

Exchange at Imperial College London

January 2022 until July 2022



Rojin Abdipour and Karlotta Fölster

Preparation Phase

Application Process

A couple of months after we got nominated by the TUM School of Management, we received further information about the application process from Imperial College Business School in the form of an exchange factsheet and a step-by-step guide to completing the online application. Be sure to also check the deadlines yourself and reach out to the Business School contacts. The factsheet also contained modules we were allowed to choose and some weblinks for general information regarding exchange studies at Imperial. Around October, we finally received a specific guide to fill out the online application in their online portal called “Imperial Gateway” and upload supporting documents (CV, proposed study plan and letter of nomination). Here our tip would be to prepare the supporting documents well in advance, since you will most probably only have two weeks in November where the application portal will be opened for exchange students.

Visa and Travel

With the UK no longer being part of the EU, there are some new regulations in place which at first might seem very confusing. The most important thing to know for your exchange is that generally, as a German citizen, you don't need to apply for a Visa if your stay will be 6 months or less (“Visitor Route” - see this useful website by the British Council <https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/moving-uk/student-visas>). Also, if you plan to stay the full 6 months, you are allowed to add the days on which you left the country to your stay. So, for instance, if you left the UK for one week during your exchange to go home, you are allowed to add the week to your stay in the end to reach the full 6 months. Regarding general travel advice, if you want to fly to the UK check skyscanner and Easyjet or RyanAir flights to the smaller airports around London (like Gatwick or Stansted) for cheaper tickets.

Finding your way in and around London is super easy. The best way to get to know the city is by foot or bike. One of us rented a “Swapfiets” bike, which can be described as a bike subscription and very convenient if you cannot or don’t want to bring your own bike to London. Otherwise, the London tube system is relatively easy to understand but unfortunately not cheap. If you plan to take the tube or a bus regularly, we advise you to get an Oyster card which you can top up with money at every tube station (you can purchase an Oyster card for 5 pounds pledge at every tube station as well). There is a student Oyster card but as far as we know, you have to study in London for at least one year to be eligible. Useful apps for getting around the city are “Tube Map” and “Citymapper”.

Finding Accommodation and Funding Options

This is probably the toughest part about preparing your stay abroad: Finding accommodation in London. First thing to know; the London flat market is very short-lived. It is totally normal to not find anything two or even one week before your arrival. In fact, from our experience it does not make sense to look for a place more than 5-6 weeks in advance, depending on what you are looking for. Unfortunately, Imperial does not offer any housing for postgraduate exchange students. However, there is the possibility to rent a room in a private student hall close to campus (see Chapter, HomesForStudents, IQHammersmith, GradPad,...). The shorter your stay, the more difficult it is to find something. Karlotta found accommodation with a British family in Clapham via the Imperial College Alumni Facebook page. This would be our first tip: Join multiple Imperial or London housing related Facebook groups (there is even one for Germans living in London), and post something about yourself and what you are looking for. The other option is to search on „Spareroom“, which is the equivalent to the German “WG-Gesucht”. Rojin for example found her place on Spareroom and was able to sublet a studio in walking distance to campus for 2 ½ months. Last but definitely not least regarding accommodation: Please be aware of scams!!! Always double (or triple) check every ad you consider and don’t fall into the “super-cheap-super-central”- trap. If the landlord requires a deposit in advance, make sure to at least arrange a video call and ask her or him to send you all their details (photo of ID, council tax form, etc.). Otherwise also always check the location on Google Maps and look for any suspicious differences in room/house positioning.

With regards to funding, there is unfortunately not much offered for short-term exchange studies in the UK due to Brexit. If you are part of a scholarship foundation like the Studienstiftung, you can apply for their study abroad scholarship to get financial support. Overall, there are 13 scholarship organisations you can apply to in Germany, most of them with a political or confessional focus (see <https://www.stipendiumplus.de/startseite.html>). Otherwise, you can always find a mini job like babysitting or dog walking via Facebook groups or university job boards once you are in London.

Arrival

Support and Mentoring at the Business School

The Business School organises its modules via an online platform called “the Hub”, which you will get access to once you have been enrolled. On this platform you have to complete an online induction programme providing you with the most important information for studying at the Business School and student life at Imperial in general. Sadly, there was no intro week in person for us to meet other exchange students right away. Instead, the first exchange networking event was organised in March, at that point we already knew most people. However, they set up a LinkedIn page where we were able to post a Whatsapp group link and meet other students this way. Our main contact at the Business School's study abroad office was Gemma Quelch, who has been very helpful and always responded to all our emails.

The best support for finding our way around campus, student life and life in London in general came from our buddy Maria. Every exchange student will get a buddy who studies a degree at Imperial College Business School. Maria even reached out to us before our stay began and gave us her mobile number to ask questions. She was not just our buddy introducing us to Imperial and other students, but in the end also became a good friend we went to multiple events and parties with. Therefore, make sure to reach out to your buddy once you are in London to also meet other students outside of your "exchange bubble".

Studies

Selection of Courses

The course selection process was slightly chaotic. We were not integrated into the internal course selection system but received a list of courses to choose from via mail which we had to respond to via mail. After some confusion we realized we can take MSc as well as MBA courses which we then selected. Once you choose your courses, they are pretty much set since they order resources like access to case simulations etc.

Courses

The courses in the end were nice but less academic than at TUM. Most of them were very hands on and up to date which was nice. Generally, the MBA courses were better in our opinion especially because people in the group projects had more drive since they were older. Regarding the content we liked every course. Just make sure you are prepared since there is a lot of interaction especially in the MBA courses. Read more in the section "Teaching and Exams" further down.

Life during Exchange

Library and Study Rooms on Campus

The library is directly on campus and very nice. On the group floor you have an open group working area, on the floors above you have silent study seats as well as quiet study areas where you are allowed to talk to your neighbour. Furthermore, around campus there are areas where you can sit and work without booking anything, and you can book study rooms and study vaults in the library as well as in the business school.

Food on Campus

There are several cafes and canteens across campus. The prices are not cheap, but you get a discount as a student, and you are allowed to bring your own food and eat it there. Most people buy food in the senior or junior common rooms, which are the biggest areas to eat, but the cafes also offer some choices and some wraps that can be heated. (We recommend trying the lemon poppy seed muffins and salad bowls in the library café!).

Societies

Student societies in the UK are a big thing and Imperial is the university with most societies (around 380). We definitely recommend joining at least one of them since it is a great way to meet people from other courses, learn new skills, broaden your horizon and just have fun! We personally checked out the feminist, women in SET and DJ society which were amazing. We also attended some "Stammtische" of the German society. There is something for

everyone. Many of them also organize events which you can even join when you are not a member. Make sure to become a member of the student union and follow them on Instagram where you can also see upcoming events.

Events

We think that the amount of very good events is one of the biggest strengths of Imperial and something we enjoyed and appreciated most. Make sure you follow all relevant societies, business school, student union accounts on Instagram and check what upcoming events there are regularly. Your buddy can also help you stay up to date. Events we attended and loved:

- International women's day: Several events and we went to a panel talk with dame Vivian Hunt from McKinsey (after the event there is usually some snacks and drinks for networking).
- Natural History Museum Party for the Business School: This certainly was one of the best events. The natural history museum got booked for a night and all students from the business school came to party together.
- Summer Ball: A ball with music, a concert, food stalls and some activities on campus.
- We innovate finals: A program for female entrepreneurs and we went to the final pitches where the winners were handed their prizes. In general Imperial focuses a lot on female empowerment and the empowerment of other minority groups.
- Climate panel: A talk with several experts from the field
- Different job fairs: There is always something going on and a great opportunity to meet possible employers.
- Hackherthon: One of us participated in a Hackherthon for female and non-binary people for a weekend. It was sooo much fun to work together with others from different studies and backgrounds and we learned so much. Also, we received food vouchers for the weekend and our group won a big prize.
- Afternoon tea: At metric, which is the universities club next to the student bar, a boozy afternoon tea was organized which was great fun.

Sports

There are several sports societies and a gym at Imperial that you can join. Both are great. The gym is next to the main building and very good with a swimming pool and several good classes. You pay a little fee but way less than anything else you can find in London.

The UK and London

London is just amazing, and you will see yourself. Here are some things we especially liked:

- Sofarsounds: Small and intimate concerts with 3 upcoming artists of different genres that you don't know before - surprise!
- App recommendations: Songkick (concert calendar) and TodayTix (musical/theatre ticket deals)
- Dishoom: Indian chain of restaurants
- Granger & Co.: Best brunch and pancakes! (Generally try all the food markets in London)
- Midnight Runners: Very fun running club with music and workouts. We recommend the bootcamp run which is great fun and perfect to meet people outside university.
- Royal Botanical Gardens: Check out the are close to the station too
- Meal Deal: For around 3 pounds you get a main dish, a snack and a drink of your choice at several of the supermarkets, which is cheaper than food on campus

- Transport: Public transport is extremely expensive, so we recommend getting a leasing bike from Swapfiets or buzz bikes which is around 15-20 pounds a month. (On public transport you can spend that a day).
- Travel: We loved London so much that we didn't see much else. Imperial offers some trips, and you can organize trips yourself. We liked Brighton and Karlotta's roomie took her to Devon to her family's place. Make sure you socialize heaps so you can travel to nice places in good company and/or people invite you.

Socializing and Building your Network

Not only the MBA course in "strategic networking" showed us how important it is that you put considerable effort into socializing and meeting people. The coolest experiences we had were due to the people we met. As you have read in the beginning, Imperial didn't support us very well in that regard. Therefore, we decided to give some recommendations:

- **Societies:** Make sure you join at least one society to meet people outside your bubble
- **University Events:** Attend some of the events offered at university and use the networking time afterwards
- **Student Union:** Join and follow the student union and the events they organize
- **Student bars:** There is the union bar and h-bar which you should go to meet people
- **Parties:** Make sure you follow the business school and university accounts and ask your buddy to inform you about upcoming events. Especially the Natural History Museum party!
- **Buddy:** You will be assigned a buddy. Use it! Ours in the beginning didn't really know what to help us with so we made her take us to events. Like this she integrated us in her social circle (of not only exchange students, but "real" students") and we became very close friends with her in the end. Through her we also attended events where we met other people who we became very close with.
- **Group Projects:** Usually you are assigned a group with "real" students. Use this opportunity to socialize.
- **Sports:** Sports is always a great way to meet people since you see them regularly. I met one of my best friends from that time at the gym.
- **Roomies:** One of us was extremely lucky to find an amazing local roomie. Karlotta found her through an Imperial alumni group on Facebook and she totally integrated her in her social circle and made her have a proper cultural experience. She even took her for a weekend to her dad's place in the countryside in Devon with her friends. Put considerable effort into finding nice accommodation preferably with roommates.
- **Online:** Interestingly, when we posted in the Imperial Facebook groups about looking for a room people contacted us if we were down for a coffee. We did and met amazing people. Furthermore, we can recommend using Bumble friends. Bumble is a dating app that you can also use to meet potential friends. One of us made one of her best friends for that time there.

Online Teaching and Exams

Classes via Zoom

The teaching at Imperial was hybrid due to the pandemic (we are not sure how it will be in the future). Meaning that you were free to go to class in person, but you could also always watch the classes live online or the recordings. However, in many courses participation was at least 10% of the grade so you had to attend live either in person or online and not just watch the recording in order to get the participation bonus. The quality of the online classes was very high. In every class there would be a technical assistant helping the professor and making sure everything worked. Also, technically the university is very well equipped with cameras following the person speaking and also shifting to the audience when questions were asked so you could always see and hear whoever was speaking while also seeing the screen on Zoom.

Exams

Since we were at the Business School, we mainly chose qualitative courses which implied that we did not have any sit in exams. Most of our courses consisted of a participation grade (around 10-30%), an individual assignment (around 20-50%) and a group project and or group presentation (around 30-60%). Participation implied attending the classes whether in person or online (the technical assistant would check participation) and contributing to the discussion and often answering questions online about the readings before class. The individual assignments were mostly essays about a certain topic that you would work on over a certain period of time and then submit online. These were not very long, not extremely academic and totally doable in the time frame given. The group projects and or presentations were mostly worked on along the classes in groups of up to 5 people. The topic was mostly more or less given, and you could choose a specialization within the frame e.g., choose a specific company, and then present in class and answer follow up questions.

Grades

In general, we thought that the grading was very generous. The scope of the assignments was usually smaller than at TUM and less academic (not so much focus on references etc.). What you do need to get used to is the number of different things counting towards the grade (participation, individual assignment, group presentation). Also, because some master courses only go for a week and MBA courses even only for a long weekend you can't really go that much into depth and the assignments were more about opinions about certain issues than about deep theoretical knowledge. However, the topics were always very relevant and up to date so even if it wasn't that academic it still felt like you did get a lot out of it and it was very hands-on.

Regarding grade recognition and transfer, make sure to update your study plan which you handed in before and send it to the International Office as soon as you have made any changes to your schedule. This way you will know quickly whether or not the courses you selected can be transferred to your master's. After the exchange, you will need to hand in a confirmation of stay and a form for credit recognition together with your transcript.

Last but not least: Have fun in London!!!

(And enjoy our little exchange recap attached 😊)

Karlotta & Rojin

Impressions of our Exchange



Natural History Museum Party



Natural History Museum Party



Graduation Day on campus



Summer Ball Ferris Wheel



Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew



Roomie, her mum, her bf and Karlotta



Friends from feminist society



Buddy and her friend



Concert with friends



London Streets



Room view Clapham



Room view Notting Hill



Daytrip to seven sisters and Brighton



Study break



Hamstead Heath



Afternoon Tea at the university club



Study break at Hyde Park



Picnic with MBA students



Natural History Museum Party



London's bridges at night



Area around campus is prettyyyy



Do yourself a favour and bike



Trip to Devon with local friends



London skyline from inside



Devon trip with Karlotta's roomie and her friends



Roomie's friends preparing



Summer Ball Ferris Wheel with other exchange students



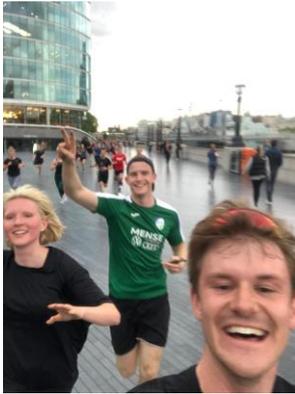
Summer Ball Concerts



Summer Ball Ferris Wheel



Summer Ball



Midnight Runners with new friends



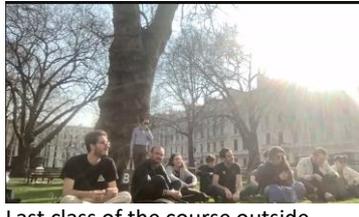
Concert with other students



Exchange students at Printworks



Having fun with our buddy



Last class of the course outside



Student union bar with DJ instructor



Exploring sights



Mercato Mayfair recommended



Our buddy introducing us to her friends