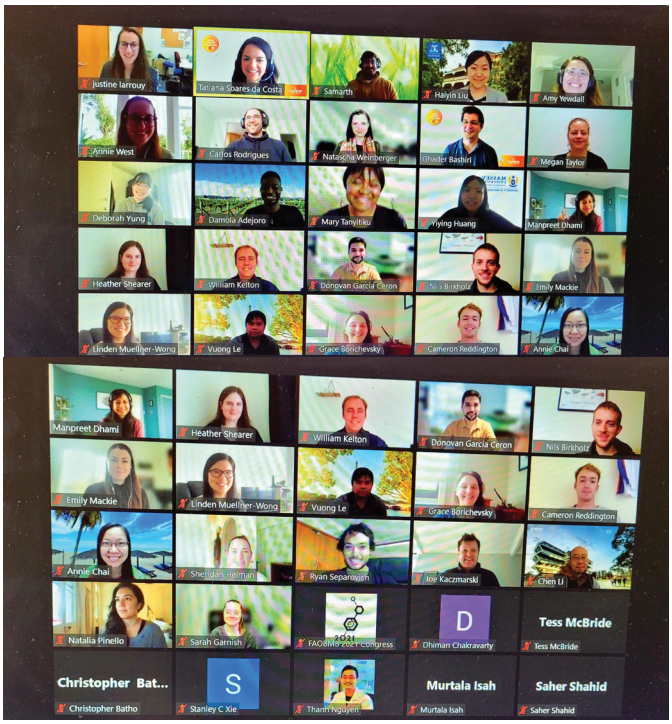
2021 FAOBMB Young Scientist Programme

The COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the world and the way we live. The FAOBMB Young Scientist Programme (YSP) 2021 was scheduled to take place in the beautiful South Island of New Zealand from 19–21 November, prior to the 16th FAOBMB Congress. Unfortunately, as with most other events since the pandemic began, the YSP had to be held virtually. In spite of the challenges, the YSP organisers, especially the Chairs, Tatiana Soares da Costa and Ghader Bashiri, successfully made the event as interesting and engaging as in-person meetings. Over 50 young scientists participated in the YSP, including attendees from Asia, Africa and Europe, despite different time zones. I attended the YSP as a recipient of one of the two 2021 FAOBMB Young Scientist Awards.



YSP participants on Zoom.

Following the welcome address by the Chairs, the first invited speaker was Peter Mace, an Associate Professor at the University of Otago. Peter shared his inspiring journey from a PhD student at Otago, followed by two postdoctoral fellowships in the US and eventually became a lab head back at Otago. In addition to an example of a successful academic career, the organisers also invited scientists who pursued careers outside academic research. Michael Baker is the current CEO of an ASX listed company, Arovella Therapeutics. Michael completed an MBA after his PhD degree and a few years of postdoctoral research. The biggest lesson from his experience is "never stop learning." The skills we acquired from a PhD degree are also useful for non-academic careers. Krish Jayatilleke started to work as a clinical research associate immediately after completing his PhD. He coordinates a number of clinical trials across Australia. Their stories were insightful for those interested in pursuing alternative career paths.

There were five YSP sessions that covered a wide range of research topics, including molecular and structural biology, microbiology, immunology, plant biochemistry, drug discovery and computational biology. Every attendee was given a chance to present their work and share new ideas. The extensive discussion after each session by fellow young scientists clearly demonstrated the interest and enthusiasm we had for each other's work.

The event provided a great platform for exchanging scientific experiences, which might lead to fruitful collaborations in the future. This is particularly important given the networking opportunities we have lost because of the pandemic. I even got to know colleagues who work in the same building as me for the first time through the YSP. What strange times we live in! Workshops on science communication and interview preparation were certainly the highlights of the event. As young scientists, we often have difficulties in conveying scientific concepts to the general public. The workshops showed us to the keys to reach broader audiences.

The YSP provided a precious opportunity for us to keep connected with colleagues. Workshops and talks from the guest speakers are immensely helpful for us to identify and build our career paths. I would undoubtedly recommend this programme to students and early career scientists.

Stanley Cheng Xie, Bio21 Molecular Science and Biotechnology Institute, University of Melbourne

Australian 2021 YSP Awardees

Naveen Vankadari (Monash University), Sarah Garnish (WEHI), Haiyin Liu (University of Melbourne), Pramod Subedi (La Trobe University), Natalia Pinello (University of Sydney), Joe Kaczmarski (Australian National University), Laura Ciacchi (Monash University), Jia Jia Lim (Monash University), Jennifer Payne (Monash University), Linden Muellner Wong (University of Melbourne), Carlos Rodrigues (University of Melbourne), Donovan Garcia (La Trobe University), Emily Mackie (La Trobe University), Christopher Batho (QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute), Sheridan Helman (QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute), Natascha Weinberger (Western Sydney University), Chen Li (Monash University), Thanh Nguyen (Monash University), Fuyi Li (University of Melbourne), Praveena Thirunavukkarasu (Monash University), Ryan Separovich (UNSW)

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