

Blog post

Edd Loades – PhD Biological Sciences

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to attend the Cumberland Lodge Life Beyond the PhD Conference. There were about 50 PhD students from different universities and different disciplines in attendance. The whole conference experience was exceptional, I've been able to meet and talk to so many like-minded people that has really built my confidence. The venue was glamorous and historic, and the tasks, talks and workshops were both enriching and enlightening. I highly recommend this conference to PhD students.

The first day included talks from Professor Kurt Barling, whose talk was really inspiring and helped me identify the transferability of my skills obtained during my PhD. The other talk from Patricia O'Lynn, MLA for North Antrim was about her career journey into politics after her PhD which I found to be an amazing story. Both talks really opened my eyes into the possibilities that having a PhD brings.

The second day was filled with workshops on verbal, written and digital communication. All workshops taught me something new and had their own tasks which provided us with an opportunity to practice our communication skills. I found the verbal communication workshop by Ed Newell, chief executive of Cumberland Lodge, to be particularly useful as he provided us all with the platform to practise public speaking about our interests to an audience. The experience of presenting while also listening to others in my position present made me feel less alone and I could relate to other PhD students.

On the third day, we were split into groups of ~7 people and had to present our research topics in front of the rest of the group. Each of us took turns presenting our research, it was interesting to observe talks from others in different disciplines. Everyone developed their public speaking skills, we all provided feedback to each other, and it was invaluable hearing the feedback on my presenting skills from my group members.

The fourth day was spent on group work, we were assigned to groups of between 6-10 people, there were 8 in my group, and together we were tasked with designing a humanitarian response to a refugee crisis – an influx of 50,000 people escaping a war-torn country. Together, we had to formulate a fast response by considering food, shelter, WASH, security, electricity, construction, and many other factors. This scenario was especially interesting as I found myself working together with people I didn't know or had barely spoken to, discussing how to approach the task and assign roles.

Overall, this conference widened my horizons to the skills that having a PhD provides, inspired me, and enabled me to be in an environment where I could learn, communicate, and enhance my transferable skills. I highly recommend this conference to all PhD students, and especially PhD students with 2+ years left who can apply for the Cumberland Lodge fellowship scheme. I would like to thank the doctoral school for funding my place at this conference, and it has been one of the highlights of my PhD so far.