The present and future of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Alumni Association in Australia (JSPSAAA)

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JSPSAAA: History, and present situation

The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Alumni Association in Australia (JSPSAAA) is one of 18 alumni associations formally recognized by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). With the institution of the JSPSAAA, alumni associations of the JSPS are now represented in five continents. Like all other JSPS alumni associations, its membership comprises researchers in all disciplinary fields in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences, who have previously been awarded long- or short-term JSPS Fellowships. The only additional requisite to be eligible for membership of the JSPSAAA is that prospective alumni must be Australian citizens or hold permanent resident status in Australia. General information is available from the Australian Academy of Science (AAS) web-site at: <https://www.science.org.au/supporting-science/other-initiatives/japan-society-promotion-science-alumni-association-australia>.

The JSPSAAA was formally recognized by the JSPS on February 24, 2017, after the JSPSAAA had approved its constitution and elected its first Executive at a meeting held on October 19, 2016 at the AAS Shine Dome in Canberra, and after it had been incorporated in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), on January 13, 2017.

The Executive Committee, composed of a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, supported by one representative for each of its constituencies (New South Wales/ACT, Victoria/Tasmania, South Australia/Western Australia, and Queensland/Northern Territory), started working immediately

after its election to set up the operational framework within which to carry out the duties of the elected members, and to achieve the final steps required for formal approval of the Alumni Association by the JSPS (headquartered in Tokyo, Japan). It also reviewed and streamlined procedures for the processing and approval of new membership applications, including those in an Honorary Member category established to recognize the achievements of individuals whose outstanding work with Japanese colleagues and institutions has contributed to understanding between Australia and Japan through scientific collaboration not supported by the JSPS. At the time of this writing, the association has a total of 226 members, and it aims to further expand its numbers by reaching more than 650 Australian researchers who were formerly supported by the JSPS. This concerted effort will disseminate information about the JSPSAAA using regular social media, a future dedicated web-site, outreach activities, and media engagement. The association also plans to replace its current active application process for membership, with an “opt-out if so wished” mechanism by which all eligible JSPS Fellows will be automatically added to the JSPSAAA membership list. The current application system will remain active by completion of an on-line form available at: <https://aas.eventsair.com/jspsaau/australia/Site/Register>.

The JSPSAAA was formed under the auspices of the AAS, which in 2017 celebrated 40 years since the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the JSPS. The MoU included research exchange programs under all JSPS Fellowship schemes. After conceptualizing the JSPSAAA in 2014, the AAS and voluntary members of the scientific community worked over a period of 2 years to formulate and execute the plan to establish the association and draft its first constitution. This preparatory work culminated in the call for membership and invitations to nominate for the eight executive roles. The first elected Executive, competently assisted by AAS staff, then continued the work leading to the final formal recognition of the Association. Through its initiatives, which have included the highly successful inaugural JSPSAAA

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Symposium held in conjunction with the 2017 AGM (Canberra, October 9–10), the Executive is now actively promoting members' direct engagement in regular operations and new activities. It appointed a voluntary Editor and the first issue of the quarterly *JSPS Newsletter* included letters from members, interviews and reports, which were published on November 20, 2017. Regular members volunteered to serve on a new committee, formed in November 2017, tasked with screening and pre-selection of Australian applications to the JSPS Bridge Fellowship Program (<http://www.jsps.go.jp/english/e-plaza/bridge/index.html>). Regional representatives engage directly with members in their constituencies to organize local meetings and outreach activities.

Finally, the JSPSAAA Symposium will become a yearly itinerant event, with local organizing committees formed by members who will work closely with the regional representatives to propose venues, and work on the conference program. An invitation to members has also been extended to assist with the design of a future JSPSAAA web-portal, which will serve as a central point of contact for all members, and maintain a data repository and archive that will replace the temporary database space currently made available by the AAS.

The future: Vision, challenges, and strategies

The work of the Executive Committee and of the Regular Members involved in JSPSAAA activities is provided on an entirely voluntary basis. Obviously, JSPSAAA activities require some material support, especially when considering the Association's future. Upon incorporation, the Association received a one-off endowment of AUD 30,000 from the AAS, but this will need to be augmented to sustain the association activities and facilitate the execution of its agenda in the long term. The Executive is looking at ways to generate cash inflows, principally through grants and sponsorships, and possibly by a minor component of direct funding from members through either ad hoc contributions to specific initiatives (e.g., JSPSAAA Symposium registration fees) or by the future introduction of a small annual membership fee.

In line with the central purpose of the JSPS, the core mission of the JSPSAAA involves contributing to the advancement and promotion of science by supporting, encouraging and fostering scientific collaborations between Australia and Japan. Given that all its members are former JSPS Fellows, access to a growing network of research teams facilitating researcher exchanges across research facilities in Japan and Australia will continue to be the principal mechanism by which the JSPSAAA can accomplish its mission. It will serve as a first point of contact to acquire and disseminate information about JSPS and AAS exchange programs to and from Japan. It will also explore possible agreement mechanisms to expand the list of

Japan- or Australia-led big international projects open to reciprocal participation. This is just one part of a broader vision for the future. In fact, the JSPSAAA is uniquely positioned to leverage its growing wealth of connections to pursue long-term strategic goals. The members of the JSPSAAA bring a unique perspective to present and future Australia–Japan bilateral exchanges and collaboration, contributing knowledge acquired through direct experience working and living in Japan. They can use their scientific and cultural knowledge of the science “scenes” of both Australia and Japan to promptly identify emerging trends that could lead to future collaboration and development opportunities. They can also engage at multiple levels to facilitate mutual understanding and promote common initiatives.

Growing relationships with official Japanese delegations in Australia will play an important role in the development and long-term sustainability of JSPSAAA initiatives, as well as for the articulation and actualization of the association's vision. Members of the Japanese *corp diplomatique* in Australia have already been invited to participate in JSPSAAA events, and to sit on JSPSAAA committees. Planned growing engagement with Japanese Consulates all over Australia will further facilitate direct exposure of Japanese diplomatic bodies to the scientific work conducted in Australia outside of the ACT, providing additional opportunities for capillary research support and the growth of scientific and cultural exchanges. At the same time, the existing and strengthening link between the AAS and the JSPSAAA will provide an avenue for access to expert knowledge about Australia–Japan scientific collaborations. This will directly contribute to two of the AAS stated purposes, i.e. the promotion of international scientific engagement, and the provision of reliable, independent and authoritative scientific advice to assist Australian organizations in delivering their international science activities.

Equally, the importance of the close relationship the JSPSAAA maintains with the JSPS central office in Tokyo cannot be overstated. Members of the JSPS regularly sit in on JSPSAAA Executive meetings, providing advice, ancillary support and sponsorship of JSPSAAA initiatives, and directly participating in JSPSAAA activities.

Looking to the future, the JSPS and the JSPSAAA share a vision for science as the “enabler” for future generations and societies. In this context, there will be planned education and outreach initiatives, possibly involving Australia–Japan exchanges, and school participation in JSPSAAA scientific symposia, which will be major features in the development of a future JSPSAAA “activity-portfolio”.

Conclusions

The JSPSAAA is the youngest of the JSPS international alumni associations, but it has made an energetic start. During its first year, its activities mostly focused on the establishment of the operational parameters for its governance structure. It can now start working to articulate and implement a bold vision for the future. The JSPSAAA is destined to play a significant role in facilitating scientific collaborations, supporting Australia–Japan bilateral agreements, and contributing to the appreciation of science by future generations in Australia and Japan.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest Graziella Caprarelli declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author.