



Future Leaders in Innovation, Enterprise and Research (FLIER)

Case Studies

Our unique FLIER programme is developing leaders of the future who can create collaborations across academia, industry, the NHS and government to drive innovation.

Here we showcase how five of our participants have enhanced their leadership skills and progressed their careers one year on from completing the programme. FLIER is crucial for developing excellence in emerging leaders and strengthening life sciences in the UK. These case studies were based on interviews held between January - February 2022 and the individual roles and responsibilities may have changed since then.

Dr Niina Kolehmainen

Reader in Allied Child Health; Newcastle University



What attracted you to the FLIER programme?

When the FLIER programme came up, it just had all the things I was looking for, particularly the diversity of people that might be on the course. It was trying to do something different by bringing together people from different sectors, which I thought would take me well outside of my comfort zone.

How has the FLIER programme contributed to these changes?

I think the short answer is that had I not joined FLIER, I wouldn't be in any of the roles that I am now. FLIER has helped me to really develop my skills and my perspectives to collaborative working, influencing, leadership and how to work with other people. FLIER has helped me understand how to view a situation and what my options are about trying to influence it. That has translated to effective leadership, which has been noticed by my seniors and colleagues, which has led into some of these leadership positions.

Since joining FLIER, have you been involved with the Academy in any other ways?

Engaging with the Academy has been a big source of enriching one's thinking and activities. I've always had a very positive perception of the Academy and their activities. They tend to be positively challenging, and quite thought provoking. They encourage debate and discussion, and there's a tolerance for diversity of views that I don't see as much in other contexts.

How has the FLIER programme contributed to your personal development?

Staying in touch with the FLIER network has helped to sustain my faith in the value of pursuing a collaborative way of working. FLIER has helped me to appreciate that if you're trying to really shift some big fundamental things, it takes time and persistence.

Dr Kolehmainen is a Reader in Allied Child Health at Newcastle University leading on collaborative research to enable better child health. She is also Lead for Children's Health and Wellbeing at the NIHR Innovation Observatory, and Deputy Director of the NHIP Academy.



The Academy of Medical Sciences is the independent, expert voice of biomedical and health research in the UK. Our mission is to help create an open and progressive research sector to improve the health of people everywhere. The Academy's elected Fellows are the United Kingdom's leading medical scientists from the NHS, academia, industry and the public service. We work with them to improve lives, strengthen research, support researchers, work globally and build our resources.

Professor Alastair Denniston

Honorary Professor, University of Birmingham, Consultant Ophthalmologist, University Hospitals Birmingham NHSFT



Has your role changed since you joined FLIER, and if so, how?

In 2020 I was appointed to the UK Government's new Regulatory Horizon's Council which provides independent advice to the UK Government as to how regulatory reform can support innovation. I've really enjoyed this role and I probably wouldn't have applied for it without the skills and confidence gained from FLIER. It's quite a senior and influential role in terms of policy development and feels like an area where I can use my skills well to create positive impact.

What aspects of FLIER have you found most valuable?

The FLIER programme continues to impact me now three years on. The peer support through the cohort has been important. It's the exposure to individuals, the networking and the immersion days with different organisations. Meeting FLIERs from different sectors has been a really important way to understand roles in other sectors, peoples' motivations and the challenges they have to navigate. It also helps to understand the frustrations they encounter with people in other sectors, and why they may find it hard to work with somebody like me who sits mainly in the NHS or in academia. FLIER has helped to improve this understanding and overcome misconceptions about working with industry, for example. The level of trust, the sense of opportunity and excitement for cross sector collaboration is something that really came through our two years of working together.

Can you give any examples of a significant cross-sector activity that you have developed since taking part in the FLIER programme?

INSIGHT, the Health Data Research Hub for Eye Health, was developed from my cross-sector project, and forms part of Health Data Research UK's hub network in the UK. INSIGHT was supported by multi-million pound pump-priming funding through the ISCF, but is now moving to being self-sustaining. The Hub was set up with six partners: two from the NHS, one academic, one charity and two from industry - Google Health and Roche. It continues to be a source of great learning and an ongoing example of my work across sectors. It's all about enabling others to access data in a safe way to research for patient benefit.

Overall, how would you describe the impact that the FLIER programme has had on your career?

I think FLIER has accelerated my career progression, providing me with the confidence to go for various senior roles. I lead a number of different teams, which include some really fantastic emerging leaders. I've seen some team members go from being a PhD student to becoming a Principal Investigator in their own right. I've very much put into practice within that team the skills I've learned through FLIER - they know all about the programme and I've passed on a lot of learning to them.

I'm so grateful to the Academy for putting on FLIER. It's the single most transformative thing I've done in my entire working career.

Professor Denniston is the Founding Director of INSIGHT, the UK's Health Data Research Hub for eye health, Honorary Professor at the University of Birmingham, and consultant ophthalmologist at University Hospitals Birmingham.

Professor Peter Bannister

Vice President of Life Sciences, Ada Health GmbH; Honorary Chair, University of Birmingham, Institute of Applied Health Research; Healthcare Sector Chair, Institution of Engineering and Technology



How has the FLIER programme contributed to your personal development?

I've been working with a participant from the second FLIER cohort to set up a company, for a new medical technology, which is building some momentum now. As time passes, it's definitely the FLIER network that's having the most sustained impact. The community that arose from the cohorts is an important part of me personally and professionally. FLIERs are in touch with each other literally every day - it's a great group to be part of, and we keep supporting each other.

The coaching has been extremely helpful on a day-to-day practical level as well as helping me to understand approaches to manage myself. The immersion visits in the first year were excellent. For example, the exposure we had to the Department of Health and Social Care was amazing, as were insights to some of the University Hospital ecosystems. Actually being in those environments in person provides a completely different learning experience and helps to form new relationships.

Since joining FLIER, have you been involved with the Academy in any other ways?

The Academy team has been working hard to come up with some tangible, meaningful initiatives where people like the FLIERs can get involved in developing and delivering the Academy's new strategy. I'm hopeful that there will be more opportunities for people like the FLIERs to help deliver some of these ambitious programmes of work.

Overall, how would you describe the impact that the FLIER programme has had on your career?

The programme has undeniably built confidence and realistic ambition. If I think back to three years ago, it's crazy to see that I'm doing all of these things now. I'm a Professor, I have a new role and I've just signed off on an MBA - that wasn't me three years ago. So in terms of the individual impact it has had on me over the three years, we all say to each other that "the single best decision we ever made was applying to the FLIER programme".

Professor Bannister has since established Romilly Life Sciences to support cross-sector collaboration underpinned by technology and robust evidence. He is also Honorary Chair at the University of Birmingham Institute of Applied Health Research and Healthcare Sector Chair of the Institution of Engineering and Technology.



Professor Charlotte Summers

Professor of Intensive Care Medicine, University of Cambridge;
Honorary Consultant, Intensive Care Medicine, Cambridge
University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

**Has your role changed since you joined FLIER and if so, how did FLIER contribute?**

I have passed my probationary period and been promoted to be the Professor of Intensive Care Medicine. Suddenly, in 2020, my work became very prominent, and I ended up sitting in some high-level meetings about how we were going to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, advising the Cabinet Office about ventilators and a whole host of other things that I had never done before. Amazingly, even though I was not aware of it at the time, FLIER was preparing me for handling all of the stuff that suddenly got thrown at me during 2020 and 2021!

How has the FLIER programme contributed to your personal development?

A lot of the focus of FLIER was around cross sector working and bringing the skills of everybody to bear on what you're trying to achieve. It emphasised the importance of clarity of purpose: why we're doing things before considering the 'what' and the 'how'. The FLIER immersion days were great, such as being able to spend a day at the Department of Health and Social Care to hear what they do and how it works. That visit provided important insights that helped me during the pandemic, and will do so for the rest of my career.

The individual coaching also helped me to build my confidence. Talking through how to handle various situations and how to build teams made me feel like I had the skills to achieve what I was aiming to.

Can you give any examples of a significant cross-sector activity that you have developed since taking part in the FLIER programme?

I'm leading a large, national trial called HEAL-COVID, which is aiming to improve the longer-term outcomes for patients who have been hospitalised due to COVID-19. At the start, I sketched out the trial on one side of A4, before speaking with fellow FLIER participants Paul Wicks and Elin Haf Davies. Respectively, they brought valuable experience of patient engagement/involvement and Aparito's digital platform. Both Paul and Elin Haf have highly relevant backgrounds and became important members of the trial team. The study wouldn't be doable without either of them.

How has FLIER helped to expand your network?

Through FLIER, I've met some of the right people and been in some of the right rooms in the therapeutic space. This has led me to being one of the people deciding what drugs get tested in national clinical trials. This wouldn't have happened without the people I met via FLIER. We have all worked collectively to provide contacts, understanding the challenges we were each having, and to support each other through the two years. It's a network that I didn't have before.

It's been transformational. I think others in the programme have said it's been life changing. It's basically the best thing I've ever done workwise. It's definitely accelerated my career progression. Opening doors for people isn't the same as them feeling able to walk through them, which I feel more able to do now. It made me braver than I'd been before. I suspect that I wouldn't ever have stood up and said that we need to do the HEAL-COVID trial without FLIER.

Professor Summers is Chief Investigator of the HEAL-COVID trial and has continued as Professor of Intensive Care Medicine and since become Interim Director of the Victor Phillip Dahdaleh Heart & Lung Research Institute.

Dr Paul Wicks

Consultant, Wicks Digital Health

**What attracted you to the FLIER programme?**

I really liked the idea of meeting peers who had done interesting and challenging work across different sectors.

How has the FLIER programme supported you in your role and your personal development?

I think that FLIER has really helped me to see the big picture of Life Sciences in the UK. This has provided me with confidence, perspective and encouragement to collaborate across sectors, and allowed me to tie things together for the different organisations I work with.

I have been very grateful for the mentorship and approached one of the speakers to be a mentor early in the programme. We have had a number of good sessions together where I brought some really hard questions that I could not ask anywhere else.

Overall, how would you describe the impact that the FLIER programme has had on your career?

FLIER has given me the support and the confidence to be an independent consultant in digital health. I've been doing this for three years now and have a successful, sustainable business. I also have a team to contact anytime I want - 16 smart people on my smartphone that most people don't have access to.

Our visit to the Wellcome Trust gave me an incredibly helpful overview of how a large non-governmental organisation thinks about challenges like mental health. Following the visit, I joined their Mental Health Scientific Advisory Board, which was been advising on a £400 million investment into mental health over the next 10 years.

Can you give any examples of a significant cross-sector activity that you have been involved in?

One of my areas of expertise is running clinical trials over the internet. Fellow participant Charlotte Summers got in touch about developing an approach to obtain information from patients with COVID for a grant that she was putting together. As an independent person, I felt uniquely able to contribute to the design of this study and we also brought in another FLIER participant, Elin Haf Davies from Aparito, to provide the digital infrastructure for the HEAL-COVID study. If it wasn't for FLIER, the HEAL-COVID study would not have been developed, which is a very tangible outcome from the programme.

FLIER was everything I hoped it would be and more. If I could send an email to myself three years in the past, I would just say, "go for it - make use of all the time and soak up the experiences" and I think I mostly did.

Dr Wicks founded Wicks Digital Health Ltd as an independent consultancy and helps digital companies generate evidence, awareness, and revenue.



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