

Report on International Mediation Singapore (IMSG 2020)

Kluwer Mediation Blog
December 12, 2020

Joel Lee (National University of Singapore, Faculty of Law)

Please refer to this post as: Joel Lee, 'Report on International Mediation Singapore (IMSG 2020)', *Kluwer Mediation Blog*, December 12, 2020, <http://mediationblog.kluwerarbitration.com/2020/12/12/report-on-international-mediation-singapore-ims-2020/>

Note: This was co-authored with Samuel Teo and I would like to acknowledge his significant contributions to the preparation of this entry.

In past entries, I have highlighted a peer mediation initiative called the [Peacemakers Conference](#) which seeks to teach 13-16 year olds how to resolve conflicts amicably in a workshop cum competition format.

As 2020 draws to a close, I want to dedicate this last blog entry for the year to an event known as International Mediation Singapore (IMSG). IMSG is run by the Singapore International Mediation Institute (SIMI) and is a premier international competition that focuses on mediation advocacy and mediation. Further, it is the only international competition that has its results audited to ensure accuracy, transparency and legitimacy. In 2020, IMSG's auditors' were Ernst & Young.

The inaugural competition was held in 2019 to commemorate the signing of the Singapore Convention on Mediation and to bring together the best teams from around the world to celebrate a shared passion for mediation. It was held in-person at the Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore. A total of 140 students comprising 40 teams from 17 countries participated in the inaugural competition. Apart from being involved in a host of networking events and receptions, participants and coaches were also invited to attend the momentous Singapore Convention Signing Ceremony and Conference as guests of SIMI and representatives of their universities. A report of IMSG 2019 can be accessed [here](#).

The purpose of IMSG is to raise awareness of mediation among law students, who are the next generation of thought leaders and practitioners in the mediation and alternative dispute resolution industry. As readers will know, the Singapore Convention on Mediation – which opened for signature only last year and has now entered into force with 6 ratifying countries and 53 signatories in total – underscores the growing international acceptance and consensus about the importance of mediation. Understanding the fundamental principles of mediation and having the opportunity to practice mediating, albeit in a competition setting, will prove to be an essential tool in a future practitioner's toolbox.

IMSG 2020 in numbers

Because of the pandemic, IMSG, like many other events worldwide, was held online this year. This allowed for a greater number of teams to be accommodated. Approximately 220 participants and coaches comprising 48 teams (an increase from 2019) competed at IMSG 2020 via video conferencing. The competition was also run with the generous support of approximately 70 volunteers and 80 SIMI Mediators who assisted as either session managers or judges.

Altogether, SIMI hosted a truly international group of participants, coaches, judges and operations personnel from 30 different countries – Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the U.K., Ukraine, the U.S.A., and Vietnam.

IMSG Competition Format

There are a few stand-out features of the IMSG competition format.

First, teams comprise 3 – 4 members and participate in both the Mediation Advocacy and Mediation categories by default. Before each round, each team nominates 2 members as mediation advocates and 1 member as a mediator. This nomination can vary from round to round. As a result, team members can gain experience competing in one or both categories depending on the team's overall composition and strategy.

Second, every team has the equal opportunity of competing in 5 rounds for the Mediation Advocacy category. Depending on each team's performance in the Mediation category, they will compete in either 2 or 3 rounds as mediators. This allows each team to maximise the value of their participation at the competition, as opposed to a knock-out round/elimination format which necessarily limits the number of rounds that most teams compete in. At the conclusion of all rounds, each team will be awarded Gold, Silver or Bronze for their performance in both Mediation Advocacy and Mediator segments. Teams are judged based on their win-loss record and ranked by other factors such as total points accumulated.

Third, despite opting to do away with knock-out rounds, IMSG maintains a high level of competition by utilising a "power-matching" process for the Mediation Advocacy category. In the first round, teams are allocated into sessions randomly. For the remaining four rounds, teams are matched with other teams with similar win-loss ratios. The effect of this dynamic live matching process is that teams are always going to be matched with other teams of a similar skill level, ensuring that all teams are consistently challenged from start to finish.

IMSG 2020 Innovations

At IMSG 2020, there were three key innovations to keep participants constantly engaged despite the change in medium.

First, because the competition was held remotely across different time zones, it was decided that the five competition rounds would be held over five days with one round per day to ensure that teams get adequate rest between rounds. Teams were also provided with not only oral feedback after the round, but also comprehensive written feedback by the judges, so that they can use the extra time to internalise the feedback received and apply them in the next rounds. After the competition, teams were sent detailed personalised feedback reports compiling indicators of each team's performance at the competition relative to the rest of the competition pool.

Second, instead of the usual two-party mediation, round 5 of IMSG 2020 was reimagined as a multi-party mediation. This meant that in every session, there were three teams competing as mediation advocates (as parties A, B, and C), with a mediator from a fourth team overseeing and facilitating the session. IMSG 2020 also continued with the practice of drawing inspiration from real-life situations shared during interviews with practising mediators while drafting the mock mediation cases. The belief is that this adds a sense of authenticity to the mock mediation cases and lets participants practice grappling with issues that they might realistically encounter in the future.

Third, to avoid the main pitfall of participating in an online competition – being stuck at home and only interacting with your team members – IMSG 2020 incorporated a series of "Team Engagement Activities" and virtual networking events in the weeks leading up to the competition. The "Team Engagement Activities" included Mediation Memes (a meme submission contest), IMSG Kopitiam (a guided networking session), and the IMSG Virtual Tour of Singapore. Through these activities, participants and coaches, volunteers and judges got the opportunity to form lasting connections with other attendees outside of the competition setting. The networking events comprised pre-competition trainings, live Q&A sessions and panel discussions put together by IMSG's generous sponsors.

In hindsight, having to move IMSG online came with its own benefits, including being able to reach out to a wider audience, especially participants who would otherwise have found it difficult to travel to Singapore. In the post-pandemic reality, it is to be expected that some competitions will continue to be run online. At the very least, there will be the understanding that competitions can be run virtually should the need arise again. For the most part, competition organisers, when reverting to in-person events, can incorporate elements of their experience running an online competition, with a heightened awareness of the benefits and pitfalls of doing so. Similarly, this is reflected by the growing recognition and acceptance of online or partially online dispute resolution mechanisms, which is predicted to stay even after the effects of the pandemic subsides.

It is SIMI's intention to host even more teams at future editions of IMSG. Readers interested in being a part of IMSG can direct queries to ims@simi.org.sg. Highlights of IMSG 2020 can also be viewed [here](#).

Thanks for reading and here's hoping for a much better 2021! Keep safe everyone!