

ERASMUS report, Integrated Design, winter semester 2022/23, University of the West of England, Bristol

There was a lot to do before my semester abroad at the University of the West of England (UWE) in Bristol started. The search for accommodation in particular caused me a bit of stress, as all students were told from the start that places in the highly sought-after student halls of residence were very limited. The whole thing worked on a first come, first serve basis. All of the available dorms were listed on the University's website and you could see exactly how much it costs per semester, where it is and what it looks like inside. There were even a few YouTube videos on the website that showed you around each apartment.

From July 1st you could apply for your favourite dorms. Weeks beforehand, we were advised to register on the relevant website so that the process would be as uncomplicated as possible. I applied as soon as the portal opened access to my favourites, but subsequently had a few problems because my previous research was incorrect. I had assumed that all the halls of residence would be located somewhere in Bristol, which is not the case. There are actually some that were half an hour away in another city, such as Bath. After a few emails the problem was solved and I finally received an email saying that I would be living at the Frenchay Campus.

This wasn't my first choice, nor my second or third, as this dorm wasn't in the city centre, which would have been closest to my campus, but on the other side of Bristol.

Unfortunately, this wasn't ideal for me, as the Frenchay Campus is directly connected to the buildings for the Business and Economy Faculty, but the Design campus is located on the other side of Bristol. Unfortunately for me and two of my fellow students who I met in my building, that meant at least 40 minutes of bus travel almost every day, split between two buses. But it must also be said that the traffic in Bristol is terrible, as are the buses, some of which simply don't stop at the stops even though they should. Nevertheless, I almost always arrived on time for my lectures and workshop courses, although I always planned an extra hour for the commute. Unfortunately, this long journey definitely meant that I didn't spend quite as much voluntary time in the workshops as I had initially hoped, as the connection from campus back to the dormitory was unfortunately even worse and sometimes it only took about two hours to get home. The commute only was that bad two or three times, but it stays in your memory and I don't want to withhold that here. So I thought twice about whether I would go to the university on your day off to spend a day in the ceramics workshop or whether you would rather work on something else on the dormitory campus.

There was a large selection of different tickets for the buses, from monthly tickets to tickets that allowed you to travel 10 times in 30 days, for example, to normal monthly tickets. All of them were also available with a discount for students, although it has to be said that it still wasn't exactly affordable. A monthly ticket for students costs around 60 euros. This only gave you access to the buses, as there are no trams or subways in Bristol.

When I arrived at the Frenchay campus on my first day, I found my way around relatively quickly. It was the first week for all students, so there were a few information stands which made me like my building, Mendip Court. Each building also had its own small reception where you could get your key card and some information. When I arrived at the apartment, I was very pleasantly surprised. There are six bedrooms in each apartment, all with their own bathrooms, and a large kitchen with two stoves and ovens, a dining table and even an open sofa/living area with a large window front through which you can see the building opposite and therefore also in the living

area of the other students. At first it seemed a little strange to me, but after a while it was really nice to cook in the kitchen in the evening and to see that many other people were doing the same thing. It also helped a lot to create a certain sense of community within the different buildings, as most people decorated their large windows for different occasions and also used the windows as a way of communicating to invite people to cooking evenings and parties in their apartments.

Even though the price was relatively high at over 2,700 euros for one semester (2,100 was covered by ERASMUS), I was still very happy that I didn't have to look for my own apartment or shared apartment. This would probably have been even more expensive and I would never have had made such good connections with other international students.

The Mendip Court building was only occupied by international students, almost all of whom only stayed for one semester. Each floor consisted of two apartments with six students each and I am incredibly happy that I ended up on this floor because I would never want to miss our evenings of cooking and playing games together. The community that is created among people who all live together in a new country and have to communicate in a different language than they are used to is simply something very special. Most apartments were separated by gender, although there were also some mixed ones. You could state your wishes when registering for the dormitories, but that doesn't mean that they were definitely respected. The site also had a permanent security team for emergencies, a general practitioner around the clock, a small shop, a bar with billiards and foosball tables and the University library.

I think I was incredibly lucky with my roommates. We got along very well and tried very hard to create a pleasant atmosphere in the apartment. We were a colourful mix of people from Belgium, Italy, Mexico and Germany and spent our free time cooking together, going on day and weekend trips, exploring the city centre and doing crafts, painting or decorating together.

After I arrived at the Design campus using the buses, I first met with XXX, the study abroad coordinator. He showed me around, showed me all the important locations on campus, and then dismissed me for my first meeting with my class. The professor, YYY, was very nice and accommodating and thanks to my fellow students I felt very well taken care of. However, the study structure at the UWE is different to ours. There are no individual courses that you can choose for yourself and put together as you like. There is a Master of Design programme in which all creative courses have been thrown together into an interdisciplinary course. As a result, we were a group of ten to thirteen students, all of whom came from completely different backgrounds, which was very exciting.

In this course you were given a timetable with events for the rest of the semester. This consisted of presentations of our individual project to the course group, discussions with YYY, theory units, instructions and, above all, at the beginning some sessions led by and another professor, which were intended to stimulate creativity so that we could then arrive at our final project draft and thoughts. The semester was therefore divided into three parts.

First came "Play." In this part, experimentation was very welcome and visiting the different workshops was very encouraged. Next came "Research." This part was a lot about finding out more about the craft you were currently working with or finding people who had already worked on something similar. The last part was "Make". This was actually about using all of your newly acquired information to create a product, a concept or something similar at the end of the project. In this area you were very free and could let your creativity run wild as long as everything was

agreed upon with the professors. You definitely noticed that they wanted the best for you and wanted to support you on your personal journey with advice and support.

Throughout the semester, I felt very comfortable sharing and discussing my project ideas and progress with both fellow students and professors, working toward a finished product. What I definitely noticed in a very positive way is that there was a lot of respect for the individual. For example, through numerous initial presentations, such as the “five things presentation” in which each of the students had to give a short talk about an image, a thing, a moving image, a quote and a place that is special to them and about which he thinks it shaped him in an important way. Since none of us among the students really knew each other, this immediately gave us something to talk about and created a very pleasant and safe atmosphere, which I sometimes miss here in Bremen.

The campus is equipped with a very extensive repertoire of workshops, from ceramics and stained glass work to textile printing and embroidery machines, everything a designer's heart desires is available. There were numerous 3D printers on site, ready for experiments, as well as laser cutters and VR glasses. The only downside to the whole thing was that, even if it wasn't particularly noticeable at the UWE itself, there are a lot of students on this campus. That means, that you have to get appointments for the workshops very early because everything gets booked up very quickly. For example, I was very lucky when I asked for an embroidery appointment in October and then got it in December because a fellow student asked just a few days later and everything was already fully booked until the new year.

But if you're not in the workshops or in the very cozy and well-equipped library, the cafeteria was a good place to eat, work or chat. There were three different kinds of food offerings: A student-run cafe that offered drinks, soups and sandwiches or wraps. Then there was a pizzeria in the cafeteria that also had vegetarian and vegan options and, thirdly, my absolute favourite: the Buddha bowl stand. Every day there was a different assortment of fresh vegetables and warm, crispy toppings. There were always plenty of vegan options here too. The prices were also surprisingly affordable. A large margherita pizza here costs from £5.50, as do the Buddha bowls. Payment was always made by debit or credit card, as is the case almost everywhere in England. Cash was often not accepted even at weekly markets and everyone had a transaction device.

There was always plenty of seating in the cafeteria, whether on a comfortable sofa, in a seating area or at an ordinary cafeteria table. When the weather was nice, there was always plenty of seating outside.

But if you did spend an afternoon in the library, you could always really enjoy the atmosphere there. There were many comfortable and private seating areas with sofas but also many desk stations with computers. You could always decide whether you wanted to sit at a large table with many other students or whether you would rather go a few steps further between the bookshelves and choose a private corner with a computer. If you needed to concentrate particularly, there was also a quiet room. Borrowing books yourself was easy and was done via one of the machines at the entrance to the library with the help of your student ID.

Personally, I found the people in Bristol both inside and outside the University to be incredibly friendly, helpful and accommodating. If it actually happened that you couldn't get a place in a dormitory and had to find something on your own, you would still get support from the UWE by alerting you to various websites and helping you find an alternative. There were also special student associations that took on this task. The University also hosted regular events on their two main campuses where students lived, especially for students abroad and widely advertised these

on their Instagram accounts. These ranged from a boat tour with English tea and cake, to theme parties, to city rallies and simply weekly meeting evenings on a variety of topics, pub evenings and shopping trips.

In my opinion, this meant that international students who did not live on one of the campuses were still able to make connections easily. There was also a “freshers fair” at the beginning of the semester where students set up numerous stands in and outside a large hall on campus to advertise their clubs and associations and recruit new members. I personally didn't take part in these clubs because I already had the feeling that I was busy enough with studying, workshops, living in a shared apartment and short weekend trips. However, there were some students in our building who particularly enjoyed the diverse sports programme. There were free courses here once a week in various disciplines, for example pilates, yoga, baseball or even climbing. If you wanted to attend these courses regularly or wanted access to the gym, you had to pay a certain fee per semester, which was around 60 pounds, but this gave you access to all the courses and the fitness studio.

As already mentioned before, my roommates and I also regularly organised small weekend trips, which really brought our floor together and were definitely one of the highlights of this semester. The connection with long-distance buses and trains was quite good and you could be in Bath in just half an hour, which is an incredibly beautiful old city that makes you feel like you've just landed in Italy and not England. London is two and a half hours away, but if you search a little the bus ticket is only 6 pounds and a flight to neighbouring countries and regions like Ireland or Scotland is definitely worth it.

All in all, I can really say that I am incredibly happy to have done this semester abroad, because even if there are always a few points that don't go perfectly or are a bit difficult, I wouldn't want to miss the friends I made there. The friendly relationship with the professors and the fact that I really felt like I was on the same level with them helped me a lot in my creative process and strengthened my self-confidence when it came to my abilities, experimentation and work in the academic context.