

Reasons for undertaking the laidlaw programme

I undertook the laidlaw programme in order to provide a framework to pursue my interests in the form of independent research. The personal funding was useful to free me from the pressure of finding a job over the summer to fund my studies. The most important aspect however was the £1,500 available to fund the research as lack of funding is the main obstacle to science research. The attachment to the Laidlaw programme would also lend me credibility when applying to supervisors or presenting my work.

I also knew that my future career would undoubtedly involve some leadership element and having some training before entering the workforce would raise me above my peers who had not been able to get such an opportunity. It would also help in actually getting a job in the first place as many assessment centres revolve around leadership tasks, something most people have no experience with.

What did you gain from the otherall programme - the research experience, leadership training, networking, international experience and any other aspect you wish to comment on

I gained a great deal in terms of research experience during my time as a Laidlaw scholar. Through my project I was able to explore concepts that I had learned about in my course to a level that most undergraduates wouldn't get the chance to do. Until their final year project. This experience gained under the laidlaw programme was invaluable when I came round to do my final year project as I'd already done similar work in the past. Furthermore it helped me build relationships with staff in the department that I would not have done had I not undertaken the summer research projects.

The leadership training has been useful as many of the jobs I am considering in the future are leadership roles that heavily test this element in the recruiting process. Having the laidlaw leadership events has allowed me to practice in this sort of environment and should help me secure the job I want after university. The residential aspect of the first training course also allowed a degree of single-mindedness that is unobtainable in an evening or weekend format.

The programme has given me amazing opportunities to network, by connecting me with other Laidlaw scholars. All the Laidlaw scholars are diverse and unique people from an array of walks of life. Everyone has something unique and interesting which they are passionate about from their research. Every person I have met on the scholarship is able to offer a unique insight into a topic I have never even thought of. This type of cross disciplinary interaction seems rare and unique in a university setting.

I had an excellent international experience which was funded by my project when I visited Australia to compete in the World Solar Challenge where my research was tested

on an international stage. Without the Laidlaw scholarship I wouldn't have been able to fund such a trip. The Australia trip has been one of the single biggest influences in my own personal development during my time at university.

How you think the programme will help you in future

I think the programme will help me in the future by giving me a broader range of experience that I would have obtained had I not been on the programme. The two summers of research project have given experience in extended writing and research projects. These have already helped me during my final year project for my degree as unlike my colleagues I had already done a similar piece of work twice. My final year project for my degree also built on my Laidlaw project which meant that my final year project started from a more developed starting point than other people's leading to a more in depth project that would have been achievable had I not had the Laidlaw experience.

The interaction in a professional setting of people who I would normally have never come into contact with has better enabled me to understand other people's perspectives.

The leadership training is likely to be useful in my future career as normally in a professional setting the sort of training we have had during the Laidlaw scholarship would not be offered until a person is already in a leadership role, at which point it is too late.

Any aspects of the programme you think could be improved

The programme as I undertook it does a good job from a research perspective, the £1,500 funding for research related equipment is vital, especially in my discipline (engineering) where almost no research can be undertaken for no cost.

I feel the leadership elements of the scholarship have some room for improvement. The things that stood out to me were the small group tasks where we had to solve a problem in a group. These "hands on" experiences allow people to learn about themselves when taking a leadership role. They are effective both in their leaderless and elected-leader flavours. These are the type of tasks that employers often use to separate the wheat from the chaff at assessment centres and so are good to practice. Changing the groups each time in these tasks is good as it allows people to meet a wider variety of people.

Unfortunately I would say that almost all of the leadership talks that we have had I have found either boring or useless, with the notable exception being Paul Burgum's talk who was genuinely inspiring. Most of the people giving these talks are "leadership professionals" who have made it their business teaching people who to be leaders rather than people who have made their business actually being leaders. Learning about leadership theory and personality types can be interesting from an academic point of view

but rarely feels actionable in the real world and when it is actionable in the real world I would say that it would fall more under management than leadership.

My recommendation would be to try and find people to give talks who have archived something impressive. Personally I feel like members of the military are often the best people to hear from about leadership as it is such an important element of that profession. But I'm sure that there are many others. For inspiration's sake, Phil Ashby is a retired marine officer whose career has been a personal inspiration and does leadership talks.

Are you prepared to give back to the programme

I have a deep gratitude to the laidlaw program as it has opened a great number of doors to me during my time at university. Due to both the opportunities provided to me as a part of the scholarship but also the things I have been able to do myself due to the cash injection.

I will be willing to give back to future scholars in any capacity.