The Travelling Scholarship of £300 granted to me by the University of Leicester allowed me to explore the arts and culture of the city of Amsterdam for four days. As we went from the 13\textsuperscript{th} - 17\textsuperscript{th} June; there was a medical convention thus increasing the price of the hotel, so all the money granted towards the hotel and flights which cost £340.90. For those four days; I was able to see Amsterdam in a new light and able to get a newer understanding of myself as a person. In addition; something I did not anticipate on my trip to Amsterdam is inspiration on how the United Kingdom could improve itself as a nation environmentally and also with its transport system.

Although Amsterdam is mostly known for the Red-Light District and its famous coffeeshops where its legal to smoke marijuana; there is so much more to the island of a city within the Netherlands. Upon my trip I learnt more about the history of Amsterdam and how they had to overcome their tragedies as well as the fluctuating control from the British and the French; the use of the canals and how they operate as well as all the Arts exhibited and
created within Amsterdam from The Moco Museum which included art from artists such as Banksy; Daniel Arsham; Andy Warhol and Chiharu Shiota and the Van Gogh Museum. This trip to Amsterdam not only expanded my knowledge about the Danish history but also developed me as a person as I learnt

**History of Amsterdam**

Before arriving on this trip; I did not know a lot about the History of Amsterdam or Amsterdam itself as a city. So, when we went to the RIJKS Museum on the 15th June I really soaked up the historical knowledge offered there. Entry to the museum was 20€; it was one of the most expensive attractions I visited but it was worth it.

From the museum I learnt that there was a lot of political fluctuation in the 1800s between the French and the British. In 1806 the French emperor Napoleon transformed the Batavian Republic, which was French and Dutch territory into the Kingdom of Holland and Louis Napoleon, Napoleon’s brother, took control over as king. So, it was solely under French control. Louis Napoleon’s reign did not last long as Emperor Napoleon took personal charge over the Netherlands. However; in 1813 the French lost their power as they were driven out of the Netherlands due to the fall of Napoleon. The House of Orange (Dutch Royal family) returned to power.
Yet the political struggle over the Netherlands was not yet over as on June 18th, the Battle of Waterloo occurred in Belgium. This was battle between the French and the Seventh Coalition which consisted of the rest of Europe. Notoriously; this battle was the end of the reign of Emperor Napoleon. As a result of the defeat of Napoleon, the northern and southern Netherlands were combined into a single kingdom under the ruling of King William I (Pictured left). Alas, this political turmoil was not over as the southern provinces broke free in 1830 and become the Kingdom of Belgium ruled by Leopold I. From these few art paintings I learnt about the political turmoil that Amsterdam faced, and which made sense to me on why some Dutch citizens in Amsterdam can speak Dutch; French and English as well.

Although the RIJKS Museum taught me a lot about Amsterdam’s history; I also learnt more about the history and culture of Amsterdam from an open toe canal cruise through Amsterdam. We went on the canal cruise on the third day and it cost 15€ and lasted for an hour. Driven by two locals; Rick and Eva they taught us about the history of the Dutch canals; the architecture of the houses and the culture of living in city surrounded by water.

Upon our cruise canal I learnt that Amsterdam was made up from three major rivers and they were created as Amsterdam was originally quite swampy and in order to make it more liveable, they turned it into canals as a form of transportation and living spaces. As there are a lot of boats homes but I shall dwell on that in the culture section. If you look across the Dutch canals, you’ll see a series of houses and bars; however, these homes are built differently to the houses we have in the United Kingdom. As the homes in Amsterdam have hooks situated at the top due to the fact that they were previously warehouses and the hooks were used to lever items up and down
on a roof. Not only do the houses have roofs but if you look closely you can see that the houses are uneven and are leaning due to erosion of the houses from the canals.

Another piece of history I learnt whilst on our canal cruise is that there is a building called ‘The Towers of Tears’ this building got its name as wives of those in the Dutch army and navy would cry whilst looking out to sea thinking of their husbands. What mad this especially sad is that the wives would move on their lives and remarry thinking that their husbands were dead, but they were just really lost at sea.

Also learnt during the canal cruise that the ‘XXX’ on the flag represents the three tragedies that they managed to overcome. The three tragedies being the great fire; the flood and the plague but it is kind of ironic as ‘XXX’ is associated with sexually explicit content and Amsterdam has the red light district.

On the second day of our visit. We took a stroll to Dam Square which is filled with different historical monuments and tourist attractions. During the Night we stumbled across the National Monument which is artefact dedicated to all the causalities and deaths during the World Wars. It was created by Dutch architect J.J.P Oud on the 4th May 1956 and still holds high importance for Amsterdam as on their National Remembrance Day as the royal family and the nation stand in front on the monument and pay attributes to all the fallen soldiers. We then followed strolled to the Homomonument further into the Square which is a piece of architecture that commodores all the homosexual’s individuals that were percuated during the World Wars. The Homomonument is three-point star situated on the floor that each star point points in the direction of the Anne Frank House; the church and further down into the Square and points towards the Homomonument plaque. As a person who identifies as bisexual it was quiet overwhelming to read about the lives of those of the queer community who were persecuted during the World Wars due to their sexuality; it was just interesting to see how far we have progressed as a society to where it is more accepted to be who you are and love who you are.
The night is where Amsterdam really comes alive and we were lucky enough to experience this on our first night. On our first night after socialising we explored the infamous Red-Light District which was overwhelmingly yet enlightening. As women who had the occupation of sex workers would market themselves to the gaping eyes of the male gaze. As a young woman it was both interesting to see a woman take control of her sexuality and use it as a way to profit off male urges yet frightening as we were simply in a man’s world literally; as most of the bystanders were drunken men. The Red-Light District is one of Amsterdam’s biggest attractions as it was one of the first cities to legalise prostitution and got its name from its origin story. Women initially plied their trade in the streets. In the sixties, the police made it illegal to solicit from doorways. Sitting behind the window was tolerated if the curtains were almost closed. By burning a red light behind the chink, it was clear to men that they could come here for a prostitute. Today it is allowed to keep the curtains open, but the red lights are still used. A general house rule is that you’re not allowed to film the women in the windows hence the image above. Furthermore, the red lights illustrate a cis-gender woman whilst the blue lights indicate a transgender woman. Following the world of prostitution; Amsterdam is very open sexually open which we explored more when we visited the Sex Museum which explored the evolution of sex. From sexual icons like Marylin Monroe to Mata Hari who uses her sexuality as a way to help her career as a spy. Upon the sex museum there’s a display of sexual art, photographs and sculptures which really leaves the interpretation up to the viewer. Following up from what I gained and learnt from visiting the sex museum is that over a period of time women became more dominant in their sexual lives and taking more control of it. Changing the purpose of sex from strictly procreation
and male pleasure to a pleasurable pastime for both partners. The act of women taking control is becoming more apparent in today’s society as women are becoming more powerful and dominant in all forms from job positions to status positions and so forth.

However, a difference in culture from the United Kingdom to Amsterdam is that everyone cycles or uses the trams or trains; there were not that many cars on the road which made the air fresher. This must feed into Amsterdam’s environmental policy’s as they actively strive for to better the environment.

The city of Amsterdam is full of artistic talent which is displayed in there many art museums; we managed to visit the Moco Museum which not only featured the work of the legendary Banksy but interesting pieces of work from other artist such as Andy Warhol and Daniel Arsham. Banksy is well known for his political pieces that often make a comment about what is going on in current affairs whether it be British or foreign. On the right is Banksy’s image of the British police giving you a middle finger which I interpreted as the police not really caring about anyone and juxtaposes the idea that the. Police are for the people and that they are there to protect and serve. On the right is Daniel Arsham’s ‘Elastic Walls’ which is his take on architecture as his sculptures are three dimensional and challenge how we view architecture.

Overall, this trip to Amsterdam was extremely beneficial to me as a being and an academic as I become more cultured as I learnt more about Dutch culture and learnt from about Amsterdam’s history. As in previous years you learn about European countries’ history such as Hitler with Germany; USSR’s past empire; the British Empire and the Spanish Civil War but not really the Netherlands ‘history as they do no really get involved in global affairs as they stay neutral. So as a historic academic it was fulfilling to know what occurred with the Netherlands. It was also beneficial to me as a being as it helped me developed due to the fact that I was able to navigate myself in a foreign country and use their public transport efficiently. Furthermore, I was able to budget my sending money accordingly which is a huge success for me as I have a poor money management skill.