

Worshipful Company of Farmers

23rd The Challenges of Rural Leadership Course

Report by Han Shiong SIAH, 2015 Nuffield Scholar

Firstly, I would like to thank Lorna and Bert Kelly Fund, Itravel Griffith, Nuffield Australia and the Worshipful Company of Farmers for allowing me to travel to the wonderful countryside of Devon to attend the 23rd Challenges of Rural Leadership course, lead by Richard Soffe and his team from Duchy Rural Business School (RBS).

Introduction:

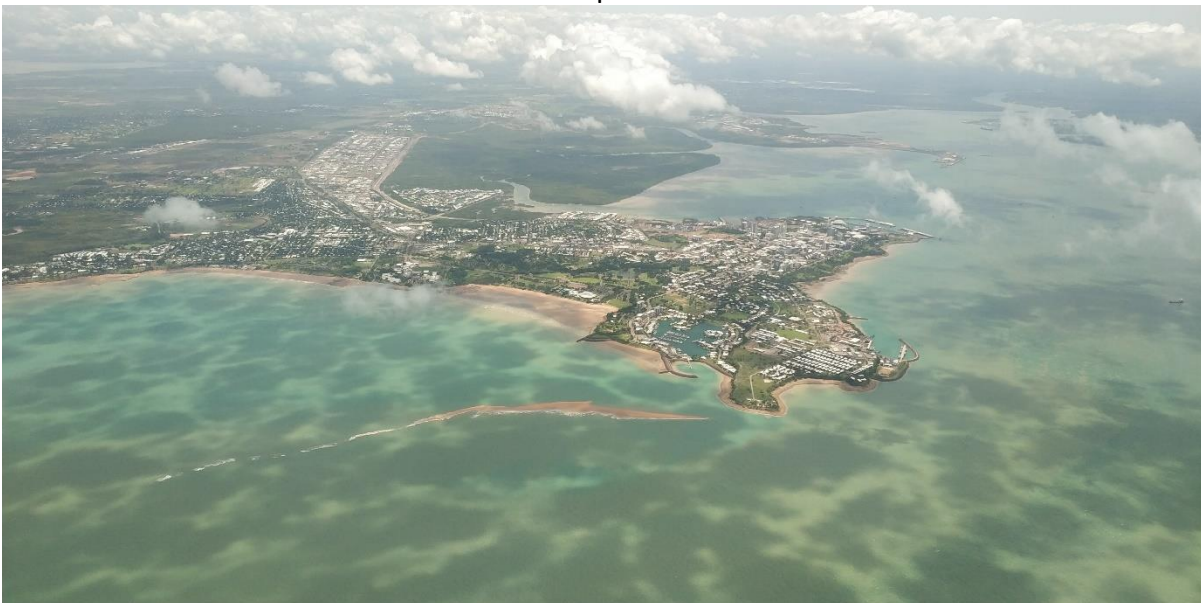
In September 2018, I got my first notification from previous Challenge of Rural Leadership (CRL) scholar that I had the chance to go to United Kingdom to attend 23rd CRL Course. Months leading up to January 17th departure I was getting ready for the challenge. This report describes my series of challenge leading up to CRL.

I live in sub-tropical of Australia, which nearest capital city is Darwin. Our average temperature usually bounces between 13 °C to 38 °C year around. So, first challenge was I am going to UK in the dead middle of winter. What does a person who sweating it out in 38c high humid wear in near 0c temp, let alone news report commenting of catastrophic snow storm forecast during the CRL course. Being bought up in Top End, anything below 24°C a jumper is needed. After getting excess amount of warm clothes, which included plenty of thermos and long johns and a very thick 5in1 winter jacket.



Author wearing gloves during CRL course indoor (Source:RBS)

I was set for take on winter in northern hemisphere...



Aerial photo of Darwin, Australia (Source: Author)

The 17 January arrived, and I boarded my 23hr flight from Darwin to London via Perth. As I was flying towards Perth, I look down and saw the harshness of summer in the southern states and contemplated that I am blessed in Northern Australia with good source of reliable water and rain. Many farmers down there are living tough time with drought and uncertainty of their future.



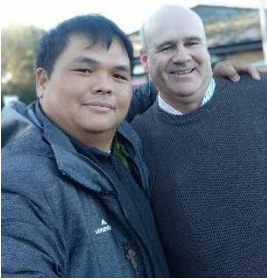
Southern Australian broadacre farming in Dec 2018 (Source: Author)

As I descended into Perth International Airport, I had a moment that I was unsure what I got myself into, there may or may not have been a wet face as I looked out into the unknown. This was a journey I am afraid of, however the Nuffield in me has shown that I need to take a breath and pick myself up and take challenges head on.

That evening as I was waiting in excitement to board Qantas QF9 to London Heathrow, looking forward to getting this 17+ hour flight over quickly. The 30-minute delay, soon changed and QF9 was cancel due to a broken plane. Me and 200+ other passenger joins the long queue to see what our faith was for that night. I was lucky to get on a Qatar flight adding another five hours delay to my journey. I was able to experience Doha airport for two hours during my unplanned transit there. I landed in London after a seven-hour delay. Now a two-hour car drive to Bristol.



Beautiful Devon country side near Malmsmead (Source: Author)



I drove into Totnes to the local train station to pick-up my fellow Australian colleague, David Drage (2009 Scholar) after his four-hour journey from London on top of his journey from Warracknabeal, Victoria. We checked into our accommodation at stunning Darlington Hall, this is where two weeks of intensive brain learning begins.

David Drage (2009 Scholar) and Author at Totnes train Station. (Source: Author)

The 23rd Challenges of Rural Leadership

Sunday afternoon it all started with introduction to 16 new faces both David and I had never met, and hoping to able to rely on name tags, 18 of us where started our first challenge included standing on chairs as well as playing musical chairs with facts about us to learn each other names, to my surprised it worked. I remember most 16 new faces quickly.



2019 Challenge of Rural Leadership Leaders (Source: Duchy Rural Business School)

First week started with a trip to a 500-year-old family owned farm which is now specialising artisan cheese supplying the world. This was our case study, where the task was to look into their business and provide advice and recommendations to continue their business to the next 500 years. I would like to thank the owners and managers for allow us free access to their operation and we hope they take on some of recommendation into their future business plans.



Grounds of Darlington Hall, Devon (Source Author)

Peter Redstone from Barefoot Thinking Company introduced our group to creative thinking over several days, this help us with our case study in providing a guidance included mind maps, 'Positive Negative and Interesting' and other point of view.

By the end first week, a strong 80+ hours had been completed. Sunday rolled in and we spend the day on a different style of challenges with great team from Dynamic Adventure. Number of adventurous tasks, I would never normally do myself, was completed, included canoeing to rock climbing, this show that I don't need to be afraid of everything and also showed how unfit I was! In the evening, we played mystery murder, don't underestimate those actors.

Author Rocking Climbing (Source: Duchy



The second week focused on leadership and communication skills. Richard Soffe and Geoff Kerr were great course leaders with many topic touches from how to lead, to the leadership gearbox ideology and succession. Jeff Welch and his crew put us through media training, tough questions a TV interviewer would ask, playing it back and analysis our faults and suggested corrections.

During the two weeks, we had several leaders came through our doors to speak to us about their roles including:

1. Neil Parish, MP
2. Dr Andrew Appleboam – Head of A&E Exeter Hospital.
3. Prof Allan Buckwell – Institute European Environmental Policy
4. Becky Willson – Duchy College
5. Bill Clarke – Trewithen Dairy
6. Howard Petch
7. Phil Brooke – Compassion in World Farming
8. Adam Bedford – National Farmer Union- Past CRL Scholar
9. Lord Taylor of Goss Moor
10. Dr Bryan Watters – Cranfield University
11. Caroline Drummond – Linking Environment and Farming
12. Minette Batters – National Farmers Union President
13. Lindsay Sinclair – National Farmesr Union Mutual
14. Jane King – Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board.

Many of these talks where interesting, some were challenging, some made us cry, and other were eye opening and made us sit back and think. These speeches where well selected and very informative.

As David Drage said in his report, the best presentations were from 17 now close friends who presented their life, their joys and challenges. We learned a lot about each other. It was surprising how close some of our challenges are without each other.

The Australians

On Saturday 26 January 2019, David and I celebrated Australia Day over lunch at Darlington Hall. Us Australian bought over some goodies, included snacks such as Chicken Salt Pringles, Pizza Shapes and Vegemite Snacks. White Hart head chef put on a great Australian BBQ lunch with sausages, on white bread with onion and sauces and finish it off with homemade jam filled Lamingtons. Overall, David and I put on great Australian lunch. We ended the event by watching MLA Australian Day lamb advertisements and having a good laugh.



Australian Day Celebration at The White Hart. (source Author)

The New Chapter

February 1 marked a new chapter in our history, it was where we graduated from the 23rd Challenges of Rural Leadership as well as being inducted into The Worshipful Company of Farmers family with our ties and certificates during our small ceremony.



The Worshipful Company of Farmers and 23rd Challenge of Rural Leadership graduates (Source: Duchy RBS)

The Challenges of Rural Leadership Course has changed who I am. I have learned a lot about myself and how I dealt with issues and challenges locally and internationally.

The opportunity for attending this course would not be possible without Lorna and Bert Kelly Fund, Nuffield Australia as well as ITravel Griffith. I believe that future scholars will get the same eye-opening opportunity to visit Devon and challenge themselves to the CRL by the fantastic team from Duchy's Rural Business School.

On the 2 February, we had our last breakfast together, then it was time to say our goodbyes to start our new journey. I hope that in the future we will reunite once again as the 23rd CRL group. If not, our WhatsApp's groups chat currently well alive with active communication daily.



Final morning in Darlington Hall, Devon (Source: Author)

Final Note.

These two weeks we shared ideas and we “fixed world issues” over couple of meals or drinks, we cried, and we celebrated at completion of a task. We are CRL leaders for 2019 and we are proud primary producers.

POWER, STRENGTH, CONFINENCE



“Thanks, guys, for great two weeks, see you soon!” Source: Katie Hall