

Leading with purpose: A recount and final reflection on my Laidlaw journey

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It all started when I first discovered the Laidlaw Scholarship programme through my university's newsletter, which immediately captured my interest as it was aimed specifically at first-year students. One particular feature that appealed to me was that the programme has both hands-on leadership and academic research components, which greatly motivated me to apply. When I first joined, little did I know that this was going to be hugely transformative and form a major part of my undergraduate study.

The Laidlaw journey officially kicked off at Cumberland Lodge in a two-night residential trip with the 2024 cohort. Despite taking place during exam season, this did not take away any of the joy and excitement. Thanks to the facilitators – Daniela, Adair, and Zach – and the other scholars, who came from various departments, my time at Cumberland Lodge was really unforgettable and filled with countless lessons. We were introduced to all aspects of leadership while bonding, sharing views, and having fun together through the engaging sessions and group activities.



Pictures from the lovely Cumberland Lodge



The 2024 UCL Laidlaw cohort at Cumberland Lodge (sadly not everyone could join at that time)

In the summer of that year came my research project, where I worked at the UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health (GOS ICH). During my time there, I picked up many new technical skills through the hands-on lab work. Beyond this, I discovered that leadership lies at the core of our daily lives and extends across all fields of work, including in lab research. While conducting my project, I learnt the importance of being critical and proactive in approaching challenges. Some samples that I tested did not yield the expected results. This allowed me to think back and evaluate what could have caused the observations and test out strategies for improvement. I also learnt the importance of discussions in planning out the appropriate next steps and not being afraid to admit mistakes, as this is part of learning.



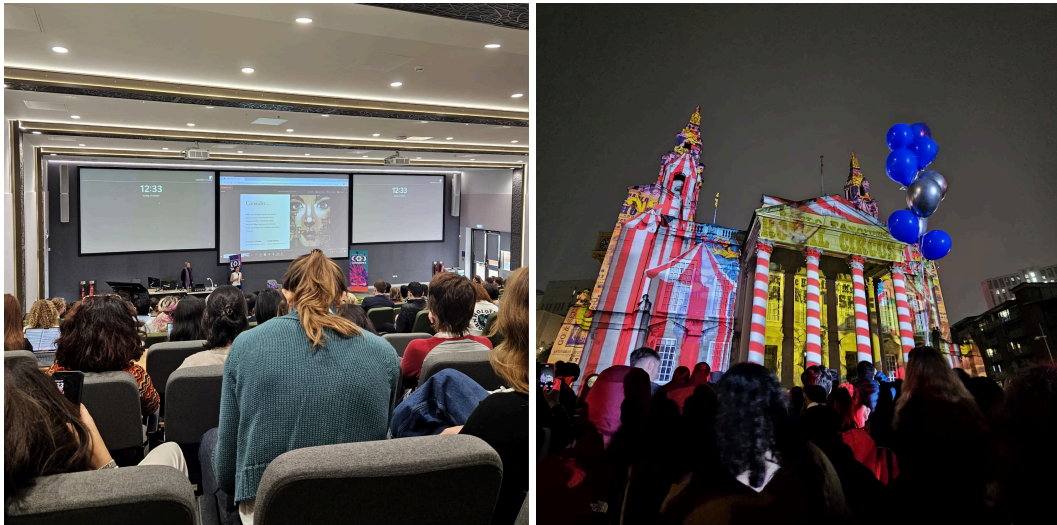
My workbench at UCL GOS ICH during my research project

Then, in the summer of my second year, I completed my Leadership-in-Action (LiA) project at Princess Alice Hospice, which was a chance for me to put the relevant knowledge that I had gained into practice. My time there had been amazing and had exposed me to significant lessons on leadership. Being in an environment that was at first unfamiliar to me and working on a project outside of my 'niche' taught me the importance of stepping out of my comfort zone for self-exploration, building confidence, and practising adaptability – all of which are essential skills to have as a leader. Moreover, I learnt to be able to communicate my thoughts and findings clearly to different audiences. Learning about the initiatives of the hospice, I also realised the value of collaboration over competition in the community to bring a greater impact.



The front of Princess Alice Hospice (they also have a stunning garden inside!)

In between my projects, I had the chance to participate in various insightful leadership workshops, which included the in-person training and the online Oxford Character Project. These sessions enhanced my understanding of the qualities of a good and ethical leader, and how they are implemented in real life. Furthermore, the Laidlaw Scholars Conference 2024 in Leeds, with the theme of 'Curiosity', allowed me to broaden my perspectives on leadership through the speaker sessions, network with scholars from different universities across countries, and learn about their projects, which I found interesting.



Pictures from Leeds during the Laidlaw Scholars Conference

Looking back, I am extremely grateful for all the opportunities presented throughout the Laidlaw Scholarship programme. All the doors opened during my time as a Laidlaw Scholar have helped me grow both personally and professionally, and I wouldn't have it any other way. The people that I have met along the way have also become an integral part of the programme, and none of the joy and learning would have been possible without them.

Previously, my ideas of leadership had been quite restricted, but now, having gained relevant first-hand experience and observed leadership values across different settings, my perspectives have expanded. I understand that leading is not about giving commands and getting things done. Rather, a **good and ethical leader** inspires and empowers people to explore their potential and be the best version of themselves. These leaders build their actions upon integrity,

accountability, and respect towards others. They provide a room for people to develop and ensure that everyone is on the same page and feels seen and valued.

Moreover, I learnt that leadership strongly correlates with being a **global citizen** – not in a geographical sense, but rather in the contexts of community and culture. Throughout the programme, I have engaged with people from various cultural backgrounds, exposing me to different viewpoints. Being a leader and a global citizen means having an awareness of the situations in the community, embracing the diverse cultures and perspectives, and harmonising them together in working towards a vision.

Although my time as a Laidlaw Scholar is drawing to a close, the journey does not end here. One key takeaway that has stuck with me ever since is to **lead with purpose**. No matter which field and where we are working, there is always a deeper meaning behind what we do, beyond what can be seen or calculated. Having a sense of purpose is what gives us a sense of direction and fulfilment, which are undoubtedly important in leadership. Going forward, I will always carry this reminder with me and strive to do my duties wholeheartedly, wherever life takes me, to ultimately create an impact.