

ERASMUS report, School of Arts, Ulster University Belfast, winter semester 2018/19

I have always wanted to study and live in a country with a different language.

My dream was actually to go to Japan, but unfortunately the partner school on Okinawa offered no programmes on animation and game design. That's why I asked the International Office for universities that offer my desired course of study. I also looked on their websites for relevant information about how things work there. I ultimately decided to go to Ulster University's School of Arts in Belfast because the course description appealed to me the most and also because the idea of traveling to Northern Ireland made me curious.

At the end of November 2017, I submitted an application to the Student Office for a stay of two semesters. This was followed by an online registration at the university and a language test for ERASMUS, which I passed with C2. Normally you would have to repeat the test after the return trip, but since I passed with the highest level, this was not necessary anymore.

On September 15, 2018, I finally flew from Hamburg via Manchester to Belfast. The flight was unproblematic, but I still had to wait about five hours for the connection in Manchester. One thing that surprised me a bit was that you have to take your shoes off at security in England.

When I arrived, I was met by helpers from International Office and they drive us to the campus. You could book this service for around ten pounds when you registered online.

When looking for an apartment, I concentrated on the student halls of residence. Although they are relatively expensive there (around €600 for a room with a private bathroom in a shared apartment), I wanted to be as close to the action as possible. In addition, the rent includes costs for water, electricity and internet access. Registering my residence was very convenient over the internet, but there were difficulties paying for the accommodation because paying with Mastercard didn't work, so I had to pay with PayPal, which is actually much more convenient. However, I was not aware that the University was divided into several locations. I mistakenly chose a campus in Jordanstown for my stay because the website said it was a few minutes away from the University and I thought it was just a part of Belfast... UNFORTUNATELY THAT WAS NOT ONLY THE WRONG BUILDING BUT ALSO A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT CITY. Luckily, Northern Ireland is quite small so the bus ride was only about 40 minutes to get to the right building in Belfast, although I initially took the train, but then you have to walk quite a bit, which gave me blisters. It really hurt. Then I took the bus from Jordanstown. You have to be careful with buses because if you don't step forward and hold out your hand, they'll drive past you cold as ice.

WATCH OUT! The room with its own "bathroom" that I got in Dalriada/Jordanstown was extremely run-down, the "bathroom" often smelled like rotten eggs, it was rusty and dirty, and the room was really sparsely furnished. I and other students from Germany also complained about the uncomfortable bed mattresses because you could feel every single spring.

In mid-November I decided to ask if I could move to the Belfast campus. I thought it would be complicated and a long process, but after a few days everything was ready for my move. Unfortunately I spilled some soy sauce on my duvet cover. The apartment and the entire shared apartment were new and super chic, also well equipped. And most importantly, the bed mattress was super comfortable and large. The University building was also just across the street, which is quite convenient if you have something to do there late in the evening.

As far as the organisation was concerned after arrival, I had to do almost nothing. If I remember correctly, the officials there had all the documents ready, so my ID card was enough. The only thing I had to do was collect the student ID card, which required me to upload a photo to be printed on it.

I did not open a bank account in Belfast because I always withdrew money from Barclays Bank free of charge as they have a partnership with Deutsche Bank, but for that you have to be in the city centre, i.e. at the Belfast campus.

As far as food is concerned, unfortunately there was no cafeteria there. So for lunch I always went to a shop across the street or a little further into the city centre.

Most of the time I cooked for myself and it tasted better than at home with mom.

Otherwise you could go out for a nice meal in Belfast, I ate really delicious ramen (Japanese noodle soup) at Wagamama and I got my first corn dog at Mikey's Deli, really good. I can only recommend Taco Fries and their service is extremely hospitable.

However, Irish beer really disappointed me. Pubs always served terrible beer. Luckily I was able to buy Erdinger bottles at Tesco, that saved me.

Internet access at the University, like at the HfK, was also provided via Eduroam, so I didn't have to set anything up because my devices connected on their own.

Orientation week was quite relaxed. In the course I chose, we divided into groups the week before the course started and did a short project to get to know each other. There was also a meeting for ERASMUS students that week, which allowed me to make a few acquaintances.

I did not have a choice of modules for the animation course, there were only four, two in the first semester and the remaining two in the next semester.

Apparently the animation programme had problems when it came to finding teaching staff.

This was probably noticeable because there was no selection of modules.

In the first semester there was a great professor who had worked for Marvel etc., but unfortunately he stopped teaching in the second semester. In general, I had a lot of "free time" as there were only courses twice a week and life-drawing once for an hour.

The course included a one-day trip to Dublin to the film festival there. What little I could see was pretty nice, but it was just the city centre and I didn't hear anything good about the rest, if you believe my Irish colleagues.

Life on campus wasn't that special. Since I'm quite introverted, I didn't interact with people too much, only when I had the opportunity, like when I met somebody in the kitchen.

In fact, my time there made a long-time dream of mine come true, as I was hired by an animation production assistant at XXX via Twitter over the Christmas period (one of the most renowned anime studios in Japan) who contacted me to work on one of my favourite animes currently running! Of course, that made me extremely happy, although it was a rollercoaster of emotions, especially because I am plagued by an inferiority complex and also stress, as it was extremely hard work that far exceeded my abilities at the time, but also great joy in finally making a dream come

true. Actually, I should have written an essay during this time, but when I explained the situation to the professor, he was very lenient and gave me more time.

All in all, it was a good experience. Living alone and interacting with different people in a different language. I felt like I was in middle school, with a lot of kindergarten drama. Maybe it was because most of them had only recently completed their A-levels.

My goals did not change much during my time there, because I worked towards them every day in my free time, which ultimately resulted in my anime job.