

# Overall Laidlaw Programme Report

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**LIDLAW**  
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## **Introduction**

My Laidlaw experience has certainly been rewarding, challenging and overall, such an enjoyable experience. Before I explore in detail my reflections on how my Laidlaw leadership attributes have developed, first I would like to reflect on some highlights of the Laidlaw programme for me. To begin with, one main highlight was the topic of my research project in the first summer. My project covered experiences of imposter syndrome in higher education and included recommendations for universities on how this can be improved upon in the future. Specifically, I thoroughly enjoyed the sub-topic of my project which covered how accent can impact imposter syndrome in higher education. As a first-generation scholar from the North East, this topic was incredibly close to my heart. Therefore, being able to explore this topic through the accent section of my report was something that I was very proud of.

Another highlight of my project was the opportunity to immerse myself in the French culture in the second summer of my project through my Leadership in Action. Being partnered with a French retirement home was something that opened my eyes to what care for the older population could be – the space I worked in was incredibly developed and beautiful; therefore, it was so valuable to be able to contribute to such a meaningful project.

## **Summer 1**

Summer 1 of my Laidlaw experience was the part which initially drew me to Laidlaw, as I am very interested in pursuing a career in social research, therefore I jumped at the chance to participate in some research which had a social impact aspect to it. For my project 'Imposter Syndrome in the Classroom', I conducted a content analysis of a survey distributed to students at Durham University surrounding the theme of imposter syndrome and coded this into sub-themes which I discussed in detail.

As this was my first experience with analysing qualitative data specifically, this experience certainly developed my research and analysis skills to a great extent. This was achieved mainly through meetings with my supervisor, Dr Michelle Addison, who was incredibly helpful and informative in her guidance, as she offered me some valuable advice on coding. Furthermore, I also conducted my own independent study on how to conduct successful qualitative research by consulting research methods textbooks such as Bryman's 'Social Research Methods'. Furthermore, my research and analysis skills were also supported through the Laidlaw Research Development Days, where we received an incredibly informative course on Starting a Research Project from Peter Whitton. This course covered advice on how to define a project, how to gather and analyse data, and some insightful discussions of ethics in research.

Building upon discussions of ethics, I also believe that my research project developed my skills in diversity, equity and inclusion. The sub-topics I coded my data into were fraudulent feelings, mental health, social class, extra-curriculars, accent, and race and ethnicity. Therefore, the discussions of mental health, social class and race and ethnicity specifically developed my understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion, as it helped me to understand the lived experience of minoritised students at university, and suggest ways in which the institution can transform to improve the experience of these students. Furthermore, I believe this also developed my emotional intelligence, as it is important to be emotionally intelligent to understand and analyse perspectives that may be

different to your own – sometimes it is easy to detach when conducting a content analysis as you are not meeting the people who are sharing their opinion. However, I found it to be incredibly important to remember the real and raw emotions which came with these responses.

Another key skill which I developed throughout my Laidlaw research project was prioritisation and time management. Whilst this is also something that I developed through my Leadership in Action project, this was certainly more essential in summer 1, as since all my work was conducted from home, individually on my laptop, I was responsible for making sure that all my outputs were complete on time. I believe that my time management skills were incredibly successful during this time, as I was very proud to get all my outputs finished on time, with a report that was significantly more detailed than what was expected. Furthermore, this project also allowed me to develop my impact measurement and analysis skills through the recommendation section of my report, which analysed which actions would create the most impact for university students experiencing imposter syndrome in higher education.

## **Summer 2**

During the second summer of my scholarship with Laidlaw, the development of my Laidlaw leadership skills was furthered, as I was experiencing an environment which was certainly outside of my comfort zone. My Leadership in Action project was titled 'Ageing Well' and the brief overview of the project was to support the senior population of Marseilles and help to engage them within the wider community. This project was created by Make Sense, a global NGO based in Paris, who partnered us with the retirement home Les Jardins d'Haïti. For Les Jardins d'Haïti, our goal was to engage the wider community of Marseilles in the retirement home by using their shared garden as a tool to convince other charities and volunteer organisations to partner with Les Jardins d'Haïti.

One skill which was certainly developed throughout this project was global citizenship, as Make Sense is an NGO which values sustainability, therefore we were encouraged to think globally about our environmental impact in detail. This took place through various training days on social and ecological transition, and through Make Sense encouraging us to take time to have a carbon offsetting day. We did this by partaking in multiple beach cleanups in Marseilles and Frioul, a neighbouring island.

Furthermore, another skill which Make Sense really encouraged us to develop was our design thinking and problem-solving skills. We had specific trainings from Make Sense on design thinking, where we covered the five steps of design thinking: understanding the situation, defining the problem, generating ideas, prototyping, validating and defining. This allowed us to think about our Leadership in Action projects in a more creative way and think more critically about the problems we had to solve, as we discovered the importance of really attempting to understand the situation before attempting to find a solution. Furthermore, we also had an ideation workshop from Make Sense which developed our creative ideation skills. This session was particularly useful as we did it in one large group of 6, even though there were two different projects with 3 people working on each. This was incredibly beneficial to the creative ideation process as it taught us the importance of having new and fresh opinions in the creative process, as some of the most valuable ideas for our project came from the other team, and vice versa.

Another valuable lesson offered by Make Sense was the in-depth discussion of non-violent communication and how to resolve conflict in a mature and professional way. I believe this significantly developed both my collaborative mindset and my communication and influencing skills. During the project, I applied these skills to foster open, respectful dialogue within the group, ensuring that everyone felt heard and valued. This experience also helped me understand the importance of sharing responsibility and working collectively rather than taking on tasks individually. Previously, I tended to take on more work myself, thinking it was 'easier,' but through this project, I realised the power of collaboration and the benefits of distributing tasks effectively among team members.

Furthermore, strategy and vision were another aspect of leadership which I felt I improved upon during the Leadership in Action experience. At the beginning of the project, this was a significant challenge for me as I really struggled to develop a vision of what the project would look like at the end of our 6 weeks. However, we received a training from Antoine, a member of staff at Make Sense which covered community building. Antoine delved into the strategy behind building a community and gave some valuable suggestions of how we could implement this into our project. This allowed me to develop a much better vision of our final project as it made me realise the importance of including outside actors and building a community from organisations in Marseilles within the project.

This project also allowed me to develop my project management skills in a way that I have never experienced. Whilst I do have some leadership experience through extra-curriculars at university, the projects I have led previously have always had someone who was in the role previously to pass on specific instructions and advice. However, this was my first time pioneering a project without anyone who came before me, therefore it was important to be incredibly organised, but also flexible when it came to project management as it was inevitable that things were going to go wrong, and it was important to be flexible and adapt. Furthermore, this also allowed me to use my critical thinking skills, as it was important to be critical about assumptions of why things didn't go to plan. For example, when we were looking into why engagement was low with the wider community, it was important to be critical, as whilst we assumed that this was due to pre-conceived stereotypes about retirement homes, we recognised the importance of going out into the community and conducting fieldwork to confirm or deny our assumptions.

### **Reflecting on my aims and expectations**

For my first summer as a Laidlaw scholar conducting research for the first time, the main aim I set for myself was to ask questions and be curious despite anxiety. Since this was an experience that was very new to me, it was inevitable that there were many things I wasn't sure of, however I felt anxious to go to my supervisor about this and ask questions or clarify things, as I did not want to be a nuisance, or seem like I didn't know what I was doing. However, I'm very proud that this was an anxiety I managed to ignore, and it did not stop me from being curious and asking many questions, as it is important not to shy away from asking for help when you need it. As a result of this, I learned so much from my supervisor, which may not have been the case had I not been so curious.

When it came to my second summer, my primary aim was mainly to enjoy my time and really appreciate the experience. This was my first experience travelling abroad completely alone, therefore I did experience anxiety and before going, I was afraid that this anxiety, along with

homesickness, would impact my experience. However, I am incredibly glad that this was not the case, and I absolutely achieved the aim of enjoying my time and not letting my anxiety get the better of me. I'm very proud of my independence during this project, and it has certainly made me feel more confident about potentially taking on similar experiences in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, I am incredibly grateful for my experience as a Laidlaw Scholar. At times, I have experienced internal conflict about my decision to dedicate both of my university summers to this programme rather than taking on an internship, for instance. However, I am so grateful that this is the avenue I decided to take, as there is no experience more valuable than contributing to a cause bigger than oneself, and the skills I have gained from this have been one of a kind. I am incredibly excited to use the skills I have learned during this experience in my future endeavours. I plan to develop the passion I found in the first summer of my research project by researching how students from the North East experience changes to their regional accent in university settings, and what this reveals about class, identity and belonging. Furthermore, I am so thankful for the opportunity to contribute to an organisation which makes real social change, which has confirmed my future aspirations to work in social research or social policy.