

REPORT: 21st Challenge of Rural Leadership through Duchy College, supported by The Worshipful Company of Farmers

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Firstly, a sincere thank-you to the Kelly Trust, IT Travel Griffith and Nuffield Australia for so generously supporting this post-scholarship course – it has been a real honour and a privilege to be given this once in a life-time opportunity. Without your commitment to the ongoing financial support to this scholarship I would never have been able to become a member of The Worshipful Company of Farmers for which I am most grateful – thank you ever so much.



This was the 21st year this course has been run (participants in the photo above), and I commend the foresight of The Worshipful Company of Farmers to see the need and benefit of preparing and equipping farmers and the people closely connected with the farming industry by designing and operating an annual leadership course focused around this sector.

This year the course ran between 22 January and 4 February 2017, at Dartington Hall which is a venue oozing with history, character and prestige, so fitting to this course. The minute one arrives and sees the gorgeous, immaculately kept gardens and the grand buildings you feel like royalty and have to step-up and play the part which is just like leadership.

There were 18 participants selected. And by all accounts, the application process in the United Kingdom seems as strict and daunting as the Nuffield application process in Australia.

These farmers and rural operators came from all over the country including Scotland, Wales, The Isle of Man and England and from very vast and varied backgrounds. There was also a representative from Spearhead International from the Czech Republic and was an agronomist in charge of a 25,000-hectare arable program. The gender mix was also well balanced, with ten men and eight women, which was the best it has ever been, indicative of the stepping-up and 'leaning in' of woman to leadership roles within agriculture with increased encouragement and support being put into place to make this positive step.



I was so impressed with the selection process of Duchy College and the Worshipful Company of Farmers as every single participant was an accomplished, highly successful individual but so personable and passionate to help one another achieve a common goal of improving ourselves for the betterment of the agricultural sector. This greatly added to the success of the course.

We feel humbled to have spent two weeks with this inspirational group of rural leaders. We have formed friendships, allies, mentors, confidants as well as bonds for life. There is a phenomenon that groups that have attended this particular course in the past still gather annually just to catch up, visit farms and generally keep each other motivated and focused on the bigger purpose. I can see this year's group being no exception.

It was also the first time that a husband and wife team had attended the course and we sincerely thank Nuffield Australia for granting Wade and I this incredible opportunity and it was our goal to make Nuffield Australia and Australian agriculture proud. We applied ourselves to the course and put in as much as we could to ensure we got the most out of the experience which was excellently structured and designed to challenge and stretch our minds. Although the excellent catering supplied by Dartington Hall seemed to stretch our bodies as well.



Richard Soffe and Geoff Kerr ably assisted by Chris Godolphin, spend all year ensuring they get the best variety of speakers to present to the course, they also interject with a strong framework of leadership tools to equip and assist us all get a chance to maximize our success as future leaders.

There is opportunity for role play, work-shopping ideas and getting into the nuts and bolts of what it is to be a successful leader which sometimes includes very difficult and hard to make decisions, uncomfortable conversations or actions which can be very isolating and make us question ourselves and our purpose.

Speakers

The speakers and topics are extremely diverse but to get exposed in a two-week period. It included the President of the National Farmers Union (NFU) – Meurig Raymond (pictured below), Minister for Agriculture – George Eustice MP, Head Consultant of Accident & Emergency Department for Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital – Dr Andrew Appleboam, a highly regarded and decorated Brigadier from the British Army who served in Iraq, Kosovo, Bosnia, N. Ireland, Belize & Rhodesia Dr Byran Watter OBE, to name but a few. It can indeed be mind-blowing.



The cross-section of presenters discussed leadership in politics, policy making, Brexit, succession planning, critical and high pressure situations, war, emotional and environmental issues, small family businesses, fast growing businesses, media including print, social, radio and TV; which makes it a very complete and well-rounded course.

Week One

The first week revolves the group doing a case study on an agricultural based business located within 200kms of Dartington. Every year the business selected for the course to perform the case study on changes. This year it was a family owned and operated business with its principle activities being farmhouse cheese making, packing and selling; dairy, beef, arable and pig farming; plus an agricultural contracting 50/50 partnership as well as a countryside education program operated through a charity developed from an in-house education initiative. This gave the group a nice set of diverse challenges to get to grips with.



The group visited the business and got to meet the entire management team to glean as much information as possible on the structure, financial, strategy and operations of the business and then address a topic that the business needs assistance with and presents the findings and recommendations to the management team within four days.

This case study taught us to work as a team and use our leadership skills to come up with a strategy to tackle the issue (s) presented by case study business. The group then needs to consolidate all the ideas, suggestions and brainstorming and get this information, all feedback and recommendations into a format to give a worthwhile presentation back to the “client” under a time pressure situation.

This exercise really challenged us but we worked well as a united team and the presentation to the management team and directors of the case study business were excited and impressed with the outcome even going so far as to express “You nailed it!” – much to our groups delight after a high-pressure week.

Week Two

The second week focused more on individuals looking at ‘work/life balance’, emotional intelligence, ‘wellness’, ‘thinking politically’, viewing situations from ‘the balcony and not just the dance-floor’, considering other people’s points of view, encouraging and opening up to feedback, empowering team members by ‘giving the work back’ and giving confidence to step-up do a ‘power-pose’ and have those uncomfortable conversations we often avoid.

We all had opportunities to be the chairperson for the day to fine tune our leadership skills. Every participant had to present to the group on our background, our farming business, our goals and aspirations which was so impressive, exhilarating and challenged us to push ourselves further to keep up with the amazing people we were surrounded by.

The two weeks were separated with a ‘day off’ where we were whisked off to the farm barn, as the weather was very wild and wet, to learn archery which many of us had never done before and we completed a range of team building exercises in a very different venue and situation. The archery was followed by an afternoon of rock climbing which again put us all out of our comfort zones.

Again, we worked as a united team encouraging and pushing each other to achieve more and go higher (literally). I thoroughly enjoyed it and will definitely do rock climbing and archery again if an opportunity arises.



The course concluded with a champagne reception with the Master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers and some of their senior members PLUS the UK Minister of Agriculture attended and addressed this function. This was followed by a very fine three-course dinner in the upper Solar room with all the ceremony and pomp that seemed fitting to a wonderful Challenge of Rural Leadership course resulting in 18 of us being inducted into the Worshipful Company of Farmers and given our certificates, ties and scarves respectively.

After a tremendous evening celebrating the accomplishment of completing this life-changing course, the participants all started their individual journeys home after emotional good-byes. After all, we had just spent at least 12 hours a day together for the past two weeks, stretching and growing our minds, exposing weakness and faults, being open and honest with each other, encouraging and believing in each other, enhancing our ability to be better leaders for our families, businesses, communities and industries. I cannot recommend this course more highly and encourage all scholars looking for that post-scholarship challenge to apply for this course.



Favourite quotes:

- **“Yes, I can”** – Andrew Smith, Course Participant
- **“The world is run by people who show up”** – Adam Bedford, presenter
- **“People work for people NOT businesses”** – Peter Redstone
- **“Your attitude determines your altitude”** – Caroline Drummond

Inspirational quotes shared by Howard Petch:

- **“Manager do things right! Leaders do the right thing!”** – Peter Druker
- **“Here lies a man who knew how to enlist in his service better men than himself”** – Andrew Carnegie
- **“A leader is a dealer in hope!”**
- **“The best leaders aren’t those who take charge and make things happen. They are the ones who are willing to be FULLY human and INSPIRE the best in others!”** Sunada Takagi

Topics Included:

- Creative Thinking – Peter Redstone
- Prioritizing in high stress and life-threatening situations – Dr Andrew Appleboam
- The Agricultural Implications of Brexit – Professor Allan Buckwell
- International Evening – hosted by Jeff Beer OBE
- Being President of NFU and the journey to get there – Meurig Raymond MBE
- GM Technology – Professor Mick Fuller
- Trewithen Dairy and the families journey from farming to processing bottled milk/cream and production of Cornish Clotted Cream – Bill Clark
- Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) – Caroline Drummond MBE (UK Scholar 13)
- EU Politics and UK Politics – Neil Parish MP
- Difficult Conversations – Rachel Vowles and Richard
- The Opportunities Canvas – Peter Redstone
- Leadership - Howard Petch CBE

- The Leadership Gearbox – Peter Redstone
- Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) – Philip Lymbery
- Interview Practice and Media Training – Jeff Welch
- The Communications Canvas – Peter Redstone
- Succession – Peter Redstone and Richard Soffe
- Psychometrics (Personality) results – Allan Glover
- Media – Debbie Beaton
- Social Media – Simon Haley
- Communications – Richard Feltham
- Openfield Grain Storage & his charity “Ride for Kate – Rob Sanderson
- Change Management – Peter Redstone
- Policy Making and Experience in EU Policy Making – Adam Bedford
- Shooting the Elephant – Richard Soffe
- Leadership – Richard Soffe and Peter Redstone
- Actual Radio and TV Interview Practice – Jeff Welch
- Leadership in War – Dr Bryan Watters
- Culture for Success – Richard Soffe and Geoff Kerr