

The GRAMNet/Camas Experience

Peter Squires- 2017 Recipient of Hawke EU Centre, GRAMNet PhD Research Fellowship in Scotland

The Hawke EU Centre's GRAMNet fellowship takes awardees on an academically and personally rewarding journey to the two very different Scottish landscapes of Glasgow and Isle of Mull. After the obligatory long plane trip from Australia to Scotland, my journey began with a brief stay in the bustling and beautiful city of Glasgow before taking an early morning train to Oban, where the ferry would take us on to the Isle of Mull.

Upon arriving at Queen Street Station in the centre of Glasgow city in the early morning of day 2, we were met by around 20 enthusiastic fellow PhD students and researchers from the University of Glasgow. On the train we had the opportunity to introduce ourselves and to discuss our respective research and work in the refugee sector whilst also getting our first taste of the Scottish countryside zooming past outside.

After a short ferry trip from Oban, we arrived on the Isle of Mull, where we would be spending the next few days living together in the centuries old Camas buildings, sat right on the edge of a sea inlet, with a stunning view out to sea. During the four days we spent on the island, we went 'back to basics' in the best possible way- sourcing our own vegetables and herbs from the property's garden, without electricity, internet or phone. Something else that was (thankfully) missing was a laptop, something which rarely leaves the side of a PhD student.

Each morning we shared breakfast with the friendly Camas staff and volunteers and were informed about the various activities which would be on offer that day, ranging from abseiling, 'coasteering' (navigating the rocky coastline and freezing waters in a wetsuit and helmet) and kayaking, to academic writing workshops held by fellow researchers. The theme of our stay at Camas was 'self-care', with a variety of workshops and activities surrounding the theme. Whilst the academic activities were beneficial to my research, it was perhaps the back to basics experience and the time that it allowed for reflection and rejuvenation which was of greatest benefit to both me and my research.

Although the majority of us would have liked to stay a while longer in the wilderness, we all left Camas refreshed and ready to get back to our respective research. Being at the difficult halfway point of my PhD, this retreat was the perfect remedy to get me over that halfway hump. I returned to Glasgow with a much clearer perspective on my research, having had well needed time and a perfect space to rethink and reflect on my research. I presented at the University of Glasgow later that week with a new and healthy motivation for my research, something which I brought home to Adelaide with me and a benefit that will no doubt stay with me throughout my career in academia.