

Nausheen Shahid – PhD Computer Science

From the day, I came to know of this exciting opportunity of a 5-day stay at Cumberland Lodge for the “Life Beyond the Ph.D.” 2022 Conference, I knew it would be a wonderful experience and it turned out great! It gives you a unique opportunity to live in a 17th-century country house in Windsor Great Park with the intellectual elite of the UK having diverse backgrounds and be looked after all day long with great breakfast, lunch and dinner in a peaceful setting to focus and reflect.

The conference programme was packed with various talks and activities such as inspirational success stories, deployment of transferrable skills learned throughout the Ph.D. journey, verbal, digital and writing techniques for better impact and public engagement and social impact of one’s research. Sessions and tasks were so well designed that you get engaged quickly and start deploying your skills.

Skills-related sessions delivered by Dr. Ed Newell, Dr. Sophie Carney, Nicola Hine and Jack Verduyn were very practical and focused. I realized that I already knew much of the information, all thanks to the well-designed Ph.D. level workshops that I attended at Royal Holloway. Now, I got the chance to revise and improve that knowledge and practice it more through the relevant tasks.

A major task assigned to all was to deliver a 5-minute presentation of one’s research in front of a multi-disciplinary audience. We had to initially present it to a smaller group of 7 members. Then, based on the vote of the majority of the delegates, a winner has to be selected from each group to present in front of all the delegates of the conference. This task gave me the opportunity to plan how I can be very concise and clear using jargon-free language so that the delegates can understand my research well. This task was time-bound and challenging as I had to work under a tight deadline but it also provided a great opportunity to showcase the breakthrough research that we are doing in our lab under the kind supervision of Prof. Kostas Stathis at the Computer Science Department, Royal Holloway University.

I utilized this opportunity to the best of my skills and presented my research. I got the majority of the votes from my group and was declared the clear winner of the first round. I presented it again to all the delegates and got an overwhelming response. The jury and the delegates got fascinated by my research and the impact it will bring. They also appreciated the way that I presented it to them and compared it to a Ted talk. Some delegates requested me to find some time during lunch or dinner to discuss collaboration possibilities. Whereas some asked me to start blogging about the progress of my research so they can remain updated with progress of my research. All this feedback was very self-assuring and confidence-boosting as a final-year Ph.D. researcher.

This task also provided the opportunity for mutual learning as I have never learnt about the science of plant pest models, innovations in water cleaning, and adoptive family practices, all in one day.

Another major task was to work in a team to plan a refugee camp. Through this task, I got the opportunity to practice my qualities of leadership, adaptability, problem-solving and working as a team player to face dynamically changing real-world scenarios. It also highlighted the importance of supporting the community in resolving social issues.

Other than the above-mentioned benefits, this conference provided me with a large group of wonderful friends and unforgettable memories. I am thankful to the doctoral school of Royal Holloway for providing me with this great opportunity and I highly recommend it to all Ph.D. students.