

Experience report: Cardiff University 2014/2015

Chemistry, 1st master semester

Planning and organisation – Why did I choose Cardiff?

I decided to spend one semester abroad right at the beginning of my studies. I wanted to improve my command of English, experience a new culture and meet new people. Because of the strict curriculum of the German bachelor programme it is almost impossible to find a university, which offers all of the needed modules. Therefore I decided that the first master semester would be the best time for me to spend a semester abroad. I wanted to use the Erasmus programme get support before and during my time abroad. I started organising this approximately one year before the beginning of the first master semester. An important part of my motivation was to improve my command of English. Therefore I wanted to study at a place, where English is not just the language of study, but also as the native language. With the Erasmus programme there are three partner universities in Great Britain. After checking the offered modules of these three universities, the decision was easy for me. I am mainly interested in industrial and inorganic chemistry, especially heterogeneous catalysis, and the University of Cardiff offers a Master programme in catalysis. But it is also possible to focus on other branches of chemistry. Next to the good selection of modules, I was interested in the Welsh culture.

First days and House-Hunting

I went to Cardiff by plane three weeks before the beginning of classes. Cardiff University only guarantees places in the residence halls to students that stay the full academic year. Therefore I had to find private accommodation. Finding one over the internet was very difficult and I arrived at Cardiff without having a permanent accommodation. But there are many letting agencies in the student area and I found a nice accommodation together with other students in less than five days. I can recommend to live in Cathays, where most of the students live and which is close to university. During this house-hunting I already met a lot of other Erasmus students from many different countries. The university organised some welcome events to assist us with the house-hunting and other organisational things. Furthermore the Erasmus society hosted meetings to get in contact with each other. The first trips to explore Cardiff, its

surroundings and Wales took place as well. The weather was very nice, so that we sometimes could not believe that this should be Wales.



Life at Cardiff University – Courses and Lab Work

Unlike the RUB Cardiff University is not a campus university. Nevertheless, all the buildings are close together and quickly accessible. The Department of Chemistry is located in the main building, which looks much nicer than the buildings in Bochum.



In general I had a very positive impression of the faculty, the staff and the lecturers. Only 15 students attended the Master in catalysis programme. Therefore the contact between the students and the lecturers was closer compared to Germany. This created a pleasant learning atmosphere. Moreover friendships developed quickly within our master course. The contact with these native speakers was especially useful to improve my knowledge of English. The lectures in Cardiff began in September and ended in December. The exams took place in January, but course work had to be done during the whole semester and was part of the final grade. In general, I think that the level of lectures was a little bit lower than in Bochum, but I still learned a lot of new and interesting things.

In addition to the lectures, I decided to take an In-depth-practical at Cardiff University. I asked different departments/workgroups for possible topics and I was always welcome, so that I could choose from a variety of topics for my project. The laboratory and equipment were new and in a good condition. I was part of a small workgroup of four people. This created a familiar atmosphere. Group meetings took place every second week, where the current research was discussed and helpful tips were given. I have completed the same amount of lectures and practicals as in Germany, which was very important for me, because I did not want to lose a semester.

Beside these academic aspects Cardiff University offered a lot of extracurricular activities. There were many societies and sport clubs.

Conclusion

All in all I really enjoyed my time in Cardiff. My expectations of the semester abroad have been fulfilled completely. It was not just the chemical knowledge that I have gained. But I was also able to get in touch with new people and other cultures. Furthermore I could visit Wales and its beautiful national parks, as well as London, Glasgow, the Scottish Highlands and many other places. I think that I gained a lot from my semester abroad and I can only recommend it to anyone. Cardiff was definitely the right choice for me.