

Basel, 26 August 2022

Experience Report on Behalf of Swiss Friends of Oxford University

Dear Swiss Friends of Oxford University,

In September and October 2021, I had the pleasure of attending two courses offered by the Department of Continuous Education, Oxford University: Clinical Vaccine Development and Biomanufacturing, and Human and Veterinary Vaccinology. Both courses are part of the Oxford Vaccinology Programme, which covered immunology and molecular biology, manufacturing, clinical trial design, immunomonitoring, regulatory strategy, post-marketing surveillance, vaccine financing and the ethics of vaccination. The courses were taught by leading experts from Oxford's Jenner Institute and The Pirbright Institute.

The Oxford Jenner Institute has made the news in 2020 as it has co-developed one of the first vaccines against COVID-19, which has been out-licensed to AstraZeneca. It remains one of the most frequently used COVID-19 vaccines across the globe. The vaccine is based on a patented vaccine platform technology, which is attributed to Vaccitech, a spin-off company from Oxford University founded by Professor Sarah Gilbert and Professor Adrian Hill at the Oxford Jenner Institute. Both professors lectured in the Oxford Vaccinology Programme.

The Oxford Vaccinology Programme was a great addition to my previous education in medicinal chemistry, public policy, and business administration. The Clinical Vaccine Development and Biomanufacturing course was attended by around a dozen participants. The Human and Veterinary Vaccinology course attracted around 20 participants. There was no option for participants to participate virtually. However, a small number of courses were held virtually. The difference in quality in in-person lecturing and virtual lecturing was tangible. Unfortunately, the much-anticipated visit to the Vaccine Manufacturing & Innovation Centre was also conducted virtually. This centre was opened in 2020 and contributes greatly to having turned Oxford into a vaccine research & development (R&D) powerhouse in the UK.

Although the course organisers advertised the course with “for professionals working in healthcare, research, business and commercialisation, clinical trials management and regulation”, most of the participants, in fact, stemmed from research. Only a small number of participants were working in business, clinical trials management, or healthcare. Although the course was advertised as “accessible if you are not yet working in vaccinology”, most of the topics were highly technical.

The highlights of the programme were the policy- and business-related lectures. The former demonstrated the overwhelming success of vaccines to date, particularly due to the support of the World Health Organization. The latter underlined the often-debated necessity to commercialise vaccines to cover the high R&D expenses incurred in the making of vaccines. Overall, I believe the two courses were very valuable, especially during the current times of a global pandemic.

I am very grateful to the Swiss Friends of Oxford University for having supported me financially in taking these courses, for which I received two certificates from Oxford University.

Kind regards,

Francesco Gaetano Fazzi