

Exchange at the University of Essex

My name is Richard and during the autumn term of the academic year 2016/2017 I went on exchange to the University of Essex in Colchester, UK. In this report I will discuss the preparation for my exchange, my arrival and first week there, the courses I took, the finances I needed and finally the daily life in Essex.

Preparation

In order to get accepted to the University of Essex (UoE), I had to prove my English proficiency. I did not have the right certificate though, as the UoE will only accept certificates provided by TOEFL or IELTS, and thus did not accept the one provided to me by Cambridge University. I managed to talk the UoE into accepting me without taking an additional IELTS or TOEFL test. This did however cost me a lot of time and stress. After my language level being accepted, the last step required was submitting my learning agreement to the UoE. The university did not allow me to follow the modules I initially wanted to take, which meant that I had to send them a list with courses I would like to take hoping I would be admitted to enough of them. This also cost me a lot of time, which resulted in me finally being accepted at the end of July, 2016. After being accepted I applied for on-campus accommodation, which I unfortunately ended up not getting, as there were too many incoming exchange students to house them all. I therefore had to find a place myself, and ended up doing this together with Robbie, who is also a student from the Erasmus University. He found an apartment in the Forest Road House, which is a private student accommodation, which we could rent for four months together with four other exchange students. The landlord had us pay the full amount up front, and wanted us to do so without first signing a contract. We of course did not want to transfer any money without a signed contract from both parties, so we managed to talk the landlord into providing us with a contract, which made us feel just about secured enough to transfer the money. After we had rented the apartment, the only thing left to do was registering my student account on the website of the UoE and booking the boat trip to Harwich.

Arrival

After 8 gruellingly boring hours on the ferry, we tried to make it interesting by gambling a little and spending our last euros on beers, Robbie and I arrived in Harwich on the first of October. It took us about half an hour by train to get from Harwich to the main station in Colchester, and from there to our apartment was just 15 minutes by taxi. Upon our arrival in the Forest Road House we met our roommates for the next three months and tried to get to know as many exchange students in our building as possible.

The first week of the semester was called Freshers' Week, during which we would learn everything about campus and life as a University of Essex student. There was a big fair which introduced all the different societies we could join, there were introductory speeches by the teachers and there were plenty of parties we could attend in either Subzero or Base Club on campus, or in Atik in the city centre. That's exactly what we did, together with all the other exchange students from the Forest Road House. Besides all the partying, there were some serious things to deal with, as there was a language assessment in the first week, which would determine whether a student requires help to master the English language from the Talent Development Centre. The university also organised plenty of events which allowed us to meet other international students or students with matching interests.

Courses

During my exchange I followed four different courses, which are also known as modules in England. A short summary on said modules is written down below.

Introduction to Banking was a course which introduced us to the banking world. It mainly focused on the role of banks in the economy, the regulation of banks and on central banks. It was a very useful course to follow, as it really starts with the basics, and later focuses on the more complex components of banking. It did have a fairly high workload, as we could expect three random assessments, which meant we had to stay on schedule as every lecture could mean test which would count for 10 per cent of final grade.

Portfolio Analysis was a module which primarily focused on asset and portfolio returns. It started off with the basics of assets and portfolios and soon moved on towards more difficult things such as risk management, yields and markets. This course was quite interesting but not very challenging.

Financial Innovation and Monetary Policy was really a pure economics course, which focused primarily on financial innovations such as money, balance sheets and central banks. Again a very interesting course which also included a very interesting guest lecture from an employee of the Bank of England.

Mathematical Methods in Economics was a module which started off with matrix algebra, went on to Lagrange optimisation and other kinds of optimisation. All in all this was not a very difficult course, though the economic manner in which the questions on the final examination were phrased proved to be quite a challenge.

Finances

Living in Colchester is quite expensive compared to the Netherlands, as even the rent of a fairly meagre student accommodation such as the Forest Road House costs roughly 500 pounds per month. Besides the relatively high rent, almost all items in the supermarkets are just a little more expensive than they are in the Netherlands.

Especially pubs, restaurants and clubs are very expensive. A pint of lager on campus sets you back 3 pounds each time, which can add up to quite a big amount on a good night. The city centre is much more expensive, as a beer in Atik costs almost 5 pounds. I also spent quite a lot of money in London, as two days there set me back over 200 pounds.

Public transport was another major cost, as a single train ticket to London costs on average 25, although booking in advance could make a big difference. Besides that the Underground and busses in London aren't cheap either. The taxis in Colchester would also cost at least 8 pounds per trip

A rough overview of my expenses is as follows:

	Per month (€)	Total (€)
Rent	590	1770
Cost of living (food etc.)	190	570
Other costs (going out etc.)	400	1200
Public transport	60	180
City trips	20	60
Boat trip to and from England		100
Total		3880

Daily life

During my exchange period there were so many different things I could do. First of all the nightlife in Essex. Every Monday there would be karaoke night in SU bar, which was followed by Milk It, which

was a party with weird typical English songs. Joining the Tennis Society meant that there was a social every Wednesday, and after that we could go to Feds in Subzero. For Feds every society has dress-up theme which all members have to follow. These themes varied from vintage tennis to cops and robbers. This always resulted in a hilarious mix of different costumes in Subzero, as all societies had different themes. I also joined the Real Ale, Beer, Cider & Pie society which organised a pubcrawl every Tuesday. Every Friday there was the Friday Night Project in the club on campus, which was by far the best party of the week.

Getting around in Essex was quite easy as I bought a bike in the first week, which meant that I could get to campus within 15 minutes and to the city centre in about 20 minutes.

There was a great gym on campus, which had a special offer for exchange students so that they don't have to buy a full year membership. There was also a cinema on campus, called Cine10. This cinema showed movies which were just released into other cinemas for a much better price. Campus also had some nice spots to get food, which meant that it wasn't always necessary to bring your own lunch.

There was a very big Tesco in the Colchester, which was where most students bought all their groceries. There were also two supermarkets on campus, which unfortunately were quite expensive compared to the Tesco.

During the weekends I visited several cities in the UK. I joined city trips organised by Essex Abroad to Cambridge and Canterbury. I also went to London three times, one time to visit the ATP World Tour Finals, which is something I would recommend anyone who is a big tennis enthusiast. The second and third time I went to visit the touristic attractions and to try out the nightlife, which truly is very good. I would definitely recommend going to different cities as Colchester itself is not a very large city, which means that you can discover most of it in just two weekends. Luckily Colchester is close to London, Cambridge, Oxford and many other cities, so that it's easy to travel to a lot of different interesting places.