

University of Edinburgh

2016 Semester 2

BSc Anatomy and Neuroscience

My exchange to Scotland was the best time of my entire life and I want to start by saying it is worth doing anything you can to make it happen. I studied the final semester of my BSc in Neuroscience and Anatomy and I have never enjoyed university so much as I did in Edinburgh.

Workload/University

At Edinburgh I took all my courses through Edinburgh Medical School: Biomedical Sciences. The department does not get many exchange students (I was one of two) but they were fantastic. Most departments at the uni provide you with a personal tutor to answer any of your questions about academic or general life. I had thought that studying at UoE would be much more challenging than at Otago, but overall I found it to be far easier. I took three papers (a full-time course load at Edinburgh). There was more lecture time, 3-4 hours a week per subject, which was often run as two lectures back-to-back. However, there were virtually no labs (I had three in total the entire semester) and many lecture slots became independent study time. There were very few internal assessments, often just one essay for the entire semester. The exams were of a difficulty comparable to Otago, but they were all two hours so are more time-pressured. At UoE they place more emphasis on imparting varied life skills so there are a range of teaching and learning sessions including lecture style, meeting style, lab style, workshop style, and tutorial style. Many students have Wednesdays off and are encouraged to use this time to join clubs or societies. There is much more time to follow interests and I never felt burnt out or overworked by school. It was a genuinely enjoyable learning experience. While most exchange students I met found it easier than at their home universities, I did meet some students in the Biology Teaching Organisation that found the workload and content to be far more advanced than they were used to. If you want to study but find the central library too busy I would recommend the New Amphion in Teviot for a relaxed atmosphere (and cheap coffee!), or the New College library (it's a little known fact that anyone, not just theology students, can get in with a student ID card). Good cafés for studying are Love Crumbs (tea comes in a flask and can last you hours), Montebarr, South Hall, Waterstones (worth the walk for a seat by the windows), Levels, and the National Museum cafe. It is difficult to buy second-hand textbooks. Most people that bought them new didn't use them so I would only get them once you have started if you think you will need to.

Living

I lived in self-catered university flats (Hermit's Croft) and loved everything about it. I would recommend not looking for private accommodation because it is far less stressful to go through the uni and you meet more people. If you are used to flatting in Dunedin, choosing one of the many self-catered options is a good idea. There were a mix of exchange students, mostly in their third years, and local first year students. The RA's at UoE work really hard. The living style is pretty autonomous, but they organise a huge range of events and foster a real sense of community within the residences. The flats are mostly modern and well appointed. All of them are in central locations. I would recommend checking to see if you are at the George Square or Kings Buildings campus as they are a 30-minute walk away from one another (there is a shuttle bus but most people opted not to take it). Most science courses, aside from

third year biomedical sciences, are at Kings. I wouldn't stress over how you rank your residences as they give you one of your five choices but it seems pretty random and I don't know anyone who didn't enjoy where they lived. It is useful to know that if you really don't like your flatmates once you get there, the university will move you to somewhere else, so don't stress! In the first week the uni runs a "free sale" where you can get anything you need to equip your flat, so don't buy it all when you first get there.

The City

Edinburgh is an amazing city. You will never run out of things to do. There is a reasonable bus system but everyone walked everywhere. Most things are no more than a 25 minute walk away from campus and it takes about a week to get orientated with the city. It is very safe and I would happily walk in most areas in the dark on my own (but stay away from the meadows). Try to get out an about as much as possible and experience everything Edinburgh has to offer (going to RA events are a good start for getting acquainted with the city). There are lots of express supermarkets, which have everything you need at reasonable prices, and as a flat we got our weekly shop delivered.

Weather

The weather was nowhere near as bad as I thought it would be. It was still 13 degrees on the 30th of December. Short days were the hardest things to get used to (the sun set about 3pm in the winter) but the temperature itself was not too cold most of the time.

Travel

It was easy to travel both in and out of Scotland. I started by going on trips run by the International Student Centre most weekends (you can find them on facebook). They are good value and a great way to see Scotland. There is also a company called Independent Student Tours (again – look on facebook), which run great trips to some of the major sites including Isle of Skye. For other local travel, I highly recommend getting a 16-25 rail card. It costs 30 pounds for the year but gives you 1/3rd of all tickets so it can pay for itself with one trip to London. Train travel is extremely easy, pretty cheap, and gives you regular and fast access to any place you could want to go. Weekend trips to places like York, Newcastle, Glasgow, Loch Lomond, and even some of the islands such as Arran, were very common and simple to arrange. There is a 30 minute express bus to the airport from Waverly Bridge and the airport itself is very manageable. Just make sure you leave some weekends to enjoy Edinburgh too!

Cost

Going on exchange wasn't cheap, but it was the best use of money I could possibly think of. Overall I spent close to \$13,000 in my six months away. This included approximately \$3500 on return flights from London to NZ (flying home in January was very expensive so I would recommend booking a flexible flight early, even if you aren't sure when to come back). It also included travel through Ireland, Spain, Morocco, and Iceland, as well as domestic trips through the UK nearly every weekend. Roughly, I think it cost me approximately \$6000 for rent and living expenses. Food is cheap to buy at the supermarket and nights out will not cost you much either. Go to Primark if you want cheap clothes or things for your living space. If you want a reasonably priced meal out I recommend Southpour (it has great food at approx. 10 pounds per main), and for something more fancy Voodoo Rooms is a lot of fun.

Activities

I couldn't list them all here, but these are good things for a local bucket list: Carlton Hill, Arthurs Seat, a walk around Holyrood Park Drive, Holyrood Palace, Edinburgh Castle, Dean Village, Crammond Island, the Botanic Gardens, Surgeons Hall Museum, National Museum of Scotland, a ghost tour (City of the Dead is good), Mary King's Close, Blackford Hill, Auldhouse nachos, 5 pound lunch special at the Southsider.

Overview

Overall, Edinburgh was an incredible university, in an amazing city, full of fantastic people. I honestly could not speak more highly of the entire experience. There will be times you get homesick, but just remember what an awesome place you are in. Find time to go to a Ceilidh (you won't regret it) and make the most of every hour you spend there.

