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“Life Beyond the PhD” is a conference hosted by the Cumberland Lodge charity which brings together PhD students and early career researchers from various backgrounds from around the UK. Its focus is encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration while also prompting individuals to consider the impact of their research within a broader societal context. These were the first few things I learned about the conference that gave me a jolt of excitement in wanting to apply.

Even though nervous about not knowing anyone, as soon as I met my roommate and a few other participants on the day of my arrival, all my angst melted away. People with the same worries as me going through the same, sometimes challenging, experience of doing a PhD, with which I had much more in common than I thought. It was refreshing.

While getting familiarised with the schedule for the week of the conference, I noticed all the meticulous work the organizers put into making sure we interact with as many people as possible. By splitting us into many different working groups throughout our days there, we got to interact and learn from other people's experiences and research work. This was also an excellent opportunity for me to talk about my research and to get feedback on how to make it more accessible to a broad audience.

The main workshop involved skills sessions on verbal, written and digital communication, storytelling, and CV-writing (for academia and industry), each complemented by its unique creative activities. Among these, a particularly valued activity for me was composing a haiku encapsulating my research. This proved to be an excellent practice in selecting the essential keywords that not only represent my research but also resonate with a broader audience.

Since Cumberland Lodge charity frequently organizes events concentrated on tackling the most pressing ethical issues of today, our last workshop was designed around the ethical considerations of funding a mission to colonize Mars. Seven interdisciplinary teams had to collaborate and come up with a plan and an ethical framework for this mission. In the end, each team had to present their plans and conclusions and motivate them in front of an expert on the subject, Professor Ian Crawford. Moreover, during our breaks, I had the chance to have lovely discussions on many other topics related to the universe with him which I enjoyed greatly.

Apart from all these amazing activities, we got to have insightful debates and talks with seasoned professionals from the Cumberland Lodge network, such as Dr Tracey Berry, John Reynolds OBE, Ria Lina, Professor Melissa Butcher, the Rt Hon the Baroness Prashar of Runnymede CBE, and many others.

The key lessons I've gained from this experience are a clearer understanding of my transferable skills and their importance in my future career. I've also learned not to strive for perfection in every endeavour and to recognize that I have a supportive community throughout this academic journey.

On a final note, I highly recommend participating in this conference, and I hope they will be able to organize it more times a year. It is undoubtedly a confidence-boosting opportunity before embarking on your post-PhD journey, equipping you with essential tools to advance with poise.