



# WUR Goes Abroad

## 1. Student Information

|                                     |                                 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Field of study in Wageningen</b> | Bachelor Environmental Sciences |
| <b>Study period exchange</b>        | 28/09/2019 until 13/12/2019     |
| <b>Country (exchange)</b>           | England (UK)                    |
| <b>City (exchange)</b>              | Lancaster                       |
| <b>University (exchange)</b>        | Lancaster University            |
| <b>Faculty (exchange)</b>           | Lancaster Environment Centre    |

## 2. Motivation for exchange

### Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I choose to go on study exchange because I wanted to experience both studying at another university and living in another country. I wanted to see the differences between Wageningen University and another university (differences in ways of studying, ways of teaching, courses/modules, time schedules, buildings, facilities, ambiance, etc.). Furthermore, by living abroad for some time, I hoped to get to know another country better (its culture, landscape, inhabitants, language, traditions, etc.). I also thought of it as a nice opportunity to improve my skills of a language that was not my native tongue. Moreover, I was certain that living abroad would contribute to my personal development, because I would become more independent by learning how to find my own way in another country.

### What is the reason you chose for this country/university?

I chose to study in the United Kingdom particularly, in the first place because I wanted to improve my English language skills (particularly fluently in speaking). Besides, I wanted to experience the British culture and explore the British nature.

I chose Lancaster University in particular, because this university really appealed to me. During the Study Abroad Fair in November 2018, I spoke to someone who had been studying at Lancaster. The stories she told me about her exchange made me really enthusiastic and curious about this university. Therefore, I visited their website, where I read a lot and watched many videoclips to get an impression of Lancaster University. I became very enthusiastic, especially because of the nice atmosphere of the university, the nice modules they provided (exactly the kind of modules I wanted to study), their good facilities and the beautiful landscape around the place where Lancaster is located.

### 3. Accessibility to reach destination

#### **Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination? (E.g. bus, train, etc.)**

Because of the environmental burdens, I did not (want to) fly to reach my exchange destination. Instead, I used two other types of transport. On my way out, I travelled by ferry and train, and on my way back by train only. I will briefly describe these two ways of travelling.

- Ferry and Train (way out)

I took the ferry from Rotterdam to Hull. This is a convenient way of travelling, as you travel mostly during the night, when you'll sleep in a cabin. I arrived at 8:00 AM in Hull. From Hull I travelled to York by bus, and from York to Lancaster by train. York – Lancaster takes approximately 2.5 hours.

- Train (way back)

First I travelled by train from Lancaster to London Euston. This takes approximately 3 hours. Then I took the Eurostar-train, which brought me from London to Amsterdam in 4.5 hours.

Lancaster has a railway station that is easily accessible from many parts of the UK, and a lot of busses and taxis are going from the station to the city centre and the university campus.

## 4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

|   | Course                      | ECTS | Short description of the contents   | Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high) | Remarks   |
|---|-----------------------------|------|---|--|---|
| 1 | Glacial Systems             | 8    | About glaciers and their mass/energy balance, glacier dynamics and Greenland and Antarctica | 5  | I really liked this course, as it provided a nice overview of glacial systems and all their important mechanisms. The information was really interesting.   |
| 2 | Environmental Plant Biology | 8    | Discusses different types of stress that plants have to deal with                           | 2  | This course was okay, but I did not like it as much as the other ones. The content was interesting, but the lectures were (in my opinion) just a bit boring.  |
| 3 | Coral Reef Ecology          | 8    | About coral reef ecosystems (involves corals, fishes, etc.) and coral bleaching             | 4  | Really nice course as well! Provides a good overview of coral reef ecosystems and problems like coral bleaching. Provides also a nice fieldtrip to the aquarium in Blackpool (however, unfortunately, in the end we did not go as the lecturers were striking...) |

### How is the study formalized? (E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material)

Compared to Wageningen, Lancaster University (and I believe most universities in the UK) is much more focussed on self-study. Therefore, I did not have much classes during the week (usually 2 lectures of 50 minutes and 1 practical of 1-2 hours for each course), but it is expected of you that you spend the remaining time doing self-study. But, in this way, I had a lot of freedom and flexibility to manage my time.

The academic level is comparable to Wageningen, in my opinion definitely not higher.

The examination of all of my courses consisted for 50% of coursework (usually an essay or report) and for 50% of an exam. However, the exams of all my courses were due in Summer during the examination period. Because many Erasmus-students, including me, would not be in Lancaster during that time anymore, we were given an alternate assessment (also usually an essay or report) instead of the exams. So, in the end, I did not do any exams, but wrote a lot of essays and reports in order to pass my courses.

Regarding the lesson material, I did not have to buy any books, since I was able to borrow them from the library. I needed a lab coat once, but I was able to borrow one as well.

**What is the culture of the university? (E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with the WUR?)**

The culture of the university is comparable to the culture at WUR. Lecturers are very approachable and engaged with their students (you can call them by their first name) and classes are usually small. However, engagement with local students is more difficult, since they have usually already known each other for a few years and tend to turn towards each other. Therefore, I spend most of my time with other Erasmus students. However, if you put some effort in getting to know the British students or join some of the societies, you will certainly come into contact with the British students as well.

**What does the university offer the student additionally? (E.g. Catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?)**

Lancaster University offers a lot of facilities on campus. There is a large, new sports centre with a fitness-room and a swimming pool. Moreover, there are a lot of sports societies, ranging from table tennis to football and netball. There are also a lot of restaurants and shops on campus, as well as supermarkets, ATMs and rooms to do your laundry. Actually, everything you need can be found on campus. Furthermore, Lancaster University has a lot of student societies, ranging from the Harry Potter-society to Baking Society or Hiking Society. I would recommend to join one/some of them, as it is fun and a good opportunity to get to know other (British/International) students. Apart from the societies, Lancaster University consists of a college-system. So, there are different colleges on campus, each having their own buildings, bars and activities. Some students even live in one of the college-buildings, but there is not always space for Erasmus-students. However, every student becomes a member of one of the colleges, even if you are not living on campus, enabling you to join the activities or college sports teams.

## **5.Housing-travelling-living**

**What are the possibilities for housing? (E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?)**

When you have applied to Lancaster University, you will automatically receive an email to apply for a room. So, you do not have to look for a room yourself (unless you want to). You have to apply for a room on campus in one of the colleges. However, this does not mean that you are certain to get a room there. In my case, there was no space for Erasmus-students on campus. Therefore, the university offered me a room somewhere else, closer to town (which I actually liked more). So, even if there is no space on campus, the university will offer you a different place to stay. I stayed at the campus of the University of Cumbria, together with a lot of other Erasmus-students. I paid 75 pounds per week for this room, so around 300 pounds per month.

### **What is the culture of the country like? (E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?)**

I noticed that the British people are very polite and friendly. They are always asking “Are you alright?” and want to help you with everything. Of course, there are some differences with home, for example driving on the left side of the road and using a different coin (pounds instead of euros). However, there are no specific habits or manners that I noticed that are worth mentioning.

### **Could you give a general price indication of the place of residence compared to living in Wageningen?**

Regarding prices, I think living here has been more or less comparable to Wageningen. As already mentioned, I paid 300 pounds per month for my room. Groceries were a little bit more expensive than in the Netherlands. Most money that I spent that I probably wouldn't have spent in the Netherlands, I used to go on trips during the weekends to explore the surroundings. There are a few points I'd like to mention, as I think they might be of use for future Exchange students as well.

- Bus pass (Unirider)

If you live off-campus, as I did, you have to travel to the Lancaster campus. The most common and easy way to travel to campus is by bus. A return ticket to the university from the city centre, is about **3 pounds**. However, it is also possible to buy a bus pass. These passes can be bought for each term separately (**108.50 pounds**) or a full year (**275 pounds**). You can buy them at [stagecoachbus.com](https://stagecoachbus.com). With these passes, you can make use of all buses within and around Lancaster for “free” at all times within the term. I bought one for my term (Michaelmas Term), which was cheaper than buying a return ticket every time. You can also buy a Day Rider for **5 pounds**, which allows you to use all the buses within and around Lancaster for just one day.

- Sports membership

If you like sports, I'd recommend you to buy a sports membership at the Lancaster University Sports Centre. These can be bought per term and are comparable to the sports rights that you can buy at WUR. When having a sports membership, you can make use of the gym facilities and swimming pool. Also, you can join one of the sports clubs that train in the sports centre. There are different types of memberships: Bronze, Silver and Gold. The difference between these three is the time you can use these facilities (not at all times) and of course the price. The Bronze membership, which I bought, costs **39.66 pounds** for one term.

- Railcard

If you are planning on travelling a lot by train (or using the train as main vehicle to travel to Lancaster), it is really recommendable to buy a railcard. This card (16-25 years) costs **30 pounds**, and provides 30% reduction on all train tickets that you buy. In my case, this really paid off.

### **Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure? (E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)**

- Taxi

There are several taxi companies in and around Lancaster that can be called to make use of their services (their phone numbers can easily be found on the internet). A single trip from the Lancaster Railway Station to my home, close to the city centre, costs around **6 pounds**.

- Bus

Most students travel to the university by bus (or walk, if they live on-campus). There are a lot of busses driving throughout the city, and they are going very regularly. There are two main bus stops in the city centre (**Common Garden Street**, which is next to the Primark, and **Lancaster Bus Station**), and there is one main bus stop at Lancaster University (**Lancaster Underpass**, beneath Alexandra Square, the “heart” of the campus).

- Train

Trains arrive and leave at the Lancaster Railway Station, which is close to the city centre. Amongst others, there are trains in the direction of Edinburgh (North), Liverpool (West), Manchester/London (South) and York (East). Train tickets can be bought at [www.trainline.com](http://www.trainline.com) (they also have an app). It is recommendable to buy train tickets in advance, because it might be cheaper (the prices are not fixed and differ per time, period and train). Also, I noticed that the trains in England are often late (or might even get cancelled), so it is smart to take this into account. If you need to be somewhere in time (for example to catch a flight), it is advisable to buy a ticket for a train that is really early.

- Bicycle

Being a Dutch person, I really liked to have a bicycle around for me to use. I bought a second-hand bike via Facebook, and sold it again when I left Lancaster at the end of the term. At first, I wanted to use the bike to travel to campus, however, I did not like cycling in England very much. They don't have proper cycle lanes, the terrain is quite hilly, and the traffic is often very busy. So, I used the bus to go campus, and used my bike to cycle around the city and the Lancaster Canal, so just for fun trips.

## **6. Free time**

### **What are must-sees in the area? (E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?)**

- Lancaster

Lancaster itself is a really nice and old city. It is not that large, but has a lot of old buildings and a small and cosy city centre. There are several museums, and there is a castle that is really nice to visit. My favourite place in Lancaster is the Williamson Park, which is a nice, green park where you can go for a walk. Also, the Ashton Memorial (an icon of the city) is located in this park. I really recommend you to go there, at least once 😊

- Close to Lancaster (< 1 hour travel)

Close to Lancaster are Morecambe, Manchester and the Lake District. **Morecambe** is a village located between Lancaster and the West Coast of England. You can go there by bus or bicycle, and enjoy the view at the sea and the hills of the Lake District behind it. The city **Manchester** can be reached by train, which takes about one hour. There is an Art Gallery and a lot of museums, and you can do some shopping. **The Lake District** is a natural park. Its nature is beautiful, and consists of hills and lakes. It is a nice area to hike or explore, and can be reached by train as well. A place within the Lake District that is easy to reach, is Windermere. Close to the train station is a Tourist Information Centre, where you can gather information for different hikes.

- Further away (> 1 hour travel)

There are several places that I have visited during the weekends. All of them are cities, and I travelled there by train. I have been to: **Edinburgh** (2 hours), **Liverpool** (2 hours), **Blackpool** (1 hour) and **London** (3 hours). Of these cities, I liked Edinburgh most, as there are a lot of museums and Arthur's Seat provides a great view at the city. Tip: if you are planning on visiting London, for example, it might be nice to stay there for a few days, for example during the weekend.

### **What does not appear in the travel guide, but is worth a visit?**

Tip: keep track of the trips organised by Graduate College (you can find them on Facebook). Even if you are not a member of this college, you can still join there trips. Usually, these trips cost between **20 and 30 pounds**, which includes transport and tickets to castles/museums. I always enjoyed these trips; you can be sure you will visit nice places and it saves you the organising/planning work.

### **Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time (E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?)**

A very nice and cosy restaurant is Greaves Park, located close to Bowerham Road. For going out, most people go to the Sugar House, which is the student night club. However, I have never been here myself. When I had some spare time, I usually went for a walk to Williamson Park.

## **7. Challenges & best moment abroad**

### **What was a challenge you have experienced?**

The largest challenge for me was homesickness. Especially in the first few weeks, I really missed home. However, after a while, when I got to know new people, the city and the university, this feeling disappeared. From that moment onwards, I really enjoyed my time there. It has been a great experience!

Tip: if you feel homesick as well, go do something that you always do at home. Watch a movie in your own language, drink that kind of tea that you always drink at home, etc. For me, it really helped!

### What was your best memory abroad?

Going on a trip with Graduate College. We went to Keswick, in the Lake District. This is such a beautiful place, located close to a large lake. With some other Exchange-students, we hired two boats and went rowing on the lake. The view was stunning, especially in this time of the year, in Autumn. All leaves were coloured yellow or orange. I will never forget this experience.

### 8. Contact details

|   |   |                             |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?</b> | yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | no <input type="checkbox"/> |
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