



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Study programme WUR	BSc Forest- and Nature Conservation
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	14/09/2023 until 15/01/2024
Exchange destination: University	Keele University
Faculty	Faculty of Natural Sciences
Country	United Kingdom
City	Keele

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

First of all, I was eager to experience student life and studying at a different university than Wageningen. I wanted to go to a university with a different education system than what I was used to. Secondly, an exchange period seemed like such an exciting opportunity to explore the culture of and living in another country. I love travelling, and I wanted to be able to visit a lot of places.

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

There were multiple reasons for choosing Keele University. Firstly, I have always appreciated the people living in the United Kingdom and I had already visited some cities and had also seen some of the nature areas. Second, this university offered a module on glaciers, which will be listed down below, and I really like this subject. Another reason for choosing Keele is that they pride themselves on their campus. It is a very big campus with a lot of nature on it, and I really liked that. There was also a large national park quite close to the campus, which I really wanted to visit. In the end, I also really appreciated that I was familiar with the language and that there was guaranteed on-campus accommodation for exchange students.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination?

I went to Keele University by train and the trip was really quite enjoyable and easy. I chose to get an Uber/taxi from Stoke-on-Trent train station, as this is only 10 minutes, as opposed to 30 minutes by bus. My tip for doing that is: please make sure that you have either cash money or a credit card for getting cabs.

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	ESC-30006 – Glaciers and Glacial Geomorphology	7.5	In this course, you get to learn the basis of everything that has to do with glaciers. This ranges from how glaciers are formed, how they work in the global system, how they move and shape the landscape etc.	5.	The teacher of this course is a big reason of why this course was so enjoyable. He really understood how to bring across concepts to students so that they understand everything. He was very passionate and allowed us to help shape the course; if there was something we did or did not want to learn about, he would change the course subjects. I feel like I learned a lot in this course.
2	ESC-30009 – Natural Hazards	7.5	This course introduces nearly all the natural hazards currently known to us, ranging from astro- hazards to more known hazards like tsunamis. This course also includes some simulation sessions to allow you to experience working in this field.	4.	I also really liked this course. The teacher was also fun and the simulations added some depth. I really learned some new things in this course, and I really liked the final assignment in which you can choose and investigate any hazard you would like. The only thing I didn't like is that there wasn't a lot of room for more depth, as every week would tackle a different hazard. On the other hand, you get to learn a lot of different things this way.
3	GEG-30016 - Economic Development and Environmental Transformation	7.5	This course delves into a lot of the current problems that people are facing in the Global South. This ranges from climate change, urbanisation, overseas working, representation etc. It explores some relevant concepts like colonialism, remissions and foreign aid.	3.	First of all, I have to say that this course was such an eye-opener. The first few weeks, we were taught about so many concepts that I had not heard of or thought of and it changed my view on a lot of environmental issues and the impact we still have as the Global North on the Global South. However, the course focussed way more on social science than on environmental science as the title seems to suggest. I didn't mind this at first, but the course continued to

					more into a socio-economical field and I missed a bit of connection to my background in forest- and nature conservation. The final assignment was also quite lengthy.
4	ESC-20017 – Human Impacts on the Environment	7.5	This course covers most of how human activity can influence the environment and the climate. It offers a lot of case studies and literature so that you can study all sorts of issues, ranging from small-scale issues like point contamination to large issues like air pollution.	3.	Even though this course was very interesting, I feel like this course could have been executed in a way that allowed for a deeper understanding. Most of the lectures consisted of giving very specific case studies and there seemed to be the assumption that all students were familiar with most of the concepts (there is a first year module, this is a second year model). The first assignment consisted of writing very short summaries, and this was quite hard but the second assignment was more up to ourselves. Still, from the literature and some of the case studies, I learned a lot more about some of the current issues in environmental impacts.
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What is it like to study there?

E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material.

The studying at Keele University is very different from what I was used to at the WUR. There's barely any in-person learning sessions, and I would say that about 80% of the modules consists of self-study. The workload was comparable to that at the WUR, if a bit less. The academic level was appropriate, but students from the WUR seem to have an advantage when it comes to referencing, as we are taught on this subject a lot from year 1. The examination was new for me, as all four of my courses only tested through writing essays and reports, but I did not mind this.

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 lecturers all seemed to be very open to conservation with their students, and most of them even knew all of their students by name and background. I really liked that. The local students also seemed very interested in talking with each other and even internationals, so that felt welcoming. I would say the class size is the biggest reason for this, as my courses at the WUR are usually in very big groups. Keele also seemed to

invest a lot of time into mental health, checking in on their students through Residence Assistance, e-mails and posters.

What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

What I really liked about Keele is that they had a Student Union. This is just a very big building with a fun restaurant, bar and a lot of rooms that were used by societies and also for parties. The SU was usually where we would do most of our weekly activities. There was another restaurant on campus, which had a broad offer of cheap student food, mainly lunch. There's a café/bar as well, called the KPA, where you could hang out and have a drink with friends outside of society activities, and the atmosphere was very good there. There were a lot of sports that students could do, but I did not make use of those often. The laundry facilities were okay, but they were quite expensive and not always enough washing machines for all of us. An additional university facility was the Keele Library, which was open 24/7 during the semester, and it had both quiet and group study places.

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?

There is the possibility of on-campus accommodation, and there is a guarantee of getting a room when you apply. You can choose which type of room you want, e.g. with or without wash-basin, and you can check the pricing on the website. I seem to remember that there is also a private company offering housing off-campus, which was considerably cheaper but there is no guarantee, and you would have to travel to get to campus.

What is the culture of the country like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

The United Kingdom is quite similar to the Netherlands but there are some differences. People are definitely way more open for conversation and small talk than in the Netherlands, and in general seemed more happy to help us out when asking for things like directions, must-sees etc. The local cuisine in Keele is the same as everywhere else in the United Kingdom, typically a lot of sausage/meat, potatoes and big servings, but there is a local product originating from Stoke-on-Trent called 'oatcakes'. They are very different from what we think oatcakes are, and are a bit like Dutch pancakes, but are more savoury and usually served with savoury toppings. I can't think of any habits that differ that much, but we did notice that soccer/football is a bigger thing than in the Netherlands in most English cities. The same goes for manners, but I do think that people in the United Kingdom are more kind and considerate.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)

The biggest advantage of living at Keele is that travelling anywhere in the UK is so easy! From campus, you either take a 10-minute drive by car or 30-minute drive by bus and then you're at the Stoke-on-Trent Railway Station! From there, you can get everywhere

so quickly. Manchester and Birmingham are very close, London is only 1.5 hour, even most places in Scotland and Wales are within 3-4 hours! The ticket prices are high, but not much higher than in the Netherlands and there is a railway pass that gives you a big discount. It is a 30% discount for a whole year, and it is only 30 pounds. We saved so much money by buying this railcard, and by using the Trainline app, you also usually get a 'splitsave' discount on return tickets. We travelled every weekend and sometimes even twice a week, so I highly recommend keeping an eye on both those things!

6. Expenses

Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

E.g. you can also indicate price differences (higher/lower/equal) in comparison to the Netherlands.

Ticket there: about 90 euros, and about 120 back to the Netherlands

Visa if applicable: -

Vaccinations if applicable: -

Insurances (extra, if applicable): -

Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation: it was 2700 pounds in total for 1 whole semester (four months), so definitely much more expensive.

Groceries: some products, like vegetables and fish, were way cheaper than in the Netherlands, while other products like cheese, dairy and snacks were on the same level or maybe a bit more expensive. I would say it was on average cheaper than the Netherlands

Public transport: equal

Restaurant/going out for dinner: depending on the city and neighbourhood, lower than or equal to the Netherlands

Daytrips/sight-seeing: Depends a lot on the city. In Oxford, you have to pay for nearly everything, while cities like Chester were mostly free to explore.

Additional remarks regarding expenses?

7. Free time

What are must-sees in the area?

E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?

I highly recommend the National Peak District, but you have to plan it well, as it is hard to reach nice areas by train. We went to Hope Village and had an amazing 5-hour walk there. Manchester is a very diverse and fun city to see, and it is very close, but as I mentioned before, most cities in middle-England are easy to reach and most of them are worth visiting. Closer to the campus is the Whitmore Tearooms, a cute restaurant that serves the local oatcakes. There are also a lot of pottery museums in Stoke-on-Trent where you can make your own pottery. The city itself is not that exciting. Trentham Village and the Trentham Gardens are also close and fun to see once.

What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth a visit?

I think my answer to the previous question covers most of it.

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time?

E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

It took some time to get used to how the education system differs from Wageningen, but after a few weeks you're used to it. Don't be afraid to e-mail your lecturers with additional questions.

What is your best memory of your time abroad?

Spending time with the friends I made was so much fun. We travelled a lot, played a lot of games together, went out to the SU and so much more. Getting to make international friends and experience things together, as well as comparing cultural habits, was so much fun.

9. Contact details (optional)

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