

# HWA CHONG GLOBAL DIGITAL YOUNG LEADERS CONVENTION

## Innovating, collaborating and thriving beyond boundaries: Applying Global Competence in HC-GDYLC

*OECD PISA's Global Competence framework was brought into play at the virtual Hwa Chong Global Digital Young Leaders Convention (HC-GDYLC), an immersive alternate reality problem-solving event where international student leaders responded together to the challenges and opportunities posed by the Covid-19 crisis.*

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The [Hwa Chong Global Digital Young Leaders Convention](#) (HC-GDYLC), a student-led initiative launched last year (18 – 21 July 2020), gathered 101 sixteen year-old international student delegates from 17 schools across seven countries (Fig 1). The event was organised and facilitated by [Hwa Chong Institution](#)'s seventeen year-old student 'Gamemasters'.



Fig 1: Participating schools

The [HC-GDYLC](#) was an immersive virtual event where student leaders globally worked together to respond to the challenges and opportunities posed by the Covid-19 crisis, by taking on the personas of different stakeholders in society. Student representatives from around the world, each with their own unique characteristics and goals, participated in this ‘alternate reality’ exercise by immersing themselves into their ‘role’ and venturing into challenges woven by student convention coordinators. During the online convention, participants exchanged perspectives with each other, made important decisions to chart their own paths and responded to new developments in the story to achieve their ultimate goal of bringing the world out of the crisis. Participants had the opportunity to experience first-hand certain roles in a volatile world, reflective of the society we currently live in. With the virtual nature of the convention, event coordinators ensured the meaningful engagement of participants by sending participants interactive “missions” of varying media formats that they could respond to in real-time (Fig 2).



*Fig 2: Student delegates collaborating on Slack platform to overcome various crises*

The convention’s objectives, adapted from the OECD PISA’s Global Competence framework, were to empower delegates to **DARE**. Through the use of a real-time crisis backdrop, delegates were empowered to:

- D**evelop global transversal competencies and exercise their character strengths;
- A**ctualise a model of education and empowerment to fortify meaningful action in their lives;
- R**ealise intellectual dialogue, cultural exchange and inter-personal connection among global young leaders; and
- E**levate beyond boundaries by harnessing the potential of digital platforms and the power of the human spirit.

The concept of this convention and the outline of programmes planned out for all delegates revolved around the four dimensions of global competence to enable them to ‘investigate the world’, ‘discern perspectives’, ‘communicate ideas’ and ‘take action’. The theme of the convention was *Concord: Standing in Solidarity, Chartering a New Era*. Despite the significant challenges the world has been facing with the Covid-19 crisis, the youth organisers and delegates acted on the belief that the pandemic would not deter them from continuing to forge international bonds, stand in solidarity and envision a new future for themselves. This was particularly significant as it took place at the height of the pandemic in July last year. Issues such as distribution of vaccines were already anticipated and discussed before mass vaccination exercises took place at a global level subsequently.

HC-GDYLC combined engagement in three worlds: 1) the alternate world – through strategies of gamification to imagine, actualise and critique diverse possibilities of idea implementation and action-taking; 2) the real world – through keynote presentations, discussions and analysis of current affairs and policy-making with leading experts; and 3) the personal world – through online activism by delegates during and after HC-GDYLC to make their community a better place.

HC-GDYLC’s storyboard concept and its unique online interactive gameplay formed the majority of the convention. Set in the context of a global pandemic, known as the Global Acute Respiratory (GARV) virus, the storyboard concept was based on the idea of immersing the participants in an alternate reality where elements are similar yet still deviate somewhat from our current reality (Fig 3). While delegates were no longer bound by adhering to the developments of the real-world in this alternate reality, they were strongly encouraged during their storyboard journey to use the real-life situation as a reference. This consisted of considering ways in which they might be able to respond differently (and perhaps more effectively) to the various crises compared to responses of global leaders in their current reality. Delegates assumed the roles of various stakeholders in society (eg. ministers, journalists, CEOs, unionists, etc.) and were free to explore issues from a multitude of stakeholder perspectives, all while infusing their personal experiences into the crafting of a unique global narrative.

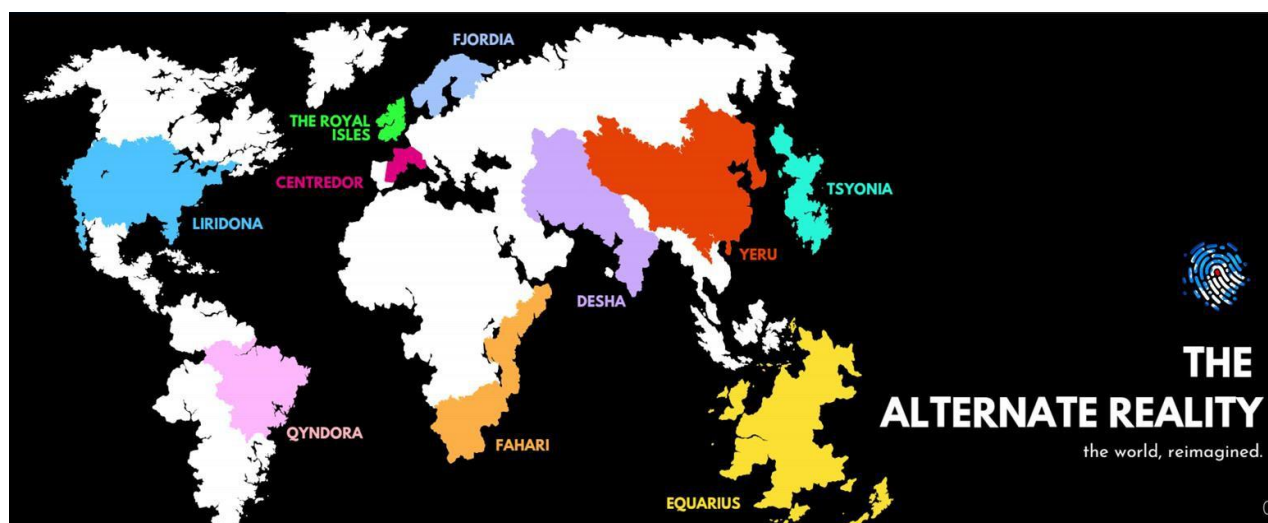


Fig 3: The alternate reality in the gameplay world

During the game, delegates immersed in domestic, regional and international modes, where they were able to discuss practical measures with fellow participants all around the world in order to alleviate the impacts of the pandemic on their countries. Through the use of the convention's innovative 'Action Cards' (Fig 4), delegates reacted to unexpected case studies such as a global shortage of PPE (personal protection equipment), international food crisis and vaccine distribution challenges to increase their 'Global Digital indicators' (Fig 5), which served to track their respective countries' progress and measure achievements in a variety of fields, including health, economic security, social equality and political relations.



Fig 4: Action Cards



Fig 5: Global Digital Indicators

To facilitate connection between the alternate reality gameplay with the challenges and opportunities facing the delegates in the real world, the convention organised keynote presentations with follow-up analysis and reflections on the issues raised. The eight keynote experts (Fig 6) from different fields of government, research and industry (in alphabetical order by family name) offered rich insights and perspectives on stewardship and leading in the uncharted territories of the current and future post-Covid world. The topics they explored with delegates were as follows:

- **Mr Bradley Busetto** (Director, UNDP Global Centre on Technology, Innovation and Sustainability): *Partnerships that enable Technological Innovation in advancing the SDGs*
- **Mr Bilahari Kausikan** (Chairman, Middle East Institute, NUS): *The Impact on International Relations during Covid-19*
- **Mr Lim Siong Guan** (Founder Chairman, Honour Singapore; Member of Advisory Board of Razer Fintech; Professor, LKY School of Public Policy): *The Future of Leadership*
- **Professor Lisa Ng** (Executive Director, A\*STAR Graduate Academy; Senior Principal Investigator, Singapore Immunology Network): *My Experience with Covid-19: Opportunities and Risks in Today's World*
- **Mr Peter Ong** (Chairman, Enterprise Singapore): *Covid-19: Staying adaptable in an uncertain landscape*
- **Dr Mario Piacentini** (Senior Analyst, OECD PISA; Lead Author, PISA 2018 assessment of Global Competence and PISA 2022 assessment of Creative Thinking): *The importance of transversal competencies to success in the real world for young leaders*
- **Dr Santitarn Sathirathai** (Group Chief Economist, SEA Group): *Challenges and Opportunities for businesses in the COVID-19 era*
- **Prof. Yeo Kiat Seng** (Associate Provost, Research and International Relations at Singapore University of Technology and Design): *Creating Opportunities and Value in Disruption*



*Fig 6: Keynote speakers (top row, L-R: Mr Busetto, Mr Kausikan, Mr Lim, Prof Ng; bottom row, L-R: Mr Ong, Dr Piacentini, Dr Sathirathai, Prof Yeo)*

Delegates and their teacher chaperones expressed highly positive reviews (both quantitative and qualitative) in the reflection logs and feedback forms during and after the convention. Findings revealed high levels of engagement and learning of global affairs and contemporary issues. There was a significant indication of growth by the student delegates in the four Dimensions of Global Competence. Delegates indicated (73 delegates out of 101 who responded to the feedback) that through HC-GDYLC, they had developed the capacities to:

- better examine issues and situations of local and global significance (4.8/5);
- better understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views (4.5/5);

- establish positive interactions with people of different national and sociocultural backgrounds (4.6/5); and
- take constructive action towards the development and well-being of others/society (4.6/5).

The student organising team and facilitators have likewise highlighted growth in their character values, learning and innovative capacities.

The work in HC-GDYLC has been presented and discussed with other educators internationally at the [Global Learning Alliance Virtual Summit](#) (20 – 21 Aug 2020) and at the biennial [Teachers' Conference and ExCEL Fest](#) (1 – 3 June 2021). Two global partner schools from Japan and USA have also benchmarked HC-GDYLC to carry out adapted versions of the event in their own countries. In the spirit of outreach and inclusivity, a team of student delegates from Singapore has also embarked on a follow-up project in conducting a mini-version of HC-GDYLC with their less-privileged juniors in Northbrooks Secondary School, thus broadening opportunities for more students to be engaged in this programme.

The ultimate goal of HC-GDYLC was for delegates to emerge as confident and visionary leaders, having understood the nuances of a global crisis through the eyes of various stakeholders in society, and having realised that all youths have their own capacities to think critically and creatively and take practical action to make a difference in their communities. Importantly, it reinforces the importance of building bridges and seeking common destiny, regardless of nationality, race and language. Delegates went on to engage in online advocacy to champion various causes during and after the convention, with causes including the environment, physical and mental health, social equality and inclusivity, and more (Fig 7a and Fig 7b).





Fig 7a & 7b: Examples of online advocacy by delegates to champion their causes

This is indeed significant, as Dr Mario Piacentini highlighted in his keynote speech the value of “inspiring young people to collaborate in order to create new knowledge, pursue their unique talents and take an active, transformative role in their communities.” HC-GDYLC has taken a meaningful step forward in creating the spark and platform to embolden youths to become the powerful agents of change they are destined to be. Grace Koh (a student ExCo member), upon reflecting on the challenges of putting this immersive and innovative convention together, represented the Gamemasters (Fig 8) when she concluded, “I now no longer fear the impossible, and I know that things are possible if we dare to dream. No challenge is too large to conquer if we conquer it with the right spirit. HC-GDYLC emerged against all odds, and its story continues, as a testament to our potential as a collective humanity.”

From the education perspective, HC-GDYLC has provided a bold new blueprint of an education model, where students’ agency and self-directedness take centre-stage, and 21<sup>st</sup> century global competencies are actualized through authentic problem-solving in a blended and gamified learning context.

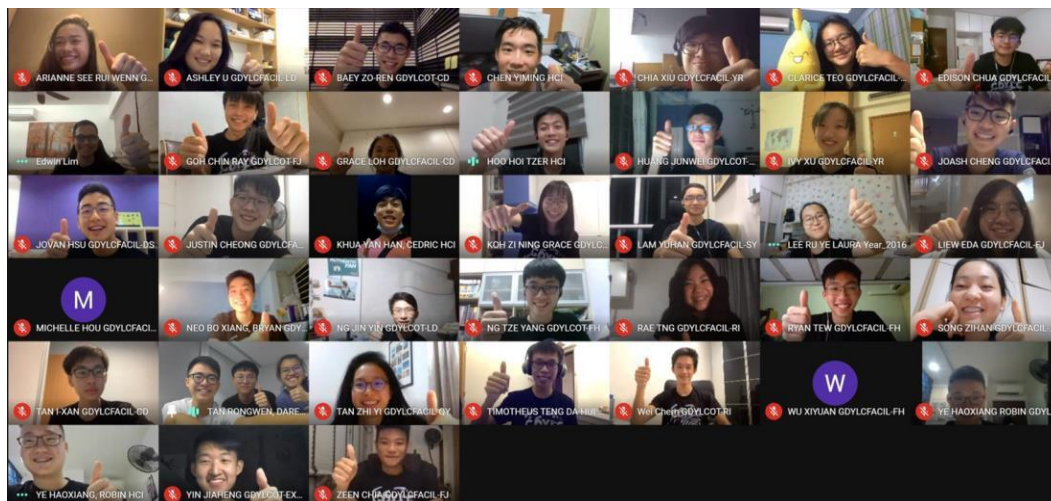


Fig 8: Our student ‘Gamemasters’ (from Hwa Chong Institution)