

London International Youth Science Forum 2019

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Summarising my experiences at the 2019 LIYSF seems quite a difficult task, not only due to the sheer amount of fond memories that I now have from it but also because of the profound impact it had on many aspects of my life, from those academic to social. It would be impossible to detail all these experiences, so instead I've chosen a few that I feel have contributed most to my current opinion that LIYSF is an invaluable journey for anyone with the opportunity to attend.

To say I was initially nervous about attending LIYSF would be an understatement. I was of course excited but also anxious about meeting so many new people and I wasn't sure what to expect. Having another person from DCU to meet and travel with was brilliant in not only actually getting to London but also in sharing those feelings of nervousness. It made me relax, realise that everyone was probably feeling the same and that there was nothing to worry about.

I had the opportunity to be a flagbearer at the opening ceremony of LIYSF and it was a great experience. Carrying the Irish flag amidst all these other students from around the world was quite surreal. It made me realise the prestige of the event that I was attending and how each one of us were connected to each other despite our geographical differences.

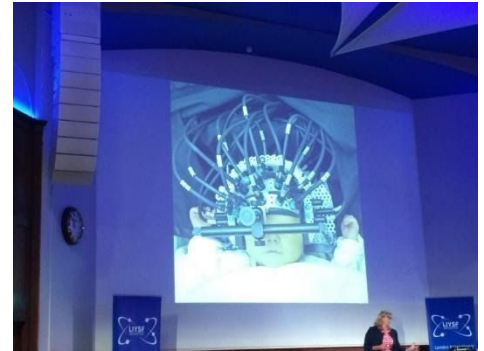
Over the 2 weeks, we were brought on various scientific visits to places such as the Brain Imaging Centre of Cardiff University, Oxford University's Clinical Neuroscience Unit) and London Metropolitan University. One visit that I really enjoyed was Oxford University (pictured right). It was here that I got to do something that I never imagined I would or could – hold a human brain. I can't even put into words how amazing this experience was for me. Being a psychology student, it was crazy to have the opportunity to hold in my hands something that is not only the basis of human existence and experience but also an entire field of science.



As well as these scientific visits we also attended several lectures, some of which were mandatory and others that we specifically chose to attend. This in itself was really good as you could pick lectures in line with your specific fields of interest. Despite some of the mandatory lectures being outside my own personal field, they were still extremely interesting. For example, Dr Anna Ploszajski with her talk on smart materials and Dervilla Mitchell, an Irish engineer who has been involved in the construction of places such as Dublin and Heathrow Airport, helped expose me to areas of science that I never before considered.

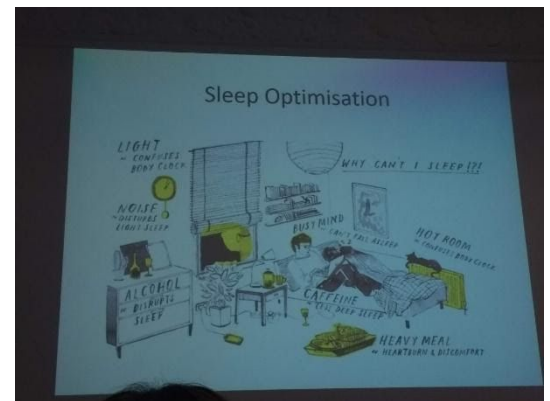
As well as encountering new areas of science, I also had the opportunity to delve deeper into parts more familiar to me, such as psychology and health. The topic of neurodegenerative disease was prominent in many of the lectures that I attended. For example, Professor Christopher Kennard explored the relationship between eye movements and Parkinson's disease while Professor Seth Love focused on the role blood flow in the brain plays on the development of Alzheimer's and dementia. Not only did these lectures highlight the complexity of neurodegenerative diseases but they made me realise the potential of such areas in psychology as there is still so much to discover.

Other lectures included that of medical physicists Professor Clare Elwell and Dr Gemma Bale. They are interested in brain mapping and are specifically researching the use of mapping brain oxygenation in new-borns in order to detect early signs of neurological conditions such as autism. Early detection of such conditions would lead to earlier interventions which could be potentially life-changing for affected individuals. I personally found their lecture quite inspiring. Not only did they explain to us the mechanisms behind such methods, but they showed us how their work can be used to benefit not only people at home but also those around the world in places such as the Gambia in Africa.



Dr Simon Kyle delivered a really interesting lecture about sleep and sleep hygiene. Not only did he highlight the importance of sleep and its benefit to nearly every aspect of one's life, he also provided us with practical take-home tips in order to improve the quality of our own sleep habits.

Another lecture that I really enjoyed was delivered by Dr Tolullah Oni, in which she discussed the numerous factors that influence the health of an individual and society. Instead of viewing health as a one-dimensional phenomenon, Dr Oni considered a wide range of factors from genetics to environment, presenting a holistic view of individual and societal health that was new to me. Her lecture made me realise that I have a great interest in public health and disease and it's something I definitely want to venture further into in the future.



Undoubtedly, Dr Oni's lecture inspired me academically however, her influence did not end at that. Upon concluding her lecture, Dr Oni mentioned an idea that I feel captures the most important experience I had at LIYSF. This was the idea that throughout life, our involvement in many different communities is key for individual development. These communities are wide and varied, sometimes overlapping and sometimes being separate. They include things like our family, our friends from secondary school, our friends from college, our work community, our reading community, our football community and so on. This list can be endless but so different for each and every one of us.



Upon arriving home from London, I realised that I now have a new community in my life, my LIYSF community, which consists of hundreds of people from all over the world. Although the main thing bringing us together was our interest in science, I feel as though this community has gifted me with so much more, from fun and laughter to being open-minded and bold in being myself. Every single day I met someone from somewhere that I've either never been or met someone from before and it was truly amazing. We were so different in relation to our home locations, cultures and traditions but nonetheless, could always find something to talk about and discuss. It was something I never experienced before. Over the course of the 2 weeks, there were many planned social events that we could attend such as parties, a treasure hunt, cultural shows and the LIYSF Olympics. These were all great fun and provided a way to get to know everyone.

Within this larger community of LIYSF, I've also made friendships with people that I hope to not only maintain in the future but to strengthen. It was these people, some located close and others much further away, that truly made my LIYSF experience as memorable as it is. From Day 1 of LIYSF, attending lectures, travelling around London, getting lost in the underground, sightseeing, holding a human brain, being complete foodies to a sad goodbye at the end, I can honestly say that I enjoyed every single minute of my experience at LIYSF and its these new friendships and amazing people that I have to thank for it.

In conclusion, LIYSF was an experience that I will never forget as the things I learned, the experiences I had and the people I met are and are going to influence me for the rest of my life. I can only hope that in the future I have adventures as eye-opening, inspirational and just pure fun as LIYSF was, but I know it will be hard to live up to. Finally, I would like to thank DCU for this opportunity that I hope I have done justice. It was truly an amazing experience for me and one that I know others too will enjoy in the future. Thank you.