

## **Scholar Report**

Name:	Jyotiraditya Vaghela
Faculty:	Leeds University Business School
Email Address:	fy21jsv@leeds.ac.uk
Title of Scholarship project:	So, what's your plan? Identifying differences in the career planning needs and behaviors of WP and non-widening participation (WP) Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students.
Supervisor:	Stacey Mottershaw

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Laidlaw Scholarship for bringing so many opportunities my way. Their guidance has been extremely enlightening and has provided me with multiple insights on how I can develop my personal and professional life to move forward towards my goals. I also gained the opportunity to be a part of different events such as leadership workshops which have answered a lot of questions regarding my personality and provided me with my strengths and weaknesses which I can work on or the research which has given me a deeper understanding so many factors and shined a light on the flaws which I got to know in my workshop. In this report, I will reflect on all of these experiences, what I have learned and how can I improve myself in the future.

## **Introduction**

The Laidlaw scholarship program has granted me the opportunity to be a part of research which can bring change to higher education in the United Kingdom. Over the six weeks, I went through multiple important literature such as research articles and journals, setting up and inviting various students from different universities and I experienced the role of note taker during the focus groups. My research's goal was to partake in focus groups to understand the perspective of widening participation (WP) postgraduate students (PGT) and how could universities improve their career provision so they can best support WP PGT. Other than the research, I had the opportunity to participate in the residentials and workshops. This played a vital role in helping me understand how I can improve professionally and how best I could move towards my career goals.

## **The Research Project**

The landscape of higher education has vastly been improving in the United Kingdom and I had the opportunity to be part of a project which directly impacts the future of students. The title of my project was, "So, what's your plan? Identifying differences in the career planning needs and behaviours of WP and non-widening participation (WP) Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students." The aim of the research was to understand the difference in the career planning needs of WP and non-widening participation students by carrying out qualitative and quantitative research across six higher education institutions. I was given with the role of research project assistant under the supervision of Ms Amy Longsdon and Ms Stacey Mottershaw who have provided me with support in every step of the way. My

part as the research project assistant was to assist both the research supervisor with organizing and being present in all the focus groups which is a part of the qualitative research. The goal of this project was to be a foundational study, which could be the basis of multiple future research and share knowledge regarding the perspectives of WP PGT students so universities can eventually provide their best support with the career planning needs and behaviours of PGT students, before, during and after their life in university. To explore the diverse perspectives of WP PGT students and obtain qualitative insights by performing focus groups. I was supposed to undertake a series of focus groups across multiple Higher education Institutions based within UK in the six weeks they were part of the research. In the first week, Firstly I had a proper introduction with both my research supervisors who thoroughly explained the goal and history of the research. As a part of the NEON WP in PG group, they explained the impact which the research could have for WP students, how they were planning on sharing the research and given with key reading relating to the research. While I was going through the key reading such as research by Lancaster university, "Tailoring career provision to meet the needs of Postgraduate students" I got to learn a lot about research based around this topic which also led me to understand the lack of research in this area for WP students in postgraduate studies. As an international student, I was intrigued by the whole concept of WP students and extremely excited to be a part of the research which could potentially bring huge change to how universities provide career provisions to WP students. With the beginning of week 2, My first task entailed the creation of a comprehensive form to be distributed to PGT students. This form aims to gather information from the PGT students from the six participating universities+ which includes, University of Huddersfield, University of York, University of Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Nottingham and University of Exeter. The form is specifically curated, to know the student's nationality and their Widening participation category. We received a huge number of responses totalling to more than 400 responses but that lead to suspicions regarding bot generated entries to the form. So, to solve this problem we asked the students to provide us with their university email address. Among all these responses we randomly selected a subset of students who had provided with their university email addresses for the focus groups. The first setback which we faced was due to the time constraint, we did not receive responses from University of Huddersfield which provides with their university email which led to the number of focus groups to drop down from six to five. The next step was to select students who were qualified to participate in the focus groups and provide them with the participation information sheet and consent forms which is needed to be done before they can participate in the focus groups. The last step before we perform the focus groups was to prepare a few questions as a basic guideline to be used during the focus groups. For the research, there are three key research questions, which we used to distribute the focus groups into 3 sections so we can get answers for all the questions. While waiting for the consent forms, the next task was to prepare the questions for the focus group and sending a team's invite to all of them. To prepare the questions, the questions were distributed into three different sections so the focus group can best answer the key research questions, which are,

- "What are the career planning needs and behaviours of PGT students?"
- "Is there a difference in the career planning needs and behaviours between WP and non-WP PGT students?"
- "How could university staff most effectively support WP PGT students with career planning?"

After receiving the consent forms, the next step is to plan out the facilitators for the focus groups. The main thing to be aware of is that no facilitators are part of the same university, so the research is not influenced by any bias. It was finally time for the focus groups, The student's role is to join all

focus groups to gain a better understanding of the WP PGT students and prepare notes and themes. The second setback during the focus groups was that the students from University of Nottingham were not able to attend and hence we had to cancel another focus group leading to the total focus groups changing from five to four. The goal of the last two weeks was to prepare an analysis for the focus groups. The first task is to prepare transcript of the focus group. It is important to prepare a proper transcript so it can help prepare the findings for the university. The second task was to find quotes from the transcripts according to the key research questions and try to find themes so all universities can help improve their policies.

### **Personal Impact**

The Laidlaw Scholars Program is not just about the research, the experiences we have gained in residential, and workshops has helped me develop professionally and academically. I have gained so much from the research. The opportunity I had has really opened me to new experiences and taught me so much regarding the struggles faced daily by WP students. I first chose this project due to understand such problems and try to contribute towards helping these students while improving my research skills by gaining a firsthand experience in doing research but now that I am done with the research, I realize it has become a huge part of my self-development journey. During the research, I understood my flaws such as my lack of communication skills and time management which had led to few inconveniences during the research but realizing this has made me focus towards improving myself so I can best perform in my academic and professional career. I also have been able to cultivate essential skills such critical analysis and management skills. I hope that as this research has helped me, I was able to help WP students put forth their problems so they can be provided with the necessary help. The residential and the workshops have also helped me improve a lot, the first residential helped me learn more about myself, we had the opportunity to go through our quintax report and while I was going through the report, I realized how correctly it has summarized me and what possible development areas I have. I also improved on my social skills while learning about the scholar's research. In the second residential at Selside, I had the opportunity to overcome my fears by going through activities which I wouldn't usually attend such as ghyll scrambling. On the educational outreach day, I had a great time interacting with sixth form students as a mentor. It had become a two-way street of sharing knowledge, I talked with them about my dreams and my life in India and as an international student, while listening to their inspirations, dreams and lifestyle. The enthusiasm and curiosity of these students reminded me of why helping the community is so important and it also helps improve my own enthusiasm. I also got the opportunity to help some kids who were shy to participate in the conversation and guide them through the tasks. Overall, listening to them was a great experience.

### **Future Plans**

Just before joining university, I had taken a gap year due to two reasons. Firstly, due to the uncertainty because of COVID-19 and secondly because I was going through some mental health problems. During that time, I was helping my aunt with her community service and observing her contributions inspired me to start my own company which is based around helping others. I am currently studying business management and marketing and my career will be based around my dream of making India to a better country. My goal while applying for this scholarship was to learn how I can be a better leader and learn more about how I can apply myself so when I am done with my bachelor's degree, I can implement them when I pursue my dream. The research and the scholarship have been so helpful in understanding my flaws and sharpen my strengths. I will be able to use these leadership, analytical and communication skills to make my dream into reality. I haven't yet decided if I would like to do a master's degree before pursuing my dream. After interacting with

WP PGT students and learning their postgraduate experience, I might be looking at completing a master's degree.

### **Conclusion**

The Laidlaw programme is so much more than just a means to my dream, it has helped me improve and reflect on myself, provided me with an exposure to the world of research, it reminded me why I decided to pursue my goal and helped me make lifelong friends with fellow scholars. Everyone from Laidlaw has really supported me for the past year. The residentials, workshop, educational outreach day and research have been vital in their own way for me to develop as a leader, a researcher and as a Laidlaw scholar. I want to once again say thanks to my fellow scholars, Matt, Rebecca, Marcus, Stacey and Amy for looking out for me and helping me develop my skills. This is the first time in my life that I got the opportunity to gain such experience and meet such amazing people and with their guidance I would continue to improve and hopefully would be able to bring a positive impact around the world.