

ERASMUS Erfahrungsbericht

Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, England, winter term 2020/21

1. Reasons for choosing Northumbria University

I decided to study one semester at *Northumbria University* because I found their university website to be the most interesting, inviting and most convincing one of all the universities I had to choose from. Northumbria University is a highly inclusive university which equally cares about their students' and teachers' wellbeing, which is emphasised by their huge mental health support that every Northumbria member can access freely. Northumbria University has an Ask4Help desk which is open 24 hours every day to answer all urgent questions that are related to university issues. I was able to inform myself about my course, the Students' Union, the university library and the campus facilities before my departure due to their helpful website (<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk>).

2. Available information before departure

At my home institution *Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena*, I found most information related to my semester abroad on the website of the international office. I found all the necessary information there, including the deadlines for handing my application in, information about health insurance, travel costs and, of course, the documents that have to be filled in before the semester abroad starts. In addition to the International Office, I found my personal Erasmus coordinator from my department (Department of English and American studies), Dr. Karsten Schmidtke-Bode, extremely valuable, since he answered all my questions thoroughly.

The information about the university abroad was not as detailed as the information my home university gave me, but it was enough to prepare for my stay. I found my accommodation on the university website, as well as my application portal. When I had a question, I could write an E-Mail to the external office of *Northumbria University*. The only information that I missed before my departure was any information about my modules since Northumbria University does not provide any overview or information about the modules on their website.

3. The academic period

I studied one semester at Northumbria University (winter term 2020/21). The academical year works differently in England than in Germany: the academic calendar is not split into two, but three semesters per year. Semester One began on the 21st of September 2020 and ended on the 22nd of January 2021, which means that one semester lasts for four months. Semester two is scheduled from

18.01.2021 to 28.05.2021 and Semester Three from 24.05. to 03.09.2021. The Winter Break took place from 21.12.2020 to 08.01.2021, followed by the assessment period in which Essays must be handed in and exams have to be written.

4. *My course*

My course at Northumbria University was an *undergraduate Exchange Programme*, in which I could choose from different modules from English literature, History and Creative Writing, which all belong to the Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences. I only received information about the modules shortly before my departure. When the semester started, I was told that unfortunately, the university was not able to mix different module levels due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that I only got modules that were below my level at my home institution. For the same reason, I only received two out of four modules that I requested. All courses were taught in English only. The Ask4Help desk, the Students' Union and the module tutors were always available when questions arose. But when it comes to financial issues, Northumbria University would always make sure that everyone pays their tuition and accommodation fees, despite financial hardships that many students are currently suffering from during the pandemic. I have to mention here that Northumbria University has a zero-tolerance policy regarding drug abuse, criminal behaviour and, during the pandemic, also regarding the disregard of Covid-19 restrictions, which means that the university would expel any student that does not follow the University guidelines. Comparing the quality of teaching that I experienced, Northumbria University (NU) cannot keep up with FSU, especially in online teaching. All my modules mostly consisted of two- hour long pre-recorded lectures, accompanied by two live (online) seminars in two out of three modules. Since the university gave me courses below my actual level, I felt demanded too little by the content of my modules. The assessments were easier than at FSU, since all three assessments were 2000-word Essays each – compared to normal term papers at FSU with 12-15 pages (which equals around 7000-8000 words).

5. *My accommodation*

I decided to live in a university-owned student accommodation because it was the cheapest option compared to normal flats. I was able to book my room online on the university website. My student hall was catered, which means that we got breakfast and dinner served every day. This saved a lot of my time and money! But I have to be honest and acknowledge that the food in the student hall cannot be compared to self-cooked food. Unfortunately, most of the meals were greasy and fried, and thus contained a high amount of fat or sugar – including the typical English breakfast consisting of baked beans, sausages, fried eggs, canned tomatoes and ham, which was served daily (for me being a vegetarian, my choice

was thus limited)¹. Nevertheless, I can highly recommend living in a student accommodation because it is the best place for socialising: you could find a common room with a table-tennis table, a piano and a cinema room in my student hall and you met many residents daily in the dining room. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, socialising was highly restricted to the social bubble (=household), which meant I would not have been able to meet anyone if I had not lived in a student hall. Since I lived in a student hall, I was able to make wonderful friends who lived in the same accommodation, despite social distancing restrictions.

6. *Why Newcastle upon Tyne, England?*

England is a special country with its own system of measuring units, English cuisine, currency and 'driving on the left of the road'- principle. The English cuisine is obviously not famous for being particularly fantastic, but there will nevertheless be many fantastic restaurants in every English city. Newcastle upon Tyne was the city I lived in, and I am glad that I chose this city. There is something about Newcastle that is unique. May it be all the stunning bridges at Quayside at the Tyne River, the old industrial areas, or the mixture of different types of architecture: a walk around the city is always amazing. Newcastle has a lot to offer: a beautiful city centre with several interesting shops, pubs and restaurants, metro and bus stations that can bring you to every other city nearby and Geordie-speaking locals who will always be friendly and kind, as well as the best party scene in the UK (I did not experience it due to Covid-19 pandemic, but every local confirmed that statement). Furthermore, Newcastle upon Tyne is only 20 minutes away from the sea: there are stunning beaches in Tynemouth, South Shields, and Whitley Bay.

7. *Costs of living*

Living in England is clearly more expensive than living in Germany. Almost everything is more expensive (except for clothing). Especially grocery prices are incredibly high compared to Germany, which is another reason why I appreciated my catered accommodation. Of course, rental prices are higher in England than in Germany as well: I paid £2,000 for my catered accommodation for four months. Thus, in my case, the Erasmus scholarship only covered half of the rent, but since I received *Auslandsbafög*, it was manageable to cover all my costs abroad. The flights to and from Newcastle cost around 270€. I did not have to pay any tuition fees at Northumbria University.

¹ Marginal note: If you are a fan of German bread, I have to disappoint you, since you will not be able to find anything similar to that in English supermarkets.

Conclusion

Despite higher costs of living, I can highly recommend living and studying in Newcastle upon Tyne. The city is beautiful, the people are kind and friendly, the weather is better than you might think, and the university offers a wide range of courses. This semester abroad has changed my life forever. It did not only help me to improve my English skills, but it also helped me to gain more self-confidence and to become more independent. I had the chance to meet lovely people from all around the world and learn a lot about different cultures, languages, people and about life in general. I can thus honestly recommend going abroad to everyone who is open for a new adventure.