

# University of Essexxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

## General information

My name is Robbie and I have studied at the University of Essex in Colchester during the autumn term of 2016-2017. In relation with other exchange semesters, the exchange semester at this university was quite short. It lasted from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October until the 24<sup>th</sup> of December. I applied for this university, because I wanted to study in a native-English speaking country and I wanted to live on a university campus. Because the University of Essex was quite known for its campus life, I thought it would be the best option for me.

## Preparation and accommodation

As an European student, I did not need to arrange a visa. The things that I had to arrange were a language test, an accommodation and the journey. The university requires a sufficient language grade, so you have to get an IELTS certificate. I did the IELTS exam in Amsterdam to fulfil this requirement. Essex University has a lot of on-campus accommodation. The prices range from £76.93 for a room in a flat with 16 people up to £151.90 for a room in a house with 6 people. At the time you got accepted by the University, they send you an application form with a learning agreement and all the possible housing opportunities. Your weekly rent will depend on the type of accommodation that you choose. I applied for the North Towers as I heard some good stories about it. However, as a result of a big inflow of new Essex students I got refused. Take into consideration that British students and exchange students from outside Europe get an advantage for this on-campus accommodation.

The university was really not helpful with looking for accommodation as they did not want to guarantee the safety of rent contracts in Colchester. An exchange student set up a Facebook group where exchange students could group up and then search for off-campus accommodation together. Finally, after many skype calls I ended up in a private off-campus complex called "The Forest Road house". I shared a flat with 3 Germans, 1 Peruvian and 1 Dutch guy. Although, we stayed there for just three months, we had to pay rent for four months. We had to pay the whole amount at once upfront which was quite a risk. However, we paid and at our arrival everything turned out to be fine. The Forest Road House consists of 30 houses spread over 3 buildings with all 6 inhabitants. There were many other exchange students living in the building as well, which created an amazing atmosphere. There was always someone around to hang out with. The complex was about 10 minutes away from the university by bike(yes I am Dutch, so I bought a bike), which is really close.

## Arrival

The journey to Colchester is relatively easy. I took the ferry from the Hook of Holland to Harwich. This journey takes around 8 hours, but it is really cheap. From Harwich it is just a one-hour journey to get to the university. The first week was the introduction week, in which the university arranged all kinds of activities to make the new students feel comfortable. There are a few mandatory talks where you will be given information about the university and the courses. In addition, they organise some parties, where you will make a lot of new friends in a short period of time. This creates a solid basis to start with your studies in the second week.



## **Courses**

In your learning agreement you have to fill in 4 courses before the start of your exchange. Each course is 7,5 ECTS and because you have to earn 24 ECTS, it is obligated to follow four courses. In the second week you are able to follow all the courses that seem interesting to you. It is possible to switch courses until the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week. Then they arrange a big meeting in the sport hall where you have to submit the definitive courses that you will follow. I ended up with the next four courses:

### Intermediate macroeconomics

The course covers many of the same material as the macro-economic course at the Erasmus university. It discusses topics as fiscal and monetary policy, exchange rates and the quantity theory of money. However, in this course they observe the subjects into more detail than the Erasmus university does. The Spanish lecturer gave a lot of real world examples related to the material, which made the course really interesting. There was a syllabus, which contained all the necessary information for the exam. Macroeconomic cycles are recurring events and have a major impact on a country its economy, so it is good to have some knowledge about them. This course had one interim exam that counted for 50% of the grade and one final exam that covered the other 50% of the grade. I would recommend this course.

### Introduction to banking

This course gave me a good oversight of the nature of banks, of all of the functions they fulfil and of the risks we nowadays face with them. The first part of the module was given by a Spanish teacher and the second part by a Greek teacher. Every week there was a possibility that we had an in-class test. In total we had 3 of those in-class tests, from which the 2 best counted for 30% of the grade. This course learned my which problems banks face and why governments are so heavily participated in saving a countries' banking system. It also learned me the difference between the European, American and English Central banking system, and how they execute monetary policy. It ends with an exam that covers 70% of the grade. I would strongly recommend this course.

### World economy in historical perspective

This course examined the world economy from a historical perspective. It skipped, huge historical facts and focused on things that genuinely made changes to the shape of the economy. To widen the range of scope, we also looked at events in Asia and related them with events in the Western world. Covered topics include the economic impact of colonisation, the industrial revolution, the origins and development of our financial system and the explanation behind the great divergence between the poor East and the rich West. I had to write one essay about Modern imperialism, which consisted for 50% of the grade. A final exam covered the other 50% of the grade. I would recommend this course.

### British Culture & Society

This was by far my best course. We observed and evaluated the British history and British society. Britain has been an important player in the world for over the last 500 years. It was part of the Commonwealth, part of the European Union and was a special ally of the US. The course places everything in perspective, and integrated everything we learned to explain Britain's current position in the world and its choice for the Brexit. For this course we had one lecture and one workgroup every week. During the workgroup we closely interacted with the Scottish teacher and we discussed many typical "British" things, such as why Britons want to do everything the other way around. The exam of this course consists of one essay about an actual British topic. You are able to choose this subject from a provided list of subjects from the teacher. I strongly recommend this course.

## Finances

The price level in the UK is approximately the same as in the Netherlands. There is a large Tesco close to the university, which is 24/7 open and has everything you need. Furthermore, the university also has a small supermarket which is open 24/7 as well, but this one is a little bit more expensive. The rent expenses are really dependent on where you live. Personally, I paid 1480 pounds for the rent of four months. On campus the rents are generally higher than off-campus. All the sports societies at the university are free of charge, however if you want a Gym membership you have to pay 35 pounds a month. Telephone costs are around 10 pounds a month. The transport costs are quite expensive in the UK. If you want to go to London by train, I advise you to order the train tickets in advance on the internet. I travelled to Birmingham, Cambridge, Canterbury a few times to London during my stay. Those trips can be quite expensive. Especially London, where I had to pay eight pounds for a beer. In total I spent around €4500,- during my exchange.



## Daily life

Besides studying, there is a lot to do on and around the university. There is a Student Union, which is an organisation that arranges a lot of events on the campus specifically for students. This union has its own bar and even has its own club called "Sub-zero", which are both open nearly every day. Besides that, everyone on the university is allowed to set up its own society. As a result there are a lot of different societies ranging from ordinary sport societies to even a Harry Potter society. I joined the tennis society, the International Society and the beer society, which were a lot of fun. The international society organises three trips each term, and I joined two of them to Canterbury and to Cambridge. Because there are so many possibilities to meet new people, you don't have to worry that you have nothing to do or no one to go out with. The university itself has a huge library, which is a really nice and quiet place, where you can study. Furthermore, it has a lot of books that you can use for your courses and for your essays.

Due to the fact that I was living in the Forest Road house, most of my friends also lived there. Many of them were (European) exchange students, and we often hanged out in each other's flats. Despite that we just had a small living room/kitchen, we have had some good house parties. Furthermore, every Monday there was karaoke at the Student Union Bar. We went there with a group of exchange students every week, which was a lot of fun. Whereas the University is really international, the town next to it is completely the opposite. The city centre of Colchester is located closely to the University. It has an old castle, an old theatre, many small British pubs and a big club. Essex is one of the counties with the highest percentage of pro-Brexit voters. When you walk through the city and meet those typical Britons with their strong accents, it really feels like a different world. I really liked to experience those both worlds. To sum up, I had a wonderful time which I will never forget and I could definitely recommend this destination!

