

The Life Beyond the PhD 2023 Report by Rachel Tyler



One of the reasons I pursued my PhD was due to how much I enjoyed the interdisciplinary collegiate atmosphere I found in academia while pursuing my master's degree. Unfortunately, starting my doctoral research in 2019 meant I only had 1 term to embed myself in Royal Holloway before the strange few years we have just been through began. With a move to online digital events came few opportunities to meet PhD peers in person. Therefore, it was with great delight I accepted a chance to attend *Life Beyond the PhD* at Cumberland Lodge, supported by the Doctoral School.

Arriving at the conference was a surreal experience: taking a taxi from Slough train station, we were allowed through the gates of Windsor Great Park, and then I was dropped off in front of a beautiful red brick building. On arrival at Cumberland Lodge, we were thrown straight into the week's activities, hearing from the lodge's chief executive, Ed Newell, and their new programme director, Melissa Butcher; before an interesting panel conversation between Tracy Berry, Ria Lina, and John Reynolds: science lecturer, virologist-turned-comedian, and--somewhat topically--the CEO of a British water supplier. This unusual grouping of individuals mirrored the diversity of the delegates attending the conference, and who were all pitted against each other that evening, in the '(anti) University Challenge' quiz after dinner.

A programme of sessions and workshops followed during the weeklong retreat, one of which included preparing a 10-minute presentation that explained our Doctoral research to a diverse and interdisciplinary group of academics, but with only 15 minutes to prepare it--this was definitely a challenge!

There was further group-work which included creating a convincing presentation on the feasibility and ethical considerations of setting up a colony on Mars (!): this was a fantastic experience. The task really drew attention to the discipline-specific thinking patterns we can find ourselves replicating, without even realising. Combining groups of people specialising in the arts and humanities (such as myself), with scientists, as well as people from all across the world (with correspondingly different experiences and views) was exceptionally enlightening.

The retreat proved to be much needed, and came at just the right time for me. Making connections with all these different people, some at the beginning of their PhD journey, others, like me, coming to the end, was really uplifting. It was also great to meet two fellow RHUL students there!

I would love a future opportunity to spend time at Cumberland Lodge --- having time to discuss and have open, even heated, debates, on important topics, in a safe and supportive environment is always fantastic, and one that the Lodge obviously excels at. And- having time to do so in such a lovely (if quite alien) environment in the middle of a Royal Park, during the last days of summer, can't be beaten.