

## Reflective Report

This summer of 2020 was not what I had planned for it to be; not just outside the Laidlaw programme but also regarding the leadership development sessions and my research. Yet I regard this summer as one of the most productive ones in my life when it comes to personal development.

### Supervisor

I want to start by saying, that one of the most crucial people for this project was my supervisor. Talking to her always proved to be incredibly helpful. Not only does it help to have someone with experience in my field to discuss all problems and struggles with, someone who assured me those struggles were normal or advised me on how to overcome them. It also helped to have someone take a look at what I had done from a distance and tell me if what I was doing had a structure and what I had to focus on.

### Research and Project Management

During this summer some of the most important aspects were my research and project management skills. It showed that I was very good at planning my research but not as good at executing it according to plan. At the beginning of six weeks, I was very focused and able to work on the project for hours without needing a break. After the two-week interval in which I did not work on the project, I noticed a change and found it hard to get back into my rhythm. In the end, I was able to follow my personal schedule but often enough it had been tempting not to stick to one since no one controlled my daily progress. I learned from this experience that I work more productively whenever I finish something in one go, may that take a day or six weeks. Because of COVID I also ran into some organisational and logistical issues. Since I had intended to conduct my research in Dublin with the University resources available I was now forced to work without actual library access and in an entirely different environment. At the very beginning, I was simply overwhelmed. Despite the proposal I was suddenly no longer sure about where the project was going. The lack of clear expectations for the output, having to structure and plan everything myself and the sheer number of sources was very difficult at first. Eventually, I learned how to deal with these things. I slowly figured out what sources I needed and where my project was headed. I realized that sometimes it helped to set short term goals when I was not entirely sure of the long-term goal, which meant that sometimes I would do something as simple as writing down exactly what I was going to do that day. I did however realize that goals can be accomplished quicker, and be worked towards more effectively if the goal objective at the end is clear. This is also how I overcame the issue of switching around between different tasks because I constantly felt like I had made insufficient progress in the majority of areas and so I kept jumping to a different task without having finished the first one just to feel like I made some progress in that one. Another area in which I noticed considerable progress is that of decision-making. I have always struggled with making decisions concerning me or my work and it was the same for the first half of the project. Then

however suddenly I was able to make decisions much quicker and with much more confidence and certainty during the second half. As soon as I was able to see those improvements and when I finally knew what the outcome of my research would be it was maybe the most liberating moment of the project.

### **Self-Knowledge and Awareness**

Another strong aspect and goal of mine was the improvement of self-awareness. That meant first of all admitting and then accepting all of my confusion, uncertainty, and doubt towards myself and the project. Only then was I able to think about the reasons behind those feelings and how I could solve these issues. It helped me to visualize my goal and understand what I wanted to learn and what skills I needed on the way there. It made me approach personal challenges differently. I am more forgiving when it comes to setbacks and more likely to not give up just because I am momentarily upset or overwhelmed.

### **Resilience and Determination to Succeed**

One of the most important changes that I noticed was in regards to my resilience. This whole programme to me is a way of challenging myself and nothing I did seemed easy to me. But one of my goals was to be more positive and resilient after set-backs instead of feeling stuck and defeated. I realized that determination, flexibility, creative thinking and adaptability help a lot in getting over setbacks and finding another way to achieve the goal. Aside from adapting to a new environment I also came across some other issues. For example, the software I had intended to use for my quantitative analysis and the first half of my qualitative analysis was suddenly no longer available. Finding and learning to use new software also provided me with a new hard skill. Another unexpected change was that I only noticed towards the end that I would not be able to greatly incorporate the aspect of education. However, as soon as I had realized that and the focus of my work had become clear I was able to move forward with other aspects much better.

### **Collaboration and Team-Working**

This summer also involved a lot of group discussions and teamwork. Despite not having to work with a team for my research I did learn something in terms of collaboration and teamwork through online interactions and of course working with my supervisor. I realized that one of the first steps should always be to listen to others and then adapt your own ideas or connect them to those of others. Just to holding onto your idea and trying to get everyone to like it was not working towards a collaborative group effort. And to me, that is where the benefits of a diverse team lie.

### **Effective Communication / Networking**

Another goal of mine was concerned with improving networking and communication skills. Being in touch with other scholars who went through similar problems helped me to cope with the feeling of struggling and motivated me again. It created a feeling of community. And yet, while I found most

interactions with other scholars to be very pleasant, networking and connecting was still difficult for me. Doing everything virtually instead of in-person made it harder for me to feel comfortable and led to me being quieter and more reserved than I would usually be. While I did get in touch with a lot of people and joined as many meetings as I could I feel like nothing lasting has come out of it. While I believe my attitude and willingness to engage and connect is great, I still need to work on how to more permanently connect with people.

### **Leadership Skills**

I have started to understand and reflect on my own leadership style. For example, I got the impression that I often realize when progress or conversation is staling and there is confusion about where this work as a group is going. I do not necessarily put myself in “THE” leader position. But I think that in groups without a clear leader I know when and how to lead the group back on track. In groups where someone has taken on the role of a sole leader, I try to make sure everyone is getting heard. Furthermore, I believe my leadership style is very adaptable. I can quickly take on more responsibility and “lead” more if necessary but I can also take a step back. Other leadership styles I encountered I found to be very considerate and focused on including everyone and looking for better compromises rather than shutting people down. I have also had some negative experiences as part of smaller groups during the leadership development sessions when I encountered people who were not very open towards new ideas and criticism and who seemed to view group work as a competition within the group rather than working together. This way, I noticed what I want to avoid as a leader because it appeared unproductive and discouraging and seemed to limit healthy discussion and creativity. Generally, however, I enjoyed the sessions, in particular reading the character study and highlighting how much of a role character plays for good leadership. Even things that were outside of my comfort zone, such as being put on the spot or having to summarize very complex ideas with just a few words was always challenging for me but helped to simplify things

### **Further Development**

There are some skills which I want to develop further in the second half of the programme. I aim to improve my networking skills, both virtually and in-person. I want to continue working in teams and see how my leadership style fits in and if there is anything I should adapt since every group is unique in its composition. And finally, becoming a more confident speaker, which I did not yet get to train.

### **Conclusion**

This first summer of the Laidlaw Programme taught me how to approach new challenges, how to deal with setbacks, to accept that doubts and insecurities are natural and ways to overcome them, that a clear goal helps to work more effectively and finally it taught me, what kind of leader I aspire to hopefully be in the future. Overall, it was a challenging but surely positive and enriching experience.