

## **Exchange report Durham University, academic year 2018-2019**

### **Study Programme**

As an exchange student in Durham University, you are able to partake in many courses. I came to this University as a law student, where I was able to partake all of the law courses available to law students in Durham (except similar courses that I already took in Groningen). The law courses I took were related to my bachelor International and European law such as Competition Law, Contemporary Issues in the Law of the European Union, and International Human Rights. These courses delved intensively in either areas which we were not able to cover in our second-year courses or new topics which I am very interested in. For students in this bachelor, I highly recommend these courses as they will further your interest in the areas of international and European law.

My biggest takeaway in Durham University was taking a language course. The university has excellent language courses in various different languages. I took a beginner language course in French, where I had three hours of class with mandatory homework every week with lots of writing, reading, and speaking assignments. The department is renowned around the UK for its excellence and the professors are very experienced in their various courses. I highly recommend taking a language course in Durham.

Furthermore, my exchange gave me the opportunity to partake in courses not within in the field of law. There are several, relevant departments that offer a wide range of courses. I personally partook in a second-year course from the Philosophy (Political Philosophy) and a third-year course from the History department (Gender and Sexuality during Britain's Long 20<sup>th</sup> Century). Even though I had very little background in these two fields, the university still gives you the opportunity to take these courses. In hindsight, I would try to take more law courses rather courses from other departments, especially those which are very different from the field of law. Yet, it is very nice that exchange students are not limited to taking courses which are within the field of law.

Unlike Groningen, most courses (with very few exceptions) have exams in the beginning of May until the beginning of June. There is only one main exam per course, with the exceptions of the French language course (I had three exams: written, aural, and oral test) and in the Competition Law course (the grades are based on two essays – one submitted in the beginning of the second term and the second submitted in the beginning of the third/final term). For students from Groningen, this might be a little hard to adjust to since our examination is very different. While most of the exams in Groningen are three hours long, this was not the same for most of the courses (both law and non-law). There are also no computer exams, everything is done by hand in Durham. However, Groningen students should not be intimidated by these differences, as long as you put the work in, it should be fine.

### **Language**

Durham University is located in Northern England; thus, the national language is English. Being part of the LLB International and European Law, it should not be difficult for any student (especially internationals coming to Groningen) to study in Durham.

### **Finances and other conditions**

In the UK, living costs are a bit higher than they are in the Netherlands so it should be expected that students will be spending a bit more than they do in Groningen. Cost of rent is also generally a bit more expensive than it is in Groningen. During my academic year in Durham, the UK is still an EU Member, thus I did not need to get a residence permit or something similar. Additionally, there were no charges when applying to the host university. Monthly, I spent an average of 800 to 1000 euros per month, this includes rent and living expenses. This depends mostly on the location of your residence in Durham, plus how much you wish to spend on trips around the UK amongst other things.

### **Preparation and contacts with the faculty abroad**

From end of September to mid-October (around the beginning of the academic year), there are several opportunities to meet with law students and faculty of the university. In the end of September, you meet with the Durham Exchange Office and its faculty members as well as all the other exchange students from other Erasmus programmes. During Freshers Week, I was given the opportunity to meet with the law faculty and the dean of the Law Faculty (Thom Brooks) who gave an informational lecture about the faculty itself. In the beginning of the academic year, the law faculty have a small cocktail party in their faculty to introduce the students to the different law professors which gives exchange and non-exchange students the opportunity to mingle with one and other.

Furthermore, for law students especially, we have a former Groningen professor, Dr Barend van Leeuwen who taught EU law in Groningen and currently does so in Durham. Barend was more than happy to be in contact with me prior to and during my stay in Durham to help me prepare for what was to come.

### **Housing**

Durham is a collegiate university, where students are separated in different colleges which is spread around the city (this is somewhat similar to the Harry Potter house system). While everyone is allocated into a college, Erasmus exchange students do not get the opportunity to live in the college unlike students who come from beyond Europe. Thus, exchange students from Groningen have to find a place privately.

As I mentioned earlier, housing will definitely be slightly more expensive than in Groningen but this depends in which part of the city you are looking. It may be difficult to find a place at first but there are several ways to find rooms. Personally, I would recommend looking at Facebook groups such as 'Durham Uni Find a Housemate' where students or landlords offer rooms in their house which have become vacant due to someone dropping out or are looking for housemates to rent a house with. This can similarly be done on the website 'Spareroom' It is also possible to contact letting agencies let single rooms but I found that looking through the Facebook group was my safest bet as letting agencies may not have any rooms/places available.

Durham is a very small town, smaller than Groningen but similarly inhabited with lots of students. I would recommend to look for accommodation in the following areas: the Viaduct, Claypath area, and Elvet/Whinney Hill area. I lived right next to the Elvet (Mavin Street) which was around five minutes away from the Law Faculty and Bill Bryson Library (the university's main library) and very close to the Bailey. The Bailey is the old town center where the famous cathedral and castle are located, where many of the colleges are located as well as most restaurants, cafes, and nightlife.

Some of my friends also lived in areas such as Gilesgate or Nevilles Cross. While it may be cheaper to live in these areas, I would not recommend it because you have to walk for at least 30 minutes or more or take a bus to the university or the Bailey.

### **Guidance/reception at host university & Culture, free time and travelling**

As previously mentioned, the introductions given both by the exchange office and law faculty for all incoming law and exchange students which allowed to get acquainted to the faculty and the students as well as the city.

One of the main reasons I chose Durham was because of their collegiate system. During my year, they had 16 colleges and as an Erasmus student you get randomly allocated into one of them. A college can be basically seen as a student association with housing for its members. Students who do a full degree in the university will live in college during their first year, with the option of coming back in their third or fourth year. The college provides all facilities, including a library, sports facilities, a bar, meals and more. All colleges organize an introduction week/fresher's week in the first week of the academic year.

Through Freshers Week, you get to know a lot of people (from first to final years) which leads you to be involved in college life throughout the year. I would definitely recommend doing this because this is the very essence of the Durham Student culture. During Freshers Week, I would recommend going to the college sports and societies fair. Each college has sports teams in all sorts of sports such as football, softball, badminton, field hockey, pool (etc.) which split by gender as well as into different leagues depending on how good you are at the sport. Joining either a society or a sports team is a great way to get to know people at your college. Most societies and teams will also regularly host very fun and unique social events, which are a must!

Additionally, during Freshers week, there is a large fair for university societies and sports teams which is held by the Durham Students Union (DSU). You can get involved in a wide array of sports teams and societies; you will be very surprised as to what you will find. I highly recommend joining at least one society or sports team either at college or university level, as it is also another great way to meet people other than those who are on exchange. I joined the Durham Erasmus and Exchange Society, Durham Intersectional Feminist Society, and Durham Union Society (Debate Society) to name a few.

Being able to go for exchange for an entire year allows you to travel around the UK. While it is possible to do that yourself or with a group of friends. I would recommend having a look at this group called 'Don't Be a Tourist' who did fantastic tours around cities in the UK (I was able to visit Edinburgh, York, and Liverpool through this service). Otherwise, it is possible to go to certain locations on your own but depending on how far it is, the price of the train/bus tickets can be quite pricey.

Ultimately, if you are ready to do an entire exchange year as is required for Durham, I recommend Durham University. I would not change my experience there at all and would happily do it all over again – it was everything I hoped and more! While it may be a small town, there is so much experience that you might find at that end of it that one year was not enough and that you will leave wanting to stay.