

# Laidlaw Summer 2 Reflective Report

## 2022

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My journey through the Laidlaw Programme began deep in the days of full COVID lockdown measures at the desk in my childhood bedroom, took me all the way to the Sagrada Família in Barcelona, and is now ending in a Dublin that has no pandemic restrictions at all for quite some time. The last eighteen months was a period of deep personal growth for me, with the many challenges of this time balanced out by the equally many moments of incredible support, solidarity and pride from the achievement of struggling through and overcoming these difficulties.

While I still recognise myself in the Zoom photos from the start of the programme, when I look in the mirror now I see an older and wiser Sarah, a person who is much more kinder and understanding towards herself, someone who has a better understanding of what she wants from this world and what her place in it is. April 2021 and October 2022 are worlds apart, on a global and on a personal level, and I can say for sure that the structure of the Laidlaw Programme played an essential role in facilitating my personal development over this time, allowing me to recover the confidence in myself and my capabilities that I had lost during the pandemic lockdowns.

In preparation for writing this final reflective report, I revisited my original aims and goals for the programme that I had identified in Summer 1. Reading my Strengths Profile again, I was immediately struck by how much it resonated with me now, much more so even than when I had originally completed it in June 2021. Over the last year I feel that I have been able to deliberately and consciously utilise these strengths of mine in a way that I hadn't before, with this newfound sense of self-awareness leaving me with a truly stronger-than-ever foundation of self-belief. Similarly, knowledge of my weaker areas is something that has also been really valuable to me, as it means that I can try to avoid being in situations where I won't be able to play to my strengths, or, where unavoidable, have the foresight to be able to plan properly and ask for support in the areas where I struggle. I don't think I necessarily would know myself this well had it not been for the framework and guidance provided by the programme, and across the board in every area of my life this has been hugely beneficial to me.

During the Kippure weekend away in March 2022, I identified the following as my top leadership aims: loyalty, community, balance, simplicity, and independence. These five words have really stuck with me ever since, and are qualities that I have used as a guideline in my life ever since. The leadership days, workshops, and events we completed over the course of the programme exposed me to an incredible range of thought-provoking ideas, concepts and speakers, and I'm really grateful to have had these opportunities to evaluate and reassess my own leadership style in these different contexts.

Everything I learned during the programme was put to practice during Summer 2 of the programme, when I was given the truly phenomenal opportunity to complete a Leadership-in-Action experience of my own design - six weeks in Barcelona translating the "Invisibles y Ocultas" exhibition from Spanish to English, in conjunction with the Museu de Ciències Naturals de Barcelona and Universitat de Barcelona. The process of organising and completing this LiA was an amazing learning experience that saw me push the boundaries of what I thought I was capable of doing, showing me that there truly is no dream too big to achieve. Travelling abroad completely by myself and living in a different country for six weeks was an incredible experience that gave me a

huge boost in my own self-confidence and independence. A lot of this came from successfully figuring out regular day-to-day things in the context of my everyday life in Barcelona - simple things that I take for granted at home like the public transport system were now a new and interesting challenge, especially with the language barrier of Catalan and Spanish. Another challenge was the weather. I had been looking forward to the warmer climate but soon found that the novelty wore off pretty quickly, leaving me gratefully sheltering in one of Barcelona's many air-conditioned public libraries for hours at a time - until I got kicked out back into the 30°C heat for the midday lunchtime siesta!

“Invisibles y Ocultas”, the exhibition that I worked with for my LiA, showcases the lives and work of 24 women in STEM all throughout history, with the aim of setting right the false narrative of a womanless scientific history by bringing these figures out of obscurity and into the light. My aim was to broaden its reach by creating an English-language translation of the material, therefore bringing the exhibition to an English-speaking audience. Obviously - being a woman studying Theoretical Physics - this LiA was something that held a lot of meaning for me, and as such was a hugely gratifying project to work on and complete. While in the future I would love at some stage to organise a physical exhibition of the material in Dublin, at the moment I am thrilled that my translated version will be uploaded onto the museum's website, right beside the Spanish-language version.

I am more grateful than I can say to have been able to have had the opportunity to complete this LiA. It's common knowledge that women as a group are very underrepresented in the STEM fields across college students and faculty, in academia and in industry. As the norm, this is something that is sometimes very easy to overlook or to not notice, but I really believe that it has a huge influence, even if only subconsciously. I am hesitant to use buzzwords and over-used phrases like “you can't be what you can't see”, but I truly can't adequately put into words the feeling I had walking through this exhibition for the first time. As I read the stories of these women, these pioneers of science, I experienced this deep sense of rightness and belonging, something that was so validating in a way that I didn't know it could be until I felt it. As I worked my way through translating the 24 profiles, I felt such pride at the achievements of these women, and rage at how many of them were needlessly held back at every stage of their careers and yet persevered, especially considering how these are the women who came the furthest - who knows how many others didn't make it that far. That first day that I visited the exhibition I really just wished that my friends from home were there with me to see it and to experience the same emotions that I felt seeing this beautiful exhibition in person - and then I realised that this was exactly what my role was, to bring it from a Spanish-speaking to an Anglophone audience, that this was exactly what I would achieve with my LiA.

I have learned a huge amount from my time in the Laidlaw Programme, from the people I met and the connections I made, and the incredible experiences I have had thanks to this programme. My sense of my own self and my leadership skills has never been stronger, and I feel that I now have a renewed purpose and confidence that I will take with me throughout the rest of my time in college and later life. I believe now that I am capable of leading from a place of genuine authenticity and self-knowledge of my own strengths and weaknesses, that I really deeply know who I am. Through learning from and with my cohort, the programme has taught me the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to work and to life, something for which I am especially grateful. In meeting the global Laidlaw network online via Zoom, I got a new sense of my identity as an Irish person and as a European and global citizen, gaining an important perspective on identity in the context of the interconnectedness of the world. Travelling to Barcelona and living abroad also gave me a different perspective on life, the lessons from which have stayed with me ever since.

My time as a Laidlaw scholar has truly shaped who I am today for the better, and I feel so lucky to have been given the many opportunities to grow and develop through this programme, and

especially to have had the support of the TCD Laidlaw team and my cohort throughout. I really have learned and grown so much over this time, and I can't wait to see where the skills I have gained will take me in the future.