

### Collingwood College donor impact report

Summer 2025



#### Thank you

Dear Collingwood alumni

As I prepare to relinquish my Collingwood role as Principal after fourteen happy and personally fulfilling years, I find myself reflecting upon how contemporary College life contrasts with my own student experiences at Durham in the 1970s. In many ways, the immense power of the collegiate experience, as outlined in our 50th Anniversary brochure, appears to be largely unchanged and, hopefully, this will long continue.

What is markedly different, however, is the role of the College in more actively and explicitly seeking to encourage a more diverse student body to recognise and fulfil their potential and, in so doing, to contribute positively to the betterment of the lives of others. Collingwood's Aims and Vision as outlined in our Annual Plan states:

At the heart of our College are our students. Our vision....is that Collingwood, through its student body, staff, SCR, alumni, friends, and visiting scholars and professionals, will provide a context that fosters and maximise each student's intellectual, social, cultural, artistic, sporting and moral/spiritual growth, and a strong awareness of, and commitment to, social responsibility. Fundamentally, we will seek to further develop a strong communal sense of duty and care in which 'being the best' is framed not solely in relation to one's own personal achievements but also in the multiple ways that we enrich the lives of others.

To achieve this end, we have focused upon building a College culture and environment that consistently emphasises, encourages, and supports student agency and personal development. We do this, not only through our direct messaging, but also, more indirectly, sometimes subliminally, through our everyday casual, informal, and proximal interactions.

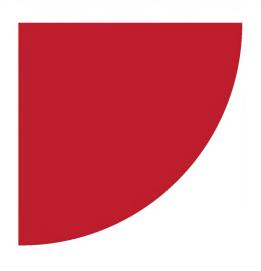
Thanks to the incredible support of you, our alumni, I think it is fair to say that the opportunities for student wider personal development that are on offer at Collingwood currently rank amongst the best in the U.K.

The incredible generosity, vision, and drive of our alumnus, Mark Hillery, backed up by the support of other alumni, has led to the creation of state-of-the-art facilities for theatre, music, dance, film, sport, and socialising that motivate and enable our students to operate at the highest levels. I should like to take this opportunity to thank Mark for all he has done for our students, and hope that we shall both witness the realisation of our shared vision in which each generation of former students 'Pass it On' by supporting and nurturing those who subsequently follow them through Collingwood's doors.

What may sometimes be less salient than our magnificent facilities is our huge student development programme, one that could not operate as it does without the committed support of so many of our alumni. Your assistance takes many forms: careers advice and internship opportunities, mentoring, talks and presentations, together with scholarships, bursaries, grants and other forms of financial aid.



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Each year, we ask those students who have received financial assistance as part of a particular student development programme to write a brief report of their experiences. These are then passed on to those benefactors who back that scheme, thanking them for their help. This targeted approach can mask the overall scale of alumni support, however, so I thought you might be interested to receive a document that combines most of this year's student reports. As you will discover, the contribution made by our alumni is, quite simply, breath-taking. And, of course, these reports only represent one element of the past year's development activity.

Thank you for everything you have done for Collingwood; it is hugely appreciated. Despite my great sadness in moving on, somewhat paradoxically, I also depart with a sense of joy that with your help, we have been able to make such a difference to so many lives. The personal accounts presented in this document bear testament to this. I hope you will find them as uplifting as have I.

Joe

Joe Elliott
Professor, Principal of Collingwood College in the School of Education

\*Student development at Collingwood is all about providing opportunities; in some instances this is also linked to financial circumstances. In order to respect awardee privacy the reports included at each stage of this composite report may or may not have been supported by that particular fund.

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#### Sudhamshu Patrayani Student Experience Officer

A student development programme of this size and scale generates a significant amount of administrative activity. Collingwood students are fortunate to have the support of a Student Experience Officer to enable them to make the most of the opportunities available thanks to alumni support. We are deeply grateful to alumnus Neil Hunt for so generously funding this role, which in turn maximises the impact of all of the programmes outlined here. Not only does the Student Experience Officer enable the donor funded development experiences which our students illustrate here, it also allows lots of other valuable activities to place.



My name is Sid, and I am the Student Experience Officer at Collingwood College. I want to quickly express my heartfelt gratitude for your generous support. Your contributions have been instrumental in enabling students to access life-changing opportunities, develop their skills, and make a meaningful impact within the wider community.

A key part of my work at Collingwood is fostering meaningful connections between students and alumni who have built successful careers in a variety of industries. One of the ways we do this is through our Collingwood Connect Talks, an ongoing initiative that brings accomplished alumni back to college to share their experiences, career insights, and advice with current students.

**Breaking into the Film Industry** – We welcomed Aidan Elliott and Harry Rylott for an insightful discussion on careers in the movie industry.

A Career in Politics with Lord Henley - Students had the unique opportunity to ask questions and gain valuable career insights from someone who has spent decades in politics.

Collingwood students often dedicate their time and talents to making a real impact within the wider community.

One of the most heart warming projects this year was the **Christmas Charity Concert**, where we partnered with Burnside Academy to bring music and joy to young pupils. Over four sessions, Collingwood's student volunteers worked with 15 primary school students, teaching them the Christmas song 'Do You Hear What I Hear?', before performing together in Collingwood's theatre.

Our Annual Music Outreach Project with Laurel Avenue and Pittington Primary Schools continued this year, bringing music to young minds. Over four weeks, Collingwood students worked closely with pupils, teaching them 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow', which we are now set to record in our state-of-the-art music studio.

This year has also been about expanding Collingwood's digital presence and ensuring that students and alumni—both current and future—stay connected to the college.

#### Collingwood's First-Ever 360° Virtual Tour:

This was a deeply personal project for me. As an international student, I remember how difficult it was to find visual insights into Collingwood before arriving. Now, prospective students—whether from the UK or abroad—can explore the entire college digitally, including key facilities such as our music studio and social spaces.

Collingwood Connect Podcast with Lord Henley: In this episode, third-year students Ollie and Sophie sit down with Lord Henley, one of Collingwood's first-ever students, to reflect on his time at Durham, his political career, and the evolving role of the House of Lords. The discussion also touches on the early days of Collingwood, its alumni network, and the challenges of public service. This podcast is now available on YouTube.

#### Theo Fotheringham

"I received funding to cover costs associated with an unpaid internship at Ajuno, a small innovation consultancy start-up specialising in UAS (drone) operations. The funding enabled me to commute to the office for in-person work, travel to Bristol to meet the team at their headquarters, and cover living expenses such as food while I was working in the office.

My activities in this 6-week (40 hours a week) internship included:

- Collaborating with the founder on proposals and sitting in on meetings with national companies exploring the use of drone technology.
- Developing Operating Safety Cases for companies seeking to integrate drones into their operations.
- Conducting research on using CoPilot Studio to enhance company efficiency and producing a report on this topic.
- Writing minutes for extensive meetings to ensure that non- attendees received comprehensive updates.
- Visiting the Bristol headquarters, where I participated in a company social event, helping to build stronger connections with my colleagues.
- Working with Ajuno's sister company, Airwards, which is focused on creating a drone-based community and fostering industry connections.
- Testing DIY drone kits for the Young Citizen's Festival, where Ajuno delivered a talk.

This opportunity has significantly contributed to my development by providing hands-on experience in a professional setting. I also had the chance to network with professionals within the company, gaining insights from them and preparing for a major networking event at Google, hosted by Airwards and Ajuno in November.

This experience has also taught me that I am more productive and satisfied when working in a collaborative office environment, which will influence how I approach my final year projects.

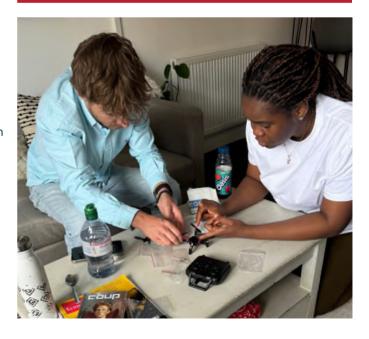
The most memorable moment was attending the company social event at the Bristol headquarters. This informal setting allowed me to connect with my colleagues on a personal level, particularly with one of the founders, as we shared experiences from our time at Collingwood College.

Thanks to this opportunity, I have learned that I thrive in an office environment where collaboration is key. Working remotely hindered my efficiency, whereas being in the office allowed me to make the most of my workday, collaborate more easily, and enjoy my work more.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the donor who made this opportunity possible. Their support allowed me to fully participate in the internship, which significantly enhanced my skills and overall experience. Being able to work in the office greatly improved my productivity and enjoyment, which in turn made me more effective in my role."



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#### Imogen Hewitt Modern Languages and Cultures Third Year

Interning at REfUSE, a social enterprise based in Chester-le-Street, was an eye-opening and deeply rewarding experience. REfUSE rescues surplus food that would otherwise go to waste and transforms it into affordable, nutritious meals served in its community cafe and at events. I was fortunate to work across many areas of the organisation — from the kitchen and cafe front-of-house to the office and school outreach — which gave me a complete understanding of how the enterprise operates and the values that drive it.

Each day brought something new. I gradually became more confident helping in the kitchen and front-of-house and even cooked my own dish, which was served in the cafe. I also supported a number of REfUSE's community events, including restaurant nights and the Greenbelt Festival, where we ran an outdoor kitchen and catered on a large scale using only surplus food. It was hectic but exhilarating, and such a memorable way to raise awareness of food waste and REfUSE's mission.

One of my favourite experiences was getting involved in REfUSE's school programme, Eat Smart. The programme introduces children to the topic of food waste and teaches them practical ways to reduce it. I shadowed a full day at one school and later helped out at a celebration event. Seeing the children so engaged and thoughtful made me realise just how powerful education can be in changing habits and building a more sustainable future.

Back at the office, I was trusted with real responsibility. I worked with my supervisor on planning upcoming events, including one that required me to help estimate the carbon cost of a restaurant night. I also ran my own independent campaign promoting the use of beans and pulses — developing social media content and organising a launch event. It was exciting to take the lead on a creative project like this, and I was really proud of how it turned out.

This internship helped me grow in ways I hadn't anticipated. It confirmed my desire to work in the charity sector after university and gave me practical insights into how charities function day to day. I had the chance to work alongside people from a wide range of backgrounds, all of whom taught me something different. I learned how to be more independent, take initiative, and trust my own problem-solving instincts — especially while managing my campaign or supporting big public events.

REfUSE's work also deepened my understanding of climate activism. I've always cared about the environment, but this internship showed me what meaningful action can look like on a local level. The food waste issue became personal to me, and I've been trying to share what I learned with others. In fact, the experience motivated me to help set up a formal student volunteering project with REfUSE this academic year, giving more Durham students a chance to get involved. I'm now leading that project through DUSVO, and I hope it continues long after I graduate.

To any students thinking about applying for funding or internships like this — go for it. Especially if you're curious about the charity or sustainability sector, opportunities like this are incredibly rare. Not only was it a meaningful experience, but it was genuinely fun too.

Finally, I want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who made this internship possible — from the team at REfUSE to the donors who support opportunities like this. You gave me a chance to work on something I'm truly passionate about, and it's already influenced the direction I want to take after university. I'm very grateful.



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#### Fengyu Wang Psychology Third Year

When I first began my internship at Washington Mind, I felt nervous. English is not my first language, and I worried I wouldn't fully understand the discussions or that my ideas wouldn't align with the project's direction. But from the very beginning, I was met with warmth and encouragement. Angela and Kathy, my mentors, created a supportive and collaborative environment where I felt safe to express myself and contribute meaningfully. As we developed survey questions for a project exploring expressions of grief, they offered thoughtful feedback and reminded me that perfection wasn't the goal — it was authenticity.

Once we finalised the survey, we circulated it to a broad audience and were thrilled to see an initial surge in responses. While participation tapered slightly in the second week, the results offered rich insights into how people experience and express grief. One particular response stood out to me: someone shared that they kept a loved one's ashes in a tattoo. It was such a powerful and creative way of holding on to memory, and it changed how I viewed grief — not just as sadness, but as something deeply individual and expressive.

My role was to conduct a latent thematic analysis of the responses. I started by familiarising myself with the data, creating initial codes, and gradually grouping these into broader themes. This was my first time working with qualitative data in this way, and the process not only strengthened my analytical skills, but also awakened a deeper academic curiosity. The work left a lasting impression on me, and for the first time, I began to seriously consider pursuing a Ph.D. — one focused on how children and adolescents navigate grief.

In one of our final team meetings, we discussed how we might improve future survey engagement. While adding multiple-choice questions might have increased response rates, we ultimately chose to retain the openended format to preserve the richness of the data. This decision reinforced something I learned throughout the internship: that research isn't just about gathering information — it's about listening. Open-ended responses gave space for participants to express grief in their own words, offering perspectives that we would never have captured through fixed options.

This internship has shaped me in more ways than I expected. It taught me to believe in my ability to contribute — even in spaces where I initially felt out of place. I realised that my voice, shaped by a different language and culture, can offer unique insights. I also learned how to communicate clearly and effectively, ask questions with empathy, and navigate unfamiliar academic terrain with resilience. Most importantly, I became more attuned to the emotional lives of others and more committed to fostering compassion in my future work.

Beyond the academic skills I gained, this experience transformed how I relate to those around me. Immersing myself in a project about loss made me reflect on my own relationships and the importance of cherishing the people I love. It reminded me that grief is a universal part of life — one that calls for tenderness, patience, and connection. These are lessons I will carry with me far beyond this project.

Looking ahead, this internship has influenced the direction of my academic and career goals. I plan to explore grief and emotional well-being within the field of educational psychology, particularly how schools and communities can support grieving children and adolescents. I want to study how to create environments where young people feel safe expressing their emotions and are equipped with the tools to navigate loss.



This internship has shaped me in more ways than I expected. It taught me to believe in my ability to contribute — even in spaces where I initially felt out of place.



To any student considering applying for a college-arranged internship or seeking funding — I would say: don't hesitate. Be open to growth, even if it feels daunting at first. This experience gave me more than I expected — confidence, skills, purpose, and mentorship — and I believe it can do the same for others.

I am incredibly grateful to everyone who made this opportunity possible. Thank you to the donors whose generosity sustains the Student Opportunities Fund, and to Angela and Kathy for their kind and empowering guidance. This internship helped me grow into the kind of researcher and person I hope to be — one who listens carefully, thinks critically, and leads with empathy. Thank you for giving me that chance.

#### Dilan Philibert Natural Sciences Third Year

From the very first day, we were welcomed into the heart of REfUSE — a social enterprise café in Chester-le-Street committed to tackling food waste by collecting and repurposing surplus produce. What made this internship truly unique was its structure: we were assigned individual projects while also contributing as volunteers across different areas of the café. This combination allowed us to explore how a mission-driven organisation operates from both strategic and grassroots levels.

My personal project focused on developing a sponsor framework to encourage local businesses to support REfUSE's work. Alongside that, I created a set of marketing materials that could be shared with potential partners. This office-based element challenged me to work independently, plan ahead, and think creatively about communication and outreach — all of which sharpened my organisational skills and taught me how to manage a small campaign from idea to execution.

Outside the office, we were hands-on in the day-to-day work of the café. We helped in the kitchen, front of house, warehouse, and even joined local collection runs to pick up food that would otherwise have gone to waste. There was something incredibly grounding about seeing every part of the process — from receiving the rescued produce to preparing and serving it to customers. Being included in team meetings, event planning, and school workshops gave us a real sense of ownership and allowed us to connect with the wider REfUSE mission.

A personal highlight was helping run REfUSE's food stalls at local festivals. We served smoothies and other dishes while engaging attendees in conversations about the UK's food waste crisis. It was both rewarding and eye-opening to speak with people directly about these issues and see how small conversations can lead to bigger change. These events brought together everything I'd been learning: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and an understanding of social advocacy in action.

This internship helped me discover that I thrive in roles where I can lead, communicate effectively across teams, and contribute meaningfully to a cause. I also realised how much I value having a practical component in my work — it grounds abstract ideas in tangible action. As I look ahead, I'm now actively seeking out roles that allow me to combine my people skills with my passion for social impact. Whether that's in the charity sector or a mission-driven business, I feel more confident in the direction I want to pursue.

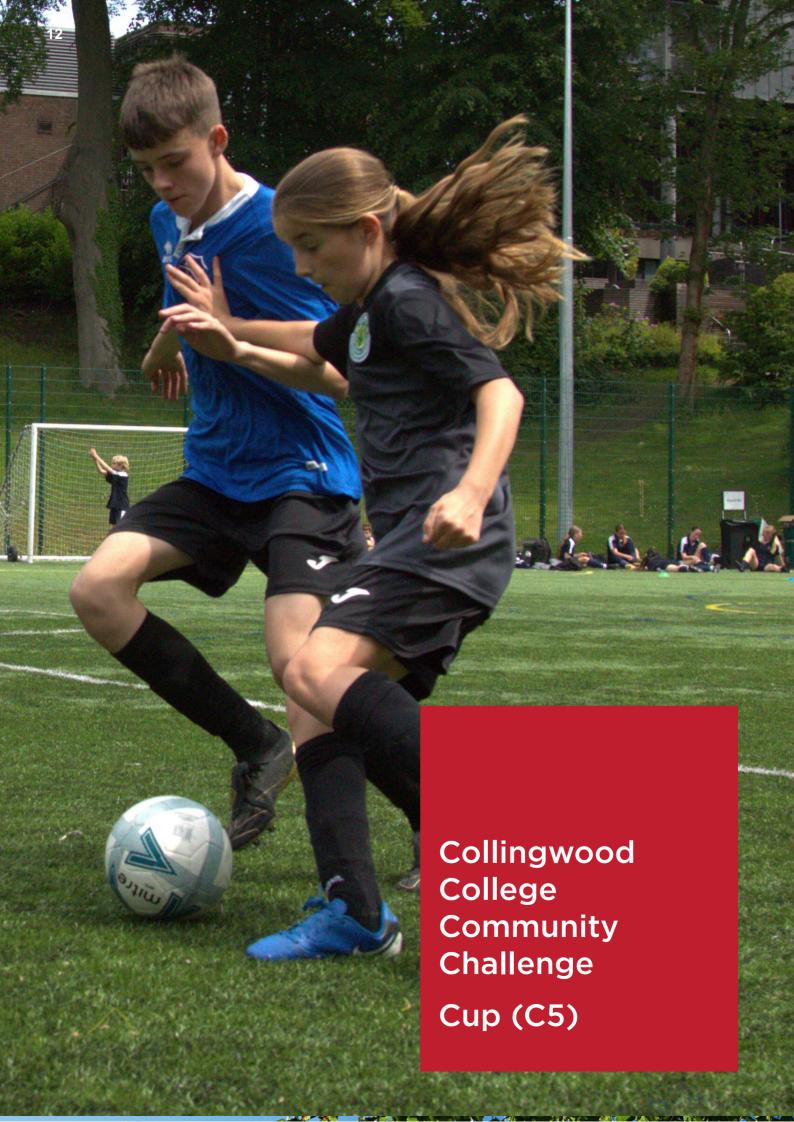
To anyone considering a similar opportunity, I can't recommend it enough. This experience isn't just about trying something new — it's about growing into yourself. It helped me reflect on where my strengths lie, where I feel energised, and what kind of working environment I want to be in. It also offers concrete evidence of professional skills that employers value: collaboration, independence, initiative, and adaptability.

Finally, I'd like to express my deepest thanks to the donors who support students with such opportunities. Without your generosity, experiences like this simply wouldn't be possible. You're not just funding student internships — you're helping us explore career paths, gain real-world skills, and contribute to meaningful projects that have a genuine social impact.



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The Collingwood Community Challenge Cup (C5) continues to serve as a powerful example of how sport and outreach can come together to inspire and engage young people in County Durham. Designed to encourage aspirations towards higher education, the tournament invites mixed-gender Year 7 and 8 teams from local schools to experience a day of football, community, and university life at Collingwood College.

This year, we were delighted to welcome students from Easington Academy, Framwellgate School, Parkside Academy, and St. Bede's Catholic School & Sixth Form College. In line with the project's goal of increasing young women's participation in football, each team included at least 50% female players — creating a vibrant, inclusive atmosphere throughout the tournament.

The day began with matches on Collingwood's 4G 'Crumb' pitch, followed by lunch in the college dining hall, guided tours of the college, and informal conversations with Collingwood student volunteers about life at university. The afternoon concluded with an awards ceremony, celebrating team spirit, performance, and participation.

The project was co-led by two Collingwood students, supported by a small team of volunteers who helped with coaching, refereeing, and hosting. Their energy and commitment ensured the day ran smoothly and remained focused on accessibility, fun, and encouragement. Thanks to your continued support, C5 remains one of Collingwood's flagship outreach initiatives - connecting students and schools with the university community in a way that's memorable, meaningful, and motivating.

#### A note from the student organiser

The tournament this year was successful and an enjoyable day overall, and it was great to see how involved the children were in every activity. A highlight was coaches approaching us after the tournament to congratulate the team on how well it was organised - and, most importantly, on how much the children enjoyed themselves. This was a great reward and showed that all the hard work paid off. I learnt a lot from organising the tournament and am really looking forward to seeing what next year's volunteers make of it. I learnt a lot from communicating with schools and organising the logistics to prepare for the tournament, such as arranging tech and materials, timetabling, gathering volunteers, and sorting meals. Hosting such an event requires loads of small tasks that all combine into one big day. I realised that even one job not done properly could affect the outcome, which pushed me to be very precise about the little things - a really valuable learning curve. I'm grateful to have led the C5 project; I was passionate about it and seeing it through has been a highlight for me. Going forward, it's also been a useful talking point in my applications outside university. Most importantly, it was a great day for the schools, and I really hope we continue supporting this tournament, so it becomes even bigger and better.











## Carl Murta Physics Third Year

When I first joined this internship, I didn't know that I'd be helping reshape an entire outreach programme. What started as a project focused on chemistry sessions for local Scout and Guide groups eventually expanded into something broader — and I was lucky to be part of that transition.

My role involved coordinating and evaluating the existing project while helping plan its rebrand and future direction. I began by reviewing previous feedback and reports, identifying areas for improvement, and discussing these in stakeholder meetings. From arranging these meetings myself to summarising action points and managing follow-ups, I gained practical skills in communication, planning, and working with multiple stakeholders.

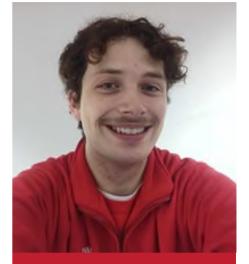
One of the key outcomes was the rebranding of the project to "STEMSG," extending its focus beyond chemistry to include a wider range of sciences. This meant researching feasible activities for different age groups, considering logistical constraints, and identifying potential new volunteers. I also helped inventory equipment previously used in the sessions — a hands-on task I genuinely enjoyed, especially after weeks of coordination and admin-heavy work.

This experience has significantly improved my communication and timemanagement skills. I became more confident managing multiple lines of communication and setting clear goals to structure my work. These are skills I'll carry with me into future roles, whether academic or professional.

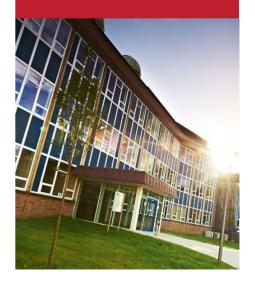
That said, the role wasn't quite what I expected. The internship description was fairly broad, and even during the interview, the exact scope hadn't been pinned down. I'd initially hoped for something more practical and delivery-based, involving hands-on science activities with young people. Instead, the work leaned heavily towards project planning and marketing. While I still found the skills I developed useful, I occasionally struggled to stay engaged — partly for personal reasons, but also because I didn't feel fully supported. Having someone outside the immediate team to speak to, perhaps in college, would have made a difference. I'd recommend building in that kind of support for future interns, as well as clarifying the nature of the role from the start.

Despite those challenges, I'm grateful for the experience. I now have a better understanding of what I enjoy in a role, and what kind of work environment helps me thrive. And I've learned that even when an opportunity doesn't go exactly as expected, there's still so much to gain.

To the donors who made this possible: thank you. Your support allowed me to take part in a project that reached young people beyond the university and gave me the chance to reflect, grow, and build valuable experience. These kinds of funded internships are vital in helping students explore new areas, gain confidence, and make an impact beyond the classroom.



I became more confident managing multiple lines of communication and setting clear goals to structure my work. These are skills I'll carry with me into future roles, whether academic or professional.



# Oliver Stewart Physics Second Year

This year, I had the opportunity to work as a casual intern on Durham University's Futures in STEM programme — an initiative designed to support sixth-form students who are interested in studying Physics, Chemistry, or Maths at university. It's a three-strand, three-week cycle programme, rotating between subject-based tutorials, mentoring sessions about university life, and independent study tasks. My role primarily involves administrative and marketing work to help the programme run smoothly — tasks like scheduling sessions, sending out reminders, and recording attendance.

It's been a fascinating experience, not just because of the organisational challenge of coordinating dozens of sessions and multiple strands, but because this programme is one I've known from the inside out. As a sixthform student, I took part in the very first Futures in STEM cohort, on the physics strand. It played a huge role in shaping my decision to apply to Durham. To now return as a student intern, working behind the scenes to deliver the programme to others, has been deeply rewarding. One of my favourite tasks so far was writing a testimonial about my experience for the website — it was a full-circle moment I never expected to have.

Through this internship, I've built a strong foundation in time management, scheduling, and digital communication tools — particularly through my use of Microsoft Teams and the management of multiple student groups. I've also learned to adapt quickly when plans change, as sessions occasionally have to be rescheduled due to tutor or mentor availability. Working closely with the programme lead and the subject coordinators has helped me better understand the behind-the-scenes challenges of running a large-scale outreach project, and I've developed communication and teamwork skills through frequent check-ins and collaborative decision-making.

One of the most valuable aspects of this internship is its flexibility and focus on development. I've had the opportunity to suggest ways of improving the programme and even sat on an interview panel when recruiting new tutors and mentors — an experience that gave me insight into what makes a strong applicant and how selection panels work. The programme recently underwent a rebrand and has plans to expand to include Computer Science and Engineering, and it's exciting to be part of something that is constantly evolving and growing.

This internship has reminded me just how meaningful it can be to give back to something that has helped you. I know first-hand what it feels like to be a sixth-form student full of questions and doubts, wondering if university is the right fit — and I also know what a difference it makes to have someone believe in your potential. Being part of this team means I now get to be that person for someone else. It's also taught me to appreciate just how different everyone's circumstances are. Whether it's a student missing a session due to family responsibilities, or a mentor having to step away for health reasons, I've learned the importance of compassion and adaptability in making programmes like this work for everyone.

Looking ahead, I would love to continue my involvement with Futures in STEM. I've already extended my internship into this academic year, and I hope to keep working with the team throughout my final year at Durham — and possibly even beyond. The programme's mission resonates deeply with me, and I feel proud to play a small part in helping others discover where they belong.

To the generous donor who have made this internship possible: thank you. Your support allows students like me not only to develop valuable skills, but to be part of something that has a real impact — on individuals, on outreach, and on the university's broader commitment to access and opportunity. I hope you know how much your support means.



As a sixth-form student, I took part in the very first Futures in STEM cohort, on the physics strand. It played a huge role in shaping my decision to apply to Durham.





#### Benjamin Laud Law Third Year

I obtained funding to pay for my subs and sporting equipment for Durham University Lifting Club, where I was part of the Powerlifting Team. The funding meant I could stay in the club for the rest of my final year, covering my subs and gym costs. It also helped me buy specialised wrist straps—important because I broke my right wrist in second year—and powerlifting shoes, which really helped with my ongoing knee problems. Because of this, I was able to keep going with the one sport I truly enjoy, even with my injuries. It gave me a proper outlet and something fulfilling to focus on outside of my studies, which I really valued in final year.

This opportunity didn't give me new skills as such, since I'd already been competing in the sport, but it allowed me to keep at it in a meaningful way. Balancing sport with uni was definitely a challenge, but one I appreciated. It taught me patience and how to persevere, especially when pushing through injury. One moment that stands out was breaking my own 130kg bench press record—even though my wrist was still recovering. The wrist supports I was able to buy thanks to the funding made all the difference.

It also helped me realise that aiming for big numbers, like qualifying for BUCS, isn't as important to me as staying healthy. I now pay more attention to how my body feels and I'm a lot more thankful for being able to train at all. For anyone thinking of applying for help, I'd say—just ask. It wasn't a massive amount of money, but it made a big difference. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to pay for subs, let alone the gear I needed.

I would absolutely recommend this fund to other students. It helped me stay involved in the only sport I really stuck with during uni. That was important to me, especially with how full-on academics can be at Durham—it gave me something else to focus on. Thanks so much to everyone who supports this fund. It helped me keep doing what I love in my final year, and I'm genuinely grateful for that.

#### Anonymous Recipient English Second Year

I obtained funding to purchase academic books for my English degree, most importantly the three Norton Anthologies that were recommended for my course. These are absolute staples in the literary field—not just for my three years at Durham, but for my wider academic and personal development beyond university. Thanks to the funding, I was able to own physical copies, which meant I could annotate them directly and engage more critically with the texts. I constantly refer back to them; they've become pillar stones in my literary learning. Without this support, I simply wouldn't have been able to afford physical copies, so I'm incredibly grateful.

Having these books in my hands—not on a screen—completely changed how I experienced the material. The anthologies cover poetry and plays across historical periods and genres, and they helped me develop a much broader understanding of English literature. I especially enjoyed the poetry volume, which helped clarify my own interests and even sparked ideas for my dissertation. I also purchased other books from my reading list, and holding those tangible copies let me connect more deeply with the texts. It gave me a much-needed break from screens, and let me engage with stylistic and formatting elements that often get lost in digital versions. The result was a richer, more truthful, and more enjoyable reading experience.

Using the Norton books again in second year confirmed just how foundational they are. They're more than textbooks—they've become treasured resources. The physicality of the books reminded me how much I love owning real books and not relying on a laptop. It reaffirmed how much I value the reading process as something immersive and tactile.

Being able to annotate as I read has helped me hone my critical voice, which is especially important as I head into dissertation writing and advanced theory work. Having these tools has made engaging with the material easier, more natural, and ultimately more fulfilling.

To other students considering applying for funding, I would say: absolutely go for it. It's helped me so much, and I'm genuinely thankful. The support can create a ripple effect—small things like owning your own books can lead to bigger, longer-term gains in confidence and academic development. Of course, I would recommend this opportunity to other students. I now treasure the Norton Anthologies and other texts I was able to buy—they've made a real difference.

A big thank you to the donors who made this possible. I really appreciate the support—especially as my family has recently gone through some difficult financial changes. My dad moved out of the family home, and my mum doesn't work, so the funding meant more than just books. It brought me happiness, and it helped me succeed. I'm truly grateful—and so are my family.



#### Steph Roarty Music Second Year

Thanks to the funding provided by Collingwood, I was able to continue my flute tuition this year — something I've pursued since I was nine years old. I had two goals going in: the first was to completely transform my technique, which had begun to limit my progress. That meant relearning fundamental things like how to position my lips, how to breathe, how to expand my lung capacity, and even how to hold the flute completely parallel to the floor. My second goal was to learn and perform Cécile Chaminade's Flute Concertino, a piece I had always admired but never felt confident enough to attempt. Working with my incredible teacher, Joo-Lee, made both goals possible — and taught me far more along the way than I ever expected.

One of the most impactful lessons Joo-Lee taught me was how to practice. In the past, I would tackle large chunks of a piece and try to perfect them in order. This often led to frustration and a constant sense of failure. Joo-Lee flipped this approach entirely. We started with the easier sections, and focused on one element at a time — sometimes accuracy, sometimes expression or dynamics. If something felt too difficult, we'd skip it and return once I had the confidence and skill to face it. Learning a piece non-chronologically was totally new to me, but it worked — and it's changed how I approach challenges more broadly, including my university assignments.

Another huge shift came in the way I hear and engage with the music. I'd never tried to memorise anything before, and when Joo-Lee first asked me to learn just four notes by heart, I practically cried — it felt impossible. But a year on, I can now memorise complex musical passages. This has sharpened my ear, improved my intonation, and helped me truly feel the music as I play. The difference in my sound is noticeable — and I've become far more aware of my own musicality.

This tuition has helped me fall back in love with the flute. It no longer feels like another subject or obligation, but something I genuinely enjoy and look forward to. I've gained so many new skills and developed as both a flautist and a musician. The lessons have also provided a stress-free, warm and welcoming space where I can grow.

One moment I'll never forget: I've always struggled with sight-reading, but one day I played through an entire Mozart Concerto — with piano accompaniment — almost flawlessly. When we finished, Joo-Lee and I just burst out laughing. I was in shock, and she was laughing with pride at my disbelief.

It's cheesy, but this year I finally realised I am actually a decent flute player. That confidence has changed everything. I'm now planning to complete my Diploma flute qualification next year — something I never thought I'd be ready for.

To anyone considering applying for support from college: don't hesitate. I almost gave up flute this year because I didn't think I could afford it, but this is exactly what the Student Opportunities Fund is for. I'm so thankful I asked — and even more thankful to those who made it possible. Your support allowed me to continue a creative pursuit that brings me joy, confidence, and a real sense of personal growth. Thank you so much.



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### Lucy May Grazier BA Education Studies Second Year

Last year, I completed my Level 1 qualification in British Sign Language (BSL), and I found it both intellectually stimulating and deeply rewarding. This year, thanks to the generous funding from Collingwood, I was able to take the next step and enrol in the BSL Level 2 course — something I wouldn't have been able to afford on my own. The funding enabled me to build on my previous knowledge, develop my communication skills, and strengthen my confidence in using BSL meaningfully.

The course ran for 20 weeks, with sessions every Monday evening at the Durham Students' Union. Each class introduced a new topic, and our tutor — who is herself Deaf — guided us through key vocabulary, gestures, and facial expressions essential for that week's theme. There was a strong focus on memory and comprehension, and we always had time to practise our conversational and receptive skills. Being taught by someone with lived experience of Deaf culture made the sessions all the more engaging and insightful. Her daughter, a CODA (Child of Deaf Adult), also supported the class and shared her own perspective — giving us a deeper appreciation for both the language and the community it serves.

Assessment was through three exams: receptive (watching a signed video and answering comprehension questions), presentational (delivering a five-minute signed talk — I chose the topic of "travel"), and conversational (a dialogue with the examiner on the theme of "eating out"). All exams were recorded for external assessment. The exams were nerve-wracking at times, but the preparation process taught me a lot about self-discipline and consistency.

This opportunity significantly contributed to my personal development. As someone with ASD, non-verbal communication has sometimes been challenging for me — but BSL has offered a new and empowering way to express myself. Practising gestures, facial expressions, and physical communication helped improve my confidence not only with BSL but also in everyday interactions. I also found myself drawn to wider issues of accessibility and inclusion, and that has shaped my values and career ambitions. I'm now a voluntary Outreach Officer for the Durham University BSL Society, where I create posts and resources to raise awareness and encourage others to take part in the course. It's been exciting to help others begin the same journey.

A particularly memorable moment came after our final exams. We celebrated with a small party at the Students' Union — bringing food, soft drinks, and music, and simply chatting and reflecting on how far we'd come. That evening reminded me just how connected we'd become as a class, and how rewarding the whole experience had been.

I've also realised that I have a real passion for advocating for people with communication-related disabilities. It's something I hope to carry forward into my future studies and career. Eventually, I'd love to complete the full BSL qualification pathway — there are six levels, followed by training to become a translator or interpreter. For now, my goal is to work towards Level 3.

To any student considering applying for funding: don't feel guilty. The support exists for opportunities like this — things that help you grow, build your confidence, and pursue what matters to you. I'm so glad I applied. This course has added something unique to my CV and even helped me secure a job; my manager said it helped me stand out from other candidates.

To the donors who made this possible: thank you from the bottom of my heart. I come from a low-income, single-parent family, and growing up, we didn't have the means for things like this. Your generosity gave me more than a qualification — it gave me direction, self-belief, and a new sense of purpose. I'm so grateful.



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#### Mani Skett Combined Honours in Social Sciences First Year

Competing in the British Gi Championships — one of the most prestigious Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) tournaments in the UK — was a huge personal milestone for me. For context, BJJ is a wrestling-based form of submission grappling where the aim is to isolate an opponent's joint and force them to 'tap out'. I travelled to Manchester with my team from 5th Element Jiu Jitsu, entering a bracket of 32 competitors and finishing with a bronze medal. I won my first two fights by armlock and the third on points. My semi-final was a slow, tactical match that ended in a referee decision against me — frustrating, but a valuable experience all the same.

Although I had competed in BJJ before, this tournament felt like a different league. The intensity — both physical and mental — was something regular training couldn't replicate. Some matches pushed me to my physical limit, but the toughest part might've been the nerves in the lead-up: the pressure, the anticipation, the constant thoughts of how things might go wrong. I lost sleep over it more than once. But stepping onto the mat and winning three matches in a row reminded me that the hard work I'd put in over months really mattered.

That first match will always stand out — it was the first time I won by submission in a competition, rather than by points. It felt like a breakthrough moment. Even the loss in the semi-final had meaning: it taught me humility and helped me reflect more deeply on my own game. In fact, I saw more improvement in the weeks after the tournament than at any other point in my BJJ journey. It made me even more determined to keep training and competing — probably obsessively.

While I didn't formally connect with professionals in the field, I met a number of other competitors. The shared sense of focus and drive was something I really appreciated. And although this experience hasn't changed my academic or post-university plans directly, it's had a big impact on how I carry myself — especially when it comes to resilience, preparation, and growth.

To any students considering applying for funding: don't hesitate. It's an incredible way to take on new challenges and develop in ways that go beyond the classroom. I'm deeply grateful to the donors and university staff who made this opportunity possible. Thank you for supporting experiences like this.





#### Amy Anne Strode Business and Management First Year

I started this academic year with zero experience in rowing, but by the end of it, I was racing at Henley Women's Regatta — one of the most prestigious events in the sport. That transformation is something I'll always be proud of, and it wouldn't have been possible without the support I received from the Student Opportunity Fund.

The funding covered race entry fees, travel, equipment, and other essential costs, enabling me to train and compete with Team Durham across the full season. I took part in some of the biggest events of the year, including BUCS Head, BUCS Regatta, and Henley Women's, all while juggling a Business and Management degree. Balancing a rigorous rowing programme — 12 to 16 sessions per week from August to July — with my studies was incredibly demanding, but deeply rewarding.

One of the most valuable aspects of the experience was learning to operate as part of a crew. Unlike most sports I've done before, rowing demands absolute unity — every movement, breath, and decision has to be aligned with the team. This challenge helped shape me as both an athlete and a teammate. As a squad, we ended the year with five BUCS medals across different boat categories, from Development to Senior 2V — a testament to our hard work and growing cohesion.

Personally, I've gained more than just athletic skills. Managing such a packed schedule taught me discipline, time management, and organisational skills that I know will benefit me throughout my time at university and beyond. Rowing also gave me the chance to develop leadership skills — whether that meant helping set the tone during prerace talks or taking responsibility in the boat during tough races.

One of my favourite memories from the year was racing in the BUCS Regatta Development Women's 8. We were all nervous — it was our first time racing that particular boat as a full crew and we hadn't had much time to practice. But the race went incredibly well. We pulled together, rowed our hearts out, and finished third. The joy and adrenaline of that moment is something I'll never forget.

This experience reminded me how valuable it is to try something completely new. University is full of unexpected opportunities, and taking a chance on rowing has shaped my year in ways I couldn't have imagined. It's helped me grow in confidence, built my resilience, and reignited my passion for competitive sport. I'm now more motivated than ever to push myself further, and I'll definitely be continuing with rowing next year.

For any student thinking of applying for funding — I couldn't recommend it more. The support made a real difference to my ability to participate in sport at a high level without being held back by financial concerns. It gave me the freedom to focus on developing as a rower and a student, and to fully commit to the sport I've come to love.

To the donors who make the Student Opportunity Funds possible — thank you. Your generosity has enabled me to take full advantage of what Durham has to offer, and your support has made a meaningful difference in my life. I'm incredibly grateful.



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#### Mirran Morrison Theology and Religion (BA) First Year

I used the funding I received to train at Bisley Camp over Easter, attending three intensive weekends at one of the most renowned rifle training sites in the world. One of these weekends was with my Durham team, while the other two I attended independently. The support I received made it possible to travel from Durham to Surrey and cover the essential costs of accommodation, living expenses, ammunition, rifle and target rental, and coaching.

The first training weekend was especially important. It gave me the chance to coach newer members of my team — a responsibility that helped build my confidence and reminded me how much I had learned. It was also an opportunity to meet other university teams and connect with members of the British Young Shooters Association (BYSA). I don't come from a traditional shooting background. I'm a disabled woman from Northern Ireland who went to an integrated school — and there are very few people like me in this sport. But weekends like this one offered me a level playing field. They gave me access to a world that can be hard to navigate alone, and the funding gave me the chance to step into it.

On the back of that weekend, I was invited to return to Bisley for two more training sessions. The first was focused on a new discipline — Match Rifle (MR). I was lucky enough to meet the MR captain during my first visit and, through him, connected with two other coaches who took me under their wing. They offered one-to-one guidance on how to shoot competitively at distances of 900 and 1000 yards — something I never imagined myself doing.

By the third weekend, I had become part of the BYSA Northern Counties team. I had dinner with my new teammates and, for the first time ever, coached myself through a full round. I scored incredibly well — a proud moment that ultimately earned me a place on the BYSA Match Rifle team. I now represent Northern Ireland, and I'm training to compete again this year.

The sport has become a major part of my life. The funding didn't just cover travel or equipment — it opened a door. It gave me the space to work around my disability, to ask for help without feeling like a burden, and to be part of a community where I could grow. I was able to purchase electronic ear protection to help me compete safely with hearing loss, and stay onsite when needed so I wouldn't have to miss out on training.

I've fallen in love with rifle shooting — and without the support I received, I wouldn't have been able to pursue it. I still have around £200 of the funding left, and I plan to use it to buy a shooting jacket that actually fits my frame — something that's especially important as a woman in a maledominated (and male-sized) sport. It will also help fund another training weekend later this year.

Since this experience, I've been elected as the first Development Officer for the Durham University Rifle Club. It's now my responsibility to help train and support new members. I'm one of the youngest and most recent additions to the team — but thanks to the confidence and skills I've gained, I've found my voice. I've learned patience, perseverance, and self-belief. And I've made friendships and found mentors who have changed my life.

There's one moment I'll always remember: coaching myself for the first time and landing a score I never thought possible. It was more than just a good day — it was proof that I belonged.

To the people who made this opportunity possible: thank you. You gave me the chance to believe in myself. I hope I can do you proud.



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## Abigail Taylor Theology and Religion (BA) First Year

I received funding for a one-month intensive Arabic language course in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. Each weekday morning, I attended four hours of language instruction, covering Modern Standard Arabic skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Wednesdays were dedicated to the Tunisian dialect and practical skills like how to write a CV in Arabic. The teaching was fully immersive — conducted entirely in Arabic — and often turned into an entertaining game of charades when words failed us. Our small class of six meant we all had the space to speak, stumble, and grow in confidence.

Beyond the classroom, I immersed myself in the local culture. One evening, the language school took us to the Roman Theatre of Carthage to see Ziara, a three-hour sensory whirlwind of Tunisian music and dance. A kind stranger beside me spent the evening patiently trying to teach me how to dance in the Tunisian way — with limited success on my part! She even tried to teach me the Zaghouta, a high-pitched celebratory vocal sound, but I never quite mastered it. Still, these moments of shared laughter and generosity made me feel deeply welcomed.

The most meaningful part of my experience, however, was how quickly Tunisia came to feel like home. I was often invited to lunch by people I had only just met — a friend's grandmother, a neighbour from the beach, a café owner who remembered my usual order after just two visits. There was one evening where I found myself singing with strangers in a café, utterly lost in the lyrics but fully present in the joy. At no point did I feel like a tourist — I felt like part of a community.

This was the first time I had ever lived alone, and I surprised myself by how much I enjoyed it. Coming from a busy shared student house, the shift to living solo in a foreign country could have been daunting — but it turned out to be exactly what I needed. I developed a stronger sense of independence and resilience, navigating day-to-day life in a culture and language that weren't my own. It gave me the confidence to trust my instincts and enjoy the freedom of finding my own rhythm.

Of course, the academic benefits were equally important. My vocabulary and grammar improved, and I became more comfortable using Arabic conversationally. But what really stood out were the honest, eye-opening conversations I had with Tunisians about their lives, their country, and how they feel seen (or unseen) by the outside world. These were the kinds of conversations that no textbook could replicate — they gave me a deeper, more human understanding of the language I've chosen to study.

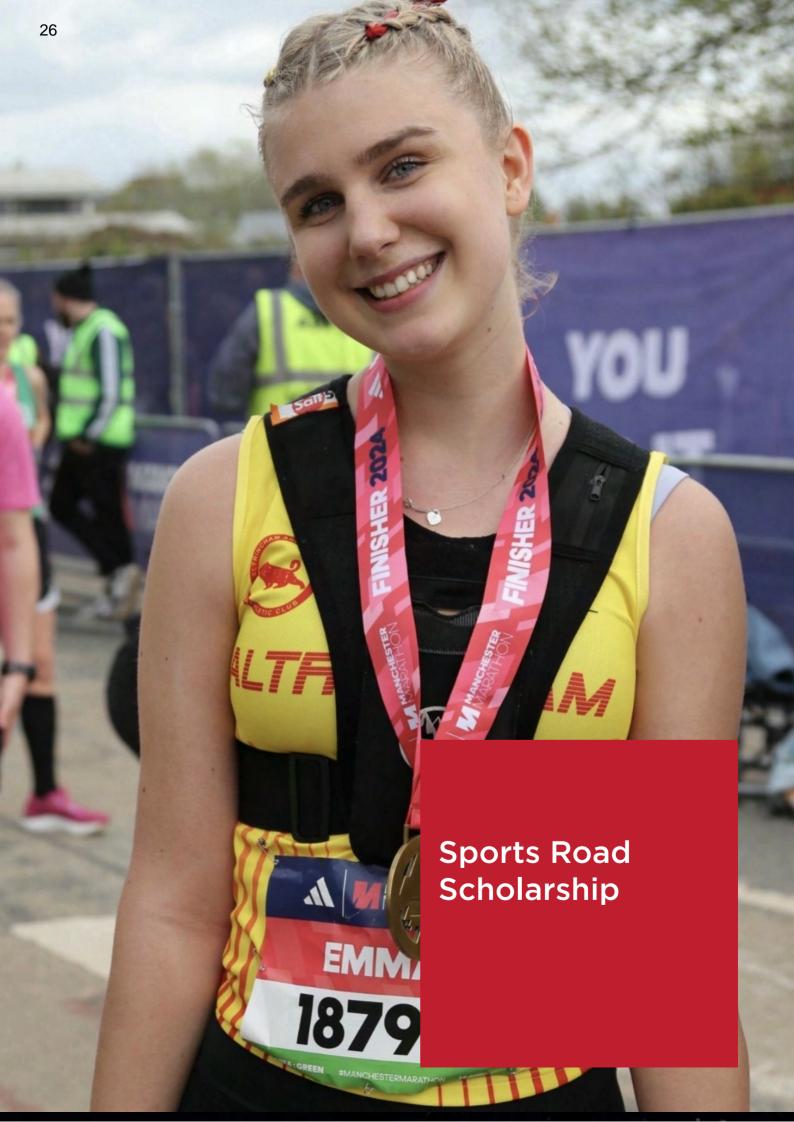
This experience has had a lasting impact on how I see the world and my place in it. I plan to return to Tunisia next summer before beginning my final year at Durham. I've fallen in love with the country, its people, and its way of life. It's also made me realise how deeply I want to continue exploring new cultures, learning languages, and connecting with people across borders. Even small details — like watching England play in the Euros while drinking mint tea instead of a pint — reminded me how joyfully adaptable life can be.

To the donors who made this possible: thank you. The impact of your generosity goes far beyond a month-long course. It gave me the chance to feel at home in a new part of the world, to grow in confidence, and to fall even more in love with the language I'm studying. You're not just funding experiences — you're shaping lives. And for that, I'm endlessly grateful.



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The Sports Road Scholarships are awarded to our excellent athletes and sports people to ensure they are able to make the most of the sporting activities and opportunities available at Durham.



#### Philip Kay Sport and Exercise Science First Year

The Sportsroad Scholarship has made such a huge difference to my life at university. I have settled into life at Durham very smoothly and my introduction to the university has no doubt been helped by the scholarship. I attended preseason which was the most perfect start to university life. Since then, I have played in all of the BUCS 1st team fixtures, and I have made the most appearances for Durham United FC.



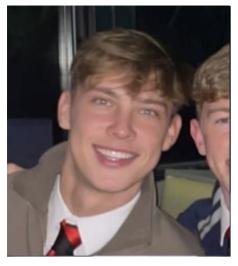
#### Katie Rutherford Geography First Year

University life so far has been an incredible experience, my course is going well and I have enjoyed the content taught this year. I have made some incredible memories with each of my teams. Recently I won the BUCS Northern Tier 3 league with DUWRFC 2s going unbeaten in all league games after winning our final game in Sheffield, having had some incredible score differences throughout the season. In the same week I also won the floodlit cup final with CCWRFC which was an incredible moment for the team.



#### Lara Battersby Finance Second Year

The scholarship has not only alleviated financial pressures but also allowed me to fully immerse myself in university life, both academically and socially. It has provided me with the freedom to focus on my studies and sporting extracurricular activities, laying a strong foundation for my future endeavours.



#### Marko Porozovs Law with Year Abroad Second Year

I came thinking it will be tough meeting new people and going away from home but I quickly came to terms with the fact that Durham, and specifically Collingwood, was the place for me. I have found a real sense of family and belonging; which I never expected coming into this. I have tried to push the boat out and participate in as much as I could, whether I was familiar with this or not. This includes things such as playing new sports I've never really played before like badminton, joining and starting to play golf and frequently attending discussions and talks from guest lecturers and other academics .



#### Liutauras Balciunas Economics with Management Third Year

Another thing the Sports Road Scholarship played a huge role in was my development as a person – with its help I was lucky enough to be able to attend interviews in London for internships and other summer programmes and in the end, I landed a Finance Internship with Nationwide. I am very excited for what the future holds and the prospects on the horizon have been possible thanks to this scholarship.



## Emma Simpson Biological Sciences Third Year

The support from the scholarship was particularly important to me due to my injury. Apart from enabling me to equip myself with appropriate footwear for distance running, to pay for society and club memberships and to travel to take part in various events, crucially it also allowed me to receive physiotherapy from a nationally renowned sports physiotherapist, who has been a great help in designing my injury rehabilitation regime and encouraging and advising me on what it was reasonable to undertake in the distance running field.



### Ione Banks - Sproxton Stagecraft technician (music studio)

When visiting Collingwood for my post-offer holder visitor day back in 2022, I knew immediately it was the college for me based solely on the pending status of the new 'Collingwood Studios'. Having worked within music studios and record labels for the past few years, continuing to exercise my passion while branching into new territories was essential to me. The opportunity to work within Collingwood Studios as a technician has far exceeded my hopes to immerse myself in the College's music scene, and has been one of the most exciting and rewarding features of my time at university so far. Not only has the studio become a place to develop my love for music production and sound engineering, but it has also become a safe haven where I can decompress and take much-needed breaks from my degree. From running sessions to recording performance projects, meeting likeminded artists and experiencing new genres, my time in this role has been my most formative as a musician.

My key responsibility this year - alongside general oversight of the facilities - has been running the Purple Radio Live Lounge sessions, which are recorded every other Sunday, and feature artists from across the university (and even a few from the wider Northeast!). This was a project I personally wanted to head due to my post as Station Manager at Purple Radio, allowing me to oversee the sessions from two managerial perspectives, and has most certainly been the project teaching me the most about my role. Whether I'm recording a solo guitarist and vocalist, a folk group of cellos and accordions, or a 7-piece jazz band, I have been committed to achieving the most efficient setup and best live sound. It has been a project motivated by personal research, be that watching One Mic setup videos to diversify my record approaches or hosting late-night solo sessions to familiarise myself with the kit, I have been incredibly dedicated to making the most of my role.

In addition to expanding my niche skillset within audio production, the role has developed my wider professional skillset as a customer-facing position which demands pragmatism, tact, and effective communication. Within the post, I interact with a breadth of personalities and production styles and must adjust my recording approach to best benefit the artist and realise their vision. This customer-facing aspect hasn't only been developmental, but enjoyable too – I thrive when building meaningful relationships, and greatly value the potential to network and occasionally collaborate within the position!

Another responsibility has been hosting tours and open days around the facilities, which are also incredibly fun; as a chance to display my own passion for the studio and for my role, tours with guests, staff, or prospective students are always light-hearted and full of pride.

Note from Joe Elliott: Ione's recorded performance shown at my leaving formal can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=bYu3eF45Oxg





Durham, and specifically Collingwood, is entirely unique for this sort of opportunity – in fact, I have spoken to friends at other universities studying music production who don't have the same level of access to creative facilities or recording opportunities as I am lucky enough to have – and I always make sure to iterate to pupils the value of these extra-curricular opportunities. As mentioned, they have been incredibly important within my university experience as a source of morale during busy or difficult periods.

Finally, my role has not only connected me with talented student bands and the local music network, but it has encouraged me personally to get involved with creative projects and performances outside of my post. This has led to my involvement in some fantastic events which will no doubt stick with me forever – singing at the Farewell Formal for our beloved Principal, Joe, for example. Here, I got to perform a song live at the dinner itself, as well as display the video that the media team and I had produced using entirely Collingwood facilities and equipment. It was an honour to be able to play this for Joe's last Invitation dinner, and I know how much he loves the project. It's safe to say more music videos are in the stars.

Overall, the far-reaching effects of this role have made me feel like an integral part of Collingwood, and that is incredibly valuable to me as someone who has gained a lot from the college's generosity and relied heavily on its support. The investment in students at Collingwood through positions like mine are what make students feel so valued and this contributes towards the incredibly tight-knit community fostered within our college family. I look forward to taking on more responsibility within the studios in future and am incredibly motivated to continue within my post in my third year at Durham.



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#### Riley Hutton - Sproxton Stagecraft technician (theatre)

My name is Riley Hutton, and I'm a second-year Computer Science student at Collingwood College. Originally from Lancaster, I came to Durham with a strong background in technical theatre and live event production — something that immediately drew me to Collingwood! Since arriving, I've been involved in tech in college and the university, and I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to contribute to college life and Durham's wider arts culture in my Student Technician role

Some highlights from this year include:

- Supporting Durham Student Theatre shows as a Duty Technician, helping with both performances and the crucial setup and get-outs.
- Providing technical support for Music Society concerts within college, with a wide range of musical styles and performers.
- Completing a three-day Rigging for the Entertainment Industry course with UK Rigging (funded by the college), gaining confidence and skills working at height with rigging equipment
- Helping build an incredible stage setup for Joe Elliott's farewell formal, with video walls, sound, and lighting.
- Assembling a new media server from scratch, integrating our cameras, pre-recorded content and video walls/projectors into one system.

Thank you for your support in facilitating this role!









#### Lily Palmer Sports and Exercise Sciences First Year

My internship, supervised by Katie Di Sebastiano from the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, focused on cancer prehabilitation and the Cancer Treatment Outcomes Prehabilitation and Rehabilitation Programme in County Durham and Darlington. This free programme supports newly diagnosed colorectal, lung, gynaecological, or head and neck cancer patients—physically and psychologically—before treatment. It offers tailored plans including nutritional guidance, exercise, emotional support, and help with smoking and alcohol reduction.

Given that many patients choose not to engage with the programme, my internship centred on understanding and improving participation in its physical activity circuit sessions. After attending these sessions and speaking with patients, I noticed that peer support—hearing from others with lived experience—was a strong motivator. This insight formed the basis of my literature review, exploring how peer support could increase engagement with cancer prehabilitation.

I also led a project with the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust to design posters encouraging participation. I interviewed patients, organised photo shoots, and collaborated with a designer. These posters are now displayed in hospital sites, helping prospective patients feel more confident about joining. A short video using the interview audio is also in development and will be presented at upcoming prehabilitation conferences.

Although cancer prehabilitation wasn't directly aligned with my original interest in sports and exercise physiology, I was immediately drawn to it. Like many, I know people affected by cancer, and contributing to this work felt meaningful. I also participated in other ongoing research within the department, which gave me valuable exposure to different topics and methodologies.

Over the course of the internship, I learned how to formulate a research question, critically evaluate literature, and write engaging academic work. The poster project allowed me to grow as a leader, build confidence in expressing ideas, and improve my interpersonal and qualitative research skills through designing and conducting interviews. Working with professionals from the NHS and Durham's Sport and Exercise Sciences Department gave me a better understanding of collaborative research environments.

The highlight of my internship was interviewing patients and hearing how these sessions impacted their recovery and confidence. Seeing their quotes and portraits on display, knowing they'll help others take that first step, is something I'm very proud of.

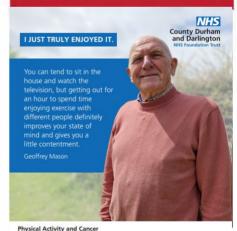
This experience gave me a new level of confidence. I've done things I'd have previously avoided—like leading interviews and sharing ideas with professionals—and realised that projecting confidence is key, even when I'm unsure. It's also shaped my future direction. I plan to continue into further study and work in research and/or coaching in strength and conditioning. For now, I'll stay involved in departmental research where I can, and actively look for more opportunities like this.

If there's a research topic that excites you, apply! This internship was a brilliant way to explore something new, gain practical skills, and work with amazing academics.

I'm deeply grateful to Katie Di Sebastiano, the Sport and Exercise Sciences Department, everyone at the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, and especially the patients who shared their stories. Huge thanks as well to the donors—your support gave me the time and space to work on something that's helped me grow both personally and professionally.



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Physical Activity and Cancer
Physical activity sessions are a key component of the Cancer Treatment
Outcomes Programme to help patients prepare for their planned treatment o
surgery (prehabilitation). As Geoffrey's experience shows, attending these

#### Oliver Stewart Physics Second Year

My internship in the Department of Astrophysics, supervised by Professor Mark Swinbank, focused on creating an immersive 3D visual and audio experience using data from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). The JWST, launched in 2022, is already revolutionising our understanding of the early universe. Using deep field images from the PRIMER survey, I worked with a region of the sky about the size of the Queen's eye on a coin held at arm's length—tiny, but teeming with information.

Around 50,000 galaxies were selected from the PRIMER catalogue. I created thumbnails using SExtractor software, calculated their xyz positions using right ascension, declination, and photometric redshifts, and loaded them into Partiview to generate a 3D 'fly-through'. This allowed us to demonstrate the staggering depth and abundance of galaxies in this small area—travelling visually further into space and back in time, approaching the earliest galaxies formed shortly after the Big Bang.

What made this project even more meaningful was its outreach goal: making the universe accessible to blind and visually impaired people. I worked with the STRAUSS project to generate audio 'sonifications' for each galaxy based on its energy spectra. These were embedded into the video so users could literally hear the universe. The final product will be released publicly for educational outreach and planetarium use.

The project enhanced my skills in research, problem-solving, and programming, particularly with Linux and Python. More importantly, it deepened my appreciation for the vastness of the cosmos and made me feel like I was contributing to something special. A personal highlight was watching the final video projected in the lecture theatre—it felt like being inside a planetarium I helped build.

I also attended weekly meetings with the research group and connected with academics at events like the AGN conference. These discussions gave me valuable exposure to postgraduate research life. A particularly memorable moment was connecting with a fellow student who is visually impaired—he gave me advice and contacts for charities that could benefit from the fly-through, making the outreach aspect even more rewarding.

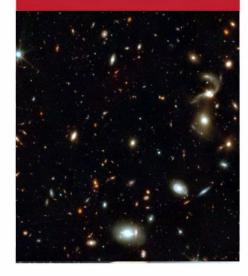
One key lesson from the project was that there's rarely a 'final version' in research. The work involved a lot of trial and error—running into issues, adapting code, testing ideas, and refining the output until we got it right. It was a big learning curve, but also hugely satisfying. This experience confirmed how much I enjoy being in a research environment. With two years left in my degree, I want to explore more research opportunities in different fields to help shape my direction. If possible, I'd love to return to this project in the future and develop it further from both scientific and accessibility perspectives.

If there's research at the university that excites you, go for it. Even if it's outside your comfort zone, it can open up entirely new paths—or even confirm what isn't right for you. Either way, it's invaluable. I'd absolutely recommend this internship. It lets you contribute meaningfully to active research, learn from brilliant people, and see the university from a whole new angle.

Huge thanks to the staff, the JWST consortium, and especially the donors. You've made a lasting impact on my personal and academic development, and I'm incredibly grateful.



I worked with a region of the sky about the size of the Queen's eye on a coin held at arm's length—tiny, but teeming with information.



#### Alexander Shin Biochemistry First Year

As a first-year student, I had no prior experience in the lab. To me, this was an issue because I wanted to engage in the actual research I was reading about in science journals and lecture material. Without lab experience, I felt like I was not practicing science, but rather commentating on it. This internship has been incredibly beneficial for my personal growth and for the aspirations and goals I've now set for myself going into second year.

I worked alongside another intern for six weeks under the supervision of two PhD students. Their expertise was starkly evident, and I was very grateful to have the chance to learn from them, ask questions, and improve as a scientist — rather than simply a science student. That summer, the lab was focused on neurodegenerative disease pharmacology: drug design, efficacy, and toxicity. The relevance of the research was a major motivator throughout six challenging but fulfilling weeks

In the latter half of the internship, I began running assays independently, writing up results in a research-grade format, and presenting weekly to the lab group. Professor Chazot offered pointed feedback on my slides and delivery, which pushed me to improve. By the final week, I was confidently running immunofluorescence assays, analysing the data, and compiling statistics. Some of my work was included in a paper now under peer review — a milestone I'm proud of.

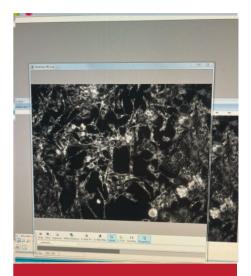
I was trained in a wide range of lab techniques, including ELISA, immunohistochemistry,  $\beta$ -gal staining for senescence, and confocal microscopy. I also practiced pipetting volumes down to microlitres, preparing solutions, and culturing neural glia as in-vitro test samples. On the data side, I used Excel to process raw outputs and gained access to software used exclusively in the lab. Most significantly, I taught myself to use RStudio for statistical analysis. Programming had always felt out of reach, but I worked on it in the evenings outside lab hours, determined to break through that barrier. By the end, I was using R to analyse my own results — a big leap in confidence and capability.

This internship also helped me secure a placement year at GlaxoSmithKline in their protein degradation lab at R&D HQ in Stevenage for 2025–2026. The technical skills and focus I developed helped me perform well in the interview, and the experience confirmed that research is where I want to focus my career.

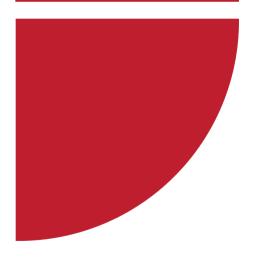
One highlight was realising I was the only intern who didn't break a single coverslip during microscopy prep — a tiny win, but I'll take it! I also loved heading to the Bill Bryson Library for write-ups in the warm Durham summer. These small moments defined the rhythm of a deeply fulfilling six weeks. Working closely with two PhD students, two postdocs, and Professor Chazot gave me insight into the daily pace of academic research. While I didn't network outside the department, the mentorship I received was invaluable. I came away from the experience not just with new skills, but with a deeper understanding of what a future in research could look like.

If you're a STEM student curious about life in the lab, I would absolutely recommend applying for a research internship like this. It's an unmatched chance to explore your interests without the pressure of exams — and to contribute meaningfully to real research.

Finally, thank you to the donors and to Collingwood College for making this experience possible. Your support allowed me to be fully immersed in the work, and I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to grow, learn, and clarify the kind of scientist I want to become.



Some of my work was included in a paper now under peer review — a milestone I'm proud of.



#### Thomas King Classics Second Year

My internship focused on a project applying modern cognitive theory to classical texts of antiquity — an emerging area within Classics. It was supervised by Andrea Giannotti and Dr George Gazis and split into two stages: first, foundational reading and development; second, the formalisation of my academic contribution. The focal point of the experience was an international conference held in Durham, which shaped the timing and structure of the internship.

To begin, I engaged in intensive reading on key concepts like conceptual metaphor theory and conceptual integration networks. These helped build a theoretical framework that I could apply to fifth-century Athenian tragedy — the project's case studies. Through meetings and discussions, I refined my understanding and began developing my own critical perspective on how cognitive theory functions as an interpretive lens. I argued for its value not just in the insights it produces, but in how it reorients the process of literary analysis.

Midway through the internship, I assisted with the academic conference held in Durham. I was responsible for taking minutes during each session and had the opportunity to chair a talk by Professor Edith Hall — a highlight of the entire experience. The conference brought together scholars from across Europe and exposed me to a wide range of academic approaches to cognitive Classics. I then formalised my contribution to the project by writing a review of a key chapter central to the research. This allowed me to consolidate my understanding, offer critique, and articulate my own position within the ongoing debate — all of which contributed to the development of the wider research.

As someone hoping to pursue postgraduate study, this internship gave me an early taste of academic life. My Greek improved significantly. More broadly, I became more confident in structuring arguments, synthesising ideas, and writing persuasively. Receiving regular, detailed feedback helped refine how I communicate ideas, and engaging with complex scholarship each day improved my reading efficiency and stamina — something I know will serve me well in the future.

A highlight of the internship was chairing Professor Edith Hall's lecture at the conference. Introducing such a respected academic to an audience of scholars was a nerve-wracking but exhilarating moment, and one I'll always remember — especially because she later pulled me aside to praise my delivery. I've also come to understand that for me, careful, patient reading is key. While I'm not the fastest reader, I now see the value in going slowly and thoroughly — especially when tackling unfamiliar material, like the cognitive theory I was exposed to during the project. Many of the researchers at the conference had spent years working on this approach, and I wanted to ensure I was engaging with their work on its own terms.

This experience has shaped the direction of my dissertation, where I plan to apply one of the cognitive theories from the internship to a Latin text. This approach hasn't been systematically explored in that context yet, which is exciting. I'm also now developing a thesis proposal that builds on this work as part of my MA applications. One of the scholars I met at the conference has even invited me to a masterclass in Thessaloniki next year — a rare and exciting opportunity. It feels as though this internship has opened several doors, and I'm looking forward to seeing where they lead.

I would absolutely recommend this kind of opportunity to others. If you enjoy academic work or want to explore research in your subject, it's a brilliant way to develop professionally and personally. The fulfilment I gained from working on something meaningful — and being treated as a contributor to a real research project — was incredibly motivating. I'm deeply grateful to the donors whose generosity made this internship possible.



As someone hoping to pursue postgraduate study, this internship gave me an early taste of academic life.



#### Aletta Mantle Geography Second Year

During my six-week internship, I worked alongside Dr Rebekah Harries on a project analysing sediment discharge events in the Rio Teno, Chile. These extreme sediment events pose a risk to nearby communities living at the confluence of the Rio Teno and Rio Claro, so understanding what drives them is crucial.

My work began with using satellite images to map glacial change in the region. This helped me develop my coding skills, particularly in Python, as I edited and used scripts to automate the selection and processing of satellite images. After this, I gathered and calculated sediment and discharge data from the Rio Teno, covering the period from 1979 to 2018.

I then used MATLAB to carry out a principal component analysis on the sediment data. Once the components were identified, I used a Gaussian Mixture Model to cluster the sediment discharge events. I followed this by analysing antecedent data to explore possible drivers behind each cluster. It was a challenging process, but also one that gave me a much deeper understanding of statistical methods, coding, and how real-world data is used in hazard research.

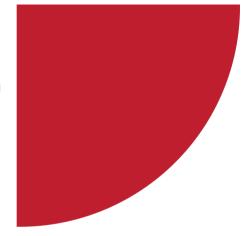
Before this internship, I had never edited a Python script or worked with MATLAB. By the end of it, I was confident not only editing code but writing my own, troubleshooting issues, and using it to create figures. It was a steep learning curve, but a really valuable one, and I know these skills will be useful for my third year. I also improved my use of Excel, especially for building and applying more complex equations.

Beyond technical skills, I gained a lot in terms of mindset and confidence. I used to struggle with resilience and would often ask for help quickly. Now, I feel more comfortable trying to solve problems independently first. A moment that really stood out was a Friday when Rebekah and I spent ages trying to fix a coding issue in order to generate a graph. I kept offering suggestions and we worked through it together — the elation when it finally worked was amazing. It made me realise how much I had learned and that I could genuinely contribute useful ideas.

This internship has also shifted my thinking about the future. I'm now seriously considering a master's degree, which wasn't really on my radar before. The experience gave me a clearer picture of what research work looks like — and how much I enjoy it when it's a topic I care about.

To anyone considering applying for a funded opportunity like this, I would say definitely go for it. It's a great way to develop academically, strengthen your CV, and earn some money over the summer. Thank you so much to everyone who made this internship possible. It's such a fantastic programme, and I feel incredibly lucky and honoured to have been a part of it.

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### Jessica Allen Biological Science First Year

I worked in Professor Heather Knight's laboratory, which focuses on the genes and mechanisms involved in plant freezing tolerance. I was supervised by Dr Irabonosi Obomighie and final-year PhD student Morgan Lee, whose projects explore how components of the plant cell wall and specific protective proteins contribute to freezing resistance. It was a fantastic opportunity to contribute to current research while developing a wide range of new technical and scientific skills.

My work involved growing and caring for Arabidopsis plants under sterile conditions and then carrying out a variety of molecular biology techniques to assess their genetic differences and stress responses. I performed DNA extractions, PCR, gel electrophoresis, and sequence analysis to genotype mutant lines. I also explored alternative methods like Touch-and-Go PCR and gradient PCR to troubleshoot primer design, learning that even when methods don't succeed, the process teaches resilience and deeper understanding.

As my confidence grew, I progressed to RNA extraction, cDNA synthesis, and Q-PCR — techniques used to assess gene expression in different plant lines. This required careful preparation and precision, improving my attention to detail in the lab. I also carried out stress assays, including root growth and chlorophyll degradation on mannitol and salt plates, to explore how drought and freezing tolerance might be linked. I then used electrolyte leakage measurements to assess freezing damage and compare levels of cell injury at different temperatures.

By the end of the internship, I had a much clearer understanding of how data is gathered and analysed to identify genetic systems involved in freezing tolerance. It was rewarding to contribute to a real research project and see how each technique built toward answering a bigger scientific question. One of my favourite moments came after running Q-PCR four times, trying to refine the process. Finally getting results that worked felt like a huge win — and proved to me that persistence pays off. It's easy to feel like something's gone wrong if a result isn't perfect the first time, but I've learned that part of research is trial and error, and that's okay.

This experience has really improved my practical lab skills, but it's also taught me how to manage my time, prioritise tasks, and approach experiments more independently. I now understand how different techniques fit together and how one result informs the next step. It's given me a more holistic view of the research process and helped me become more confident when facing challenges.

I've also come away from this internship with a stronger interest in plant genetics and a clearer sense of direction. I've adjusted my second-year module choices to focus more on plant science, and I'm now seriously considering switching to the integrated master's programme so I can pursue research further. Working alongside experienced researchers has been inspiring and made me excited to explore this field more deeply. I had the chance to attend a seminar by a researcher from Valencia, who is now collaborating with Durham scientists on improving citrus fruit yields. It was a reminder of the broader impact of this kind of work and how global collaboration plays a role in advancing science.

To anyone considering an opportunity like this, I'd strongly recommend it. You gain practical skills, confidence, and clarity about your academic interests — all while being supported financially and professionally. It's a unique chance to try something new and build experience that really makes a difference on your CV and future applications. I'm very grateful to everyone who made this internship possible — especially as a first-year student. This experience gave me the opportunity to put years of learning into practice, build new skills, and explore a path I now know I want to follow. Thank you to the donors who made this possible.



From participating in sports and social events to attending valuable career development programs, your contribution has significantly enriched my university experience.



# Benjamin Craig Philosophy, Politics and Economics First Year

Undertaking the Collingwood Research Internship gave me the opportunity to work alongside my statistics professor from my first-year module, Economic Methods. I took on the role of a research assistant on his working paper, which explored how introducing the internet within a population changes cultural perceptions. As the paper was being written from scratch, I was responsible for doing preliminary reading on the topic — reading through 62 papers and narrowing them down to a shortlist of six. We considered various case studies, including detailed work on Finland, Germany, and China, but ultimately decided that the most interesting insights could be found in the developing world.

The paper we chose to follow most closely was Hjort & Poulsen's 2019 study on the impact of broadband access in 12 coastal African nations between 1999 and 2013. Reusing their broadband and geographical data, I cross-compared it with political and cultural survey responses from the Afrobarometer dataset — including questions on attitudes toward gender and religious freedoms.

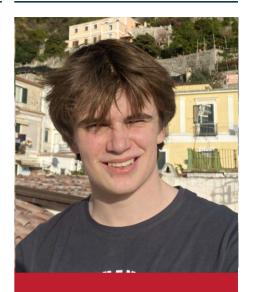
I sorted and cleaned all this data using STATA. Although I'd never used the software before, I worked through Hjort & Poulsen's code to understand their method, which turned out to be a great introduction — especially since we've now started using STATA in second-year workshops. Unfortunately, my time on the project ended just as the data was ready for analysis, so I didn't get to see it through to completion. Still, I was solely responsible for identifying a research niche and setting a clear direction for further work, which was really rewarding.

This opportunity helped me decide that I wanted to pursue an economics dissertation within my degree. As a result, I've opted into the preliminary economics dissertation module this year. It also gave me a better understanding of how tools like STATA are used in real academic research, and how important it is to organise and direct a project from the outset. Doing all the preliminary reading helped me appreciate how early decisions in research shape the entire outcome, and gave me a sense of what dissertation work might feel like.

One of the highlights of the internship was being told to pick a paper to replicate, entirely on my own direction. It was the first time I'd been trusted to steer a research project in this way, and hearing that the paper I'd found had strong academic potential was a really encouraging moment. I also realised that while I'm not sure I want to pursue academic research long-term, I do want to work in an economics-related role in the public or private sector. It was interesting to see how economic theory can be applied to real-world questions like cultural shifts, and it gave me a clearer sense of what work in this field can look like beyond lectures and exams.

For anyone thinking about applying for one of these internships, I'd definitely recommend doing some research first — try to find something that lines up with your interests and goals. It's a great opportunity to explore a subject more deeply, and it can be really helpful when trying to decide on your academic or career direction.

I would absolutely recommend this opportunity to other students. Especially in first year, when summer work can be uncertain, this is a chance to do something productive, get paid, and gain experience that actually means something. It's also a window into what academics and professionals in your subject actually do — and whether that's something you might want to do too. I'd like to thank Dr Diego Marino Fages for giving me the chance to take on so much independent work under his guidance. And thank you as well to Sid Patrayani and the donors of the Student Opportunities Fund for making this possible — I'm really grateful to have been part of it.



I quickly came to terms with the fact that Durham, and specifically Collingwood, was the place for me.



# Zara Hossain Politics and International Relations First Year

As part of my Collingwood Research Internship, I worked on a project focused on climate governance in Southeast Asian countries. My main task was to research and put together a literature review, which would form the basis for a broader piece of academic work. This involved reading through a large number of academic journals, narrowing the list to the most relevant texts, and writing detailed notes and summaries for my supervisor.

This process allowed me to explore a part of the world I hadn't studied in my degree so far. Southeast Asia, and the Global South more broadly, is often overlooked in international relations, so it was exciting to gain new insights into the region's geography, political systems, and environmental challenges. The work helped me understand how Southern and Northern states approach climate change differently — particularly in relation to emissions responsibility, measurement, and accountability. I learned about regime types, governance histories, population demographics and how these factors intersect with environmental policy. This gave me a more nuanced view of how colonisation and imperialism have contributed to the North-South divide.

The project also helped me improve my time management and organisation. I was responsible for meeting deadlines and structuring my own workload, which made me realise how much I enjoy planning out my tasks and being proactive in long-term projects. Meeting regularly with my supervisor helped me refine my understanding of the topic and gave me space to share ideas and receive constructive feedback. It was reassuring to realise that I could contribute something valuable, even in an area that was completely new to me.

The research process itself taught me how to build a literature review, search effectively, and identify the most useful parts of academic sources. I also gained confidence in working independently and managing research tasks with minimal direction. These are skills that will help me in second year, particularly in my Politics in East Asia module and my upcoming research project. Having already explored environmental governance in the region, I now feel much better prepared to approach the module with curiosity and context.

One of the key things I've learned about myself is that I'm good at handling open-ended projects — I like the independence, and I've discovered an interest in the politics of the Global South that I hadn't explored before. It's made me more confident in pursuing modules and topics that aren't immediately familiar.

To any student considering an internship like this, I would definitely recommend applying — even if the project isn't directly in your field. You might end up learning something completely new that you really enjoy. It's also a great way to develop academic research skills and gain confidence in thinking critically about your subject.

I'd like to thank Collingwood for this opportunity. It's helped me grow academically and personally, and it's made me realise just how much more there is to explore in my degree.

The Sports
Road
Scholarship
played a huge
role in my
development
as a person.



#### Oliver Hershon Liberal Arts Second Year

For my internship, I conducted research as part of the 'Musicians, Audiency, and Attunement' project, focused on the band 'Transition' — a Taiwanese pop band made up of two Bristolian brothers. It's a unique setup, and we explored footage from a Transition performance at Van Mildert College in 2022. The aim was to investigate how musical sound, performers' crowd engagement strategies, and the physical space interacted with each other during the performance.

Over the summer, we set out to convert a front-facing video of the audience into a birds-eye view — something that would allow for a much clearer analysis of group movement and crowd behaviour. Analysing individuals from a flat, front-on angle wasn't practical, so I took on the technical challenge of motion-tracking and spatial mapping. I began by trialling a few motion-tracking options before settling on ViTBAT, a piece of software that extracted screen coordinates for audience members. From there, I wrote a Python script that could transform those coordinates into birds-eye positions, accounting for distortions, limited field of view, and occlusion.

After what must have been thousands of iterations and a whole lot of troubleshooting, I finally got a script that worked — converting the original footage into something we could actually use to analyse audience interaction. The result has already been shared at the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) conference, which is really exciting to think about.

This opportunity helped me develop a mix of technical and interpersonal skills. Before this, I knew almost nothing about Python, but I had to learn quickly and push myself to figure things out that even professionals thought might be unachievable. More than just learning a programming language, it was the process of failing and finding workarounds that helped me grow. That sense of perseverance and problem-solving is something I'll carry with me.

I also learned a lot from working alongside a professional musician. It didn't feel like a typical hierarchy — we worked as equals on our parts of the project, and I had ownership over the technical side. That independence taught me to manage my time effectively and communicate my progress clearly in regular check-ins. Summarising complex work into manageable updates was a skill in itself.

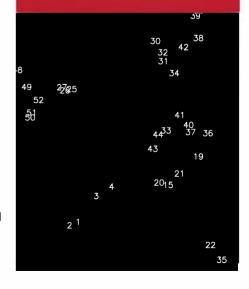
The most memorable moment was definitely the breakthrough when the script finally worked. After so many failed attempts, it was hard to tell if I was close or way off. When it finally clicked, it was one of the most satisfying moments I've had in any academic project. I also realised that I might be a better problem-solver than I gave myself credit for. Some of the workarounds I developed weren't conventional, but they got the job done — and taught me that sometimes creative approaches really do work.

This internship made me think more seriously about academic research in music. I'm starting to see musical academia as a viable option, and this experience has opened that door for me in a way I hadn't considered before. To other students, I'd definitely suggest asking around your departments to see what projects are in the works — there might be something out there that really excites you. And I'd absolutely recommend an opportunity like this. Unlike traditional internships, you genuinely feel like your work is contributing directly to something real, and that's incredibly motivating.

It was such an honour to work on something — in a field — that I'm genuinely passionate about. Your contributions made that possible, and I can't thank you enough. I really hope that someday I'll be able to pay it forward.



It was such an honour to work on something — in a field — that I'm genuinely passionate about. Your contributions made that possible, and I can't thank you enough.



#### Zachary Scott-Paul Geoscience First Year

Thanks to the generous support of the donors, alongside grants from the Durham Expedition Society and the Royal Geographical Society, I took part in a month-long field expedition to Gran Canaria. Over the course of the trip, we circumnavigated the island and sampled macroalgae at 41 coastal sites to analyse nitrogen pollution levels via isotope analysis. We collected nearly a thousand samples representative of the coastal environment, which were later processed in Durham's Stable Isotope Biogeochemistry Lab (SIBL) under the supervision of Professor Darren Gröcke.

Our goal was to compare current nitrogen isotope data with samples collected during COVID-19, when tourism on the island was virtually non-existent. By comparing the two datasets, we hope to assess the direct impact of the tourism industry on coastal nitrogen pollution. The findings may contribute to broader conversations around environmental degradation and the importance of sustainable tourism.

The fieldwork experience helped me build a range of practical and transferable skills. I developed techniques in environmental sampling and lab processing, as well as confidence working in a research setting. Beyond the scientific work, planning and coordinating the logistics of a project this size honed my time management and teamwork skills. Navigating tough conditions, schedule changes, and unexpected challenges brought out the value of collaboration and leadership in a very real way.

Working in the SIBL lab with Professor Gröcke introduced me to mass spectroscopy and isotope analysis — techniques I'd only previously encountered in theory. This hands-on experience, along with exposure to field experts and lab specialists, broadened my understanding of environmental geoscience and gave me new confidence in working within professional research settings. Even language skills came into play; after a month of interacting with locals across the island, my Spanish definitely improved!

One of the most memorable moments of the expedition came early on. On the second day, we were up before 5 a.m. to reach a beach before low tide. Everyone was tired and morale was low — until we witnessed the most beautiful sunrise across the sea. It was a moment of calm and perspective in the middle of a demanding schedule, and it reminded me of the beauty in this kind of work.

This experience also showed me how resilient I can be. Working through unpredictable field conditions, adapting to new tasks, and leaning on the support of my team taught me a lot about the importance of perseverance and shared effort. It's made me even more excited about pursuing a career in field research — something I now feel more committed to than ever. I'm even considering using the project as the basis for my dissertation.

For other students, my advice would be: ask everyone and don't be discouraged by rejection. It took several conversations with professors and many setbacks before this expedition became a reality. But the result was more than worth it.

Without a doubt, this has been the highlight of my academic journey so far — not just for the skills gained, but for the fun and friendships made along the way. I'm incredibly grateful to the donors who supported this opportunity. Collingwood students are fortunate to have this kind of support available, and for me, it's made a truly transformative difference.



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#### Ishak Ege Saykan Computer Science Second Year

During my internship, I created a comprehensive setup script for installing and configuring several sensors — including Kinect v1, Kinect v2, and MYNT EYE S — on a ROS2 Linux environment. This involved writing step-by-step instructions to create a workspace, clone the relevant repositories, and run the installation scripts effectively. The team uses ROS2 systems to communicate with hardware like sensors and robots, and I had no prior experience with this architecture. I spent a couple of weeks learning ROS2 from scratch and figuring out how I could contribute meaningfully to the project.

This meant diving deep into Linux and learning how to integrate multiple systems seamlessly. A major challenge was that many of the sensors didn't have wrappers for ROS2, so I had to write my own. In some cases, the sensor SDKs weren't compatible with the Linux version I was using, and I had to adapt existing ones to make them work. Much of my time was spent solving this problem, and it turned out to be one of the most valuable learning experiences of the entire project.

Through this process, I developed a wide range of new skills — from working with Linux and mastering ROS2 to effectively using open-source software. I also learned a great deal about problem-solving in real-world scenarios. This internship gave me a realistic introduction to the life of a programmer: facing complex problems, adapting to unfamiliar tools, and working independently while still contributing to a larger goal. It was incredibly satisfying to persevere through the challenges and get things working.

One of the more amusing (and terrifying) moments was when I looked up one of the sensors I was working on and discovered it cost £10,000! It definitely made me handle it with extra care. I also realised through this experience that I'm more resourceful than I thought. Even with limited familiarity, I was able to pick up entirely new technologies, build a strong understanding of them, and construct working systems from scratch. It's made me more confident in my ability to tackle unfamiliar problems in the future.

This internship has reinforced my passion for programming and problem-solving and has made me even more certain that I want to work in tech. It also sparked a deeper interest in Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCI), an area I'd like to explore further. I was lucky to have some helpful conversations with Professor Toby Breckon during this time, and the whole experience has helped shape my goals for the next few years.

For anyone considering an opportunity like this, I'd say absolutely go for it. Just try to find something that excites you and, if possible, is compatible with your summer schedule — especially if you're looking to work remotely. I had a great time with this project, and I'd recommend it to anyone who's curious, motivated, and ready to learn.

Finally, I'm incredibly grateful to everyone who made this internship possible. Your support has not only helped me build technical skills but has also encouraged me to keep exploring and stay curious about what's possible in this field. Thank you!



This internship gave me a realistic introduction to the life of a programmer: facing complex problems, adapting to unfamiliar tools, and working independently while still contributing to a larger goal.



#### Benjamin Hughes Computer Science Second Year

In the summer, I worked with Professor Toby Breckon's team in the Computer Science Department, I focused on enhancing the robotics research infrastructure by integrating sensors—LiDAR, GPS, and thermal cameras—into the Robot Operating System (ROS). This involved configuring the sensors, synchronising their data, and ensuring they operated cohesively. I also documented the process to make the system replicable for future use. This hands-on work gave me valuable experience with complex robotics tools I wouldn't usually encounter in a standard academic setting.

Collaboration was a key part of the internship. I worked alongside other interns with different skillsets, and together we refined our systems based on feedback from the research team. Presenting our work and responding to questions helped me communicate technical ideas more clearly, and the teamwork element pushed me to stay flexible and efficient in a fast-moving research environment.

Sitting in on research meetings gave me insight into broader topics such as anomaly detection and autonomous navigation. Observing how researchers approach cutting-edge challenges helped me better understand the scope of visual AI and robotics, and gave me a clearer picture of what a future in research might involve.

A highlight was tagging along with Professor Breckon on various errands—an unexpected but memorable window into the day-to-day of a research career. It showed me that success in this field isn't just about technical skills but also about adaptability and problem-solving in unexpected situations.

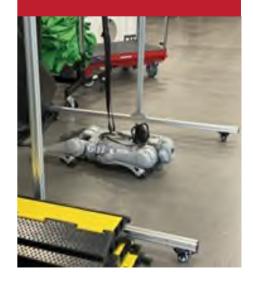
This experience confirmed my interest in robotics and computer vision and has made me seriously consider postgraduate study in the field. I've also realised I thrive in collaborative, problem-solving environments and enjoy the technical challenges that come with applied research.

To other students, I'd say: take every opportunity you can. Even if you're unsure how it fits into your long-term plans, the experience will teach you something valuable. I'd especially recommend reaching out to lecturers whose modules you've enjoyed—it could lead to something more than just classroom learning.

I'm incredibly grateful to Professor Breckon and his team for treating me like a real contributor, and to the Collingwood staff and donors who made this experience possible. Thank you for supporting such a meaningful opportunity!



To other students, I'd say: take every opportunity you can. Even if you're unsure how it fits into your long-term plans, the experience will teach you something valuable.



#### Danial Maqbool Computer Science First Year

This funding allowed me to dedicate my summer to a research internship focused on amnesiac flooding—an area within computer science that explores how information can be shared efficiently in networks where devices periodically forget received messages. The opportunity enabled me to co-author a paper on the topic, and without the support of this grant, I would not have been able to fully commit to this work over the summer.

At the beginning, I found the pace and complexity of research quite daunting. I had to adapt quickly to working with formal proofs and the level of precision expected in academic computer science. With guidance from my mentor, I developed a deeper way of thinking analytically and learned how to approach proofs more systematically. One of the most exciting challenges was building a Python simulator for the algorithm we were studying. It was difficult translating theory into something functional, but also incredibly satisfying. Along the way, I learned how to debug code, troubleshoot independently, and adapt when things didn't go as planned.

Beyond the technical learning, the experience taught me how to collaborate more confidently and communicate my ideas clearly. I found myself becoming more comfortable asking for feedback and contributing to discussions, which helped me feel much more at ease in an academic setting. Finishing the research paper was a major highlight—it felt like a huge personal milestone and something I could genuinely be proud of.

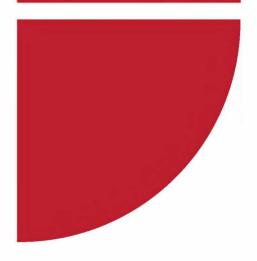
This experience also gave me a much clearer sense of direction. I now know which side of academia I would pursue if I decide to continue in research, and the skills I gained—especially around time management and independent problem-solving—will stay with me. I've also realized that I need to be more conscious of how I manage deadlines in future projects.

To other students, I'd say: apply for everything you can. These opportunities are not only a great way to gain experience, but they're also productive and fun. I especially recommend it to first-years—when it can be harder to secure a traditional internship, this kind of experience can really boost your confidence and your CV.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone who made this internship possible—especially the donors and my professor. I would never have considered a PhD before, but thanks to this opportunity, I'm now thinking seriously about a future in academia and contributing to the development of technology.



The opportunity enabled me to coauthor a paper on the topic, and without the support of this grant, I would not have been able to fully commit to this work over the summer.



#### Nathaniel Lansing Engineering First Year

Thanks to the funding I received, I was able to work with the Durham University Solar Car team to investigate how the aerodynamic efficiency of the vehicle could be improved, focusing particularly on features that could be realistically implemented in future models. The project began with a literature review of aerodynamic components commonly used to reduce drag, from which I selected a feature—wheel housings—that appeared to offer the most potential benefit. Using SolidWorks to model the geometry and Ansys Fluent for computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulations, I adapted a 3D model of the 2023 Durham University Solar Car (DUSC) to test the aerodynamic performance of this component. The results showed a 10.5% reduction in the coefficient of drag, indicating a significant improvement. I also explored two other components—a canopy fin and trailing edge flaps—which showed benefits at a basic level, but were ultimately less effective than the wheel housings.

The research wasn't just theoretical. I had to ensure the aerodynamic features I designed were practical and could feasibly be implemented on the vehicle. This made me think not only like a designer but like an engineer—balancing performance improvements with real-world constraints. Alongside the simulations, I used Fidelity Pointwise for mesh generation, and regularly collaborated with other members of the team to align my designs with ongoing work on the car. I was also responsible for a full technical report summarising the project and its findings, which I hope will be useful for future team members as the design evolves.

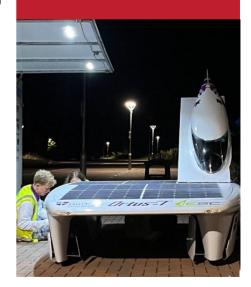
One of the most exciting parts of the internship was joining the team at the 2024 European Solar Challenge in Belgium, a 24-hour endurance race held on a former Formula 1 track. Seeing the car in action and engaging with other solar car teams gave me a much broader perspective on the engineering challenges and innovations involved in sustainable racing. I was able to talk to engineers and enthusiasts from across Europe and connect the work I had done in simulation to the performance of the real vehicle.

This project was my first experience writing a formal university research report, and I gained hands-on experience with several professional engineering tools and software packages. Beyond the technical skills, it also taught me a lot about working collaboratively. The team environment required careful time management, communication, and sometimes taking the lead on design decisions. I realised through this that I'm especially drawn to the analytical side of engineering and aerodynamic theory, and this has helped shape my future career interests. I've long considered a career in motorsport, and this internship has not only strengthened that interest but also helped me build connections and experience in the field.

I'm incredibly grateful to the donors who support the Student Opportunities Fund and to my supervisor, Professor Sims-Williams, for making this project possible. The skills and experiences I've gained have been invaluable for my development as an engineer and have given me greater confidence as I think about life after university. I would strongly recommend this opportunity to any student considering it—especially if you're excited about getting hands-on with a project that goes beyond what you learn in the lecture hall.



Thanks to the funding I received, I was able to work with the Durham University Solar Car team to investigate how the aerodynamic efficiency of the vehicle could be improved.



#### Anna Worledge Health & Human Sciences First Year

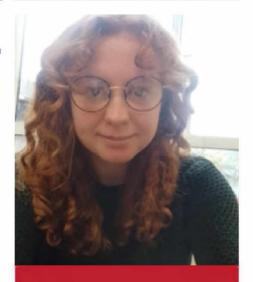
I began my internship on July 8, 2024, with limited experience in research but a lot of enthusiasm for possibly pursuing it after graduation. I joined the Medical Humanities Lab under the guidance of Dr. Laura Mazzoli-Smith and Pip Hardy, who research digital storytelling in healthcare—looking at how facilitators support people in crafting meaningful, personal stories. These stories aren't just educational tools in medical training; they often have therapeutic value too. You can actually view some of the digital stories facilitated by Pip on Patient Voices:

#### https://www.patientvoices.org.uk/

The research took a qualitative approach, using open-question interviews. Over the course of the internship, seven interviews were held, each lasting about two hours. I contributed to three main areas: helping shape the interview questions, editing transcripts, and analysing responses to find key themes. Every Monday morning, we met to discuss our progress and share ideas. Watching how Pip and Laura adapted their approach based on what emerged from the data was a great learning experience, and I was encouraged to offer my own insights too.

One area where I made a meaningful contribution was in identifying themes around AI. Some participants felt AI could help with facilitation, while others stressed the importance of the human element. It was exciting to see a point I'd raised become part of the wider discussion. I also conducted literature searches and wrote a review—challenging but rewarding given how little work exists on digital storytelling facilitation in healthcare. It pushed my reading stamina and showed me how much groundwork goes into meaningful research.

Watching the interviews gave me fascinating glimpses into people's lives. I especially appreciated the honesty of facilitators sharing moments when things hadn't gone to plan—it made the work feel very human. I've realised how excited I am by the idea of storytelling, and I'm now exploring its deeper, even evolutionary roots for my dissertation. This experience has confirmed that research is something I want to pursue, and I'd really encourage others to step outside their departments and explore interdisciplinary work. Most of all, thank you to the donors and everyone who made this possible. These six weeks have made a lasting impact on me.



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#### Isabelle Dodd Liberal Arts Third Year

Thanks to the Student Opportunities Fund, I was able to travel to New York City and perform in the finals of the ICCAs—a few months that I will never forget. I joined Northern Lights A Cappella this year, and we kicked off our competition season with a brand-new set. It wasn't all smooth sailing—we went through four different versions of our set before deciding to arrange Do Your Thing, which completely changed our style and approach. After winning the semifinals in London, we started planning our trip to the States!!!

The trip itself was one of the highlights of my time at Durham. The funding I received enabled me to do so much more than just get to the competition—it allowed me to immerse myself in a city that I've always dreamed of performing in. We were lucky enough to rehearse for two days in the Lincoln Centre, which gave us an incredible insight into the professional performing arts world. Seeing students from some of the top music, dance, and acting institutions around us was hugely inspiring. As someone who dreams of performing on a Broadway stage, stepping into rehearsal spaces used by some of my favourite performers made that dream feel a little more real.

Another highlight of the trip was seeing the brand-new musical The Great Gatsby, starring Jeremy Jordan and Eva Noblezada. The show was stunning, and meeting the cast at the stage door afterward was genuinely surreal. It's now my favourite musical—I can't stop listening to the soundtrack!

And then, of course, there was the competition itself. Northern Lights has already given me so many performance opportunities across the UK, but this was something else entirely. Performing on a Broadway stage at the Town Hall Theatre was exhilarating (and nerve-wracking!) but an unforgettable experience.

It also gave me the chance to see how different the American A Cappella scene is from ours, which was fascinating from a performance and creative perspective.

Being able to perform in an international competition was an eye-opening experience. It not only expanded the places I've performed in but gave me the chance to meet performers across the US and Canada who are also aiming for careers in musical theatre. We shared stories, techniques, and tips we've picked up in training, which was so valuable. I also got to work with professionals like Ben Bram—the man behind all the arrangements in Pitch Perfect! Watching how he worked with us on ensemble singing was incredible and has definitely influenced the way I think about vocal performance and group dynamics.

This trip massively boosted my confidence. I was incredibly nervous to perform on a Broadway stage, but doing so reminded me that I'm capable of much more than I sometimes give myself credit for. It helped confirm that this is the industry I want to be in, and I've since decided to pursue a career in musical theatre—not just in the UK, but internationally. This autumn, I'll be heading to LAMDA to begin an MA in Musical Theatre, and I know this experience played a big role in shaping that path.

To any student thinking about applying for funding—just go for it!! There is no experience too big or too small. If it has the potential to support your growth or your goals, it's 100% worth it. This trip was genuinely life-changing, and I'm so thankful to have had the opportunity to learn, perform, and grow alongside some of my closest friends. Whether it's with Northern Lights or another opportunity entirely, if you ever get the chance to go abroad—seize it!



### Nicklaus Lau MSc Management

The funding provided me with financial security during the trip, allowing me to keep my focus- as Musical Director of the group - on putting on our best performance on stage, which resulted in one judge awarding us 154 out of 155 points.

I found the trip incredibly enriching as I was representing an entire country and had earned the right to compete internationally. High-calibre venues and professionals supported our preparation, and being in one of the most musically prominent cities in the world allowed both myself and the group to grow as musicians. Visits to renowned musical staples such as Birdland Jazz Club made this a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I was able to further develop my musical directing skills and nurture my journey as a musician, surrounded by people and settings that were artistic hubs—such as New York Town Hall (a Broadway stage) and the Lincoln Centre. Our appearance at the international final helped cement my position in the scene and has opened up a world of opportunity, as others around the world are now commissioning my work and musical insight.

Very high-level professionals in the a cappella and music scene were present at the event, and we were able to connect during the post-finals gathering, paving the way for future collaborations.

A moment I'll never forget was standing at the top of the Empire State Building, overlooking a city skyline that my group and I had worked so hard over the past year to reach. I've learned my value as a musician, arranger, musical director, and individual in the industry, and I will take these skills and new networks forward in my career. This experience has shifted my career path to focus more on the music industry and scene—I've now taken up a part-time position at a leading a cappella-related company in the UK.

To other students considering applying for funding: consider how it can change the opportunity for the better and be sure to give back any way you can. This was absolutely a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Without your support, I would not have been able to experience my time in NYC the way I did. I thank all who supported me and have since given back equally to the university society through my effort and contribution.

\*\* Since the above reports were submitted, two more Collingwood students were supported through the Student Opportunities Fund in 2024-25 to continue their journey with Northern Lights. This year, the group not only retained their UK Championship title but went on to place third at the World Finals of the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella in the United States. This remarkable achievement stands as a testament to how donor support continues to open doors for talented students to grow, perform, and thrive on the global stage. We look forward to sharing a full student report from this year in due course\*\*

More info here: https://brnw.ch/21wSmR3



# Ranunthiya Pochanukul MA Conservation of Archaeological and Museum Objects

Being part of the Durham University Dance-Sport Society (DUDT) this year has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my time at university. As a complete beginner to ballroom and Latin dance, I had no idea what to expect when I joined, but the journey has been incredible. Thanks to the funding I received, I was able to fully participate—attending structured lessons and practice sessions, travelling to competitions across the UK, and growing both as a dancer and a person.

My dance partner, Rebecca Tellem (also from Collingwood), and I took part in regular practices designed for all levels, from beginners to intermediates. We threw ourselves into every opportunity and found the experience both challenging and joyful. With support from our coaches and teammates, we built not only our technique and performance skills but also a strong friendship. I now consider Rebecca one of my best friends, and I owe that to DUDT.

Over the course of the year, we competed at major university competitions including Nottingham Varsity, NUDC in Leeds, IVDC in Blackpool, and the Manchester Spring Competition. Some of the standout results include 1st place in the Off-Beat category at both NUDC and IVDC, 2nd place in the NUDC team match, and reaching the semi-finals in multiple Latin categories in Manchester. At the national-level IVDC competition in Blackpool, we ranked 23rd for Beginners Waltz and joint 11th for Beginners Quickstep—a huge accomplishment for two first-year dancers.

Dancing has not only given me technical skills but also taught me discipline, teamwork, resilience, and how to handle nerves under pressure. I've learned that personal growth doesn't just come from academics—it also comes from putting yourself out there, trying something completely new, and committing to it. Representing Durham at national competitions, performing on stage, and being part of such a passionate and welcoming team has been life-changing. Without the funding from Collingwood College and its alumni, none of this would have been possible. Dance can be an expensive pursuit, and your support has helped cover essentials like shoes, competition entry fees, travel, and accommodation.

To any students thinking about applying for funding: don't hesitate. Whatever your interest—whether it's research, sport, the arts, or volunteering—these opportunities can shape your university experience in the most unexpected ways. I know I'll carry the memories, lessons, and friendships from DUDT with me for a very long time.

Thank you again, from the bottom of my heart, for making this possible.



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## Daisy Jackson Psychology

The funding I received from Collingwood College was crucial in supporting my participation in the prestigious Henley Royal Regatta as a member of the Durham University Rowing Team. The Henley Royal Regatta is one of the most renowned rowing events in the world, attracting top teams from across the globe. Competing at such a high level is a dream for many athletes, but the associated costs can be prohibitive. The financial support from the College allowed me to cover essential expenses such as travel, accommodation, and entry fees—costs that would otherwise have been a significant barrier to my participation.

In addition to covering logistics, this funding enabled me to fully commit to my training regime in the lead-up to the regatta. The rigorous schedule—including early morning water sessions, strength and conditioning workouts, and technical coaching—required a high level of dedication and focus. The College's support ensured that I could concentrate fully on improving my performance and representing Durham at the highest level of competition.

This opportunity has significantly contributed to my personal development, particularly in enhancing my resilience, discipline, and leadership skills. Participating in the Henley Royal Regatta played a crucial role in preparing me for the GB U23 trials, where I progressed to the final stages. This was a transformative experience that demanded peak physical fitness, mental toughness, and technical refinement. Preparing for both Henley and the trials required deep commitment and effective time management to balance the demands of elite rowing with academic responsibilities.

I also found myself developing strong leadership skills, often motivating and supporting teammates through challenging moments. The lessons learned and skills acquired have not only propelled my rowing career forward but will also benefit my academic and future professional journey.

My most memorable moment was the entire week at Henley with my teammates, especially the intense training throughout the summer that led up to it. Through this opportunity, I realised my capacity to push beyond my limits—both physically and mentally. I discovered a new level of resilience and determination within myself, particularly in high-pressure situations, and that's given me greater confidence in my abilities both on and off the water.

This experience has also influenced my goals for the year ahead and beyond. My success at Henley and in the GB U23 trials has motivated me to continue competing at a high level, with the aim of selection for the GB rowing team. Academically, I'm now even more focused on managing my time between studies and sport, and I'm seriously considering a career that combines my passion for rowing with long-term opportunities in the field of sport.



I encourage other students to seek funding for opportunities that align with their passions and long-term goals. Plan your application carefully and explain clearly how the funding will help you achieve meaningful outcomes. These experiences can be transformative, offering personal growth and opening doors that might otherwise remain closed.

Absolutely—I would highly recommend this opportunity to other students. It offers vital financial support and provides access to experiences that can shape both personal and professional development. Competing at this level and facing new challenges has been invaluable, and the impact goes far beyond the event itself.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the donors and staff who made this opportunity possible. Your generous support has had a profound impact on my journey, allowing me to grow as both an athlete and an individual. Your commitment to supporting student development is truly inspiring, and I am incredibly thankful for the chance to pursue my goals because of your contributions.

## Daisy Pank Chinese Studies

The funding I received played a crucial role in enabling me to pursue high-level training and competition with the England Mixed Open team in the run-up to the Touch World Cup. As the youngest female in the squad, I was regularly travelling to two-day training camps every three weeks, alternating between Nottingham and London. These weekends were intense — packed with structured Strength and Conditioning programmes, repeated fitness tests, and high-pressure drills designed to sharpen both technical skills and team coordination. Being surrounded by athletes with multiple England caps was incredibly challenging, but also inspiring. I learned so much from simply observing their discipline and absorbing their tactical awareness. It pushed me to raise my own game — not just on the pitch, but off it too.

Being able to attend these camps without the constant stress of travel and accommodation costs made a huge difference. It meant I could focus entirely on my performance, knowing I had the support to be present and prepared. Every session was an opportunity to grow — not just physically, but mentally. I didn't make the final 16 for the Touch World Cup, but the experience itself has shaped me profoundly. The rejection hurt, but it also fired me up. It made me more determined to keep pushing and to come back stronger next time. I've realised that sometimes setbacks are what really fuel progress.

One of my highlights was a weekend in Nottingham when we scrimmaged against the Women's Open team. I managed to score a try — though it was the kind of try that only works because everyone around you has played their part perfectly. It was a collective win, and one of the most satisfying moments of the whole experience. Playing alongside and against international athletes constantly pushed me to adapt, think faster, and trust my instincts more.

This journey taught me some important things about myself. I've always wanted to succeed, but I hadn't realised how much pressure I was putting on myself to keep up with older, more experienced players — especially when I was still adjusting to life at university. I've learned that it's okay to make mistakes, that confidence can make or break your performance, and that overcommitting doesn't make you stronger — it makes you burnt out. I'm now far more intentional about how I manage my time, and I've started focusing on finding balance between sport, studies, and recovery.



All of this has filtered into my role at Durham too. As co-captain of the 1st team next year, I've been bringing everything I've learned — the drills, the mindset, the game awareness — to help develop our squad. I'm passionate about growing the sport within the university and creating a team culture where we support each other the way I experienced at England Touch.

I'm incredibly grateful to Collingwood and the donors who make opportunities like this possible. Without their support, I simply wouldn't have been able to take part. What I've gained isn't just a stronger skill set — it's a deeper understanding of who I am as an athlete and a person. Thank you for investing in that.

#### Qin Xi Wong PhD in Physics Second Year

As a final-year PhD student in Physics, I've often been immersed in scientific research, but this year I decided to take a different kind of intellectual challenge: learning Japanese. Thanks to partial funding from the Collingwood Student Opportunities Fund, I was able to enrol in the elementary Japanese course offered by the Centre for Foreign Language Study. This support enabled me to take my first real step toward a long-standing goal — not just to study the language, but to more deeply engage with Japanese culture, which has fascinated me for years. During my undergraduate studies, I spent time supporting Japanese transfer students from Teikyo University as they settled into life in Durham. Later, as vice-chair of the Anglo-Japanese Society, that cultural connection only deepened.

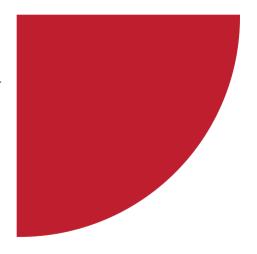
Before the course, I'd dabbled in self-study, but I found it difficult to stay consistent or build a strong foundation. The structure of a formal course made a significant difference. That said, it was anything but easy. Japanese grammar — especially its sentence structures and verb conjugations — was completely unlike anything I'd learned before. Pronunciation was another hurdle, and listening exercises were frustrating at times because my ears weren't used to the unique sounds. Balancing my research with language study also made consistent practice a challenge.

Still, it was in those moments of frustration and slow progress that I grew the most. I realised that setbacks didn't mean failure — they were part of the process. There were days when it felt like I was going in circles, making the same mistakes over and over. But then came a breakthrough: during one lesson, I answered every question correctly. It was a small win, but it reminded me that my efforts were paying off, and it gave me the clarity I needed to plan how I would continue learning once the course ended.

This opportunity has had a genuine impact on my personal development. I've learned how to be more patient with myself and how to persist even when things feel difficult. Language learning has also made me more comfortable with uncertainty — something that has translated to greater confidence in other areas of my life. Most importantly, I've come away from this experience with a renewed sense of curiosity and resilience. If I continue at this pace, I may even be able to pursue work opportunities in Japan post-graduation — a possibility that feels more real now than it ever did before.

I'm incredibly grateful to the donors who make this fund possible. This wasn't just a language course for me - it was a chance to grow, to challenge myself, and to take meaningful steps toward a dream I've held onto for years. Thank you for supporting students like me in such tangible and transformative ways.

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#### Catherine Cowper International Relations First Year

Thanks to funding from the Collingwood Student Opportunities Fund, I was able to participate fully in both Collingwood Hockey and Collingwood Woodplayers during my first year at Durham. These societies shaped my experience in ways I didn't anticipate — from building friendships to growing in confidence and developing as a performer and team member.

While I initially joined both groups, my focus gradually shifted more towards Woodplayers as I began prioritising DU Hockey over college-level sport. This transition turned out to be a blessing. Being involved in Woodplayers was transformative. I performed in our Freshers' Showcase, singing both solos and duets in the Mark Hillery Theatre, which remains one of my most memorable experiences at Durham. That evening introduced me to some of my closest friends and led to further opportunities — including being asked to sing at the Collingwood Invitation Formal.

My involvement in Woodplayers gave me the confidence to apply for an executive role, and I'm now proudly serving as Vice-President. I've also started organising Open-Mic nights at Collingwood for charity — something I would never have imagined doing before this year. The experiences I've had, both on and off stage, have helped me grow not just as a performer, but as a leader. Performing in front of large audiences pushed me out of my comfort zone and gave me the self-belief to pursue roles I once thought were out of reach.

This journey taught me so much about the power of saying yes to new opportunities. I learned how much I enjoy being part of a creative team, how fulfilling it is to perform and collaborate, and most importantly, how important it is to back myself even when I'm nervous. The growth I've experienced in confidence, resilience, and teamwork has been immense—and I owe it, in large part, to the chance this funding gave me.

I'm so thankful for the support I received. University can be financially overwhelming, and this opportunity meant I didn't have to miss out on the things I love because of cost. For anyone considering applying — especially those unsure whether they'll be eligible — I would absolutely encourage you to do it. If you set out clearly how the funding would support your goals, it can genuinely change your university experience.

Thank you again to the donors and all those who made this possible. This has been a truly unforgettable year, and I'm so excited to continue building on everything I've learned.



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### Ashkan Rezazadeh MSc. International Business Management

Thanks to the support of the Student Opportunities Fund, I was able to take part in the International Study Tour at ESADE Business School in Barcelona, Spain — a truly transformative academic and cultural experience. The core of the programme was a consulting project, where I worked as part of a student team to develop a market expansion strategy for a startup ski company. Applying the theories we had learned in class to solve a real-world business challenge pushed me to think critically, collaborate effectively, and approach problems with creativity and structure. This hands-on work helped deepen my interest in consulting, giving me a tangible sense of what it means to deliver value to a client in an international business context.

Alongside the project work, we visited companies such as HP and Freixenet, taking part in tours and conversations with industry professionals. One of the most memorable visits was to a replica of HP's original wooden garage — a small, humble space filled with early photos and memorabilia that powerfully illustrated how innovation can begin in the unlikeliest of places. The experience was both inspiring and grounding, reminding us of the passion and persistence behind many great companies.

We were fortunate to present our final recommendations to company executives and receive their feedback, which was both validating and immensely instructive. Meeting professionals like Joan Riera, a seasoned entrepreneur and our lead lecturer at ESADE, as well as HP's Xavier Llobera and Quim Tomas, advisor to our client company Husta Skis, made the project feel real and high-stakes. These interactions gave me the chance to not only learn from experts but also expand my professional network in a meaningful way.

Throughout the study tour, I grew immensely — not only as a student but also as a global citizen. The experience challenged me to adapt quickly to unfamiliar situations, communicate across cultures, and manage the pressures of a real client brief. I gained confidence in my ability to problem-solve in complex, fast-moving environments, and it reaffirmed my interest in pursuing a career in international business strategy and consulting. I've come away from the programme with a stronger grasp of the challenges businesses face when expanding into new markets, and a better understanding of how to navigate them.

Beyond the academic and professional lessons, this experience gave me moments of reflection and discovery — about how I work best, how I handle uncertainty, and how much I value cross-cultural exchange. I've returned with fresh energy and clarity, and I now plan to tailor the rest of my degree around courses and projects that build on this experience.

I would absolutely recommend this opportunity to other students. It offers so much more than classroom learning — it's a rare chance to learn through doing, connect with professionals in your field, and immerse yourself in a new cultural and business environment. To the donors and staff who made this possible, I am deeply grateful. Your support enabled not just a trip, but an experience that has left a lasting mark on my academic journey and professional aspirations.

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#### Emily Davis Classics First Year

Being part of the DU Sailing Club this past year has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my time at Durham. As a member of the third team, I had the opportunity to participate in a number of away events and regattas, including the BUCS competitions, which were both incredibly competitive and enriching. However, being involved at this level comes with a substantial financial burden. Sailing is an expensive sport — not only do we travel across the country for multiday events, but the costs of accommodation, gear, boat maintenance, and kit quickly add up. The funding I received through Collingwood's Student Opportunities Fund made it possible for me to take part in these experiences without having to constantly worry about the financial strain. It made such a difference in allowing me to remain fully involved in a sport that means a lot to me.

Before joining DU Sailing, my background was primarily in fleet racing, and I had only ever sailed single-handed boats in Bermuda. The move to team racing in double-handed dinghies was a steep learning curve, but one I was excited to tackle. I quickly had to adapt, not just to new equipment but to a different style of racing altogether — one that demanded clear, strategic communication and coordination with a partner. Over time, I became more vocal and more confident in my decision-making, and I developed a stronger understanding of boat mechanics and performance. These skills have also helped me grow as a leader, and I'm proud to say I've been selected to serve as Bosun for the DU Sailing Executive in the upcoming academic year.

One of the standout moments from this year was our trip to Glasgow for the BUCS Fleet Racing event. Competing in unfamiliar waters with strong tides and currents pushed me far beyond my comfort zone. It was the first time I had to truly rethink my sailing approach to suit the conditions — and it paid off. That trip also brought with it a surprise highlight: we were invited to a ceilidh, where we learned traditional dances and enjoyed incredible music in a vibrant, joyful atmosphere. It reminded me that sport is as much about community and culture as it is about competition.

This experience has taught me a lot about resilience. There were stretches where we had events back-to-back over several weekends, and it was physically and mentally exhausting. Balancing sailing with academic deadlines was no easy feat, but I didn't pull out of a single event — because I knew my team was counting on me. That sense of accountability and my ability to persevere through the pressure showed me I'm more capable than I'd previously believed.

Looking ahead, this opportunity has made me even more committed to continuing with DU Sailing in the next academic year. I know that when things get tough — financially, emotionally, or logistically — there are systems of support in place at Collingwood that I can rely on. And that reassurance has made a world of difference. I'm excited not just to keep racing, but to take on a leadership role and support others in the club, especially incoming sailors who may be navigating similar challenges.

To the donors and everyone who helps make the Student Opportunities Fund possible — thank you. Your support genuinely changed my experience this year. I don't think I'd still be sailing if it weren't for the help I received. It gave me hope and reminded me that I'm not alone. I'm endlessly grateful.



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# Emma Spanton Natural Sciences Second Year

Spending eight weeks in Lusaka, Zambia as a netball development officer with Sport in Action was the most eye-opening and fulfilling experience I've had. Thanks to the generous funding support from Collingwood's Student Opportunities Fund, I was able to reach my fundraising goal and take part in this incredible project. Every weekday, my placement partner and I worked directly with volunteer coaches at local hubsites, running development sessions and delivering coaching workshops. These sessions were often challenging, but they were filled with joy, laughter, and a real sense of community. Watching the kids we worked with grow in confidence and skill over time was beyond rewarding.

As part of a small team of netball officers, we designed and delivered three coaching workshops to a group of around 25 local coaches. Each workshop included both classroom-based learning and practical sessions outdoors, covering the fundamentals of coaching, defensive techniques, and how to teach basic skills. The aim was to give coaches the tools to continue leading sessions independently after the programme ends. By the time they complete all six workshops, they'll receive certification—a small but significant step for grassroots sport in their communities.

What made the experience truly special were the relationships we built. Off the court, I had the privilege of being invited into coaches' homes, cooking and sharing meals like shima (their national dish), and spending time with their families. We also hosted our own "British Night," where we cooked classic meals for our Zambian friends, played games, and danced together. These cultural exchanges created unforgettable bonds and helped me see just how powerful sport can be in bringing people together across backgrounds.

Living in Zambia also came with its own set of lessons. With 13 student volunteers from the UK across football, netball, basketball, and media, we all stayed in the same house, cooking, cleaning, and adapting to a completely new way of life. It was a far cry from home comforts, but the challenges only added to the sense of camaraderie and personal growth. I've come back more adaptable, resilient, and sure of myself. I realised that I'm far more socially confident than I had assumed—connecting with new people and communities felt natural, and energising.

One memory I'll always hold close is from a tournament at my hubsite, Mtendere. Just before the games began, Sport in Action's national netball coordinator, Gideon, presented three full sets of netball dresses to the young girls playing. Seeing them light up with pride as they stepped onto the court in proper kit was deeply moving—the energy that day was electric, and I'll never forget it.

This experience has inspired me to stay involved with Sport in Action through Durham next year. I want to keep supporting this work and help future volunteers benefit in the same way I did. To anyone considering applying for funding or a college-arranged opportunity—go for it. These experiences change you in the best way. And to the people who made this possible—thank you. Your support helped create something that will stay with me for the rest of my life. I'm truly, deeply grateful.



What made the experience truly special were the relationships we built. Off the court, I had the privilege of being invited into coaches' homes, cooking and sharing meals.



## Udayasree Sadasivuni LLM- International Trade and Commercial Law

The funding I received made two incredible experiences possible—Pre-Moot in London and the Vis Moot competition in Vienna. While the Law School provided some support, it was the additional help from Collingwood College that made the full experience possible—covering essential costs like visa application fees, travel to and from London and Vienna, and accommodation in both cities. Without this, I wouldn't have been able to fully participate. I'm deeply grateful not just for the financial assistance, but for the way it removed background stress and allowed me to immerse myself in what turned out to be a genuinely transformative journey.

In London, I had the chance to engage with barristers, attorneys, and legal professionals from across the globe. These conversations offered new perspectives on how arbitration is practiced in different jurisdictions and gave me insight into the nuances of international dispute resolution. What made it even better was experiencing all of this with my team—we constantly learned from each other and from the professionals we met.

Vienna was the heart of the experience. For seven days, we competed in multiple rounds of hearings before rotating panels of arbitrators. The energy was intense, and the strategic preparation before each round was both demanding and rewarding. I was proud to see how well the team adapted under pressure and how every single round contributed to their growth. We'd debrief in the evenings—sometimes exhausted, sometimes elated—but always ready to improve for the next day. Exploring the city at night together, attending impromptu socials, visiting museums, and bonding over shared challenges made it all the more unforgettable.

Some of the most meaningful moments happened off the competition floor. I attended networking events designed for student coaches, professors, and arbitrators—spaces that felt intimidating at first, but turned out to be rich with insight and generosity. One night, I stood in for a professor who couldn't attend and found myself in a room of legal experts and PhD students. That evening became one of the most intellectually stimulating experiences of the trip. I also met a professor from the University of Vienna whose work heavily shaped my dissertation topic. Our conversation brought a new depth to my research and remains one of the highlights of the entire journey.

There was something truly special about being surrounded by so many people who care deeply about arbitration. I came away from Vienna not just with stronger professional skills and a broader network, but also with lasting memories, renewed motivation, and a clearer sense of purpose. This was more than a competition—it was a life-changing experience that I'll carry with me throughout my career.



I came away from Vienna not just with stronger professional skills and a broader network, but also with lasting memories.



#### Abhishek Murali MSc Business Analytics

The support I received from the Student Opportunities Fund played a pivotal role in helping me take two major steps toward building my career as a business analyst. With the funding, I was able to pursue two globally recognised certifications: the IIBA Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP) and the Microsoft Power BI Data Analyst (PL-300). These certifications not only added credibility to my CV but also gave me the kind of practical knowledge and technical skills that I can already see transforming the way I approach projects in my MSc and beyond.

Preparing for the CBAP was rigorous but incredibly rewarding. It challenged me to think more strategically about stakeholder needs, business requirements, and the overall architecture of effective problem-solving in real-world business contexts. I found myself learning to evaluate situations with a deeper level of analysis and becoming more confident in how I communicate business needs and solutions. Alongside this, the PL-300 certification helped me sharpen my technical toolkit, especially around Power BI. I went from knowing the basics to being able to build powerful dashboards that tell compelling data stories. There was a real moment of joy when I completed my first interactive dashboard—I saw data I'd been staring at for hours suddenly make perfect sense, beautifully visualised and ready to support decisions.

The most meaningful part of this experience was not just the technical progress I made, but how much I learned about myself. Balancing certification study with academic work pushed me to manage my time with more discipline than ever before. I realized how motivated I am by curiosity and the satisfaction of solving complex problems. At the same time, this experience helped me see how adaptable I can be when diving into new tools or unfamiliar territory. I genuinely enjoyed the process, which has only confirmed that business analytics is the path I want to follow after graduation.

Along the way, I connected with people who've been in the field for years—through forums, study groups, and webinars—and learned so much from their insights and feedback. These interactions helped me go beyond the textbooks and understand how business analysis and data tools are applied in the real world. I also gained a better sense of the kinds of roles and industries that excite me the most, which will shape my job search going forward.



I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity. It's made a tangible difference in my confidence, capabilities, and direction. I'd especially like to thank Sid Patrayani and Claire Connor at Collingwood College for all their support and encouragement throughout this process—their kindness and practical help truly kept me grounded and motivated. I'm also deeply thankful to the donors behind the Student Opportunities Fund, whose generosity empowers students like me to pursue professional growth that might otherwise remain out of reach. This support didn't just help me get certified—it helped me take a leap toward becoming the kind of analyst I hope to be.

### Dominic Newton Mathematics Third Year

Over the past year, the support I received from Collingwood College enabled me to push my limits in rowing, culminating in the unforgettable experience of racing in the first Eight at the Henley Royal Regatta. This prestigious event marked the peak of a season filled with intense preparation, discipline, and teamwork. The funding I received covered crucial costs such as travel, accommodation, and equipment—allowing me to fully commit to training and competition without the added pressure of financial strain. Representing Durham University at Henley was a huge honour, and the atmosphere, intensity, and scale of the regatta made it a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Our crew's journey to the quarter-final included one particularly unforgettable race—beating Princeton University. Competing against such a well-known and respected US institution and coming out ahead was a moment of real pride and validation for all the work we had put in. Beyond the physical achievement, what made the experience so meaningful was the sense of unity and shared purpose within the crew. Being part of the first Eight required absolute trust, coordination, and resilience, and I learned to rely on others just as much as I pushed myself.

This opportunity had a huge impact on my personal growth. It taught me discipline in how I trained, how I managed my time, and how I handled setbacks. I've become better at structuring my time and have developed a stronger work ethic, both on and off the water. I also discovered the extent of my mental resilience—learning how to push through fatigue and self-doubt, and how to stay focused even under pressure. It helped me understand that I'm capable of more than I often give myself credit for, and that real growth happens at the edge of your comfort zone.

Though the opportunity didn't directly influence my future plans after graduation, it has undoubtedly shaped how I approach challenges. I've also come to value the power of shared effort—how people working toward a common goal can achieve more together than they could alone. While I didn't formally connect with professionals in the field, being part of the wider rowing community at Henley gave me the chance to observe elite-level athletes and learn simply by being immersed in that environment.



To students considering applying for college funding: don't hesitate. If there's something you're passionate about, commit to it fully and let that drive show in your application. These opportunities are about more than the activity—they're about the growth, memories, and confidence that come with doing something that challenges you. I'd absolutely recommend this to others—rowing has given me some of my most meaningful university experiences, and it wouldn't have been possible at this level without Collingwood's support.

To everyone who made this experience possible—thank you. Your generosity allowed me to pursue my sport at a high level and gain so much in return. I'm truly grateful to have been given this chance.

#### Luke Godfrey Nicholas Nelmes Second Year

Thanks to the generous support from Collingwood's Student Opportunities Fund, I had the life-changing chance to volunteer in Kenya with Abiero Girls' Empowerment (AGE) and briefly work with the Kenya Wildlife Service. This experience gave me the opportunity to make a tangible difference in communities that truly need support, while also pushing me far outside my comfort zone and helping me grow in ways I never expected.

My time on Mfangano Island, located in Lake Victoria, South-West Kenya, was focused on volunteer teaching with AGE, an incredible charity working to empower girls through education in an area where poverty, child marriage, and teenage pregnancy are all too common. The school I volunteered at, Wasamo Girls' Secondary School, is the only girls' boarding school on the island and operates with extremely limited infrastructure and resources. On arrival, I was thrown in at the deep end — my first lesson wasn't even in maths (which I'd been preparing for), but in history. I was handed a textbook and asked to teach the history of Johannesburg to a class of 22 girls, with no plan or experience. I just tried to stay one page ahead of them! From that moment onward, I adapted quickly and eventually found my footing, mostly teaching Form 2 maths to girls aged 15–16.

The final four weeks before summer exams felt especially high-stakes. I wanted to make a real difference in such a short time, and I'm proud to say the students scored 80% on the topics I taught. I also learned how to mark 60 exam papers—an experience that gave me a newfound appreciation for teachers everywhere. Every day brought a new challenge, whether it was coming up with creative lesson plans using minimal resources or giving motivational talks during open-air assemblies. The girls were inspiring, resilient, and eager to learn despite all the obstacles they faced. It was a privilege to stand in front of them each day.

After leaving the island, I spent a short but memorable period with the Kenya Wildlife Service, working at Nairobi National Park. I helped monitor safari trucks to ensure they weren't speeding, going off-road, or putting wildlife at risk by allowing tourists to step out of their vehicles. Being in the park from 6am meant I got to witness the wildlife at its most peaceful — lions, rhinos, and even a lion cub sleeping beside its mother. That image is one I'll treasure for the rest of my life.

This trip helped me grow in countless ways. I've become more adaptable, more confident in public speaking, and more self-reliant. Teaching in a completely unfamiliar environment, with very little support, showed me just how much I'm capable of when I step up. I learned to think on my feet, manage a classroom, and communicate across cultures. It also helped me realise how much joy can be found in simplicity and community. Mfangano Island reminded me that connection, not possessions, brings true fulfilment.

Since returning, I've found myself seriously considering working abroad in the future. This experience opened up a new world of possibilities and made me realise how much more there is to learn—and give—beyond the UK. To any student thinking about applying for funding, my advice is: have a clear, achievable plan, start early, and build strong relationships with your host organisations. The letter of support I received from AGE was, I believe, a vital part of my application.

To the donors and everyone involved in making the Student Opportunities Fund possible—thank you. You enabled me to not only contribute to a cause I care deeply about, but also to discover new parts of myself. This experience was transformative in every sense of the word, and I am deeply grateful.



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#### Lily Palmer Sport and Exercise Sciences First Year

This year, thanks to the support of Collingwood's Student Opportunities Fund, I had the extraordinary privilege of representing Great Britain as part of the U20 Women's Ultimate Frisbee Team at the World Junior Ultimate Championships (WJUC) hosted by the World Flying Disc Federation in Birmingham. This journey, which began with a taster session during Freshers' Week, turned into a whirlwind year of training, learning, and competing at the highest junior level in the sport.

After making the team through a rigorous two-stage trial process, I spent the season travelling across the UK to attend intensive weekend training sessions led by three of the nation's top coaches, alongside expert guest coaches. We also competed in national tournaments against elite club teams to prepare ourselves for international play. All of it led to one unforgettable week in July, where we faced off against 21 other nations, playing high-stakes matches every day. We rose to the challenge, reaching the power pool and competing against some of the world's top teams, including Canada, France, Japan, and the USA. Ultimately, we placed 7th—two positions higher than our seeding—and proved just how competitive and committed our team had become.

This experience has transformed me, not just as an athlete, but as a person. Being part of Team GB pushed me far beyond what I thought I was capable of, mentally and physically. When I first picked up a frisbee less than a year ago, I could barely throw. But after taking on coach feedback, training obsessively over the winter holidays, and committing fully to the process, I went from being a complete beginner to scoring layout points at the World Championships—and was awarded GB Women's Most Improved Player. It's surreal and incredibly affirming to look back on that growth.

From a professional perspective, this opportunity has been invaluable. I aspire to work in high-performance sport as a strength and conditioning coach, and having experienced first-hand what it means to train, travel, and compete as part of a national team will help me empathise with the athletes I work with in future. I've also developed technical skills, tactical understanding, and a deep appreciation of diverse international playing styles, which I'll carry forward as both a player and a coach.

One of the most heartwarming memories was trading jerseys with players from around the world at the end of the tournament. I now have kits from Singapore, the USA, and Japan—each one a memento of the friendships and respect we built across borders. I'm also taking on a leadership role within Durham's Ultimate Frisbee Club next year as a member of the executive committee and will continue training hard with the goal of making the GB U24 and senior teams in the years ahead. It's my hope to pass on the knowledge I've gained to new players, just as others supported me on my journey.

To anyone considering applying for funding: please don't hesitate. You never know where it might take you. This opportunity has changed the course of my year—and possibly my future. I am endlessly grateful to the donors who make the Student Opportunities Fund possible. Your support allowed me to experience something incredible, and it's given me the confidence to believe that, with enough dedication, anything is possible.



Thanks to the support of Collingwood's Student Opportunities Fund, I had the extraordinary privilege of representing Great Britain as part of the U20 Women's Ultimate Frisbee Team.



#### Diptarup Ray MSc Management

Attending the LSE Summer School for Entrepreneurial Finance was a transformative experience that deepened both my academic understanding and practical engagement with the world of startup finance. The course offered an intensive dive into topics such as venture capital, financial modelling, and risk management, taught by esteemed faculty with real-world experience. Through immersive case studies and simulations, I was able to develop the ability to make informed financial decisions in fast-paced, high-stakes environments—something that will serve me well in my future career.

The generous funding I received played a pivotal role in making this experience possible. It covered tuition, accommodation, and living expenses in London, allowing me to participate fully without financial stress. I was also able to attend industry seminars and events across the city, which broadened my perspective on the European entrepreneurial ecosystem. One of the most memorable moments came during a live pitch session, where I presented a financial strategy to a panel of venture capitalists. Their feedback was not only constructive but empowering, and that session alone taught me more about communicating ideas under pressure than any classroom lecture could.

My time in London wasn't limited to academic learning. I interned with a local startup incubator, applying concepts from the classroom in real-time scenarios—an invaluable opportunity to test theory against practice. This internship helped sharpen my analytical thinking, improved my strategic problem-solving, and gave me firsthand insight into the challenges faced by early-stage ventures. It also strengthened my confidence in navigating dynamic work environments and validated my interest in working within this sector long-term.

Beyond technical knowledge, the experience strengthened essential soft skills: adaptability, resilience, and clear communication. The intense pace of the program taught me to stay focused under pressure, while the diversity of my peers—many of whom were founders or professionals from across the globe—enhanced my collaborative skills and global outlook. These connections have already led to potential partnerships and mentorships that I am excited to explore further.

Looking ahead, this experience has shaped my academic and professional direction. I'm now more focused than ever on pursuing finance-related modules, particularly those aligned with venture capital and entrepreneurial strategy. I also plan to seek further internships in this space and eventually explore launching a venture of my own. The insights I gained—both in and outside the classroom—have given me a strong foundation to build on.

To anyone considering applying for a funded opportunity: don't hesitate. Start early, be intentional in your application, and make the most of your network. The right opportunity can be career-defining, as this one has been for me. I'm incredibly grateful to the donors and staff who made this experience possible. Your support didn't just fund a course—it empowered growth, ambition, and confidence in a future I'm now even more excited to pursue.



Attending the LSE Summer School for Entrepreneurial Finance was a transformative experience that deepened both my academic understanding and practical engagement with the world of startup finance.



# Isabel Cory MSc Earth Science Third Year

Thanks to the generous support I received through the Student Opportunities Fund, I was able to complete a three-month international research internship in Canada through the prestigious Globalink Mitacs programme. As a third-year Geophysics (Earth Science) student, this opportunity allowed me to work with a dynamic international research team at McMaster University's School of Earth, Environment and Social Sciences. Our project focused on the Niagara Escarpment, where I used drone photogrammetry and differential GPS systems to investigate the potential presence of a tectonic fault within a post-glacial valley.

My time in Canada was deeply hands-on. I spent weeks conducting fieldwork using quadcopter drones, collecting extensive geospatial data, which I later used to generate and analyse 3D models. I worked with advanced software packages including ESRI Drone2Map, CloudCompare, and MOVE—programmes I had not encountered before, but which are now valuable tools in my skillset. Alongside the research, I completed a series of professional development workshops that focused on refining scientific writing, presentation techniques, and career planning. I also attended networking events where I met leading researchers in Earth Sciences and connected with students from across Canada, gaining fresh perspectives on international education systems and research approaches.

Beyond the academic experience, this internship gave me the confidence to step outside my comfort zone, live independently in a new country, and adapt to unfamiliar environments. Travelling across Eastern Canada—from the breathtaking Niagara Falls to vibrant cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec—added a rich layer of personal growth to the journey. I came back with a renewed sense of independence, a deep appreciation for the life I've led in the UK, and a reminder of the power of pushing beyond perceived limits.

One moment I'll never forget was during our first field excursion: driving past Niagara Falls. It was a surreal experience—seeing something I had only ever read about in textbooks suddenly come to life before my eyes. That moment captured what this whole internship meant to me: making the distant and seemingly unreachable feel tangible and real.

What this experience taught me above all is that I'm capable of far more than I thought. It showed me that growth happens when you challenge yourself—and that some of the most rewarding learning takes place far beyond the classroom.

To any student wondering whether to apply for funding or hesitate due to financial concerns—please don't hold back. These experiences are genuinely life-changing, and the knowledge, friendships, and confidence you gain are irreplaceable. I'm deeply grateful to the donors who made this internship possible. Thank you for believing in students like me and for opening doors we may never have reached on our own. This has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience I'll always carry with me.



Beyond the academic experience, this internship gave me the confidence to step outside my comfort zone, live independently in a new country, and adapt to unfamiliar environments.



#### **Hamish Murray**

I received this funding to purchase rugby boots, and it was a pivotal moment in my athletic and personal journey. At a time when financial constraints threatened to sideline my participation in rugby, the funding provided the essential support I needed to continue playing. With new boots, I could fully commit to the sport, attending all training sessions and matches without the worry of inadequate gear. This equipment was not just a pair of boots; it symbolized an opportunity to pursue my passion and excel in the sport I love.

The impact of this support extended far beyond merely acquiring new footwear. Being able to consistently participate in rugby enabled me to reach over 50 caps for the university's 1XV team. Each game was a chance to grow, both as a player and a leader. The rigorous training, coupled with the high level of competition, honed my skills and built my resilience. My dedication and improved performance on the field did not go unnoticed; they led to my signing a semi-professional contract with Richmond. This achievement was a testament to the doors that financial assistance can open, transforming potential into tangible success.

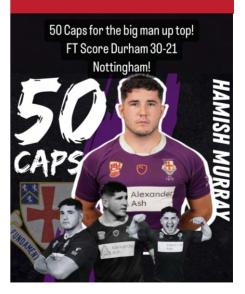
Moreover, the support I received fostered a deep sense of gratitude and motivation to give back. I have since become an advocate for similar funding opportunities, sharing my story to inspire other athletes who might be facing financial hardships. My experience underscores the profound impact that financial support can have on an individual's ability to pursue their dreams. It is a reminder that sometimes, the right support at the right time can change the trajectory of a person's life, enabling them to achieve milestones they might have once thought unattainable.

The college fund's support in purchasing rugby boots has played a key role in my personal and athletic development. It enabled me to train consistently, improve my skills, and deepen my understanding of the game, while also teaching me the value of discipline, teamwork, and preparation. As a senior player, I also developed leadership and communication skills by mentoring younger teammates and fostering a positive team environment. This opportunity has been transformative, shaping my growth both on and off the pitch.

I would absolutely recommend this opportunity to other students. While there can be a perception at Durham that most students come from more privileged backgrounds, that's not everyone's reality. I was initially hesitant and even a little embarrassed to ask for help, but the process was seamless, and the support made a massive difference. I'm incredibly grateful to the donors whose generosity made this possible.



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#### Heather Jean Maxwell

The funding I received from Collingwood College allowed me to take part in an international rowing race in France as the cox of one of CCBC's top men's 8s. It was a pivotal experience in my time at university—one that wouldn't have been possible without financial support. The race brought together crews from across different countries, ranging from other university teams to country-level clubs. It was an incredible opportunity to represent CCBC on an international stage.

Our journey began late on a Thursday evening and that afternoon, we met the main organiser who had invited us and were shown around the boathouse before being introduced to the boats we'd borrowed. Both were Filippis, which caused huge excitement across the crews. For me, getting to cox a boat of that calibre was an amazing experience. The Friday training session, on what turned out to be the only calm day on the lake, was unforgettable—I felt incredibly lucky to be coxing in such a beautiful setting. That evening, we had dinner provided by the organisers —a massive "pasta bonding" meal that really brought the group together before race day.

Saturday brought challenging conditions, with white caps forming on the lake. The original 7km route was shortened to a 2.5km straight course through the least choppy section. Despite the rough water, both CCBC crews rose to the challenge. Our first 8 won the race, and my crew—the second 8—came second, beating Paris University Crew. We later went on to race in shorter regatta-style events, and our crew made it to the final.

The prize-giving ceremony that evening was a proud and memorable moment. Dressed in black tie and our loud red, white, and black striped blazers, we certainly stood out as we collected our awards. The night was full of celebration, meeting other international crews, and sharing stories with the organisers who had made the event possible. On Sunday, slightly worse for wear from the previous evening, we had time to explore the village before heading back to Durham.

This trip was something I was initially very nervous about. Out of both crews, I was the only female member attending, which made me feel a bit out of place at first. But over the weekend, I formed stronger friendships with everyone, and it made our crew feel even closer. I was pushed far out of my comfort zone—not least because I don't speak French fluently, having only studied it at GCSE. Communicating with the race organisers and relaying important information to the team helped me grow in confidence. It also strengthened my leadership skills, both in and out of the boat.

Not only did my coxing improve from using new equipment and racing in unfamiliar conditions, but I also learned how to support and motivate my crew through uncertainty. A highlight that still makes me smile is when we first arrived at the hotel, and one of the organisers pointed at me and exclaimed, "Ah, must be the petit cox," which got quite a few laughs from the crew. Moments like that, along with how warmly we were welcomed, made the experience more memorable.

Through this opportunity, I learned that even in unfamiliar environments and despite language barriers, I can act with confidence and lead effectively. It's had a lasting impact on how I see myself, and it inspired me to apply to become Cox Captain in my fourth year.

If any student is worried about affording an experience they've been offered, I'd encourage them to apply for college funding. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to experience something so formative—both for my skills as a cox and for my own personal development. I would like to say a massive thank you to the donors for the support. Without you I would not have experienced this opportunity that has been a staple trip from my time at university. This trip will forever be a highlight and a story I love telling and remembering!



The funding I received from Collingwood College allowed me to take part in an international rowing race in France as the cox of one of CCBC's top men's 8s. It was a pivotal experience in my time at university.



#### Milly Rose Ogden

Thanks to the Opportunities Fund, I was able to compete for the university at BUCS in Sheffield across two national events in November and February. I raced in three events at each competition and achieved great times that reflected the effort I put into training at Freeman's Quay and Maiden Castle six times a week. The fund covered my travel and accommodation and also contributed towards my subs. I wouldn't have been able to take part so easily without this support.

The fund had a big impact on my stress and anxiety about money last year. With 23 hours of contact time a week and a full training schedule, it's been hard to find a part-time job I could manage alongside everything else. This support allowed me to enjoy training without worrying whether I'd be able to afford to compete. It motivated me to continue swimming and representing the university again this year.

A highlight for me was experiencing a national competition against universities from across the UK— and racing alongside Olympic and world-level athletes. I learned that I can push myself further than I realise and that I can focus on my performance and wellbeing when I'm not under financial strain.

This opportunity has encouraged me to keep competing at a national level. I'd definitely recommend applying for funding—doing something you love without financial stress makes a huge difference. Don't assume your situation isn't worth the support.

100% I would recommend this to other students. I'm so grateful I was able to get help through college—it made me proud to represent both my college and university. Massive thank you to the support network and the Opportunities Fund. I wouldn't have been able to experience this without it.



#### **Oliver Coulson**

I received a generous funding grant from Collingwood College Durham to support my participation in rowing with Durham University Boat Club (DUBC). This grant was instrumental in enabling me to fully engage with the sport and develop my skills as a rower. The funding covered essential costs including training fees and travel expenses for competitions, allowing me to focus on my athletic development without financial strain.

The grant enabled me to participate in several key rowing events throughout the year, culminating in a notable achievement at the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) Regatta. Against fierce competition from universities across the UK, I proudly secured 5th place in my event. Participating in BUCS and other competitions taught me valuable lessons about performing under pressure, preparation, and the power of teamwork. Beyond the physical aspects of the sport, my involvement with DUBC, made possible by the Collingwood College grant, has had a profound impact on my personal development. I've gained crucial time management skills from balancing training with academic commitments, and the camaraderie within the team gave me a supportive community at Durham. My 5th place finish at BUCS boosted my confidence and motivated me to set higher goals. Looking ahead, I plan to continue competing and applying the discipline and leadership skills I've developed to my future career as a Royal Marines Officer.

A highlight was crossing the finish line at BUCS in 5th place—a moment of pride that captured how far I'd come with my team. I discovered resilience I didn't know I had, pushed through physical and mental barriers, and found ways to motivate myself and others, even in difficult moments. I've also realised I perform best under pressure and that I'm willing to make sacrifices for long-term goals and team success.

To students considering applying: start early, tailor your application, and don't hesitate to ask for help. There are more opportunities than you think, and the support is genuinely worth it.

I wholeheartedly recommend this opportunity to other students. The grant allowed me to fully commit to rowing without financial burden and gave me the chance to represent both my college and university at a national level. The experiences and skills I've gained are highly transferable and have shaped my personal and professional growth.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Collingwood College Durham for their generous support. Your funding allowed me to immerse myself in rowing with DUBC and achieve more than I thought possible. Your support has made a lasting impact, and I'm truly grateful. Thank you for making this experience possible.



I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity. It's made a tangible difference in my confidence, capabilities, and direction. I'd especially like to thank Sid Patrayani and Claire Connor at Collingwood College for all their support and encouragement throughout this process—their kindness and practical help truly kept me grounded and motivated. I'm also deeply thankful to the donors behind the Student Opportunities Fund, whose generosity empowers students like me to pursue professional growth that might otherwise remain out of reach. This support didn't just help me get certified—it helped me take a leap toward becoming the kind of analyst I hope to be.

#### Aman Khawaja

I was granted funding from Collingwood's Student Opportunity Fund to support my participation in sports competitions through Collingwood Boat Club and DU Judo, as well as events for Enactus Durham. This funding was instrumental in helping me achieve several personal, athletic, and leadership milestones. It allowed me to cover membership fees, competition entry fees, and travel expenses, enabling me to take part in prestigious events such as the Sheffield Tournament and BUCS Judo competitions—where I won a silver medal and reached the quarter-finals respectively. Competing at these events not only enhanced my skills but gave me the chance to test myself against top-tier athletes.

A significant portion of the funding supported my participation as President of Enactus Durham at the Enactus World Cup 2024 in Kazakhstan. Our team presented our social enterprise project, Taka Taka Zero, which focuses on sustainable waste management in Kenya. We reached the semi-finals—an incredible achievement. The World Cup gave us the chance to showcase our work globally, network with inspiring teams, and learn from innovative projects tackling similar challenges. These experiences pushed me to think creatively and strategically, while developing cross-cultural connections that will shape my future.

This opportunity from Collingwood has contributed significantly to my personal development. Through Judo, I achieved my Brown Belt, a milestone requiring consistent training and competition experience. Competitions in London and Sheffield in November 2023 came with financial challenges, but thanks to this support, I was able to compete—and even win Silver in Sheffield. This taught me the importance of persistence, resourcefulness, and the value of community support. Joining Collingwood College Boat Club as a Novice rower in my final year was also a highlight. Despite being new to the sport, I embraced the challenge and found that the intense training improved my physical fitness, teamwork, and time management.

As President of Enactus Durham and part of the UK National Champion team, I also developed leadership and organisational skills through national and international competitions. Managing finances, logistics, and presenting our work under pressure taught me valuable project management skills. A highlight of the World Cup was networking with other teams—particularly Enactus Kenya, whose project shared similar goals with ours. These experiences deepened my understanding of social entrepreneurship and strengthened my commitment to creating impactful, sustainable change. I've learned a great deal about myself through this opportunity. In Judo, I realised my resilience in overcoming financial barriers and achieving competition success. Rowing taught me to step outside my comfort zone and push my physical and mental limits. In Enactus, I discovered a passion for leadership and using entrepreneurship as a tool for social good. I've grown not just in skill, but in confidence, motivation, and purpose.

For students seeking funding or applying for college opportunities, my advice is to be clear about how the support will help you grow and overcome barriers. Be specific about what it will enable you to achieve, and how it aligns with your goals. Most of all, make the most of every opportunity—each experience adds to your development, no matter the outcome. I would highly recommend this opportunity to other students. The funding opened doors that I wouldn't have been able to access otherwise—from sports competitions that built my skills and confidence, to international events that expanded my network and shaped my professional aspirations. I'm deeply grateful for the opportunities I've had and all I've learned through them.

To the donors who support the Student Opportunities Fund, and to everyone who helped connect me with these experiences—thank you. Your generosity allowed me to grow, achieve, and participate in opportunities that have been essential to both my personal and professional journey.



As President of Enactus Durham and part of the UK National Champion team, I also developed leadership and organisational skills through national and international competitions.



#### Samuel Goodban

One of the best experiences I've had in Durham was being part of CCAFC (Collingwood Football Club), so when my boots fell apart mid-game, I was stuck without a pair for the remaining fixtures. This wasn't something I had budgeted for, and not many models fit my feet properly, so cheaper options were difficult to find. Receiving funding through the Opportunities Fund completely alleviated that financial stress and meant I was able to continue playing. We finished second in the league and reached the semi-finals of the cup—only getting knocked out due to a fixture timing issue.

In the third term, I decided to take up boxing to raise money for charity, but I needed help with the upfront cost of equipment. The fund made this possible, and I was able to train for six weeks before taking part in a fight night representing CCAFC. I won my fight in the first round by TKO, and the event raised nearly £18,000 for the Oddballs Foundation.

Sport has been a massive part of my time in Durham and plays a huge role in supporting my mental health. I live with inflammatory bowel disease, and during flare-ups I experience arthritis that's especially painful in my joints. One way to reduce the impact of flare-ups is by strengthening the muscles around those joints. Boxing training in particular focuses on full-body strength, so I'm hopeful that my next flare-up will be more manageable. I also try to make the most of the times when I'm fully fit, because I never know when the next one might hit, or how long it will last.

Boxing training pushed me to my limits. It took real discipline and hard work, and through that experience, I learned a lot about myself. I developed a greater sense of resilience and drive, and realised that I have the ability to push through the pain barrier and keep going.

A standout moment was playing my final game with the football team I've been part of for four years—it's something I'll always remember. We're already planning an alumni event to meet up again next year. And in boxing, my highlight was winning the fight after weeks of hard work and feeling the energy from the crowd—it's a feeling I'm not sure I'll experience again.

To other students, I'd say—if you're struggling to afford sport or activities, the college is here to help. It's always worth applying and getting involved in college life. Collingwood is such a brilliant college for sport and societies, and this fund really breaks down the barrier to participation.

Thank you so much to everyone who supports the Student Opportunities Fund. Without it, I would have struggled financially to take part in the sports I love. This funding made it possible, and it's helped my whole university experience end on a high note.



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#### **Stephanie Daw**

Thanks to funding from Collingwood's Student Opportunities Fund, I was able to travel to Helsinki, Finland in June 2024 to present methodological findings from my PhD project at the FUNORE conference on Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR). The conference brought together academics and postgraduate students from across Europe to explore both the challenges and possibilities of using QLR as a research methodology. My own PhD is a qualitative longitudinal project that followed 12 LGBT+ young people over 12 months, exploring their transitions to adulthood in a post-pandemic society. I presented on the use of participatory scrapbooking as a method that complemented the qualitative nature of my studyoffering insight into how it engaged participants and enriched the data.

While I've attended other conferences throughout my PhD, this was the first focused specifically on QLR. It was an invaluable opportunity to network with researchers whose work I've engaged with closely, and to see how this methodology has been applied in a range of contexts. The setting was also exceptional—Helsinki offered a beautiful backdrop for academic exchange, and the talks delivered by academics across Europe gave me much to reflect on. As the final conference I presented at before my viva examination, it was also a timely chance to share my findings, receive feedback, and anticipate the kinds of methodological questions I might face in the viva.

This experience has significantly contributed to my personal and professional development. It helped me better understand where my work sits within the field and gave me the chance to present to, and learn from, experts in qualitative research and youth transitions. It also helped me sharpen my skills in communicating academic ideas to a wider audience—something that will be essential as I pursue a career in academia. I connected with researchers in QLR and youth studies whose work aligns with mine and have been able to identify potential external examiners. It's also helped me refine ideas for postdoctoral work, particularly around creative qualitative methods and their application in research with marginalised communities.

One of the most memorable moments from the trip was the evening meal held at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Fortress of Suomenlinna—a sea fortress rich with military history. We were treated to authentic Finnish food and a fascinating historical talk on the island. On a more personal level, I found myself re-energised and inspired by the creative work presented by others, and it reaffirmed my passion for continuing to work with creative qualitative methods and LGBT+ young people.



Looking ahead, I plan to submit my PhD and prepare for my viva. Beyond that, I hope to secure a funded postdoctoral fellowship where I can develop publications from my research and pursue further collaborative work with the academics I met at the conference. This experience gave me clarity on my research direction and strengthened my resolve to pursue academic work in this field.

To any student considering applying for funding, I would say—go for it. If you know the opportunity will help you grow personally or professionally, there's every reason to apply. Take time to put together a strong application and seek support from your department. Opportunities like this really do open doors. I would highly recommend this fund to other students. Opportunities like this help you learn more about your field—and yourself. For me, they've been essential to my development and to making my PhD journey more exciting and meaningful.

Finally, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the donors who support the Student Opportunities Fund. As a self-funded PhD student, I'm often limited in the kinds of opportunities I can take up. At the beginning of my PhD, I never imagined I'd be able to attend international conferences. Your generosity made that possible, and for that I am incredibly grateful.

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### Thank You

Thank you for your generous support of Collingwood's students. The combined impact of the programmes included in this report is immense. Thanks to your generosity Collingwood students are truly able to discover their full potential.

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