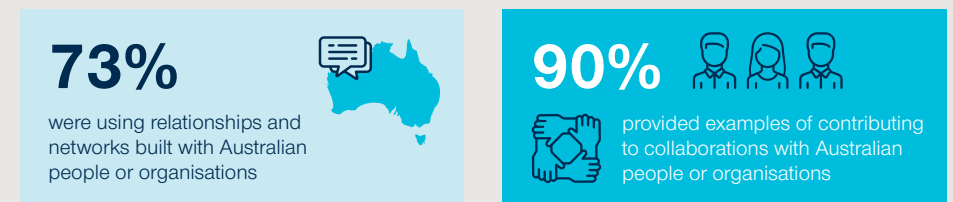


Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni surveyed:



Scholars engage with Indigenous Australians

In 2025, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia scholars participated in Indigenous engagement activities across Australia and online. These initiatives aimed to foster deeper understanding and respect for First Nations cultures and perspectives.



Image: Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia scholars during the study tour in the Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park. From left to right: Zoha Shakir (Pakistan), Sherab Jatsho (Bhutan) and Sarantuya Batgerel (Mongolia).

The flagship Indigenous engagement activity for the year was an immersive First Nations study tour in Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, South Australia. Across four days, scholars learnt about the relationship that the Adnyamathanha people, the Traditional Owners of the area, have with the environment. Supratic Chakma, a scholar from one of Bangladesh's indigenous groups, said that participating "broadened my understanding of both Australian and global Indigenous perspectives".

In Melbourne, local guides led scholars along the Aboriginal Heritage Walk at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, sharing stories of the land and pointing out native plants used for food, medicine and tools.

Reflecting on the event, Nepali scholar Unique Lohani said, "It was a wonderful experience to learn about Indigenous heritage and their deep, enduring connection with nature." Bhutanese scholar Jigme Choden agreed. "Seeing the space through the lens of Aboriginal cultures gave it new meaning," she said.

In Sydney, scholars travelled to Bundeena Royal National Park, where they heard cultural stories from a member of the Yuin Nation and had hands-on opportunities to learn boomerang throwing and traditional fire-making techniques. Maldivian participants Mariyam Ibha Jaleel and Aishath Dheena Shareef both said they gained a deeper

appreciation of First Nations culture. Similarly, Pakistani scholar Muhammad Tallha Noman valued the opportunity to "learn more about the rich culture, history and traditions of Aboriginal people through meaningful interactions during the walk".

In Adelaide, scholars visited the Living Kurna Cultural Centre and learnt from a local Indigenous artist, who emphasised art's role in preserving cultural knowledge, strengthening social bonds and expressing connection to Country. Bhutanese scholar Bunisha Pradhan said, "It was a truly enjoyable experience, especially learning more about Aboriginal people, their traditions, cultures and the way they use art as a form of communication."

Scholars also joined two Indigenous instructors for an online Aboriginal weaving workshop. Using materials received in advance, scholars followed step-by-step instructions to learn coil weaving and rope making, while drawing parallels with their own cultures. Sri Lanka's Dilini Perera said, "I was surprised to discover similarities between these methods and the traditional weaving practices from my own country."

Each of these scholar experiences helped participants gain deeper understanding and appreciation of Indigenous Australians' culture, history and achievements.

Case studies

Image: Participants in the Brisbane Scholars Symposium with representatives of the Nunukul Yuggera Aboriginal Dance Company, after a boomerang throwing workshop.

Scholars strengthen leadership skills at Scholar Symposiums

From October to December 2025, 183 Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia scholars participated in six Scholars Symposiums across Australia. These events, which had the theme of ‘From Learning to Leading: Make an Impact’, were designed to help scholars develop the skills to be changemakers after completing their Scholarships.

Each symposium began with an address from a representative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), after which a scholar delivered opening

remarks on behalf of their colleagues.

A highlight of each symposium was a panel consisting of experts drawn from the Australian Government, the diplomatic or consular corps, and the development sector. Panellists included:

- former Australian Heads of Mission to Bangladesh, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal and Sri Lanka
- Senator Charlotte Walker, the youngest person elected to Australia’s Senate, in Adelaide
- Nayomi Kannangara, CEO of the International Women’s Development Agency and a Sri Lankan Scholarship alumna herself, in Melbourne.

The panels, which were facilitated by a scholar at each event, saw these experts discuss various

leadership topics, including the importance of values for leaders, tips for networking and advice on advocating for change.

The first afternoon of each symposium was dedicated to training to help scholars apply what they had heard across the morning. Melbourne-based Nepali scholar Sapana BK said that the training “helped me improve my professional communication skills and build confidence in connecting with others”.

On the second day of the symposiums, scholars examined their Development Impact and Linkages Plans and whether these Plans needed updating in light of their time in Australia and what they had learnt on the first day of the symposiums.

Scholars also had the opportunity to provide their peers with an overview of their Plan and

outline how their studies and professional development activities in Australia would help them to implement their ideas.

Each symposium concluded with scholars engaging with First Nations Australians. These activities included art lessons from Indigenous teachers and learning to throw a boomerang, which were well received by participants.

For many attendees, the most valuable aspect of the events was the opportunity to network with other scholars from the region. “This event brought me closer to the fellow future global leaders and significantly extended my network,” said Cairns-based Bangladeshi scholar Supratic Chakma.

Summing up the views of many, Adelaide-based Maldivian scholar Muhammad Nazeeh said, “I found the Symposium truly inspiring.”



Case studies

Image: Participants in the Regional Alumni Workshop with representatives of the Government of Sri Lanka, the Australian High Commission, DFAT, and Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia.

Alumni unite for equity and development

Fifty-one Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia alumni attended the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 7–9 April.

Inspired by *Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy*, released in December 2024, the workshop's theme was 'From inclusion to equity: Development for all'. Through alumni presentations, panel discussions and group exercises, attendees discussed advocacy for the rights of people with disability and people from traditionally marginalised communities. Thirteen participants were people with disability.

Participants were selected from over 170 applications based on their advocacy for rights and equity. Alumni played a central role in delivering the workshop, with 18 making speeches, participating as panellists or facilitating sessions. Fourteen participants additionally delivered alumni spotlight presentations, highlighting their work and its impact on people with disability or from minorities and marginalised groups.

Opening the event, HE Mr Paul Stephens, Australia's then High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, said, "The workshop theme recognises that it is not enough to seek inclusion for people from marginalised communities and people with disability ... rather, we must tackle the unequal power systems and structures that hinder economic growth and human development."

Speaking at the opening on behalf of the participants, Sri Lankan alumna Halida Mohamed Mahroof said, "The work we are doing here today—working towards equity for people with disabilities and for marginalised communities—could not be more important."

The workshop featured three keynote presentations, each followed by a discussion panel featuring alumni. These presentations and panels covered topics such as advocacy by and for people with disability, the importance of making education accessible to all, and why development practitioners working with people with disability and from minority communities should consider intersectionality.

Participants also examined common challenges—dividing into groups to brainstorm

approaches to each challenge, then presenting their ideas. The workshop marked ten years since the inaugural Regional Alumni Workshop, at which the Women in Leadership Network was launched. The 2025 workshop saw the launch of the Equity for All alumni network, enabling participants to collaborate beyond the event.

Reflecting on the event, Maldivian alumnus Muthu M. Didi said, "From disability-inclusive development to intersectional advocacy, every conversation felt like a spark—igniting ideas, shifting perspectives and building something stronger than any one of us could do alone."



About the Program

Australia Awards are a central pillar of Australia's investment in people-to-people links with its partner nations—enhancing mutual understanding, cooperation, growth and stability in our region.

Australia Awards equip recipients with the skills, knowledge and networks to drive change and contribute to the development of their communities and nations. Empowerment of women and the inclusion of people with disability and individuals from traditionally marginalised groups are key objectives for Australia Awards.

Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offers opportunities to eligible nationals of

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Through a range of modalities—including Australia Awards Scholarships, Australia Awards Short Courses, Australian Professional Opportunities and support for alumni—the Program aims to:

- develop capacity and leadership skills to enable individuals to contribute to development in their home country

- build people-to-people linkages at the individual, institutional and country levels
- support Australia's public and economic diplomacy agenda.

Recipients of Australia Awards become part of Australia's alumni network, connecting them to Australia and to each other—building a global network of changemakers and ambassadors for Australia and its first-class education system.

Image: Australia Awards scholars and alumnae. From left to right: Duurenjargal Chinbat (Mongolia), Jyoti Ghimire (Nepal), Juliana Shetara (Bangladesh), Suravi Rani Sutradhar (Bangladesh) and Thelikadha Palliya Guruge Harshika Dharshani Weeraratne (Sri Lanka).



Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia is managed by Palladium on behalf of the Australian Government.

Images in this publication are of Australia Awards recipients, scholars and alumni participating in Program activities.

To learn more about Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia, visit:

www.australiaawardssouthasiamongolia.org