

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

A: Student Information

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| VUW degree(s) | Bachelor of Commerce |
| Major(s) | Marketing and Information Management |
| Exchange Institution | Richmond, The American International University in London |
| VUW Tri & Year of Exchange | Trimester 2, 2016 |

B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Books | N/A - Textbooks were available to borrow for free from the library. |
| Accommodation | N/A - Stayed with family. |
| Return Airfare | \$1600 (Originally placed a \$99 deposit on a \$2600 flight in February but found a cheaper airfare/re-booked for \$1600 in April. |
| Local Transportation | Had to commute to campus (Zone 1) from Zone 4 so I purchased zone 1-4 travel cards for 158 pounds a month (roughly \$300), providing unlimited travel. A student discount card can be purchased from Transport for London for around \$40 and gives 33% off travel/travelcards on the London transport network. If living in the central city, i.e. at halls, a travel card is not needed - pay as you go will work out cheaper. |
| Meals | N/A - Meals provided by family. |
| Visa | N/A - Had a British passport so didn't need one. |
| Health & Insurance | STA Travel Basic Insurance Plan - \$277 |
| Personal Spending | Budgeted around \$50 a week for personal spending. |
| Communications (phone, etc.) | 15 pounds a month for 4GB of data, 1000 minutes and unlimited texts. (Was roughly \$25 at the time). GiffGaff is a relatively less used mobile provider in the UK but has fantastic deals/great coverage and service. |
| Other fees (specify) | |

What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?

Due to the crash of the pound following the Brexit decision, this provided a favourable exchange rate for converting New Zealand dollars to Pounds.

Supermarket food was a lot cheaper than expected.

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

Travel within London on the trains was a significant cost.

Eating/going out in central London can end up costing a lot also.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, traveler's checks, etc)?

CashPassport.co.nz provides a reloadable cash currency card which can be used in any place that accepts MasterCard, including free cash withdrawals from ATMs. It can be reloaded for \$1 via bank transfer but can take up to 3 business days so you must be pro-active to ensure you have enough money during this period. They provide an easily assessable app to monitor your spending with a 24hr toll free number if you have any issues.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

Kensington is one of the most expensive suburbs of central London and that is reflected in the supermarkets/shops nearby. Expect to pay more. Notting Hill Gate is a 10 min walk/2 min bus away and has cheaper supermarkets, such as Tesco and Sainsburies and will provide significantly cheaper shopping/food.

Do not open up an overseas bank account. These can carry hefty fees for International Students and can be difficult to close after you leave. Cash passports are a much cheaper and easier alternative to managing your finances.

Keep up to date with the exchange rates.

Groupon has fantastic deals and discounts on food/drink/activities in central London.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

50p-1 pound for a can of coke (\$1-\$2)

Roughly 2-3 pounds for a coffee. (\$4-\$6)

C: Visas & Insurance **Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

N/A - Had a UK Passport

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

N/A - Had a UK Passport

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

No mandatory insurance.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

STA Travel provided an insurance plan when booking flights. This was more convenient and worked out to be cheaper and more extensive than other external insurance plans. The Victoria University STA branch were very knowledgeable and had dealt with lots of Victoria Abroad students in the past, thus could advise which options were best.

D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

| Course Title | Language of Instruction | VUW course equivalent or elective | VUW points/cr edits value | Rating (1-5) | Comments |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| VUW Trimester 1/YEAR | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| VUW Trimester 2/2016 | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|---------|-----------------------------------|-------|---|---|
| Digital Marketing and Social Media (MKT6220) | English | Internet Marketing (MARK312) | 15pts | 3 | A perfect blend of theory and practical work. Students also present the key points in their essay in groups to the class so that feedback could be gained prior to submission. The lecturer has a heavy focus on real world applications of the content as well as critical thinking exercises, which was incredibly valuable. |
| Advertising Management (MKT6200) | English | Marketing Communicatons (MARK301) | 15pts | 4 | This course provided a great opportunity to be creative in terms of designing advertisements and crafting a campaign. It definitely offered a 'taster' in terms of what working for an advertising agency involves. The highly experienced lecturer is open to provide feedback/constructive criticism on designs for the assignments throughout the semester so it is highly advisable to seek this. |

| | | | | | |
|---|---------|------------------------------|---------|---|--|
| Marketing Planning and Strategy (MKT6405) | English | MARK201 Marketing Management | - 15pts | 5 | Not much assessment until the final week in which a report, presentation and exam are due. Time management is therefore highly important to ensure that the report is worked on throughout the semester instead of near the due date. Attendance to lectures are necessary as key advice in terms of the assignments/exam are often verbalised and not written down. |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

I had no issues with the registration process. Once my application had been sent through, a conditional offer was received relatively quickly and I was able to submit a student contract. The Victoria Abroad office and Host University were available via email for queries.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

Due to the small class sizes, registration into courses is highly competitive. Therefore, it is important to organise your student IT login prior to the time courses open for enrolment and register asap. I was initially on the waiting list for a course that was full when I enrolled however, as students often un-enrol from courses, I was able to gain entry.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

The required course-load is 3-5 courses. was initially enrolled in 5 courses however, was advised that most exchange students decide to only do 3. This is a comfortable workload that allows a balance between uni work, extra-curricular activities and exploring the city on your exchange.

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

There is a noticeably stronger focus on group work at Richmond. Most assignments, including reports and essays are completed in groups of 3-4, which allows for a more comfortable distribution of workload and development of synergy skills. The classes are also significantly smaller than at Victoria, with most classes averaging around 12 students. This allowed for a more personalised teaching approach. The academic experience definitely exceeded my expectations and I truly felt engrossed in the content of the courses. The learning outcomes of each assignment were clearly communicated and I understood the value of what I was learning in terms of my future career.

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

Due to the smaller class sizes, the style of teaching was more personalised, allowing more engagement with the content of the courses. The 'liberal arts' aspect of Richmond's teaching philosophy manifested in the frequent usage of real world contexts - lecturers had all worked in their fields so could offer real world insight, which was highly valuable. The workload was about the same as expected at Victoria however, assignments were mostly due near the end of the semester, leading to slightly less workload in the beginning.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

The required course-load is 3-5 courses. I was initially enrolled in 5 courses however, was advised that most exchange students decide to only do 3. This is a comfortable workload that allows a balance between uni work, extra-curricular activities and exploring the city on your exchange. A lot of the courses on offer at Richmond are close to Victoria courses in terms of content, thus selecting a courses for cross-crediting is a relatively easy task.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Communicating within a group is crucial due to the large focus on group assignments. Also, the small class sizes mean there is more pressure to engage in class discussions.

Furthermore, there is no study break week before exam week. Some lecturers will allow you to study in the final week of classes however, some skip straight to exams. Therefore, keeping up to date with coursework is important because the exams quickly approach.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

These were satisfactory. Richmond is significantly smaller than Victoria so there were less computer facilities but these were of high quality with PCs and Macs available for use.

I initially had issues connecting to the internet on my laptop, however, the computer staff in the library were very helpful and set this up for me.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

N/A

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Private/family.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

Pros:

- Worked out cheaper.
- More freedom.
- More flexibility in terms of moving in/out.

Cons:

- Travel/commuting to uni was a significant cost.
- Commuting on the tube can often leave you frustrated.
- Much harder to make friends.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Although living off-campus can often work out cheaper, factoring in the cost of commuting to uni, halls would be the recommended accommodation option. Furthermore, there are many social benefits of living with other students and having meals provided for you under a meal plan mean halls are an attractive option for an international student.

How early can you move into accommodation?

The move-in day at halls begins the day before orientation week starts. As I was living with family, I moved back to London a month prior to the start of uni.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

Meals provided by family.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

Finding off-campus housing in London can often end up costing a significant amount, even for a small place and is significantly competitive. AirBnB worked out to be an attractive/easier option for some of my friends who were looking for off-campus accommodation.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

The highly competitive nature of the market means you must be proactive in searching for a place.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections**What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?**

Due to the small class sizes, it was easy to make friends within classes and the local students were very welcoming. There were many activities at the start of the semester/orientation, such as tours and trips to shows/London sights so I found this to be another great way to get to know everyone. Although London is an incredibly busy and populated city, it is easy to feel lonely if you do not seek ways to meet new people, such as hobby meetups/groups.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

I had lived in London for the first 9 years of my life, so this helped in the transition into moving back there, along with the support I had from my family members around me over there.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

The sheer amount of people in the city was certainly a shock at the start. People are a lot less laid back than in New Zealand and in general, everyone is a lot more fast paced/impatient. Trains and streets are continually over crowded and it can feel slightly suffocating at first. However, this feeling quickly subsides by exploring/getting more familiar with the city surroundings. I found that as the time went by I was able to gauge when certain areas/trains would be busiest thus could plan my day accordingly. There is also slightly less spontaneity in socialisation due to the vast size of London - there is more of a need to plan things a lot of time in advance.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Although the busy and fast paced nature of London comes with its disadvantages, the advantages highly outweigh these. There is always something going on, from events to shows and if you appreciate anything related to the arts, there is a vast amount of culture to absorb.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

I was very welcomed at the uni by staff/students. They were all eager to hear what life in New Zealand is like.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

London is a very diverse and inclusive city to live in thus there is noticeable respect surrounding minorities. I personally identify as gay and felt nothing but kindness. In terms of students with physical disabilities, a

few of the buildings are on multi-levels with no noticeable lift services so this could pose a potential barrier. However, there may be lift services available that I may not have been aware of.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

I personally didn't face any discrimination however, following the outcome of Brexit, there seems to have been a rise in Xenophobia in England. However, London itself is a very diverse and inclusive city so this wouldn't particularly pose an issue in this area.

G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

Although there weren't as many options of extra-curricular activities available compared to vic, there were many clubs on offer at Richmond. I would definitely recommend attending the extra-curricular meeting during orientation week in which all of these are showcased.

There were also many student activities/trips on offer at Richmond, including seaside visits, west end shows, art tours and in some cases overseas trips. These were communicated via the Richmond website.

Also, the nearby universities, such as UCL and Imperial College offer memberships to their extra-curricular groups to outside students, which opens up a lot of more options.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

With something always going on in London, there is so much to see and do during your free time. The "top 5 things to do" table below shows my favourite however, the website/Facebook page "TimeOut" is a perfect way to keep up to date with everything happening in the city at the current moment and was a way for me to discover new things to do.

The rest of Europe is also very cheap to travel to and with many courses at Richmond not falling on Fridays, this leaves a 3 day weekend to explore other countries.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

The campus is situated on a busy High Street in Central London, thus there are plenty of opportunities to find employment in retail/grocery stores. There are a variety of student job websites, similar to SJS in NZ that advertise these, accessible with a simple google search. The city is incredibly competitive thus employment opportunities are often hard to seize.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Internships within the Uni are mostly on offer for higher level students who are staying for longer than 1 semester and seem to be particularly difficult to apply for as an international student. There are an extensive amount of volunteer opportunities within London, accessible with a simple google search.

5 things to take to your host country or region

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Umbrella/rain jacket - english weather can be very unpredictable. |
| 2 | Smartphone - apps, such as CityMapper will help immensely in terms of navigating the transport system in the city. |
| 3 | Power adaptors are a must. Take 2 or 3 just in case you lose one. |
| 4 | A cash passport/currency card (cashpassport.co.nz) - allows you to easily convert dollars to pounds at a great exchange rate. The card can be used anywhere MasterCard is accepted and offers no-fee cash withdrawals. If travelling to Europe, funds can be easily converted to Euros. |
| 5 | Coins/cash. Many small shops will not accept EFTPOS/will charge a fee for using one. |

5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Go to as many OWeek activities as possible. The Thames Boat Party is a must! |
| 2 | The Starbucks in ASA Briggs is cheaper than other branches and a fantastic place to study. It is a relaxed environment and a great common room type location to socialise with friends. |
| 3 | There is a fantastic computer lab in the Asa Briggs building on the underground level, perfect for studying/printing. |
| 4 | A lot of the coursework is group-work so make sure to choose your groups carefully/be an active member of your group in ensuring you are contributing your fair share of the workload. |
| 5 | Ask for help. The smaller class sizes mean you are more able to ask your professor questions about the coursework/any problems you may have regarding the content/assignments. Utilise their office hours. |

Top 5 Things to do

What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | See a West End Show - Use apps such as Headout and TodayTix to get tickets around 80% off in some cases! |
| 2 | Be in the audience of a TV show. The London Studios are within walking distance of the Southbank and often have shows that require an audience (including Grahame Norton and many other shows aired in NZ). Tickets can be obtained for free from websites such as Applausestore and SRO audiences. |
| 3 | Take a stroll along the Southbank of the Thames (with a camera in hand!) On a sunny day, the views are amazing. You'll see many landmarks, from Big Ben, to the London Eye. There are always markets/things going on with a fantastic atmosphere. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4 | Cycle from uni, through Hyde Park to Oxford Street on a London Hire Bike for only 2 pounds (£4). Oxford Street is one of the main shopping streets in London and fantastic for retail therapy after a day of studying! Hyde Park is also beautiful all year round and a perfect place to take pictures/relax. |
| 5 | Take a Thames river cruise at sunset. This is a perfect way to see a lot of the sights in the city and the sunset will provide a great photo opportunity as all of the pretty lights in the city begin to turn on. |

H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

Without a doubt, my exchange to London will be one of the highlights of my university experience. To study in one of the key commerce hubs in the world was such an immersive experience - the lecturers at my host university were distinguished people in their fields and were able to give a unique international perspective to my degree area. The networking opportunities I gained through my exchange were also invaluable as I was able to connect with the people not only based in London but with other exchange students from around the world. Furthermore, living in such a vibrant city, full of opportunities, I truly felt the meaning of the phrase, "the world is your oyster." The short time frame of the exchange meant I was keen to explore and experience as much as possible and my subsequent experiences have certainly helped shape who I am today. Overall, I believe this experience has given me a refreshing perspective on my degree and has rejuvenated my passion for learning as I head into my final year.