

NEW ZEALAND SPIRIT OF SERVICE

ARUN JAIN, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and TENNILLE MAXEY, of Statistics New Zealand, are the inaugural recipients of the Westpac New Zealand Spirit of Service Scholarship. The scholarship supports early-in-career New Zealand public servants to attend Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government to study towards a Master of Public Policy (MPP). Here they reflect on how the scholarship has changed their perspectives.

In September last year, we embarked on an incredible adventure to study at the University of Oxford: an opportunity so unique that being invited to attend Hogwarts had seemed just as likely.



Tennille Maxey and Arun Jain

Now, as we pass the half-way point in the year-long programme, we reflect on how much we have learned and realise our experience has exceeded every initial thought and expectation. The MPP programme provides a great mix of theoretical insights with practical and professional skill development. We have considered policy making from a range of viewpoints, be they philosophical, economic, or political. Between us, we have also specialised in identity and multiculturalism, public corruption,

housing in advanced economies, new economics, and the AI economy. Both of us feel a renewed capacity to connect different issues and pull together broad views of the policy issues facing the departments we serve.

Additionally, the programme has allowed us to engage with leaders and experts who have made a real difference in public policy. This has included guest speakers from political backgrounds and the private sector who have shared their experiences of working in effective (and sometimes not so effective) governments. Some highlights have included hearing from former UK prime minister David Cameron, former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd, billionaire Mo Ibrahim, and South Africa's former leader of the opposition Lindiwe Mazibuko.

One of the unique drawcards of the Blavatnik School is its ability to pull together a community that fosters critical and innovative thinking when it comes to tackling some of the world's most pressing policy issues. We have been able to draw on the experience of our cohort of 124 amazing individuals from 50 countries. We work closely together to share insights and practice. The cohort has evolved into a tightly bound network that we will draw on for years to come.

If we could summarise the programme in one word it would be "perspective". Throughout the course, we have learned that even in seemingly novel contexts, the world is a small place and we are more similar than we are different. As much as global issues impact New Zealand, we can make ripples that influence our friends and neighbours, although we may

seem small and far away. Issues we face that appear unique to us may have been traversed and addressed already. Taking a step back to consider the mistakes and successes from those diverse contexts, and reviewing our own, will ensure our policy draws from best practice and is robust. At the same time, through our experiences, we've also come to embrace the validity of opposing views and the different starting positions that we all have when arriving at individual positions. This perspective means that we can navigate tension ably and with empathy. Finally, our friends and classmates are a constant reminder that authenticity and empathy are two of the most important tools in international relationship building: something we will endeavour to apply to the rest of our careers.

Most recently, the global pandemic has moved us physically away from the Blavatnik School and community. As with our colleagues at home, this has been a crash course in resilience, adaptability, and creativity as we have moved into online classrooms.

We are both extremely grateful for the support of Westpac New Zealand, the State Services Commission, and of our own departments. Without the Westpac Spirit of Service Scholarship it would not have been possible to take this space to step away from our policy roles and reflect on issues that we will inevitably face as public servants. This year at Oxford has already been the experience of a lifetime, and as we complete the programme, we are excited to return to our roles and apply what we have learned in our work serving New Zealand.



Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government