

Experience report for the semester abroad

1. When, where, and for how long have you been an Erasmus student?

I spent the first term of the academic year 2017/2018 at King's College London. While the term lasted from mid-September until January, I stayed in London from the beginning of September until Christmas and finished my exams in Berlin.

2. The country and its characteristics

London takes a special position within the United Kingdom and in many ways differs a lot from smaller towns and the countryside. Being a metropolis, it is incredibly international and culturally diverse. The districts, like in any big city, range from urban areas dominated by business and finance to very poor living districts. Also due to KCL's international reputation, its students come from many different countries. In the undergraduate courses they tend to be a lot younger than students at, say, Humboldt University, which is a result of the high fees and strict deadlines and curricula. However, as many students take some time to work before they embark on their postgraduate studies, this is no longer the case in the master courses.

3. Academic advising

As there are that many international students at KCL, this university is very much accommodated to making incoming students feel welcome and has a huge range of programmes on offer. At the beginning of each academic year, KCL organizes a special welcome week with society fairs, campus tours, socializing events... Then, throughout the term, students have the opportunity to engage in activities and courses offered by the language centre. There are both language courses as well as tandem programs.

My academic tutor at KCL was always available, very welcoming and helpful. I had no problems whatsoever with my Learning Agreement. Whenever I needed help with a problem, for instance with finalizing my module choices, I found the staff to be very ready to help and committed to assisting me. While finalizing my timetable took some time – I could only complete my module choices the very week teaching already commenced – I ended up being able to take all the courses I had chosen, including a literature course offered at a different department. I found the range of courses on offer at KCL to be very broad and interesting. On top of that, we had the chance to meet all of the lecturers in advance. Whenever there was a lecture or a research seminar which would fit our module, our lecturers encouraged us to attend these as well for extra benefit.

4. Language proficiency

I did not take any preparatory language courses at KCL, as I found my English skills to be sufficient. All of the courses I attended were held in English. I think that I was definitely able to improve my English skills during my stay abroad, especially so in terms of academic English and speaking skills.

5. Recommendation

I would definitely recommend KCL for a stay abroad. It offers an intriguing and international research environment, with committed students and lecturers from all over the world, an enormous range of social activities and a superb infrastructure and support networks. This university really makes you feel at home. Also, especially as a postgraduate history student, I felt that I could really benefit from the range of courses on offer as well as from KCL's and its staff's ties to other institutions such as the Wellcome Collection, the Institute of Historical Research, the Senate House Library and the British Library.

6. Meals at the university

In comparison to meals at Humboldt University, meals at KCL tend to be quite expensive. Student cafeterias are not as common as in Germany. In comparison to what is on offer off campus, however, meals at KCL were very affordable. The student union runs a range of venues as well and there are various cafes, which offer rather cheap smaller dishes. I do not know about options for people with allergies, but there were always vegetarian options and, to a lesser extent, vegan meals as well.

7. Public transport

I used public transport on a daily basis to get to university, as I lived a bit further away. Traffic in London is insane, but many people do have a bike. Going by bike is definitely the cheaper option, as public transport is quite expensive, even with a student Oyster card, which can be requested online and offers a discount on travel fares.

8. Accommodation

I found my room in a shared flat online, via a Facebook group. While there is student accommodation, the application procedures are very complicated and apparently these rooms are only rented out for the entire year. Accommodation in London is incredibly expensive, even on the outskirts of the city. I paid 750€ per month – more than twice as much as in Berlin for a room half the size and of lesser quality. Student accommodation in university residences would have been even more expensive.

9. Culture and leisure time

The cultural opportunities in London are obviously enormous: galleries and museums of world rank as well as a thriving subculture and independent galleries and art projects, alternative bars as well as classic English pubs, excellent restaurants in all price ranges, a fascinating live music culture, concerts ... There is always something new to discover.

10. Financial situation

I have not kept record of my monthly expenditure, but while the UK in general is more expensive than Germany, this is even more true for London. But I had to pay more than 800€ per month for rent and public transport alone, so my overall expenses will have been well above 1,000€. Unfortunately, the Erasmus grant merely covered a very small part of my expenses and as doing the required 30 credits did not leave me any time for working, I depended very much on my parents' financial support.

Signature

I agree to the publication of my report on Humboldt's online platform and the Moodle group for the European History Master.

Berlin, 20.08.2018, Lea Frese-Renner

Location/Date/Name