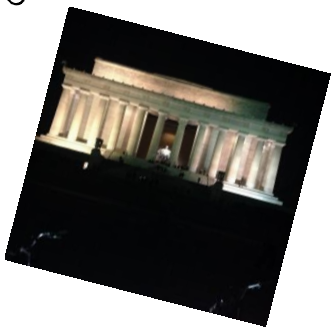
# AAALAC International Fellowship trip

I have heard so much about the AAALAC international Fellowship award over the last few years. I have been lucky to have met and get to know some of the past recipients both from the UK and America. It was back in May that a colleague said that I ticked the boxes for the award and that I should think about applying and that she would be happy to be my nominator. So after taking some time to think about it I agreed and I put my application together, with my nomination and supporting letters.

To be honest I did not think that I would do any good, I was truly amazed to get a call from my nominator a few weeks later to say that I was this year's recipient. I couldn't believe it and so it started the congratulations and the build up to this amazing trip. It is a great honour to be this year's recipient but also to be the first Irish recipient, the first of many I hope.

The AAALAC staff were amazing in organising every part of my trip, thank you. Finally the day arrived for my big trip and adventure to beginning. On Saturday 24th October I arrived in Dublin airport in plenty of time or at least that's what I taught. But two security checks later and then onto immigration it left very little time to make it to the gate. The flight to Washington Dulles went well and before long well 7.5 hours and 3 movies later I arrived. After collecting my bags I met with my driver who took me to my hotel which was to be my home for the next week. I had a great talk with my driver and he gave me some very good and interesting information about the area, the prices of houses etc. I got to the hotel a little tired as it was 10 pm at home it was time to settle in and ring home to let all know I was there safe.

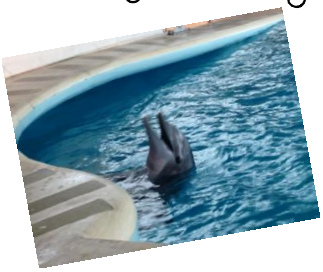
On Sunday, I had the day to myself to be a tourist and see some of the sights of Washington D.C. I got to see some many great sights and did the city bus tour before returning to my hotel.



On Monday morning I was met by the person who was to show me around for the next few days, he made me feel right at home, we had great conversations about everything and anything even peanut butter M&M's over those few days. We first visited Maryland University for the day where I met some amazing inspiring, passionate people who are doing some amazing research. I also met with the VP for research who is a fellow Cork person. We had a great time to talk about the university I work for, how research was going and how things were at home.

Day 2 started with I meeting the security of NIH (National Institute of Health) It was interesting to see and go through the security checks. I had a great conversation with the staff in the office of animal care and use. It was great to talk about how we each do things and see how both countries and facilities work. I had lunch with the animal facility program director and staff. It was lovely to hear from technicians and managers on how they work and I was able to give them some background on my career to date over a lovely lunch. We even had a laugh at I saying I didn't need to kiss the blarney stone as I was from cork and I already had the gift of the gab. After lunch I was shown around the facility by two great guys where we had a long chat about running facilities from washing areas to staffing and the animals and research going on. I got to see some amazing animals which I have not worked with before or even seen for 1 or 2 of the species. I met some animals who were just as interested in me as I was with them.

Day 3: It was raining, it reminded me a bit of home. I was delighted to see some sensorimotor research, after which we went to lunch at the AAALAC international office, where I got to meet all the staff and put faces to the names that I had been talking to over the many weeks before while finalising my trip. It was amazing to hear what they do and to be able to give some background on my career and what I've seen so far. Then it was off to Baltimore to the national aquarium an incredible visit were we got to meet the dolphins, sting rays and jellyfish to name a few and the people that work with them. We also visited the marine centre it was fabulous to see the amazing work they were doing to help fisheries.



Day 4: Started with I meeting a new person who was going to show me around for the next few days. I was told that she was a blast and that we would get on and that we did, from the minute we met we talked and laughed. Our first stop of the day was to NIH to see the biggest fish unit I have ever seen, it was truly amazing to talk to the manager and see how she and the staff work and maintain the unit. Then it was on to see a field station and a non-human primate facility, it gave me a great insight to both group housing and single housing of these amazing animals, again I think they were as interested in me as I was in them. It was great to see. From there it was on to dinner where I met some more incredible people, as we talked it turned out that we had one person in common, it just shows how small a world we live in and as always we had a lot of laughing over dinner.

Day 5: started early and I got to see a private research facility and speak with the manager there. We chatted about how we do things differently but also how we do things that are similar, we also talked about different issues they have come across and how they solved them and how we sort these issues. Day 5 finished early and so I was able to visit Washington Zoo and also take the bus tour again and also do the night tour which was great to see the city lid up and hear the history.

The following day it was off to the airport again and on to Phoenix for the AAALAS conference. Once I arrived at the hotel I had the evening to relax and see a little of the city. On Sunday morning it was an early start with registration and finding my way around. I attended the first time attendee meeting and seen some familiar faces from the week before and from home.

While at the conference I got to attend many dinners, see one of the largest trade exhibition hall I have seen, hear some amazing talks and also met and talk to so many people from all over the world. On the Wednesday I attended

the international luncheon where I was presented with my award and I was able to say a few words about my trip, but also to thank the many people who made my trip possible. To the sponsors, the people that wrote my support letters, to the AAALAC staff and to Trinity College, but also to the two people that made me feel at home and showed me around the week I was in Washington.

It has been a fabulous, amazing, mind-blowing and information exchanging trip. A trip of a life time. I will never forget it and the incredible people and research that I have seen. I have met and made some great new friendships and contacts.

It has been an honour to be this year's recipient and the first from Ireland and I will encourage people to apply for this amazing fellowship.
Thank you
Sylvie