

20th Challenge to Rural Leadership Course, Duchy College – Carly Buttrose

With the assistance of a Nuffield bursary, supported by Dawn and Tony Kelly, I was fortunate enough to attend the Challenge for Rural leadership course at Duchy College in the UK in January 2016. The course is shrouded in mystery and there was little information of what we could expect, but previous attendees spoke very highly of it so I took a leap of faith!

It is a leadership course, a journey of self-discovery as well as an intensive look at the British and European trade economy.

The first week of the course was based around a 'case study' which was in essence an exercise in creative thinking, assisted by the creative thinking tools we were taught and working towards a common goal with 20 people of different personalities and backgrounds.

The second week entailed a lot of teaching sessions, a highlight for me was a group of actors coming in and role playing 'difficult conversations' where you were asked to role play a real life conversation in your business that you may have been avoiding or been unsuccessful in the past. We did personality profiling, as well as analysing the concept of 'wicked problems' and making and living with decisions which have no real 'right' answer. Our media training sessions were also very useful.

The course was really about arming us with all the tools we may need to effectively lead and manage people, it was at times quite UK centric with a lot of the guest speakers speaking on British agriculture and politics. There was also a distinct lack of quality female speakers involved in the course which was a bit disappointing. Of the 20 participants, there was only 3 who were non UK/EU and I feel the course certainly benefits from the involvement of the Australian and NZ Nuffield Scholars. Whilst travelling through the UK on my Nuffield scholarship I never noticed the cultural differences between the countries like I did on this course.

As we watch the 'Brexit' debate unfold on the other side of the world, this course has made me very aware of the global implications of the UK leaving the EU community. A large part of the course was based around the 'stay' or 'leave' arguments. The frightening part of the equation is that the UK public are going to vote on a position but not really know what the outcome will look like as the UK negotiates its way out of the EU. The ramifications for British agriculture in the immediate future will be dire if they leave. The subsidy safety net will disappear and UK farmers will find themselves exposed to the real world markets that the Australians and New Zealanders operate in. The overwhelming majority on the course looked forward to leaving the EU, stopping the subsidies which they feel are crippling the productivity of the industry and stopping young farmers from entering the market.

Like a Nuffield Scholarship one of the biggest benefits of participating is the people you meet and the friendships you make. The Nuffield community is well known in the UK and it was amazing how many mutual friends I had with the people I met on the course. I genuinely enjoyed getting to know the other course participants, and learned and gained a lot of inspiration from listening to their different pathways to success. We still all keep in contact and the first year reunion is already planned which is great.

Overall I would recommend this course to other Scholars, as with a lot of experiences, it's not until you get home in the real world and see how it changes your day to day thinking that you appreciate the benefits of what you have learnt. This has certainly been the case for me. I have faced some difficult professional situations in the few months post this course and I am sure I would have not emerged from them in the way I have without the tools I learned on the Rural Leadership Course.