

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	English Literature, Classics
Exchange Institution	Royal Holloway University of London
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2016 Tri 1

## 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	\$180
Accommodation	\$5670
Return Airfare	\$2972
Local Transportation	\$250
Meals	\$1400
Visa	N/A
Health & Insurance	\$430
Personal Spending	\$300
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$150
Other fees (specify)	\$2000 extra travel
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Local transportation was more expensive than expected, as a train journey into central London cost 9 pounds. Food at the dining hall was also marginally more expensive than I'd anticipated.

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

My estimates were reasonably accurate, except for the additional travel I did, which I didn't initially count in.

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

Used a debit card and withdrew cash in large chunks so as to reduce the foreign bank fees.

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

Pay for food and drinks on campus with your college card as much as possible—it eliminates the VAT and it also means you're not paying any debit/credit card fees.

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

90p (\$1.90) for a can of coke and £2.40 (\$5) for a coffee.

**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?

I didn't need a visa; I have a British passport.

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

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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?

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

I bought insurance through STA travel with my flights, it was convenient and I was able to get a discount on account of being a student.

## 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/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
<b>VUW Trimester 1/YEAR</b>					
Ovid's Metamorphoses	English	Elective	15	3	This course was very self-directed, which took some time to adjust to
Gender & Writing in the C18th	English	Elective	15	4	Different to what I was expecting, but still interesting
Intensive Shakespeare	English	Elective	15	4	An excellent course, challenging but very interesting and very well taught
Middle English	English	Elective	15	3	Subject matter that I've

Poetry					never studied before and wasn't sure I would like, but because of the quality of teaching I really enjoyed it
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

The process was simple enough—conducted online, simple instructions to follow, and when I came across an obstacle in applying for accommodation it was easy to find somebody to email and ask about it. The only problem was that it took quite a while for me to receive a response.

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?

I in the end managed to register for the classes I wanted, but there were some difficulties in that, when I first arrived here, I was for some reason registered in alternative classes instead. These issues were sorted out in the end, but it took some effort.

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

Don't be afraid to try courses you think you might not be interested in—classes over here are quite different, and you may as well take the opportunity to study something new while you're here. In addition, try and choose courses that will challenge you, as that's the best way to get the most out of your studies at a new university.

### Academic Experience

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

The academic experience was quite different, in that my classes pushed me towards independent thought a

lot, especially in assignments, which my classes at Vic rarely do.

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?

The classes were much smaller, which allowed for a much more direct, lively discussion with the teacher and students. The workload differed between classes, but in general I think it was about the same as what I'd do at Vic, only more reading and less course work.

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?

4 courses is a good balance—you wouldn't want to take more than that but 4 is the equivalent of 3 and home and it's a good amount of work. I would 100% recommend the Intensive Shakespeare course that I took this semester, it was really well taught and incredibly interesting.

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

Keep up with your readings, go to your classes, and you'll be fine. The contact hours are less than at home so it may seem easy to blow off a class or two, but keep in mind that if you miss a class one week, that may be that entire week's worth of work and thus 1/10 of the entire course.

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

I didn't use the computer facilities as I took my own laptop, but the internet was always reliable and the library has an enormous supply of very helpful texts—both in the physical form and on the library search website for journals etc online.

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?

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## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Student halls

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

It was catered, which I disliked because I would rather prepare my own food. However I enjoyed the actual building I was staying in, my room was nice and big, and there were a lot of opportunities for socializing.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Founders Hall is good because it's cheaper and right on campus, plus it's a beautiful building from the outside. However, if it's an option and you'd rather have a kitchen, Tuke, Butler and Wedderburn are your

best bet.

How early can you move into accommodation?

I moved in January 7<sup>th</sup>, a few days before term started.

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

The dining hall always catered—the food wasn't amazing but it wasn't bad for a student hall. There's also a small kitchenette-type-area on each floor with microwaves, boiling water and fridges.

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

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

Look at all of your options, but most importantly look to live on campus. It makes it a lot easier for classes but also to make friends, if you're living with your fellow students.

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

I found it quite easy to make friends with the British students—they're not as open and sociable as students in New Zealand, but if one puts in effort and initiates conversations it's possible to meet people and get to know them.

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

There are many cultural differences between England and New Zealand, but all relatively small—it was challenging at times to adjust, as it must always be when you're in a completely new country, but the cultural differences really made it more interesting than they did difficult.

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

I didn't really find any of the differences challenging, but one that did stand out is the drinking culture—not to claim that NZ doesn't have a drinking culture, only that England, the students go out drinking more often. This can interfere with classes and coursework if you're not careful. While on exchange you should make the most of your opportunities to socialize and have fun, but it's also important to keep up with class work.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I especially enjoyed the independent study driven style of university studies—it's very much a case of directing your own studies, and putting your own opinions into your work.

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

University staff were always very helpful, and the students as well—happy to engage in conversation most of the time, and happy to help out with classes if I needed it.

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 transgender?

As a bisexual student myself, I found Royal Holloway to be quite successful in garnering a positive environment for minority groups. The university has quite a large LGBT community, and while I never managed to make it to any society events (one downside; they weren't very accessible), general social events on campus were for the most part quite comfortable and positive atmosphere's for LGBT students. As for disabilities, again I am mentally ill which often impacts my studies, and while I never needed to request assistance for special circumstances in my time there I was very aware that assistance was available if I needed it.

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

The odd instance of biphobia from Royal Holloway students, but nothing unlike what we experience back home—I would suggest that if you ever feel properly endangered, go to the staff hosting the event (whether it be an SU party or something else), as they were always very determined to make sure that their events were safe spaces for all.

## **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?

Team sports were available, as well as plenty of societies and arts related extracurriculars. I would definitely recommend checking out the societies day and joining any that you may be interested in.

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

Try and go into London as often as possible, to make the most of being so close to it. Plan full day trips into the city and you can see a lot in one day. Otherwise, it's relatively inexpensive to do day/weekend trips to Bath/Brighton/Cambridge/Oxford/a lot of other places in England, and they're definitely worth it. If you want to travel to other countries, use the holidays and make the most of being so close to so many amazing places.

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

Less off campus, as Egham where the campus is situated is quite small and doesn't offer a lot of job opportunities, but there were plenty available on campus.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

I wasn't aware of any through the university while I was here, except for work assisting with societies and events.

### **5 things to take to your host country or region**

1	Warm clothes! Especially a heavy coat, as in winter it's very cold.
2	Also clothes for going out, if you're into that. There are a lot of opportunities, as English students like to party a lot.
3	Good quality shoes—they may not seem necessary, but a full day trip in central London will consist of a lot of walking, and you want to be comfortable
4	Shampoo and conditioner to last the trip—this may seem silly but I found them to be quite expensive over here.
5	Photos/postcards of NZ were something I wish I had. Students here, as well as other exchange students, often don't know a lot about us and so they were very curious. It would have been nice to have photos to show them.

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

1	Order your books off Amazon, and use the Prime shipping free for students. It's quick and cheap.
2	Make sure to keep up with your readings, it makes all the difference as a lot of the courses are self-directed.
3	If you're unsure whether to join up to the gym facilities; definitely do it. I found them to be a really high quality and easily accessible, since you're right on campus.
4	Take any and every opportunity to meet new people and make friends; the friends you have on your exchange are what really makes the experience an amazing one
5	Royal Holloway isn't the most organized institution in the world, but as long as you're patient and work hard, they will make sure everything works out. Do what you can and don't stress out too much if something doesn't seem to be going right.

### **Top 5 Things to do**

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

1	Make sure to visit all of London's museums (they're free)
2	Go to the SU on Wednesday/Friday nights for drinks and dancing
3	Take the train to Bath for a day—it's a lovely city and not too expensive to get to
4	At least once, head into London with no specific plan and just wander around the city
5	Go and see a Shakespeare production at the Globe Theatre

## H: Personal Experience

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

This was the second student exchange I've been on—the first was in high school, and I can quite easily say that both were the best times of my life. The semester I spent at Royal Holloway, I found myself being challenged academically and intellectually as I'd hoped to be, I made a fantastic group of friends who I will stay close with for life, and I was able to experience living in a different country with a different culture, which increased my world experience and also my own self identity. My confidence has grown, along with my passion to achieve those things that I really want to seek. I feel a lot more comfortable travelling, thanks to the journey to London but also the enormous amount of travelling I did in the term breaks, around Europe, and I've now seen a lot more of the world than I had before. In London I've grown as a person, and I really feel like I was away for so much longer than just six months, since so much happened in just that short time. It's been harder than I could have imagined saying goodbye to my friends here, and finishing up at Royal Holloway, and I'll be very sad to leave—but I don't at all regret going on exchange.

