

Laidlaw Scholarship Assessment – Ben Sinclair

Reasons for undertaking the programme

I applied for the programme as I felt it was a unique opportunity to develop critical skills at an early stage of my development to support my future learning and career path.

I felt the research element of the programme would help me to articulate and analyse problems within my field, providing an opportunity to contribute to existing literature, and learn from academics in my subject. In addition, I wanted to simultaneously expand my knowledge of research methods, developing transferrable research skills for future practice.

I felt the leadership element of the programme would support me in understanding leadership theories, traits and styles and how to translate this into my daily life and career.

I was also very keen to develop my personal confidence, participating in activities that would bring me out of my comfort zone, further developing my personal resilience.

I also was interested in the coaching and mentoring support associated with the programme to help me navigate my skills and career development.

I felt that this investment in soft skills development would be a key facilitator to unlocking my potential and supporting my personal growth.

Finally, I wanted to add a different dimension to my university learning experience over and above academic work, to support my development as an individual and future employee.

What did you gain from the programme?

I felt the programme delivered a diverse range of activities, which supported my development in many ways.

I have become more self-aware, understanding my personality type, (supported by Belbin and Myers Briggs) strengths and areas for development, enabling me to develop an action plan for the future to support my career. I have also experienced what it feels like to be taken outside of my comfort zone and the benefits of doing this to broaden my skill base and improve my resilience.

The programme also gave me the opportunity to socialise and work with a diverse range of students, improving my confidence and also my ability to work in a team situation.

I also learnt about leadership theory and its application in the real world, and was provided with techniques for networking. In relation to networking, I also learnt that the style of networking 'taught' on the programme, is something I will need to

personally adapt for my personality type, so I am comfortable with my own networking approach.

I have developed my presentation skills via numerous 'pitches' whilst on the programme, tailoring the presentation to the audience, to ensure it resonates with the recipients, whilst also ensuring it is delivered within a given timeframe for maximum impact. I have also developed the skills to tailor a presentation to recipients who are not proficient in the subject matter.

As a mathematician, who generally works with numbers, equations and proofs, this programme has developed my report writing skills, again taking me out of my comfort zone and developing skill which will be a bonus in my future career path. As a part of developing report writing skills, I have also developed the skill of being succinct and managing within word counts, whilst also ensuring report contains the required content.

The research element of the project further developed my problem solving and analytical skills, and it was very satisfying to produce a summary report at the end of the research - to demonstrate achievement in this field. In addition to the technical side of the research element, the research project also improved my communication skills, both verbally and via email as it involved close dialogue with my academic supervisor.

Communication skills were also developed in many other ways - including the ambassadorial activity I undertook to promote the Laidlaw scholarship via posters and social media, which involved linking in with college marketing managers and college society representatives.

My time management and workload prioritisation skills were also developed during the programme, ensuring all deadlines were met, whilst also meeting the academic obligations of my degree programme.

A key skill developed during the programme was reflective learning, and understanding the importance of continuous professional development and how this can enhance future learning and development.

How do you think the programme will help you in the future?

I feel the scholarship has already helped me to self-reflect; understand myself and my strengths and areas for development.

In turn, this has helped my thinking around my career options and the working environment that would best suit my skills and personality.

The soft skills and associated confidence I have developed on this programme at such an early stage of my career are a huge benefit, which has helped to unlock my potential and stand me apart from peers in terms of my career. In addition these skills will help me navigate life in general and also to benefit my employer and the wider society.

The scholarship and the associated confidence I have acquired has opened my mind to the endless possibilities my maths degree can lead to; over and above 'pure maths'. I feel the soft skills acquired will help me to apply maths to every day real life

situations and has encouraged me to broaden my horizons on the roles I can fulfil in the future.

The scholarship has developed both my research and leadership skills and I feel this will positively resonate throughout my entire career, providing a unique set of attributes, which will support employability, professional development and job satisfaction.

Are there any aspects for project improvement and how?

I feel the programme was well structured and planned and offered a diverse range of activities and learning, which will be of benefit throughout my career.

The only area I would feedback for potential consideration for improvement would be linked to the network activities, which involved 'cold' conversations with other students. I feel these exercises were rather one-dimensional and suited towards extroverts, and it would be helpful to highlight that not all networking styles suit everyone, and individuals have to adapt and find their style, rather than leaving the impression that 'cold' conversations are 'the way' to network.

I did find the networking dinner a more beneficial networking experience, as it allowed a relationship to be built, suiting my introvert style. In terms of the 'cold conversation network techniques, I will add however that whilst not getting the best out of me from the networking perspective, it did bring me out of my comfort zone and therefore, worthwhile from that respect.

Are you prepared to give back to the programme in the future?

I have enjoyed the programme and the diverse range of skills I have developed and I am grateful for the opportunity provided to me.

In the future I would be happy to link in with the Laidlaw programme and see if there is any support I can provide to benefit future scholars.