

Erasmus Exchange University of East Anglia (UEA), Norwich, United Kingdom, Autumn 2019

Study Programme

One of the main reasons for choosing UEA was the variety of modules that were offered to exchange students. I selected 9 law modules (worth 10 ECTS each) to send to the Board of Examiners and all of them were approved, so do not worry about not being able to find the 30 ECTS needed for the semester. In general, the modules are taught in two 1-hour lectures each week and one 2-hour seminar every other week for the 12-week duration of the autumn semester. The content and style of the lectures I had was comparable to the way they are given in Groningen with the exception that lecturers at UEA tended to ask more questions and link the material to news stories (current and former) more than I was used to at RUG. The seminars are different per session, module and seminar teacher, but a typical seminar is like the RUG teaches the working groups, with questions to prepare for discussion in the seminar.

The assessment of most Autumn semester modules is done through writing an essay. All of mine were around 2000 words and due in the first weeks of January. So keep in mind that even though the semester might end early, you still have to write your assessments at home!

In the end I chose to study Constitutional and Administrative Law, Internet Law and Media Law. The first of these modules, Constitutional and Administrative Law is a first-years module. This can be seen in the amount of time that is spent on explaining concepts and the lack of depth of discussions that occur in the seminars. This can be beneficial since the constitutional character of the country can be harder to understand for people from a continental system, but might leave some people feeling unchallenged. The modules Internet Law and Media Law were, while the topic was different, comparable in style. Both modules were partially based on research into how regulation should work and taught the background information of how the internet or the media functions in order to understand regulation. The legislation that was discussed was partially UK law and some (in 2019 still) EU law on these topics. I would recommend both of these modules to anyone, keeping in mind that the amount of actual statutes or case-law you discuss is less than the amount you would get in a traditional law module.

Language

As can be expected from a university in England, the language of instruction and assessment is English. This can be very convenient since this is what you are probably already used to in Groningen. Since English knows a wide variety of accents, however, depending on where your lecturer is from and the speed in which they speak, listening to them might take some adjusting in the first few weeks. Do not let this deter you as most staff at the university try to be as approachable as they can.

The Abroad Office and other support staff

In line with the beforementioned, the contact with the Abroad Office of UEA has been really easy. Usually they will respond to emails within an hour, and if you are in Norwich you can always come to their desk in the Arts building with any of your problems and questions. A tip I would give anyone who is in the process of applying is to make use of this and ask them as many questions as you like (within reason obviously) as they are more than happy to help you. This has been the general attitude of the staff I met during my stay, whether it is the 24/7 security staff, student support services or the IT help desk, everyone is ready and happy to help.

Application and Reception at the host university

Applying for the exchange after being nominated by RUG is a series of online forms you will have to fill out in order to register at the university, this takes some time but is very straight forward. The entire process is clearly outlined on the UEA website.

Before the start of term, the university will decide on 2 international arriving days which are before the arriving days for other students. During these days the campus is filled with people who can guide you to certain buildings or departments and there is a general registration event where you can register in person and get things like a campus card etc. It is therefore important to arrive on one of these arrival days.

Located at the university is a Student Union (uea.su) that organises all sorts of events during the year, but especially during welcoming week. If you would like to take part in these events it is best to get tickets and plan these events a couple weeks in advance as most events will already be fully booked at the time you arrive. The Student Union also has tons of societies and clubs which you can join and attend events of during the term. In addition to this the abroad office organises some events for international and exchange students, which you will be notified of through email. It is important to keep track of your UEA inbox as you can receive up to 5-10 emails a day from all kinds of departments within UEA.

Culture, free time and traveling

After moving to Norwich I did not feel much of a difference in culture among the English compared to the Dutch culture, besides some people not really appreciating my Dutch bluntness.

Norwich itself has plenty of shops and some interesting buildings like the Castle or the Cathedral. Traveling within Norwich can be done by busses which take you from UEA to the city centre in around 25 minutes. From Norwich you can get on trains and busses that can take you to cities all over the country. The region immediately around Norwich is not something you would know from the typical travel guides so you will have to travel for at least 2 hours to get from UEA to the more famous places such as Cambridge and London.

Finance and other conditions

In general the cost of living in the UK is higher than that in the Netherlands, but this of course is dependent on the choices you make in spending your money. I would estimate that my total costs per month including accommodation were around 1000 euros. This is largely because I chose to stay on campus in an en-suite room, which comes at a premium. In general, the price tags in stores indicate the same or slightly more than in Groningen, but you will have to keep in mind that the Pound is more valuable than the Euro and therefore what might seem to be cheap or normally priced might still be expensive in comparison. The shops on/near campus are more expensive than the ones in town and therefore I would suggest shopping at the Tesco Metro or Sainsburys in town (25 min bus ride from campus) or at Aldi (20 min walk from campus). The shop on campus does have a variety of alcohol for those times you don't feel like going into town late at night.

Money saving tip: do not buy the textbooks in advance, as you are most likely able to borrow them from the library which usually has around 5-10 copies of prescribed material, or you will not be needing the books at all.

Going to Norwich can be done by plane from Amsterdam to Norwich for which a return is around 150 euros, but you can also fly from Groningen or Amsterdam to one of the London Airports which is around 50-100 euros followed by a train or bus ride of around 10-20 euros. Keep in mind that English train tickets are priced in a similar way as plane tickets are, meaning that the price is subject to availability of tickets and the amount of time between the date of purchase and the date of travel. A pre-booked ticket from Norwich to central London might cost 10 pounds a month in advance but can be upwards to even 60 pounds on the day itself.

Housing

I stayed in university accommodation on campus, however there is limited availability and one semester exchange students are not guaranteed a spot. Campus accommodation is pretty basic, but good enough for the three months of autumn. They have 24/7 electricians and maintenance people to help with any issues in the flat and the kitchens and bathrooms get cleaned by the cleaners. One major advantage of on campus accommodation is the fact that you can basically wake up 15 minutes before your lectures start since everything is within walking distance. If you choose to take this type of accommodation it would be wise to have a back-up plan in place since this is only confirmed a few weeks before start of term and you don't know how many people will be applying.

Finding housing in Norwich can be a challenge since there are a lot of students in town looking for similar places you are looking for, and these students start looking in January for a place to stay in the following academic year. Another thing to keep in mind is that the normal length of a contract is 6-12 months. One way of tackling this is by renting a house together with other Erasmus students and getting people who will go to Norwich in spring to take over your contract. I would recommend using the Facebook group of the abroad office to find people and arrange this early on. I have seen several groups of students manage to get housing by arranging a shared house like this, so don't panic before trying.