



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information:

Otago degree(s)	BCom, BAppSci	Major(s)	Economics, Environmental Management
Host University	Cardiff University	Semester & Year of Exchange	First Sem, 2018

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Labour Economics	English	ECON 301	18
Geographies of the Developing World	English	Unspecified 300 level Geography	18
Climate Change	English	GEOG 282	18
Environmental Law	English	Unspecified 300 level Geography	18

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

I had very unusual academic circumstances while over in Cardiff. My academic semester got pretty badly affected by UK wide lecturer strikes. They were disputing changes to their pay and pension packages. The result was for about 6 weeks all my lectures were cancelled. This sounds like a mixed blessing on paper but was a real pain due to the unions wanting to maximise strife for the university, there was never any notice. So basically I was turning up to class each day and being told at the door that the lecturer hadn't turned up again. It was frustrating because I would have travelled if knowing there would be little to do for 6 weeks. In terms of workload it was about the same as a normal Otago Semester but mine got a bit bunched because of the strikes it clumped all internal assessment over about a month because lecturers couldn't set assignments while striking. So I ended up with 14,000 words worth of essays due over the space of a fortnight. To summarise my academic experience and workload I didn't really do anything for months then it was just hectic for about a month.

Any comments on these papers:

The Labour Economics paper was interesting. It was actually a full year paper so due to only being there for a year I was excused from the final exam and just had a 100% weighted research assignment for the assessment. This meant I could pursue personal interests of the subject which

was great. It also meant that lectures were not particularly relevant as they focused on exam content.

Geographies of the Developing World was pretty dry to be blunt. One of those frustrating papers which has the potential to be fascinating, but the lecturers manage to ensnare interesting topics and tie them to a chair and beat them with a stick. Wouldn't really recommend if can be avoided

The Climate Change paper was unreal. The lecturer was extremely bright and engaging and taught around a host of relevant environmental issues. Assessment was two essays where you were given the freedom to write about what interested you, which was a real bonus. Would highly recommend this paper to anyone regardless of what you study.

The paper on Environmental Law should be avoided like the plague, which was a real shame as it could have been really useful. The reason I saw this is it is a law paper taught by the law department to non-law students. My personal opinion is that the law lecturers overlooked the extent of regular students legal knowledge which caused the paper to collapse. I had done 100 level law in Otago so I had a basic knowledge of legal systems so managed to negotiate my way through the paper all right. However, if you haven't done any law before this paper will make your head hurt.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I stayed in Talybont South, which is the largest of the four Talybont residences. They are all adjoining though. It was really good in terms of facilities my room was fine, nothing flash but very adequate. About a 15-20 minute walk to uni. Main downside was it was predominantly a first year hall so being a bit older and having already done a couple years of uni made it a bit tedious. The other thing I would say is that the halls are nothing like Dunedin ones in terms of social life they are much more like just flatting with randoms in North Dunedin. Think less UniCol more single flat on Maori Hill.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Food in Cardiff was slightly cheaper than back home. Could live off about \$40-\$50 a week on food. By memory the cost of the hall for a semester which didn't include food was about \$4300. But I had an ensuite which was a treat. One thing to be wary of at any UK uni is washing costs a bomb one company monopolised it and got the only contract so they charge about \$4.50 a load and \$3 per dry. The machines were normal sized so I could pretty happily spend the better part of \$20 doing a massive load in winter when I couldn't air dry clothes. Flights if booked early can be as low as \$750-\$800 one way, use SkyScanner or a similar comparison app. I was covered by a family insurance plan as both parents travel a lot so am unsure on the cost of that.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

Setting up a bank account in the UK is not worth your effort if you are there for 6 months. You need a proof of address and a reference. So you can't organise it before you get there. If you're a foreign student as well they need to do even more checks. Then it takes something like 3 weeks to get validated and opened. I used a Loaded for Travel card that I got from Kiwibank. It was unreal had no hassles it's basically a debit card which you load with money through your internet banking. I could load it as easily as I could move money online between my accounts. It works everywhere and holds all major currencies. My advice is get one of those or an equivalent travel card from your bank.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

I didn't because I hold a UK passport, so it was smooth sailing.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Not that I recall, on the whole Cardiff University was pretty slack keeping in touch with exchange students on the whole so I'm not sure. I don't recall needing to show proof of insurance. That may be because I was eligible for NHS treatment as I'm technically a UK citizen.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

Based in the Cardiff Students Union is all the clubs and societies. I was involved in the Ski club and went to a bunch of Rugby events. I would heavily recommend joining some sort of club because each Wednesday is club night so most clubs host what they call a social. Very similar to a red card in Dunedin usually themed with challenges etc. Really good way to meet more people as the halls aren't particularly social.

What was the university/ city like?

Uni itself was really nice: good facilities and a real mix of old school buildings and really modern recent ones. The city strikes a good balance of being big enough that it doesn't feel dead but small enough that you don't feel claustrophobic.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

There isn't a massive amount to do in Cardiff during the day. It has a pretty busy nightlife with lots of variation so there is usually something for everybody. To check out in Cardiff though I would say: Roath Park, Cardiff Castle, The Bay, Bute Park, Pontcanna Fields and try do a day trip out to Caerphilly Castle.

Any tips for future students?

Travel as much as you can, flights are way cheaper if you bus to London and fly from there. Be prepared for the uni to not be that organised early on and just get everything sorted in your first couple of weeks. Bristol is a super cool city and only 50 minutes away do some weekends there it's got a silly club scene if that's your vibe. Book stuff early, don't be conservative about whether you will be busy or not just book flights to cool places months ahead and commit to travel. If you do that, you will make your uni work around that, not the other way round.

Overall Experience

My overall experience was really good. I would recommend an exchange to anyone. My mentality about them is that so long as you don't die you will come out better for it. If I was to do it again I probably wouldn't go to Cardiff it was perfectly fine but a bit of a bland place compared to other options. I think I would have preferred to go somewhere slightly more exotic. But in saying that it was a super safe bet. I was really surprised to get a bit homesick after a couple of months away I really didn't expect to. But it wasn't too much of a biggie just chug away at it. The academic side was a bit hairy just due to the fact my semester was so messed around by the strikes but on the whole perfectly fine.

The highlights for me and what really made the trip was the amount and ease of travelling from Cardiff that I did. I travelled all over the place, the countries I visited since leaving New Zealand were: England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Spain, France, Andorra, Belgium, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Bosnia, Croatia, Portugal, Morocco, China and The Philippines. Being in the UK really made me realise how far away from everywhere New Zealand is, if booked right you could get a \$40 flight from London to most places in Europe so travelling actually became affordable.

I couldn't recommend an exchange more, it really changed my perspectives on a lot of things and made me appreciate New Zealand far more having been exposed to many other countries and their cultures. Being on the outside for an extended period looking in really allows you to appreciate what you have back home.