



Australia Awards

Year in Review 2025

Australia Awards
– Maldives



Highlights of 2025

In 2025, Australia Awards continued to support Maldives' development priorities by equipping emerging leaders with the skills, networks and leadership experience to drive meaningful change.

It was a year of growth for Australia Awards, demonstrating Australia's commitment to building human capability in Maldives, with increases in:

- scholars commencing their master's degree-level studies (16, compared to 12 in 2024)
- instances of scholars participating in enrichment opportunities (49, compared to 39 in 2024)
- Maldivian participants completing Short Courses (28, compared to three in 2024)
- participants in alumni engagement activities in Maldives (590, compared to 302 in 2024).

In total, 89 Australia Awards scholars, fellows, and Short Course and Australian Professional Opportunity (APO) participants from Maldives undertook education, training and professional development during 2025.

Fifteen of these scholars completed their degrees at Australia's world-class universities and returned home as alumni, committed to contributing to Maldives' development.

A comprehensive schedule of enrichment activities, including three flagship Scholars Symposiums, enhanced Maldivian scholars' professional capabilities and facilitated networking with senior Australian leaders. Indigenous engagement was an important theme throughout the year's activities, giving

Maldivian scholars the chance to learn about the culture, history and achievements of Australia's First Nations people.

As targeted short-term training opportunities to strengthen sector-specific capability and regional collaboration, Australia Awards also supported 28 Maldivians to complete five Short Courses and delivered four APOs.

For alumni, Australia Awards provided professional development and networking opportunities in Maldives and regionally. A highlight was the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Sri Lanka, which had the theme 'From inclusion to equity: Development for all'. Seven Maldivians joined other alumni from South Asia and Mongolia at the workshop, which launched the Equity for All alumni network. This fourth regional alumni network (alongside the Regional Women in Leadership Network, Male Allies for Gender Equality alumni network, and Champions for the Environment and Climate Action) enabled participants to continue collaborating on equity-focused initiatives for people with disability and from marginalised communities.

Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni from Maldives. From left to right: Aminath Azlifa, Yumnun Shareef, Aishath Nashia Nazim, Ahmed Mishal and Mariyam Raya Ahmed.

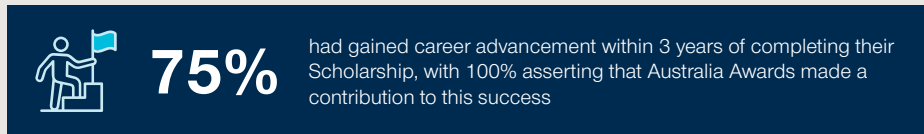
Image: Australia Awards alumnae from Maldives. From left to right: Aminath Izdhiha Rushdy, Aishath Dheena Shareef and Mariyam Ibha Jaleel.



Outcomes at a glance

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

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Maldives surveyed:



Among current scholars from Maldives studying in Australia surveyed:



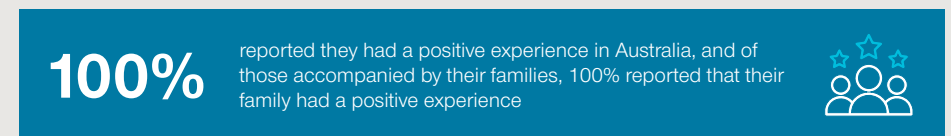
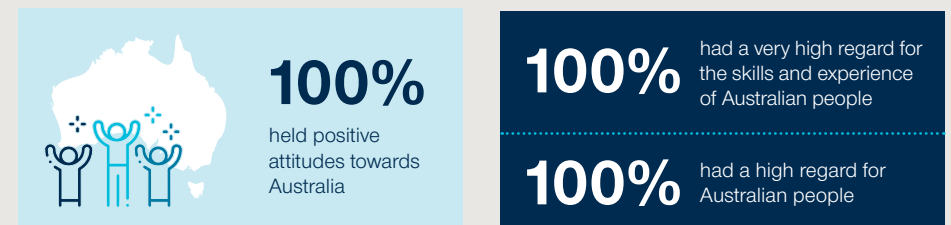
Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and Maldives


Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Maldives surveyed:



Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Maldives surveyed:





“My Australia Awards journey has been a deeply rewarding and transformative experience. Beyond providing a world-class education, it has strengthened my skills and leadership capacity; enabled me to build meaningful, supportive networks; and given me the confidence and perspective to contribute meaningfully to the development of my country.”

Ahmed Misbah
Master of Financial Economics
The Australian National University
commenced 2025

Australia Awards Scholarships

In 2025, Australia Awards Scholarship recipients from Maldives achieved strong academic and professional outcomes. During the year, 15 scholars (11 women, 4 men) completed their master’s degrees; all have returned home as alumni and are applying their learning in support of Maldives’ development priorities.

At the other end of their Scholarship journey, 16 scholars from Maldives commenced master’s-level study at Australian universities in 2025. This brought the total number of Maldivian scholars studying in Australia in 2025 to 27 (18 women, 9 men).

To complement scholars’ studies and strengthen their leadership capability, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offered 23 scholar enrichment opportunities throughout the year, including the flagship Scholars Symposiums (see page 08). Scholars from Maldives participated in these opportunities 49 times, engaging in professional development activities such as grants, internships and online communication training.

Consistent with Australia’s policy priorities, enrichment activities strongly emphasised gender equality, Indigenous engagement and equity for people with disability. Key activities included:

- an International Women’s Day online seminar with Indigenous women’s advocate Vicky Welgraven AM
- a World Environment Day seminar with Professor Anne Poelina, highlighting the connection between Indigenous knowledge and environmental management

- *Disability Sector Connect*, a study tour in Adelaide focused on innovation and best practice in disability advocacy and inclusion.

Maldivian scholar Shazeena Ahmed Naseem said, “The *Disability Sector Connect* program was an enriching and eye-opening experience.”

As part of a new initiative, Maldivian scholar Mohamed Nimal was appointed a Scholar Ambassador in South Australia to promote scholar enrichment activities.

Representing Australia’s continued investment in long-term development outcomes, 20 emerging leaders from Maldives received Scholarships to commence study in Australia in 2026, a 25% increase on the previous year. This cohort included 12 women, two people with disability and two people from target districts, reflecting Australia’s commitment to equal opportunity for all people, regardless of gender, disability status or geography.

Scholars engage with Indigenous Australians

In 2025, scholars from Maldives participated in Indigenous engagement activities across Australia and online, alongside other Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia scholars.



Image: Maldivian Australia Awards alumnus Niushad Saeed (Master of Data Science, the University of Sydney, 2025) has his face painted by Richard Campbell, an Elder of the Yuin Nation, during Niushad's time as a scholar.

The flagship Indigenous engagement activity for the year was a four-day First Nations study tour in Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, South Australia. Through various sessions, scholars learnt about the relationship that the Adnyamathanha people, the Traditional Owners of the greater Ikara and Flinders Ranges area, have with the environment.

In Sydney, scholars travelled to Bundeena Royal National Park, on the traditional lands of the Dharawal people, where they heard cultural stories from Richard Campbell, an Elder of the Yuin Nation. Attendees also had hands-on opportunities to learn boomerang throwing and traditional fire-making techniques.

Maldivian scholar Mariyam Ibha Jaleel described the experience as remarkable, offering a deeper appreciation of First Nations culture and a valuable opportunity to connect with fellow scholars from different countries.

Scholars also joined Ronnie Jordan, a Pitta Pitta Wangkamahdla woman, and Coen, a Pitta Pitta Wangkamahdla Muruwari Ngemba man, 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 Ronnie explained how weaving connects the weaver, their ancestors and the land.

Reflecting on the experience, Maldivian scholar Aminath Izdhiha Rushdy described the workshop as deeply meaningful, highlighting Ronnie's vibrant energy and calming presence as a power lesson in mindfulness. "Her gentle reminders to breathe and stay present were incredibly grounding. The stories she shared about generations of woven items—their beauty and purpose—were truly awe-inspiring. I was especially moved when she explained how weaving has long been a way to care for mental health. In today's world, where mental wellbeing is increasingly prioritised, it was humbling to hear from an Elder that this wisdom has been part of Indigenous life for generations—living in harmony with nature and nurturing health as part of that connection," she said.

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

Short-term training

In 2025, Australia Awards delivered short-term training opportunities to 62 Maldivians (37 women, 25 men) in priority sectors, including the public service, climate change and gender equality. These Short Courses, Fellowships and Australian Professional Opportunities (APOs) strengthened participants' skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to Maldives' development.

A total of 28 Maldivians completed Short Courses focused on sector-specific capability and regional collaboration, combining targeted learning and networking, as follows.

Eighteen early- to mid-career officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Finance and Planning, Fisheries and Ocean Resources, and Tourism and Environment completed the *Training in Diplomacy and International Relations* Short Course. Through a combination of learning activities, case studies, and engaging with experts, organisations and institutions, participants increased their knowledge of key challenges in diplomacy.

In addition, 10 Maldivian participants completed one multi-country Short Course and three Regional Short Courses:

- One official from the National Disaster Management Authority completed a Short Course on *Disaster Management and*

Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, managed by Australia's South Asia Regional Infrastructure Connectivity (SARIC) initiative.

- Six participants in total completed two climate-focused Regional Short Courses, supporting increased capability in responding to climate-related challenges (see page 07).
- Three participants completed a Regional Short Course on *Women in Executive Leadership Development*, focused on gender equality and women's leadership.

Asiath Rilweena, a participant in the latter Short Course, said, "The course provided an invaluable opportunity for me to pause and truly understand the difference between managing and leading. The course helped me navigate my organisation through an unanticipated crisis with empathy and fortitude and emerge stronger as a person and leader."

Image: Maldivian participants in the Training in Diplomacy and International Relations Short Course with HE David Jessup, Australia's High Commissioner to Maldives; representatives from Griffith University; and senior government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Australia Awards also supported four APOs for Maldives to support knowledge-building and networking:

- Two judges attended the International Association of Women Judges conference.
- Five representatives from the Prosecutor General's Office and one resource person from Melbourne Law School provided technical expertise on the implementation of Maldives' new Evidence Act.
- Three participants attended a SARIC regional meeting and India Energy Storage Week.
- Seven representatives of the Maldives Space Research Organisation attended the International Astronautical Federation Workshop and International Astronautical Congress in Australia.



Alumni engagement

Australia Awards alumni engagement activities in 2025 focused on supporting professional development, building linkages and increasing knowledge of priority development topics, including gender equality, disability equity and environmental sustainability.

More than 580 participants collectively benefited from alumni engagement activities in Maldives. These activities included:

- a Returning Home for Development workshop for 19 recently returned Scholarships alumni
- the Alumni Ideas Hub, a workshop to foster networks and collaboration to help alumni become leaders for change
- the third Maldives Australia Alumni (MAA) Academic Holhuashi, a public knowledge-sharing forum to foster academic dialogue
- an event for the 10th anniversary of MAA that celebrated alumni achievements
- an opportunity for alumni to engage with the Hon Richard Marles MP, Australia's Deputy Prime Minister, during his visit to Maldives.

Alumni from Maldives built linkages with counterparts from South Asia and Mongolia and heard from Australian leaders through regional engagement opportunities, headlined by the Regional Alumni Workshop (see page 08).

Four regional thematic alumni networks (the Regional Women in Leadership Network, Male Allies for Gender Equality alumni

network, Champions for the Environment and Climate Action, and Equity for All alumni network) also provided opportunities for alumni across South Asia and Mongolia to engage on gender equality, disability equity and environmental sustainability.

A total of 22 regional alumni events registered 56 participants from Maldives. Activities included:

- an alumni-led event for World Mental Health Day on the subject of 'Mental Health for Sustainable Development', featuring Maldivian alumna Sofiya Rasheed as a panellist
- briefings from Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials about *Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy* and *International Gender Equality Strategy*
- training on applying online tools for digital inclusion, organised by the Equity for All alumni network.

Australia Awards also offered small grants in 2025 to support alumni-led initiatives in Maldives. Nine small grants supported projects in priority sectors for Australia's development cooperation program by a total of 14 alumni.

“While studying at the Australian National University, I had the opportunity to engage with leading experts in my field and cultivate meaningful professional relationships that have significantly contributed to my academic and professional development.”

Uswath Ahmed
Master of Laws
The Australian National University, 2025



Strengthening climate leadership and resilience

Australia Awards is equipping emerging leaders from Maldives with the skills and networks needed to respond to the challenges of a changing climate. Action on climate change is central to Australia's international development priorities, and Australia is committed to improving the capacity of partner governments to manage the impacts of the climate crisis.

This commitment was reflected in the delivery of two climate-focused Regional Short Courses in 2025. Three Maldivians completed a Regional Short Course on *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*. Participants explored how stronger policy coherence between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation could support sustainable development.

Three Maldivians also undertook a Regional Short Course on *Accessing Climate Finance*, which built participants' capability to navigate the complex landscape of climate-related finance, international agreements, green banking and sustainable investing.

These two Regional Short Courses each included two weeks of learning in Australia, enabling participants to network with Australian experts.

The focus on climate finance capability extended to the Champions for the Environment and Climate Action alumni network, which convened two online events on the topic attended by Maldivian alumni.

Australia Awards also sought to strengthen scholars' ability to respond to climate change more broadly. A highlight was Climate Literacy training facilitated by Edith Cowan University over three sessions. Maldivian scholars were among a group of 30 from South Asia and Mongolia who explored practical strategies for reducing emissions, influencing policy, and driving positive change within organisations and the wider community.

Reflecting on the training, Maldivian participant Aishath Dheena Shareef said, "The Climate Literacy training shifted my perspective on climate change and behaviour change, showing how behavioural economics, systems thinking and nudge theory can make simple actions easier and create meaningful change over time, both within organisations and in our own lives."

Image: Maldivian Australia Awards alumna Aishath Dheena Shareef (Master of Business Analytics, Macquarie University, 2025), who completed the Climate Literacy training during her time as a scholar.



Case studies

Scholars strengthen leadership skills at Scholar Symposiums

From October to December, 14 Maldivian Australia Awards scholars participated in Scholars Symposiums in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. These events were designed to help scholars develop the skills they need to be changemakers after completing their Scholarships.

A highlight of each symposium was a panel of experts speaking about various leadership topics, including the importance of values for leaders, tips for networking and advice on advocating for change. This was followed by leadership or communications training, to help scholars apply what they had heard.

The panels were facilitated by a scholar at each event, with Maldivian scholar Aishath Dheena Shareef moderating the session in Sydney and Mohamed Nimal undertaking the role in Adelaide.

Reflecting on this training in Sydney, Maldivian participant Mariyam Ibha Jaleel said, “I attended a meeting of great minds at the Australia Awards Scholars Symposium and had the pleasure of joining an amazing leadership training session.”

On the second day of the symposiums, scholars examined their Development Impact and Linkages Plans (DILPs) and whether they needed updating. Scholars also had the opportunity to present an overview of their

DILP; Maldivian participants Aminath Izdhiha Rushdy and Ahmed Mishal did so.

Each symposium concluded with scholars engaging with First Nations Australians. These activities included art lessons from Indigenous teachers and learning to throw a boomerang. Melbourne-based Maldivian scholar Aishath Naseem said, “I connected with the Indigenous art session in a way that I didn’t expect to.”

For many attendees, the most valuable aspect of the events was the opportunity to network with other scholars from across South Asia and Mongolia. “It was fun and insightful to meet, talk and connect with scholars from across the region,” said Aishath Naseem. “I’ve strengthened my networking skills.”

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



Image: Maldivian participants in the Melbourne Scholars Symposium with Indigenous artist Rhys Jeffs. From left to right: Mariyam Raya Ahmed, Aishath Nashia Nazim and Rhys Jeffs.

Alumni unite for equity and development

Seven Maldivians were among the 51 Australia Awards alumni from South Asia and Mongolia who attended the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Sri Lanka on 7–9 April.

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, including two from Maldives.

Maldivian alumni played a central role in delivering the workshop: Aishath Nazhath delivered a presentation showcasing her development work, while Hamna Sharyf was a panellist and Muthu M. Didi delivered one of three keynote presentations.

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 in his role as a disability advocate, alumnus Muthu M. Didi focused his keynote

presentation—titled ‘Beyond Rhetoric to Reality: Addressing the Implementation Divide in Disability Inclusion’—on the challenges of achieving equity for people with disability. Each keynote presentation was followed by a discussion panel featuring alumni. Other topics covered were 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, which will enable alumni to share knowledge and learn together through expert-led discussions, interactive workshops and peer-sharing sessions on key issues relating to disability and marginalised communities.

Reflecting on the event, Muthu M. Didi said, “Being part of the 2025 Australia Awards Regional Alumni Workshop wasn’t just an honour—it was a space of learning, unlearning and collective visioning. 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.”

Australia Awards – Maldives forms part of the Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia Program and 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 – Maldives, visit: www.australiaawardsmaldives.org