

As the past 18 months quickly come to an end the reflection on the journey we long embarked on becomes one filled with questions and uncertainty about the future, given our current circumstances. It also becomes filled with a longing for more time with the Laidlaw cohort of 2019. The following report seeks to explain and consolidate the experience that the Laidlaw programme has offered to me, both as a student, but also as a young professional hoping to be working in positions of leadership in the future. Overall, the experience that I have had while taking part in Laidlaw has been fantastic, and central to shaping my overall college experience as it stands. Some aspects of the programme came with its own challenges but none that warranted much reflection, while they were a challenge at the time the overall experience superseded any difficulties faced throughout the programme.

Upon reflection I find myself questioning the real reasons which led me to apply for the Laidlaw programme, part of my reasoning was because it sounded like a great initiative and given my previous interest in leadership it appeared to be something I would be good at. However, after deeper inspection, I found the programme was much more than gaining leadership qualities and skills, it also explores how these qualities can be put to work in an academic setting (conducting research) while also providing a space for personal development. The research project was an aspect of the programme that I initially was very interested in as the final years of my degree were approaching and the possibility of a research masters loomed over me. The chance to gain first-hand experience in designing and conducting a research project while building stronger relationships with academics and lecturers appealed to me, and thus I decided to apply for the programme. There was only a slight hesitation to apply as the application process put some pressure on me, this was because the deadline was close to other deadlines from college too.

Looking back on the past 18 months I think I gained way more than I ever had imagined from the programme. Obviously some of the core skills that I learned and developed revolved around leading, conducting research, and fostering meaningful relationships through networking. However, in my opinion the programme offered students the ability to gain knowledge and confidence in their specific field, while also gaining soft and transferable skills. These skills ranged from building our self-care and coping mechanisms, to being able to form and voice our opinions. Personally, I think these skills are one of the most important that any student and future leader can have, to feel fully confident in their abilities be it in academia or in their professional careers.

In my opinion I think the programme will benefit me greatly in my future personal and professional development. From gaining confidence and the ability to openly voice my opinions I learned that more people are interested in hearing what I have to say. The confidence which Laidlaw

has given me will benefit me by helping to bring my ideas to life in the future. For example, from the presentation skills gained from the programme I can now safely say that some anxiety will subside when presenting. Additionally, I think Laidlaw expanded my want to participate and be more actively involved in change or take on new opportunities which arise. Laidlaw enabled me to come out of my comfort zone which will definitely help me do so again in the future. On top of this the Laidlaw programme sparked an interest in my creativity and problem solving skills, this I think will be extremely beneficial in my future career as problem solving skills are always sought after by employers. Laidlaw definitely helped develop the attributes that Trinity works to provide all their graduate students with such as independent thinking and continuous development.

The research that I conducted was based around second generation migrants in Ireland and how their mental health is impacted. I wanted to investigate the link between migrants living in essentially two different cultures, that of their parents and their country of origin while also growing up in another culture. The impact that this has on individuals, cannot be explored as easily as I had first anticipated as ethical approval is needed, and plenty of willing participants. The specific research topic is only the tip of a growing topic in Ireland and its effects on individuals would take many research projects to fully comprehend. However, this research enabled me to understand the position of second generation migrants more than I had before and to conduct an in-depth research on the effects that being a second generation migrant has on the mental health of individuals.

Unfortunately, given the circumstances we find ourselves in this year, everything did not go according to my original project plan. This was to no fault of my own or my supervisors and thus we devised another way to engage with potential research participants through the internet. Additionally, I wanted to fully understand the culture and outlook that other countries had towards mental health, however the lack of travel during covid-19 made this impossible. The research took shape in other ways, instead of conducting face to face interviews, I launched a survey online. Although the structure of the research changed, it still gathered strong data that I was able to analyse. Even though I perceived this as a challenge initially, this unforeseen circumstance taught me how to be flexible with my research and to power through adversity which is something a leader should be capable of doing.

Throughout the programme, the engagement with my supervisors flowed through emails and face to face mainly in the first phase of research. Again, because of unforeseen circumstances the communication with my supervisors was made more difficult in the second phase than the first. However, we kept in contact throughout the second half of the programme via email. It was interesting to communicate with lecturers from a different perspective other than that of a student.

From partaking in research it was pleasant to develop and discover a different type of relationship than I would have experienced beforehand. Although I didn't engage with other academics who were involved in this specific research field, I did receive some help from staff members of Jigsaw Dublin city. Again, it was interesting to interact with young professionals in the field of mental health and to gain some understanding of their chosen careers and how they think second generation migrants are affected in Ireland. This helped shape and refine my research and possible questions or areas of interest throughout the programme. I think the Laidlaw programme facilitated and made these interactions possible by building my confidence to approach professionals. Additionally by developing my communication and networking skills I felt more comfortable than before when approaching individuals in a professional setting.

There were many aspects of the programme which I found came to me quite naturally, for example the networking and developing friendships with other scholars. However there were some parts I found difficult especially in regards to the project, these included working on my own from home or the library and researching for hours daily. This sometimes was challenging as I thrive in social environments. I found the tedious hours to be quite strenuous, this is where I found the mindfulness and reflective exercises quite helpful. It was beneficial for me to reflect on what I had achieved in order to motivate myself to power through the rest of the workload. This is something we learned to do in the various resilience and emotional intelligence workshops.

The part that surprised me throughout the programme was the difficulty to receive ethical approval. This was also a logistical issue which I faced throughout the course of my first research period. As I was only the second cohort of scholars taking part in Laidlaw, the programme was still not well known throughout all the departments in university. This was a challenge I faced because my research was multidisciplinary and the sociology and psychology department had little interaction. This sometimes meant that the supervisors and those on the ethics committee were only hearing and learning about the Laidlaw programme through me. This proved to be a challenge as both sides did not thoroughly understand the process and reasoning behind the ethical approval needed and thus it caused a constraint on time as I did not foresee the backlog that would be caused from exchanging information with both schools. This was another challenge that I was forced to overcome and change some of the initial proposed research for.

The part which I liked the most throughout the research project was interacting with other professionals and developing my ideas further. By actively reaching out to professionals I found that the research was taking shape and found it more interesting through interacting with others. Additionally, I enjoyed designing the survey. This was of interest to me as it was a research skill I had

not yet developed. I learned how to build a survey and how to validate and increase the reliability of a research project. These skills will surely be necessary and prove of great importance in future aspects of my academic career.

Throughout the time I spent working on the research project my personal resilience and levels of determination to finish the project fluctuated. These unprecedented times that we faced in 2020 at some points challenged my mindset and positivity about excelling in both my academic and personal life. The self-help and resilience workshops really helped to develop some coping mechanisms which then in turn assisted me in overcoming the feelings of anxiety about finishing the project and reaching deadlines. In my opinion the leadership training workshops really helped me to learn techniques which would have not been available to me before, especially the mediation and mindfulness exercises. Although at first the workshops which seemed more “tangible” in nature appealed to me more, by the end of the programme I found myself enjoying those focused around mental health and wellbeing. I enjoyed how the Laidlaw programme has a multidisciplinary approach, this ensures that the scholars will always be able to learn something which is outside of their current field.

Overall, I think gaining an insight and skills to dealing with personal challenges through the leadership development workshops was my favourite part of the programme. Laidlaw was unique in the sense that it was the only programme I have ever been a part of that allowed and facilitated personal growth as well as academic and professional. This really impressed me. I think during and after the Laidlaw programme my approach to personal challenges has become more rational and positive. Taking part in the programme has taught me to become more resilient and to face adversity with a positive mindset.

The presentation workshop with the Lir academy was by far the most enjoyable and constructive part of the leadership development, it really enforced the importance of being vocal and heard in a professional manner. This workshop pushed me out my comfort zone as it required us to be present and loud, which was difficult at the start (because we didn't all know each other well as a group). However, throughout the workshop I found myself becoming more relaxed and really enjoying the challenge. I learned about breathing techniques and how to be more vocal, this is a skill which is widely overlooked by many (myself previously included). However it is extremely beneficial especially for presentations and communication purposes. Additionally the team building weekend in March in my opinion really brought the group together. I think the workshops and the teambuilding sessions this weekend were very educational while also keeping us all engaged and active. Finally, I enjoyed the mentoring session we had with Orla, I found this to be a

great way to organise my goals and plans for the programme. Again it was a way of reflect and prepare for the programme in a way I had not practiced before.

Taking part in the Laidlaw programme has taught me a lot about myself, how I learn, how I communicate, and how I interact with others in a leadership position. I found it was extremely beneficial to present my research topic to the other scholars, this helped me refine the language to suit all. This is a skill that many individuals, would struggle with. in order to get a full understanding from a diverse group your language must be accessible by all those not in your field. Laidlaw helped me communicate clearly these ideas and engage with a wider group of people.

Throughout the learning of different leadership styles and techniques on the programme, I would describe my leadership style as coaching. This is because my leadership style is primarily facilitative in nature. I think this is a good leadership style to have especially in a group setting. It helps me interact with all the members on the team, and gives all team members a real sense of teamwork. It also allows all group members to feel involved and that they are listened to. Creating a sense of respect and trust in a team is key to working efficiently. The Laidlaw programme has taught me that diversity in a group is important and all individuals can offer interesting perspectives. Thus, I consider the coaching method of leadership most reputable as it really engages all group participants.

Prior to being accepted on the Laidlaw programme I had some experience of networking. However this experience was quite daunting at times and I felt largely out of my comfort zone. The Laidlaw programme has given me skills to feel more comfortable while networking, on top of this the annual Laidlaw conference was an excellent way to put these skills to use. One of the most useful aspects of Laidlaw was that it was multidisciplinary, I found it to be a safe space where many fields can interact. This was a great opportunity to interact with others outside of our usual social circle and create lasting friendships.

In regards to leadership I would like to get more experience in facilitating groups. After the Laidlaw programme I have become more open to the idea of leadership and would like to put the skills and techniques I have acquired on the programme to use. Additionally, the mindfulness, resilience, and empathy building workshops will be an area I would be really interested in developing and using more after taking part In the Laidlaw programme. I think it has given me a new sense of empathy towards others. As a future leader I think this is a worthwhile skill as empathy develops trust and fosters relationships with individuals.

In the future I would like to stay in contact with the Laidlaw programme. I think that being part of an extensive alumni network would also be beneficial for my own personal development. I

would be open to volunteering my time, advice, and support to future Laidlaw scholars as I found this support from the previous cohort to be very helpful. Additionally, I really enjoyed taking part in the programme, so I would like to return the favour to future scholars.

If I was to suggest one slight recommendation to better the programme it would be to include or facilitate a day with the participants and supervisors. At some parts of the programme I felt that other participants were at different stages of their relationships with their supervisors while others found it hard to interact with their supervisor. Although I know it is our personal responsibility to manage the relationship with our supervisors it would be a worthwhile investment for Laidlaw to facilitate some engagement between the scholars and supervisors. Furthermore, I think if there was a meeting or training day participants and supervisors would attend it would help foster some meaningful relationship between them and help build some recognition for the participants.

To conclude the reflection journey of the Laidlaw programme, I would like to thank the careers service for the help and support which was given to us throughout the programme. I would not have achieved as much as I done without the help of Joel, Orla, or Ann. Additionally, the help and encouragement given to me by both of my supervisors really aided my journey especially when the research became difficult. Overall, the Laidlaw experience has definitely helped shape not only my future career but also, my present self. I feel more confident and am so glad to have been accepted onto the programme. The programme really shaped the way I seize and evaluate future opportunities. It has made me become more open minded to taking on different challenges. Finally, I wanted to extend a warm thank you to all the friends I have made on the journey and a huge congratulations for their work too.