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British Conference on Undergraduate Research 2023, University of Warwick, 5th – 6th April 2023

In early April 2023, I had the fortune of receiving an RSB travel grant to attend the British Conference on Undergraduate Research (BCUR) at the University of Warwick, which was being held in-person for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic. This was also the first time that the conference was being hosted alongside the World Conference on Undergraduate Research (WorldCUR), allowing UK undergraduate researchers to network with those from across the globe. The BCUR/WorldCUR conferences are a vital platform for undergraduate and early career researchers to present their work, building experience in presenting and conveying research to a broad audience.

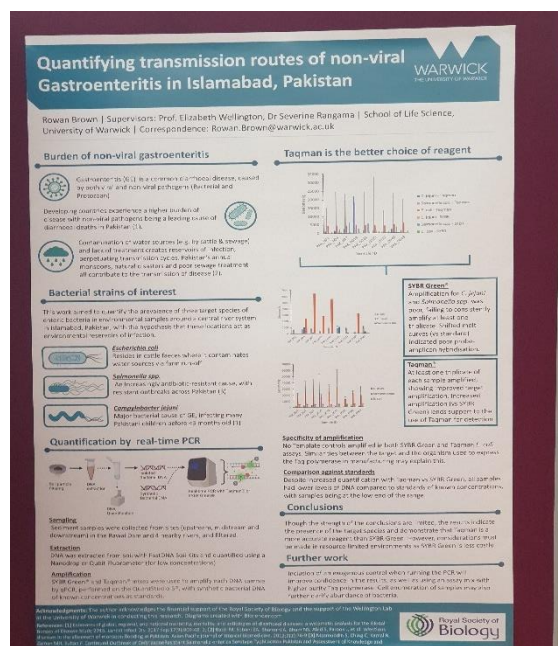
The event also acts as a bridge to science in government through the Posters in parliament event, a sister event to BCUR, allowing select poster presenter to display their research in parliament and connect with MPs on key issues.

It was a personal goal of mine to attend at least one in-person conference prior to graduating from my master's degree, an ambition which had been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was further emboldened by the conference being held at my own university, where I am enrolled in the School of Life Sciences.

The conference was a non-specialist event, covering several broad themes of research: 'The future'; 'Create'; 'Community'; 'Sustainability'; 'Health'; 'Power', and 'Data'. My dissertation investigated the transmission routes of non-viral gastroenteritis in Islamabad, Pakistan, fitting neatly into the 'Health' and 'Data' themes, in which I presented a poster summarising the key findings from the research. The poster sessions were held with all themes presenting, meaning that I was pushed to discuss my research in appropriate manner for a broad audience with varying levels of subject-specific knowledge. As a result, I had several enriching conversations with attendees, learning to convey the importance of



The Oculus building at the University of Warwick, one of the buildings in which the conference was held and a central location of networking between events. Photo credit: University of Warwick on LinkedIn, 2023.



My poster on quantifying the transmission routes of non-viral gastroenteritis in Islamabad, Pakistan

this research in differing ways depending on their background. The sessions also enabled the discussion of research that I would've never heard of within my current field of Immunology, such as the impact of fungal plant infections on date plants in the places like Dubai and Qatar, regions which consume a large quantity of dates at times such as Eid.

Though the poster sessions were held as a convergence of the several conference themes, there were several theme-specific oral presentation sessions, which I was able to attend. There was some particularly fascinating health and data talks such as ones on NHS notification of HIV positive partner diagnoses in the pandemic, management of chronic kidney disease with pulmonary hypertension and even on the impact of inappropriate harnesses on mobility/correct harness wear for dogs (which I took many notes on as the owner of a young, headstrong Labrador!)

I also had the opportunity to attend talks from my fellow student researchers at the University of Warwick, which I found to be incredibly beneficial personally as life can get in the way of communication for many of us and it was nice to have common time to catch each other up on our research.

Perhaps the most profound talk of the conference, and the summation of the event, was the closing plenary from Prof David Spiegelhalter on conveying research to a public audience and interactions of the media with research. I found this talk to be highly fascinating, highlighting several weaknesses in our current media coverage of published research but also the strength that we have in being able to shape that narrative. It was also thrilling to have the chance to ask Professor Spiegelhalter a question of my own on the coupling of scientific policy and advisory of researchers to government, as well as the opportunity to briefly network with such an accomplished academic, following the talk.



Professor David Spiegelhalter OBE, giving his talk “How not to fall flat: Communicating research to different audiences” at the closing plenary of BCUR/WorldCUR 2023. Credit: University of Warwick Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning, BCUR 2023.

Though I found many benefits, both personally and professionally, from attending this conference, it highlighted several areas for further development of myself and my skills, such as active engagement in poster presentations over passive engagement and poster design for a non-specialist audience. I think it is critical to view such things as positive opportunities and not as drawbacks, since without attending the conference, I may not have identified them and would not have had the opportunity to work on such skills.

Overall, I am incredibly grateful that I got to spend this opportunity at my university before I graduate and to make many meaningful connections with fellow young researchers. This would not have been possible without the RSB's support and for that, I am immensely thankful.